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The Mobile Workshop

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Conclusion: *Vatema* as Intellectual Agents

This book is a project of tracing the itineraries of *ruzivo* in a historical moment of encroachment and dominance by an incoming one: *vachena*'s "science." It was concerned with talking about *vatema* and their knowledge (*ruzivo*) of and practices toward *mhesvi*, *ndedzi*, *mpukane*, and *tsetse* and what happened to that *ruzivo* when *vachena* arrived in 1890, imposed themselves through fraud and force, and during their reign which ended in 1980. Mobility helped to stipulate the conditions of possibility within which *mhesvi* influenced such encounters (or not) between *vanhu* (people). Only an examination of the regimes or conditions—forces, presences, absences, movements, stasis, affordances, and preclusions—can help us parse the relations between *vatema* and *mhesvi* and the incoming *vachena*'s encounters with both (see the glossary for *chidzimbahwe* and other local keywords).

Instead of using race relations as a central analytic in the encounter between *vatema* and *vachena*, I see the mobility of multiple actors (*ruzivo* in particular) as more of a vantage point from which different entities reveal their presence, impact, indefatigability, and unignorability and become key factors affecting relations between *vatema* and *vachena*, between *vanhu* and other *zvisikwa*, between breathing beings and nonbreathing ones. *Mhesvi* and *ruzivo* of it serve as transient sites from which to analyze and understand the reasoning behind and stratagems *vanhu* mobilized against this mobile, deadly *chipukanana*. I do not see the intellect and *ruzivo* of *vatema* as "subordinate" to that of *vachena*, nor their *ruzivo* as "subaltern"; to the contrary, the book has argued and shown the opposite. I seek not merely a historical method, or a mere critique, but rather to open new analytical platforms from which *ruzivo* that seems to have been disappeared might be retraced. As a body of ideas and practices that travels through time and is adopted, shared, or appropriated, *ruzivo rwemhesvi* (knowledge of *mhesvi*) constitutes an entity or body in motion that can be followed into and

within the knowledge *vachena* claim to have discovered—in search not of some kind of *afterimage* of earlier *ruzivo* and practices, but the trajectories of *ruzivo*.

The point I make is not the same as the one that Africanist anthropologists like Melville Herskovits (1940) made in the early to mid-twentieth century—namely, that before *vachena* first robbed *vatema's* land and wealth (*kupamba ivhu nehupfumi hwavatema*), there existed survivals, vestigial, fossil forms of cultural practice of *vatema* that are only awaiting our extraction, pure, autochthonous representations of *tsika/chivanhu* (culture) of *vatema* preserved in the amber of contemporary practice. As *munhu mutema* who is trained in an enlightenment education tradition (but wary of its historical associations with a project of imperialism that dehumanized my own existence), I am sensitive to change over time, while also insisting that such change does not obliterate *ruzivo rwevatema* overnight in the same way, at the same pace, or always, anywhere in Africa.

Herskovits was writing as an Africanist scholar, but I am writing as *mudzimbahwe* with a stake in this *ruzivo*, cautious about the dangers of letting deconstruction run away from the essentialisms that ordinary people insist on and strategically deploy. Somebody once quipped, when I was giving a lecture on *Transient Workspaces* at Harvard, that speaking as an insider makes it impossible for the outsider to say anything. I take this view of the *insider* not to silence those who come from *outside*, but to access an experiential analytical location from which to incite and enrich conversation so that those coming from elsewhere can also be free to use their own analytical locations. Imagine being a professor with a class in which each student brings his or her experiences to bear on a specific subject; one common issue, yes, but many different eyes, minds, hearts, and hands.

The challenge of reintellectualizing, dethingifying, and rehumanizing *munhu mutema* as an insider is this double placement. On the one hand is the self-writer (*munyori ari kuzvinyora*), declaring independence of thought and intellect, finally exhaling: “We write about ourselves, *at last!*” The keywords must be legible among the people, hence the extensive deference to *chidzimbahwe*. On the other hand is a scholar who answers to a larger academic audience that has certain expectations. *The Mobile Workshop* has its feet firmly planted in *chidzimbahwe* idioms and addresses the academic from there, emphasizing that our writing as *vanhu vatema* must be relevant to *vanhu vatema*, just as most Africanist writing is relevant to the countries such scholars hail from first and foremost. To be meaningful to the people of Africa, these narratives must be grounded in a language that the people are articulating, as opposed to simply mobilizing local

knowledge as empirical evidence in a thesis that simply seeks to advance an idea originated from and addressing debates in US or European academies. To do that, these narratives must start seeing the people of Africa as more than just their “informants” (which in Zimbabwe explicitly means “sellouts,” given our history of *vatema* who sold out their fellow *vatema* to the Rhodesians during the war of self-liberation)—as people engaged in intellectual conversation through everyday engagement with things and challenges.

To return to Herskovits, *fossil* and *vestige* are words of *vachena* with no meaning in *chidzimbahwe*—the analytical location I write from—and both fall far short of the meanings and uses of *ruzivo* in the context of *tsika/chivanhu*. On the contrary, the irony explored in this book is precisely the ruse of *varungu* like Duerden, Rheinallt-Jones, Hoernlé, Junod, Fantham, and Bieshevel, busy fossilizing and turning *vanhu vatema* into unthinking objects of study while their colleagues like Watt and Brandwijk, Lloyd, van Warmelo, Maingard, and Laydevant were besieging the homes of every *inyanga* (healer) to make them show and tell them about every medicinal and poisonous plant they knew. We are talking of Wits and UCT medical schools and anthropology departments, local and overseas laboratories, missionaries, and Native Commissioners—a vast meshwork of *vachena* plundering the knowledge of *vatema*.

The temptation for most “indigenous knowledge” scholars is to want to restore the golden age and mourn its death when *vachena* arrived. The displacement of *vatema* and the forcible partition and occupation of their land is turned into a sudden rupture between the regime of the fossil or savage (*vatema*) and the civilizing mission (*vachena*). The challenge is to breach this epistemic boundary between “precolonial,” “colonial,” and “postcolonial” and to write from within the everyday lives and terminologies of people, which are paced and temporalized in their own complicated ways (Karp and Masolo 2000, 3). Nothing like a wholesale clearing out of ideas and practices marked *vachena*’s occupation, as the “savage’s ‘fables’” died and fossilized into “prehistory.” The clock of *ruzivo* certainly did not automatically rewind to zero, no void in *ruzivo* was ever created, and no wholesale “transfer” of revolutionary ideas from Europe filled a void that, after all, did not exist.

The process of writing for and as *munhu mutema* is one of continuing rehumanization, and we should be clear that the Africanist—the one for whom Africa is an object and subject of study—is justified in seeing Africa from a different place. I only insist that the Africanist understands that we all write from a particular analytical location, that no one viewing platform

is more legitimate than another. We just need to understand its reasons for articulation and, as people of Africa variously located, to judge for ourselves whether it expresses us or something else entirely.

I write from where I write because of what history forced me to write. Some write as beneficiaries of Europe's Enlightenment and its intellectual aftermaths; I write in refusal of being a mental victim of its thingifying impulses and actual aftermaths. I did not choose to be dehumanized, but I inherited the consequences of the Enlightenment tradition, which placed upon me the burden of first having to justify my intellect based on a standard set by the same system that thingified me and then having to self-educate myself on *vatema's* modes of knowledge, because not only were they never taught in school and university, but they were deemed *fabulous* (i.e., fable matter).

Instead of seeing the coming of *vachena* and the moment they ruled Africa as a rupture, I see *ruzivo rwevatema* as the bridge—or the drift—that enabled *vachena* to cross, occupy, partition, settle, exploit, and make a home out of Africa. Whichever part of Africa one may be in, the story of *varungu's* arrival was not only a journey guided by *vatema* who knew the land and its bounties, but also one in which the travelers tapped into *ruzivo rwevatema* to survive. Indeed, one could make the same case for *vachena's* disruptive encounter with the Maoris in New Zealand, Aboriginal Australians, and the first nations of North and South America.

This is where the historical and “indigenous knowledge” scholarship on Africa thus far is weak, in that it has not defined such *ruzivo* from the names and meanings its producers give it. One way to do so is for *vatema* to tell their stories, to do so by revisiting their own vocabularies and experiences, to go back and relive the activities and spaces they inhabited and still inhabit, and use them as equally powerful sources and filters for reading these libraries compiled by outsiders. Methodologically, that is what this book aimed to do.