

Can Women's Voices be recovered from the Past? Grappling with the Absence of Women Voices in Pre-Colonial History of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Umbuzo wokuthi amazwi abesifazana engenyulwa kanjani embalini ungakhaya sengathi ngumbuzo omdala kwabanye abantu, kodwa uma sikhangelela umumo wokucwayisiswa kwembali kweZimbabwe, lombuzo lokhu uqakathekile kakhululu. Lokhu kubangelwa yikuthi inguduzi zembali yalelizwe kungakafiki abamhlophe kazizange zizihluphe ngodingisisa ngemisebenzi, amazwi lemibono yabesifazana ezingwalweni abazilobayo. Abesifazana abathintwa lakulezo ngwalo zembali yeZimbabwe kuhlangukelwa lalezo ezilotshwe ngalezinsuku. Lokhu kutsho ukuthi inxenye yoluntu lweZimbabwe aluthintwa lakancane kuzingwalo zembali le. Lolugwadlwana lujonge ukucubungula iziji ezimayelana lokungazwakali kwamazwi abesifazana kumbali yesizwe, kunye lokwethula amaqhinga angasetshenziswa ukuze kubuthwe amazwi kanye lokuqakatheka kwabesifazana embalini yesizwe seZimbabwe kungakafiki abelungu. Nxa lolugwadlwana lubukeka njalo luzwakala sengathi lugxile kabanzi kumibono yokuhlaziya imbali, lokhu kungenxa yenjula yodala olumayelana lokudingisisa imbali yabesifazana jikelele. Ngempela, imizamo yokudingisisa ngembali yabesifazana kufanele iqale ngo kuzwisisa izindlela ezijulileyo zo kwembiwa kwembali yabesifazana.

The question of whether women's voices can be recovered from the past may sound very old-fashioned to some people, but in the Zimbabwean academic situation, it is still pertinent even after all the advances made in researching women history elsewhere. This is because there is no attempt by historians to grapple with the absence of women voices in mainstream narratives of pre-colonial history of Zimbabwe. Invisibility of women has been maintained even in the latest historical works on pre-colonial history of Zimbabwe. This means that the existing histories neglected the activities of half of the population of the pre-colonial Zimbabwean societies. This article explores the conceptual, historiographical and methodological issues related to invisibility of women in history as well as strategies of recovering women voices from the past. If this article sounds too theoretical, this is due to pertinent conceptual issues involved in an attempt to recover women voices in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. The starting point is indeed to grapple with theoretical frameworks necessary for the recovery of women issues.