Chapter 18
Politics of Belonging:
Ethnicity and Identity of the Kalanga People of Bulilimamangwe District in Colonial Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The Kalanga occupy the south-western parts of Zimbabwe, their larger concentration is in modern-day Bulilimamangwe district although some clusters of Kalanga people are distributed throughout Kezi, Gwanda and Tsholotsho districts, among other areas, west of Zimbabwe. The chapter acknowledges that Kalanga identities in pre-colonial Zimbabwean society were multiple, however, it mainly focusses on Kalanga religion (the Mwali/Ngwali Cult) and Kalanga language and demonstrates how these pre-colonial Kalanga forms of identities were later politicised and (re) interpreted and manipulated by colonialists, missionaries and Africans in an endeavour to construct Kalanga ethnic identity. The main purpose of the chapter is to present and reflect on selected Kalanga precolonial forms of identities and show how these were used to (re) construct the Kalanga ethnic identity in colonial Zimbabwe. The chapter further argues that identities are not fixed primordial phenomenon but are constructed and reconstructed over the longee durree using precolonial forms of identities such as language and religion.

INTRODUCTION

The Kalanga ethnic group is found in Bulilimamangwe district, in the South-western parts of Zimbabwe today. In this district, the Kalanga comprise of 95% of the total population, the Ndebele make up only 4% while other ethnic groups make up only a percentage of the total population. This is a group whose history has not yet been widely explored, yet these people claim that they were one of the first people to occupy the Zimbabwean plateau. According to Gwakuba-Ndlovu (2012) the Kalanga were a part of the Bantu 'tribes' which drifted southwards from the Great Lakes region and East Africa in about A.D 900.

The present-day Kalanga's origins can be traced to a thousand years back. Tlou and Campbell (1997:98) also postulate that the Bakalanga (Kalanga) arrived in what is now western Zimbabwe and north-eastern Botswana as early as about 1000 AD. It has been assumed that the Kalanga are hybrids of the Shona and the Ndebele who have tended to adopt Ndebele identity. Contrary to these assumptions, the chapter endeavors to show that Kalanga is an independent ethnic group although they have continued to interact with various groups found in Zimbabwe such as the 'Shona' and Ndebele. The Kalanga are linked to the Leorpard's Kopje Culture which is a pottery tradition associated with people that are considered to be the ancestors of the Kalanga. The Leopard's Kopje culture was the first human settlement that flourished between AD 420 and 1050.

The Leorpard's Kopje culture evolved into modern-day Kalanga. Huffman (1974:120) maintains that the Leopard's Kopje people were the ancestral Kalanga. He goes on to assert that there is a correlation between the distribution of Leopard's Kopje and 19th century Kalanga, the continuation from Bambandyanalo to 19th century Kalanga ceramics of Kalanga implied in oral traditions. However, this hypothesis does not mean that all ancestral Kalanga necessarily made the same pottery or that all Leopard's Kopje people spoke Kalanga. Beach (1984:208) also stressed the same point when he observed that the Kalanga are derived from the Leopard's Kopje culture and that they were the basic population on the western end of the Torwa state. Otukile (2003:57) gives a slightly different view when he postulates that the Leopard's Kopje people were probably descendants of the Zhizo farmers yet on the other hand, the Kopje people were ancestors of the VaShona and Bakalanga. It is not known as well whether the Leopard Kopje people were integrated into Great Zimbabwe, a state whose rulers might have come from the Leopard Kopje communities. The objective of this chapter is to show how Kalanga forms of identities such as language and religion were used to construct and re-construct Kalanga ethnic identity in colonial Zimbabwe.

BACKGROUND

This chapter grapples with the nature of Kalanga identities prior to the arrival of missionaries and colonial rulers. In this way, it moves beyond the contemporary scholarship that focuses on recent identities, by capturing Kalanga identities since the pre-colonial era. The investigation into the dynamics of ethnic identities among marginalised groups such as the Kalanga has a compelling significance for contemporary societies. Ethnicity has received fairly adequate scholarly attention in Zimbabwe and this demonstrates its palpable significance in the daily lives of ordinary people particularly in the context of deep-seated ethnic tensions. The chapter draws insight from scholarly work in Zimbabwe on minority histories, including Kalanga history. For more information on studies of minority and marginalised groups in Zimbabwe see (Msindo 2002 & 2012; Mujere 2012; Ndhlovu. 2010; Ndlovu; 2011 Nyambara; 2002 & Nyika, 2008). Enocent Msindo's pioneering work on Kalanga ethnicity in Zimbabwe from 1860 to 1990 has left a very visible imprint on Zimbabwean historiography and this chapter draws some insight from his work.

There has been a surge on scholarly work on minority groups in Southern Africa. Academic literature on ethnicity and identity was consulted in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the nature, origins and state of identities in Africa. Academic literature on the identities was examined in order to gain insights into pre-colonial and colonial state of Kalanga identities and to establish shifts, continuities and discontinuities. In 1989, Southern Africanist scholars made a contribution to the studies of ethnicity in a book edited by Vail (1989) entitled *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa.* Most of the chapters

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