

Burial Sites as Contested Memorial Terrain: Historicising Burial Places of African Indigenous Church Founders in Zimbabwe

Phillip Musoni

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4597-8526>

University of KwaZulu Natal

mphil2020@gmail.com

Abstract

Abrahamic religions emphasise remembering their origins, how they began, where they come from, and possibly where they will keep the flock moving forward without losing focus. “Then Joseph made the sons of Israel (Jacob) swear [an oath], saying, “God will surely visit you and take care of you [returning you to Canaan], and [when that happens] you shall carry my bones up from here.” (Gen 50:35 Amplified Version). Against this backdrop, this article discusses the centrality of the burial sites of the late Bishop Samuel Mutendi and Archbishop Ezekiel Guti. In July 1880, Bishop Samuel Mutendi was born in Zaka, Masvingo, and died at 96 in 1976. Bishop Samuel Mutendi was buried in Gokwe, Defe-Dopota. Archbishop Ezekiel Guti was born on 5 May 1923 in Ngaone, Chipinge, and died at 100 on 5 July 2023. Archbishop Guti was buried in Bindura, Mashonaland East Province. What is critical to note is that the burial places of these two church founders were not the places of their birth. From an African traditional worldview, family members should be buried in their rural villages closer to where their late departed relatives were buried. Additionally, the article observed that Archbishop Guti was given a hero status and should have been buried at the Zimbabwe National Heroes Acre. Still, Guti was buried at Chipindura in Bindura and not at the Heroes Acre or his rural home in Chipinge. The immediate questions one would ask are: what is the significance of Defe, Dopota in Gokwe and Chipindura in Bindura? Or what is the peculiarity of these two places? The current article found that these two burial places were chosen to preserve these African Indigenous churches’ history and pedigrees connecting the past to the present. This study employs a historical approach to uncover the significance of Gokwe and Bindura. Theological reflection was also used to interpret the meaning of choosing Gokwe and Bindura as burial sites for Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti, respectively.



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Introduction

The significance of Gokwe and Bindura as burial places for Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti, respectively, should be understood from a historical and theological perspective. Although the homes for these two church founders were Chipinge for Guti and Bikita for Mutendi, the two were finally laid to rest in Bindura and Gokwe, respectively. For Goldade, 2017, in Zimbabwe, it is considered an honour to be buried in one's homestead, close to one's departed relatives. However, Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti were buried far from their homesteads. Samuel Mutendi was buried at Defe Dopota, in the remote place of Gokwe, while Ezekiel Guti was buried at Chipindura in Bindura. This article also noted that despite the government declaring Ezekiel Guti a national hero, Guti was buried at Chipindura in Bindura and not at the Heroes Acre in Harare. This article was motivated by the need to reconcile and historicise the significance of the burial sites of the African Church founders: A case study of Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti's burial places. Hypothetically, this article argues that the decision to bury Ezekiel Guti at Chipindura, Bindura and Samuel Mutendi at Defe Dopota, Gokwe, was not an accident of history but had a religious meaning. The article argues that the selection of Defe and Chipindura as burial sites for Mutendi and Guti denotes a religious significance, just like the political activists buried at the National Heroes Acre in Zimbabwe. To understand this submission, this article is divided into three main sections. The first section narrates the history and origin of Samuel Mutendi, his call to be a religious leader, his spiritual journey, his death, and his burial. The second section deals with the history and origin of Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti, his call to be a religious leader, his spiritual journey, his death, and his burial. The last section is a discussion of the findings, and a conclusion is drawn from the findings.

Historicising Samuel Mutendi's origin and Defe burial shrine

In July 1880, Samuel Mutendi was born to Makuwa, son of Mudengezerwa, who was the son of Chirume Mushavi in Zaka, Masvingo, under the chieftainship of Chipinda, at Mount Havunga, the year Chief Chikore of Zaka District was raided by the Ndebele people (Chimininge, 2016). He was a premature baby (Mupanedemo, 2015). His grandmother, who was the midwife, wanted to bury him but then discovered that his eyes were blinking (Chimininge, 2014). He was then taken to the goats' pen to stay there since the place was warm and could sustain the life of a premature baby (Chimininge, 2016). Africans had their ways of sustaining the lives of premature babies that predated the introduction of incubators (often called isolette) in this technological era. A month later, the boy was taken from the goats' pen back home and named *Mutendeziso* (Dana, 2018). For Dana, the name *Mutendeziso* combines two Karanga words: '*tenda*,' meaning thank, and '*ziso*' meaning eye. Therefore, *Mutendeziso* means 'we thank the eye', which blinked.... Had it not been the eye that blinked to show that the boy was alive, the boy would have been buried alive (Dana, 2018). So, the boy was named

Mutendeziso, and later, the name was shortened to *Mutendi* (Mupanedemo, 2015). However, for Chimininge, the name *Mutendi* was given to the boy prophetically by his grandmother, telling the world that the boy would grow up and become a believer (*Mutendi*) in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Chimininge, 2016).

Dana mirrored the birth and life of Samuel Mutendi with the birth and life of Jesus Christ (Dana, 2018). For him, Mutendi's birth story echoes the elements of miraculous survival and unexpected awakening. Like Jesus, Mutendi defied death, emerging from a premature state. His name, symbolising opened eyes, mirrors the transformative aspect of resurrection (Dana, 2018). He further argued that while not directly comparable to Jesus, Mutendi's tale resonates with the themes of hope, survival, and divine intervention (Dana, 2018).

In 1908, Mutendi's family moved to Bikita, where Mutendi then took his national identity card (Chimininge 2016). In 1913, Samuel Mutendi joined the British South Africa Police (BSAP) and served as a police officer for nine years (Chimininge, 2016). It was during his tenure as a police officer that he received his first calling to preach in June 1913 in Hartley (Chegutu) when he was on patrol (Daneel, 1994). He saw a vision of the angel Gabriel, who said to him, "Behold, I tell you that you will set up a church in your tribal land" (Daneel, 2018). In the following year, he had many dreams and visions attesting that God was calling him to be a preacher. 1921, Samuel Mutendi resigned from the British South Africa Police in Chegutu and returned home. In Bikita, he was employed as a teaching assistant at the DRC Gumunyu School (Chimininge, 2016). At this school, he started preaching about the fire baptism. He also urged people to sing choruses, dance and pray independently rather than follow written prayers in the DRC hymnals (Chimininge, 2016). He supported his teachings with Biblical passages, such as Psalm 150 (Daneel, 2018). At that time, mass prayer, the beating of drums and other musical instruments, and dancing were not allowed in the Dutch Reformed Church (Dana & Daneel, 2007). For this reason, Mutendi faced considerable opposition from DRC ministers (Chimininge, 2016). As a result, Mutendi decided to travel to South Africa in search of a job. Before travelling, he preached from Genesis 28:11 about Jacob's journey to Laban's family (Chimininge, 2016). Mutendi and his friends prayed fervently to God to guide them to South Africa that day. On his journey to South Africa, Mutendi was accompanied by Charles Mabvure, Aaron Chinembiri, Paul Taka, and Muyaramwi (Chimininge, 2016). They went on foot and covered around 700 kilometres from Bikita to Pietersburg, now called Polokwane in South Africa (Chimininge, 2014). In South Africa, Mutendi and his friends joined the Zionist group of Engenas Lekganyane that had just emerged in 1925 (Dana & Daneel, 2007). In the same year, Mutendi returned to Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and started the Zimbabwean ZCC ministry (Dana & Daneel, 2007).

What is fascinating in Mutendi's historiography is that his life took a transformative turn when he encountered the angel Gabriel in 1913, even though he was not religious then (Morton, 2019). The other fascinating matter in Mutendi's historiography is that his

theology involving the beating of drums, baptism by immersion, and appropriation of traditional beliefs resonates with the ZCC's theology even before he joined the ZCC in South Africa (Morton, 2019).

Back in Zimbabwe, Samuel Mutendi began to preach the gospel to his former colleagues at Gumunyu School, and some people repented and were saved (Chimininge, 2016). His preaching was quite different from that of the Dutch Reformed missionaries since he was able to contextualise the biblical message in terms of the African worldview (Muzurura, Mutambara & Mahohoma, 2022). This is how Samuel Mutendi founded the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Zimbabwe in 1925. He established various congregations in the Masvingo Province and baptised people by immersion, which set the ZCC apart from the Dutch Reformed Church (Mupanedemo, 2015).

It is essential to note that baptism by immersion is the most adopted method for baptism among most Zimbabwean Independent or Pentecostal churches. In the context of African Indigenous Churches (AICs), river baptism holds a deep spiritual significance. Immersion in water during a river baptism symbolises death to the old self and resurrection to new life in the spirit (Guti, 2001). Participants experience a profound sense of purification, forgiveness, and spiritual rebirth (Guti, 2001). They are washed clean of past mistakes and are welcomed into a new relationship with God (Guti, 2004).

Thus, through exorcism and water baptisms by immersion, this church continued to attract many black Zimbabweans, leading to a great deal of persecution of Samuel Mutendi and his followers. Samuel Mutendi and his followers were persecuted every day by missionary churches such as the Dutch Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church (Chimininge, 2014). These two missionary churches were the dominant churches in Bikita, Zaka and the entire province of Masvingo, where Mutendi had established his Assemblies. On several occasions, Mutendi was reported to the police and was accused of organising a band of terrorists against the government (Dana & Daneel, 2007). Mutendi, therefore, decided to extend his territory to Gokwe, where these two churches had not established churches. In the past, the Gokwe district was known for the notorious tsetse fly, a vector responsible for transmitting a disease known as the sleeping sickness or human African trypanosomiasis (Shereni, 2020). Besides, the district was commonly known for the legend of Gandavaroyi Falls, located about 100 kilometres from the Nembudziya Shopping Centre, where suspected witches and wizards were thrown to death during the precolonial era (Mukonyora, 2001). This suggests that Gokwe was an extremely primitive area. Therefore, in the 1960s, Samuel Mutendi established another great centre of worship in Gokwe in Chief Sahai at a place called Defe Dopota (Chimininge 2016). However, the Mbungu shrine continued to hold spiritual significance for the Mutendi and his followers, though a new spiritual centre was established in Gokwe. The Mbungu shrine, formerly known as the Sote shrine, is located in the Bikita District, Masvingo (Muzurura, Mutambara & Mahohoma, 2022).

In 1976, during the Easter celebrations at the Mbungo shrine, the frail old bishop must have had foreknowledge of his death and told his followers that he would not see them again and that he was being called to heaven to receive the crown that was awaiting to him (Daneel, 2007). Mutendi, who was the most remarkable and independent church leader in Zimbabwe and who led the ZCC in Zimbabwe for some fifty years, died on 20 July 1976 at a newly established Jerusalem at Defe in the Gokwe South District and was buried there (Dana, & Daneel, 2007). Since then, Defe has been a place where the Zion Christian Church's congregants gather to celebrate the life and legacy of their God-fearing founding father, Reverend Samuel Mutendi (Daneel, 2018). Thus, it has been their custom since 1977 to assemble at the ZCC headquarters at Defe Dopota in remembrance of Bishop Samuel Mutendi in a celebration called *Zuva ra Samere Mutendi* (the day of Samuel) (Chimininge, 2016).

Historicising Ezekiel Guti's origin and burial on the Chipindura hillside in Bindura

On Saturday, 5 May 1923, Mr Ngwanzeni and Mrs Dorcas Guti from the Mutema Ngaone area of the Chichichi Village Chipinge were blessed with a baby boy (Takavarasha 1987, 3). Mrs. Dorcas Guti named the boy Handinawangu. Handinawangu became the first son of Mr. Ngwanzeni and Mrs. Dorcas Guti (Takavarasha, 1987, 3). However, Dorcas had two sons before this marriage, while Ngwanzeni, because of his several wives, had many children (Takavarasha, 1987).

In nearly all traditional African societies, names have meanings (Nwadiokwu *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, naming children is a momentous occasion often marked by ceremonies in many traditional African societies (Nwadiokwu *et al.*, 2016). Some names mark the occasion of the child's birth. For example, if the birth occurs during the rain, the child would be given a name that means 'rain' 'Mamvura', or if the mother was on a journey at the time of birth, the child might be called 'Chenzira' (off the road). This is what we see with the birth story of Handinawangu. Dorcas named the boy Handinawangu as a way of venting her bitterness. This is so because, at first, Dorcas' parents gave her (Dorcas) to Ngwanzeni for marriage to thank Ngwanzeni for doing good to the family of Dorcas (Erwin 1985, 11). However, Ngwanzeni, who had several wives already, decided to pass Dorcas on to his nephew, Mucherechedzwa, to be her husband (interview 19/01/2024). After she gave birth to two sons, Mr. Mucherechedzwa died, and Mr. Ngwanzeni took Dorcas back as his wife (Erwin 1985, 11) and gave birth to Handinawangu. Having this in her mind, Dorcas called her son Handinawangu, which means "I don't have any of my own". Dorcas was trying to re-tell her story, as she was filled with a feeling of rejection and sorrow. For her, being handed from one man to another without her consent depicted a situation of slavery and being unwanted (Takavarasha, 1987).

Adding to this painful narrative, in traditional African settings, wives in polygamous settings supported themselves. Dorcas was given the plot to support her children. In

addition, according to the age-old African customs, Handinawangu, being the eldest child in a family of three, namely Handinawangu, Serah and Nelson, Handinawangu must earn money to provide for any education of the younger children if education was to occur (Erwin, 1985). Therefore, to help provide for the family, Handinawangu, in 1937 in his early teens, began the first of what was to be a series of dealings with the white man who ruled Zimbabwe then (Erwin, 1985). The interaction with the white farm owners during Handinawangu's early days was full of disappointments (Erwin 1985, 13). At a certain time, Handinawangu earned as little as twenty-five cents a month (Erwin 1985). Knowing that he had been defrauded (Erwin 1985, 13), Handinawangu left these employers and started working as a carpenter up to the time he left his carpentry to become a full-time Minister of Religion when he founded the Assemblies of God Africa (AOGA) Church.

Accordingly, Handinawangu's life as a preacher started one night when he returned home from his workplace, Mutare, which white farmers still owned (Erwin 1985, 15). One day, as the family gathered in the kitchen, Dorcas, their mother, narrated what a missionary preacher had preached while she was in the streets of Chipinge.

When my mother visited another place where she heard about the last punishment for all sinners, she came back and, in the evening, as we were in a small round thatched hut surrounding a fire, she began to relate the story to us. When I went to bed, I had a sleepless night. That night was the night of my calling to seek God. In the morning, I went to my mother and asked if she can show me a man who can explain to me about God. My mother said, "You know very well in this place there is no preacher and no church." I went into the bush by myself and began to cry under a tree, saying, "Creator if you are there save my Soul." I did this for several days, disappearing into the jungle and weeping under the tree without telling anybody. Sometimes, I would sit on the rock under the tree or lie down looking up to heaven for several weeks. But one afternoon something wonderful happened. I heard beautiful singing in heaven, and it was like the whole heaven was singing very sweet thick music. As I was wondering and listening, I heard a voice saying:" Fear not and sin not (Guti 2014, 22).

This article posits that praying to the Creator and looking up to heaven suggests that from time immemorial, the Shona people of Zimbabwe knew about the existence of a Creator whose dwelling is in heaven. This Creator is commonly known among the Shona tribes as Nyadenga (the owner of heaven), Musikavanhu (the Creator of human beings), weKumusoro (one who stays in heaven), Muwanikwa (he who was before anything was), and many other names given to this God (Van der Merwe, 1957). This article also observed that the Shona people of Zimbabwe shared the same cosmological worldview with other African societies in understanding the existence of the Creator who created the heavens and earth. In that vein, Mbiti argued that missionaries did not bring a God to Africa, but God brought missionaries to Africa (Mbiti, 1970). This is supported by the fact that no missionary ever taught Handinawangu that there was a Creator to whom he pleaded for several weeks to save his soul. No missionary ever had to convince Handinawangu that there was a Creator who created the living and the dead.

Shorter argues that missionaries' only task in Africa was to convince Africans that Jesus Christ was the great ancestor (Shorter, 1977) or the proto-ancestor (Bujo, 1992).

After this encounter, a series of prophecies set the centre stage, pointing to God calling Handinawangu to be a preacher. First, Handinawangu was told in a vision that his name would change from Handinawangu to Ezekiel (Erwin 1985, 43). Handinawangu agreed with that vision. So, going through legal channels, he changed his name and added Ezekiel (Erwin 1985, 43). Accordingly, Ezekiel became the name by which most people in Zimbabwe and across the globe knew this famous preacher.

In 1941, after many days of prayer and fasting, the Angel of God appeared to Ezekiel, and he saw in a vision the man who was to baptise him (Guti, 2014). Later in the same year, Ezekiel Guti met Enock Gwanzura, the black overseer of the Apostolic Faith Mission Church, who gave him a simple message about Jesus Christ. Guti received Jesus Christ as his personal saviour and was baptised in the river by Enock Gwanzura. From that day, Guti joined the Apostolic Faith Mission Church.

Historicising the birth of ZAOGA FIF and the Chipindura burial site

Guti's popularity came to light when he joined the AFM after his baptism. In no time, Guti was appointed a lay evangelist in this church (Maxwell 2006, 66). During that time, the initial focus was not on Guti but on the powerful figure of Enock Gwanzura, the overseer of Black churches of the AFM as a whole (Maxwell, 2006). Gwanzura was remarkably gifted in healing, exorcism and preaching and founded many of the AFM's black churches. For Maxwell, though Enock was gifted in healing and exorcism, Guti was equally powerful with the gift of healing, prophecy and a gift of preaching (Maxwell, 2006). He formed a prayer band group that used to meet in his house at cottage 593 in Highfields (Maxwell, 2006). The prayer band group was known as the Ezekiel Guti Evangelist Association (EGEA) (Maxwell, 2006).

In 1949, Ezekiel Guti began to preach with his group at Rhodesia Force Club and moved around Harare, working and preaching, and many miracles happened (Erwin, 1985). Later, he moved to Highfields. Highfields is a major suburb in the capital city of Harare in Zimbabwe. However, at times, many confrontations with missionaries happened, resulting in Guti's preaching certificate being taken from him. During this time, Black preachers needed to be certified by white missionaries to preach on the streets. Without the certificate, one would not preach on the streets or in the church. Accordingly, Guti was often denied an opportunity to preach on the streets. Guti and the prayer band group started to meet secretly at his cottage 593. So, since the group was no longer under the AFM, many times when the group attempted to go out to preach, their leader Guti would be convicted for planning a coup against the white Rhodesian government of that time (Erwin, 1985).

In 1959, Nicholas Hepworth Bhekinkosi Bhengu of the Assemblies of God (AOG) from South Africa came to Rhodesia to hold a soul-winning crusade in Salisbury under the banner 'Back to God' crusade. This is how the Assemblies of God (AOG) Church officially opened its branch in Highfields in the capital city of Salisbury, now known as Harare in Zimbabwe (Tagwirei and Masango, 2023). Quoting Mpoko (2019:16), Tagwirei argued that several local gospel ministers, such as Reverend F. Murwisi, Reverend Kenneth Mawire, Reverend Daniel Gara, and Reverend Wilfred Mutasa, joined Apostle Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu and established the Black missionary work in the AOG (Tagwirei & Masango, 2023). Against this background, Ezekiel Guti, who only had a few believers then, joined the Assemblies of God- Church (Maxwell, 2006). Before Bhengu came to Zimbabwe, Guti envisioned a large white sheep, which he later felt must have been Bhengu (Erwin 1985, 84). When Bhengu finally came to Zimbabwe and met Guti, they shook hands, and it was such a powerful spiritual experience for both that their hearts melted (Erwin 1985, 84). Bhengu trusted Ezekiel so fervently that, in his absence, Guti would automatically carry out the AOG leadership roles in Harare. Thus, Guti would oversee the congregation since Bhengu was stationed in South Africa (Erwin, 1985). However, some people were unhappy with this relationship and spread negative stories about Guti's leadership. People would write to Bhengu telling him that Guti was getting a large following of people, warning him that he would lose his Church to Guti (Erwin 1985, 85). Later, a decision was reached to excommunicate Guti from the church.

The fame of my being used by God threatened missionary leaders and they said, "You want to take over." They told me to choose between two things either to leave the church or to sit down in the bench not preaching." I was afraid to leave the church and agreed with their decision to stop preaching. However, I tried to sit down, but when a preacher preached, fire burned in my spirit and would find myself again in the streets preaching. It was then that they expelled me. I did not ask anyone to follow me. I told those who followed me to return to the church, but some persisted in following me (Guti 2014, 30).

For six months, Guti did not know what to do. He could not return to the streets to preach without the preaching certificate. This was not the first time a missionary church excommunicated him. As noted by Maxwell, the withdrawal of Guti's preaching certificate from the AFM resulted in Guti and his EGEA prayer band group not going to AFM, and they started to fellowship at his cottage 593. So, again, after his excommunication from AOG church, Guti could not go back onto the streets to preach without a missionary certification. It is against this background that Guti migrated to Bindura.

In 1960 God said, rise from Highfields, and quickly go away. I wept not knowing where to go, but he said, rise go to Bindura, a very primitive area, no one will trouble you there. I will make my work grow through you. I was shown in the spirit, and I arose and went to Bindura (Guti, 2014).

Although Bindura was unattractive, in the spirit, Guti could see what God would do, so he prepared to leave, knowing that he would be gone for a long time (Erwin, 1985). He did not tell the people of Highfields that he would be gone for long, but the Spirit revealed it to them. They wept and took up an offering of fifty cents for him (Erwin, 1985: 88). With no accommodation or promise of food or help, Guti left for Bindura carrying his carpentry tools in the hope he could support himself (Erwin 1985, 89). On 12 May 1960, Guti delivered his first sermon under a gum tree near Chipindura Hill in Bindura (Erwin 1985, 90).

The history book of ZAOGA records that many people were miraculously healed on that day. People with different sicknesses and diseases were healed during Guti's preaching under the gum tree (Guti, 2014). On this day, the ministry called Assemblies of God Africa (AOGA), a name which could have been borrowed from the Assemblies of God Church, was born under a gum tree in Bindura, near Chipindura Hill.

Later, Guti bought an old Salvation Army church built near the Chipindura Hillside. This Salvation Army church became the first church building of the AOGA Church. The building was no longer used when he bought it from the Salvation Army church. Perhaps the Salvation Army, a missionary church, failed to attract a good following in Chipindura. However, with the coming of Guti, who was gifted in performing miracles and seeing visions, Guti won the hearts of many and became members of his church. Later, the church grew and reached many nations. Today, members from all walks of life undertake a pilgrimage to the Bindura Chipindura Spiritual Centre for prayer retreats. In addition, because Guti used to pray in a cave located in the Chipindura Hill, his church has turned that cave into a prayer retreat centre. Today, the Chipindura Hill is commonly known as *ku Gomo re ZAOGA*. The church has also built a cathedral and a healing centre and has maintained the old church. Today, many adherents of this church and other denominations come to Bindura to pray on ZAOGA mountain, at the old gum tree, in the cathedral, and in the Healing Centre building. However, while the old church was also a prayer centre, today, it is no longer a prayer centre because Ezekiel Guti has been laid to rest in it.

Major findings and discussion

Guti, who died on 5 July 2023, was buried on 10 August 2023 at the old church in Bindura, Chipindura. According to Guti's directive, the old church was renovated to accommodate the grave of Ezekiel Guti. Guti, like Mutendi, must have had foreknowledge of his death and told his executive to renovate the old church at Bindura. However, he misled his executive regarding renovating the old church when building a room attached to the old church, which was purportedly his bedroom to sleep in when he visited the prayer centre. Only the close family members knew that the old church was being turned into a mausoleum. Besides arranging his burial site, Guti, who must have foreknowledge about his death like Samuel Mutendi, told a multitude of his church pastors during his address at the 2023 pastor's Deeper-Life Conference that his time to

depart was near. He exhorted his pastors to stop praying for him but encouraged the church to pray for the three apostles he had ordained to continue leading the church when he was gone. Guti publicly announced his succession plan on that day, including Apostle Joseph Guti's appointment as the church president deputised by Apostle Michel Nyambo and Apostle Steve Simukai.

So, Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti's burial sites were not an accident of history but were carefully selected. Burying Samuel Mutendi at the Defe shrine and Ezekiel Guti at the old church in Bindura was meant to connect the old to the new. This submission is because the burial sites were not selected by the family members or the leadership of these churches but by Mutendi and Guti themselves. The Biblical Joseph made a poignant request before his passing. He instructed the Israelites to carry his bones with them when they left Egypt. His desire was not to be buried in exile but rather to rest in the Promised Land – the land flowing with milk and honey God had promised their ancestors (In-Kook Ko, 2013). Bindura for Guti marked the beginning of his ministry, the ministry that had spread to many nations. While the specific reasons for Mutendi choosing to be buried at Defe are not documented explicitly, this article argues that Defe holds much significance in Samuel Mutendi's spiritual journey and leadership. Accordingly, this article argues that the two burial shrines remind the followers of these two church leaders of the church's history, its origins, how it began, where they come from, and possibly where they are going, and keeping the flock moving forward without losing focus.

Although critics would argue that burying church founders at church shrines promotes idol worship, this article maintains that burial sites for African church leaders at church centres must be understood from the Church's historical and theological perspective. The article found that the practice of burying church founders in churchyards is not peculiar to Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti. The Anglo-Catholic leaders, including bishops and abbots, were typically buried in consecrated churchyards associated with cathedrals, monasteries, or other significant ecclesiastical centres (Rumble, 2013). These burial grounds held a spiritual significance and were often located near places of worship (Rumble, 2013). For Rumble, the burial of church founders at existing religious shrines is done to unite church members as they are constantly reminded of the faith and teachings of their church founders when they see the place where their leader was buried (Rumble, 2013). The article has noted that Christianity, as one of the Abrahamic religions, places a great emphasis on remembering their origins through preserving the graves of their important leaders. For example, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, situated in Jerusalem's Old City, is believed to be the site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. This church is revered by Christians worldwide. The Church of the Nativity (in Bethlehem) is also believed to have been built over the traditional birthplace of Jesus (Rumble, 2023). This church, again, is a major pilgrimage site for Christians (Rumble, 2023). The tomb of Rachel (in Bethlehem) is one of the revered sites for Jews and Christians. It is believed to be the burial place of Rachel, Jacob's wife.

Furthermore, we have the Basilica of the Annunciation (in Nazareth). This church commemorates the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary about the birth of Jesus (Rumble, 2023). These are just a few examples, and many other burial sites are centres for religious pilgrimages in Israel. Each site carries a deep spiritual and historical significance, drawing pilgrims and visitors worldwide.

This article posited that burying Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti at such shrines is a contestation between remembrance and forgotten memory. The article argued that burying Ezekiel Guti at the National Heroes Acre was a national hero. Though it was his highest honour it would have become a forgotten memory. This is because Heroes Acre, a national burial shrine, can only be accessed after following the prescribed protocols and procedures. This article noted that burying church leaders at religious centres strengthens the sacred shrines. This is so because, by their very nature, burial sites for religious leaders are sacred shrines (Muzurura, Mutambara & Mahohoma, 2022). People visit these sites for religious purposes, either to seek healing, healing powers, and a strengthening of faith or to seek meaning in questions of life and death (Muzurura, Mutambara & Mahohoma, 2022). This article observed that even the graves of biblical leaders, such as Abraham, King David, Jesus, and John, the son of Zebedee, are the reasons why people from all walks of life visit Israel today. This article argues that these graves are visited for spiritual revivals and to connect spiritually to these church fathers. Borrowing from Gundani's observation that the religious organisations or institutions associated with 'Mai Musodzi' and Barbara Threadgold [female church leaders] continue to define the social and spiritual horizons of Mbare residents" (Gundani, 2019), this article argues that Defe and Chipindura, Bindura as burial shrines for Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti respectively, will continue to be sacred shrines for the present and future members of these churches. Previous researchers have shown that, in the same spirit, the place where Bernard Mizeki was martyred and buried has become a focal shrine for Anglicans and other Christians, and one of the greatest of all Christian festivals in Africa takes place there every year in memory of the life and legacy of Bernard Mizeki.

Conclusion

This article argues that Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Guti's burial sites at the existing church sites must be understood from a church's historical and spiritual perspective. Thus, the motives behind burying these two church founders at Defe for Samuel Mutendi and the ZAOGA Bindura, Chipindura -the old church for Ezekiel Guti were to preserve the history and pedigrees of the church. This will help to connect the past and the present. Defe and the ZAOGA Prayer Mountain (Chipindura) as burial sites for Samuel Mutendi and Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti, respectively, are equated to the burial shrines of Bernard Mizeki of the Anglican Church and the burial shrines of Biblical religious leaders, such as Abraham, King David, Samuel, and John the son of Zebedee, just to mention a few. Religious people visit these burial shrines because they are reminded of the faith lived by their leaders.

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