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# Towards Re-Historicization: An Engagement of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe's Efforts to Rewrite the History of James Anta

Martin Mujinga 

Research Institute of Religion and Theology-UNISA, Pretoria 0002, South Africa; martinmujinga@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This paper is a follow-up to the research conducted in 2021 titled *James Anta: missionary, martyr, and the unsung hero of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe*. The paper was a reconstruction of Anta's life, ministry, and martyrdom. The research found out that although the blood of Anta was the seed of Methodism in Zimbabwe, the church was reluctant to honour him. The research also noted that the Wesleyan Methodist church created a biased history of African cultural epistemology, which has no place for people who die young and unmarried. The paper concluded with a call for the Wesleyan Methodist church to rewrite its historiography, giving space to its martyrs like Anta. After reading the 2021 publication, the Wesleyan Methodist church leadership made urgent actions towards the re-historicization of Methodism in Zimbabwe with Harare West District dubbing its April 2022 Synod as James Anta Synod. The Synod further resolved to name the school they were intending to build after Anta. Moreover, Kadoma District agreed to rename Banket Circuit (where Anta was assassinated) as James Anta Circuit. The Wesleyan Methodist church further erected a monument of Anta and made the site a pilgrimage shrine. The fast responses by the church to honour Anta in 2022 justify their zeal to rewrite their history after 136 years of reluctance. This paper used both primary and secondary sources to gather data. The paper concludes by challenging missionary churches to honour African agents whose history and sacrifice were seldomly considered and yet they were the key people in the Christianisation of Africa.

**Keywords:** re-historicization; Wesleyan Methodist church; Zimbabwe; James Anta; rewriting; history



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## 1. Introduction

The history of Christianity in Africa is a product of missionary historiography. Such history elevated the missionaries and downplayed the role played by the African agents and the sacrifices they made in the process of Christianising Africa (Etherington 2019). This paper will focus on how the Wesleyan Methodist church side-lined the sacrifice and martyrdom of James Anta for 136 years and yet after a reconstruction of Anta's life, mission, and martyrdom, the church took less than eight months to give him credence. Among the teacher-evangelists who came to Mashonaland (now Zimbabwe) with Owen Watkins and Isaac Shimmin in 1881 and later George Eva in 1882 were three Sotho tribesmen, namely Josiah Ramushu, Mutsualo, and Modumedi Moleli. The other seven evangelists were Xhosa men, namely Samuel Tutani, Wellington Belesi, Mutyuuli, Mulau Fokasi, James Anta, and Shuku (Thorpe 1951, p. 5; Zvobgo 1991; Gondongwe 2011, p. 216; Mujinga 2017, p. 117).

Anta established himself at Zvimba's kraal and built a rough pole and dagga school/church. In 1893, his school had 200 children. Anta was also a hunter and he used to provide game meat to the locals. Conflicts were rife in the Zvimba area; on the one hand, the White settlers felt that Anta was interfering with prospective mine and farm workers, and on the other hand, the locals felt that Anta was a friend to White settlers, and the new doctrine of salvation he was preaching was a threat to African status. Thus, a vacuum was created between the settlers and the Whites with Anta standing on the unmarked boundary.

In 1894, Trooper Cooper, who was a policeman, was killed whilst trying to enforce and collect the hut tax. The conflict intensified and later in the same year, on the last Sunday of September, at a church service attended by between 500 and 600 people including all seven Chiefs and Indunas of the Zvimba area, a problem erupted. The seven Chiefs were captured and four of them were murdered, on the accusation of complicity in the killing of Trooper Cooper. In 1896, the Shona uprising erupted, and some locals plotted to kill James Anta because they felt that he was a sell-out or he was involved in the murder of the four Chiefs. Chief Zvimba liked James Anta and his church and had promised him a girl to marry so that he could settle in his area; however, the relatives of Chief Zvimba's wife (the Matare's) were against the idea (Ralepata 2022).

Although Anta was this relevant in the history of Methodism, from 1886 to 2021, the church mentioned his name in their writings and speeches without paying particular attention to the sacrifice he made as a young and unmarried Xhosa teacher–evangelist from South Africa. It was after the publishing of the article titled *James Anta: missionary, martyr, and the unsung hero of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe* in December 2021 by Martin Mujinga that the church made frantic efforts to honour Anta by dubbing a Synod in his name, resolving to build a primary and secondary school in his recognition, agreeing to rename Banket Circuit (the place of his martyrdom) to James Anta Circuit, erecting a monument at his shrine and making Anta's shrine a pilgrimage shrine for prayer, fasting, commemorations, and celebrations.

This paper aimed to engage the efforts made by the Wesleyan Methodist church towards the re-historicization of the history of James Anta in less than eight months. In achieving this aim, the paper gathered data through oral interviews, testimonies, and stories of James Anta collected in the Zvimba area in 2022. In addition, data were also collected from the minutes of the meetings held by the Methodist church in Zimbabwe between January and August 2022 and August 2023. The data were analysed using a narrative analysis.

A narrative analysis was chosen because this qualitative research methodology focuses on interpreting the narrative analysis. Data were acquired and organized to allow the researcher to understand how the individuals experienced something, for example, instead of focusing on just the actual words used during an interview, the narrative analysis also allows for a compilation of data on how the person expressed themselves, what language they used when describing a particular event or feeling, and the thoughts and motivations they experienced (Abbadia 2023). A narrative analysis also considers how the research participants constructed their narratives. Of the many types of a narrative analysis, this paper implored the historical narrative because it describes individuals, events, and historical changes that happened in the story of James Anta. Historical narrative is also important because it relies on historical records, eyewitness accounts, and research and in the process presents factual narratives of historical events and shapes our understanding of history (Abbadia 2023).

The paper starts by locating the problem statement. This will be followed by a discussion on the steps taken by the Wesleyan Methodist church from December 2021 to August 2022 to honour Anta. The response by Harare West District to name the school after James Anta, the dubbing of their 2022 Synod as James Anta, efforts towards the discovery of the martyrdom site, the several visits and partnership of Harare West and Kadoma District, the conducting of the memorial service at the place of Anta's martyrdom, and the testimonies of the Zvimba people and the decision to declare the Anta shrine a pilgrimage centre will characterise this paper. The paper will conclude by challenging missionary churches to honour African agents whose history and sacrifice did not seriously attract African scholarship and yet they were the frontmen of the Christianisation of Africa.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The history of Wesleyan Methodism in Zimbabwe speaks loudly about the role played by the first missionaries and yet the expansion of Methodism in Zimbabwe was largely

the work of the 10 teacher–evangelists from South Africa (Mujinga 2021, p. 1). This glorification of armchair theorists at the expense of the teacher–evangelists who were trendsetters of the Gospel in the unknown places where they were travelling on foot at times with empty stomachs justifies the assertions of Edward Hallett Carr (1987, p. 4) that “the writing of any history is biased because it is written by the victors who write history for those who sponsor them to support a certain agenda, interest, glorify some individuals and suppress the hardworking powerless individuals”. Of the 10 teacher–evangelists, Modumedi Moleli and James Anta were martyred during the Shona uprising of 1886–1887, and yet Moleli received scholarly attention and church recognition (Graaf 1988) unlike James Anta (Mujinga 2021, p. 1). The Wesleyan Methodist church went further to ignore the history of Anta who was killed in Mashonaland West by naming the High School close to his place of martyrdom in honour of Modumedi Moleli who was assassinated in Mashonaland East (Gondongwe 2011, p. 79; Mujinga 2021, p. 2). The oversight of ignoring Anta’s martyrdom and naming the school after Moleli could have been caused by the fact that Anta died young and unmarried, and such category of people have no proper place of honour in the cultural traditions of Zimbabwe in particular. Moreover, it can be argued that this cherry-picking of heroes of faith was because the selection and rejection of people who matter in history was carried out according to the needs of the times (Fernández-Armesto 1995, p. 25).

The paper published by Mujinga (2021) pointed out the unfair treatment caused by the undefined de-historization of Anta. The paper also further bemoaned the Wesleyan Methodist church’s unperturbed action to honour James Anta, who came as a young and unmarried Xhosa missionary and sacrificed his life for the growth of Methodism in Zimbabwe. Mujinga further decried that from 1886 to 2021, between the death of Anta and the first reconstruction of his history, there was no building in his honour or a monument enshrined by the church in his recognition. For example, in 1971, the Wesleyan Methodist church conducted a church service to honour James Anta at his burial site when Rev Andrew Ndlela (the first Black leader) was the president (now Presiding Bishop) (Mujinga 2021). This was the first time for such an event to be arranged but nothing was done further than that memorial service. The issue was reignited on 23 June 1986 when Revs Nason Makweshe, Charles Manyoba, and Prof Stanlake Samkange visited the death spot and presumably mounted a copper plaque in memory of James Anta. The visit was followed by the 1986 Wesleyan Methodist Conference resolution to honour Anta by building a memorial with a cross on it, and a school or a church. Unfortunately, the plans remained Conference resolutions without action. It was only between December 2021 and August 2022 that the Wesleyan Methodist church made great strides to honour Anta and this paper is interested in this fast-track recognition and the rewriting of history.

### 3. Definition of Re-Historization and the Need to Historicise Wesleyan Methodist Church

Words do not mean the same thing all the time. In the academic discipline, different authors have different definitions of terms (Heli 2020, p. 268). Carr (1987) analysed several definitions of history presented by different historians in his book *What is History?*

Polybius defines ‘history as a story of things worthy of being remembered. On the other hand, Rousseau regards history as ‘the art of choosing from among many lies that one thing which most resembles the truth’. Moreover, Henry Johnson stated that ‘history in the broader sense is everything that ever happened, and we have to limit our understanding and study those events that are very significant and have left behind a deep impression on man’. Carlyle holds the view that ‘history is nothing but the biography of great men and that it is a record of human accomplishment, particularly of great souls. Seeley also mentions that ‘history is past politics, and present politics is future history. The writing of history is therefore based on both the myth and social interest of a given time (Carr 1987).

Carr (1987) concluded that history means interpreted records of the origin and the impact of the human being in the society.

From the definitions of history presented above, it is evident that the Wesleyan Methodists did not somehow consider the stories of Anta as oracles worth documenting as they believed that Anta's ministry, mission, and martyrdom were not worth remembering or writing about, nor was his death worth recording as one of the many events and him being one of the persons that spoke to the Methodist stories in Zimbabwe. This propensity to consider Anta as a less important man who had accomplished nothing defines what this paper is calling de-historicization, which is the opposite of re-historicization.

The word re-historicization was purposefully chosen for this paper to appreciate the efforts made by the Wesleyan Methodist church to rewrite the history of James Anta, whose ministry and mission had been de-historicised for over 136 years. For [Huang \(1990\)](#), *to de-historicise is to separate or remove from history or to deprive of historical context*. The second part of Huang's definition where he mentions de-historicization as deprived of historical content resonates well with the subject matter of this paper given how the Wesleyan Methodist church mismatched the name and the ministry of Anta with the Methodist history. Re-historicization is therefore used to reconstruct 136 years of the Wesleyan Methodist church's non-committal on something they later carried out in less than wight months.

Re-historicization in this paper demonstrates the evidence of the coordinated efforts of the Wesleyan Methodist church to appreciate the work done by Anta. It is an elucidation of the official statements and resolutions made by the church between December 2021 and August 2022 to reposition the rejected martyr of Methodist history. It is a retelling again and again, a reiteration, a re-storying, and a rewinding of the way Anta was massacred at the flat stone in the Zvimba area during a church service and how this brutal killing made the history of Methodism. Furthermore, re-historicization means a re-engagement, a recap, and a re-emotionalization of the stories of Anta's martyrdom and how his blood was the seed of Methodism in Zimbabwe. Moreover, re-historicization describes the turnaround of the Wesleyan Methodist church to dedicate schools, a circuit, the erection of Anta's monument, and declaring the site as a pilgrimage site to rewrite the Methodist history. Lastly, re-historicization is a navigation of the Wesleyan Methodist church's expediency to rewriting its history in 2022, surpassing their previous efforts of 1971 and 1986 where plans were made but no action was taken to honour Anta.

This reluctance by the Wesleyan Methodist church even under Indigenous leadership is what is being referred to as "the church's unwillingness to honour Anta". The phrase was deliberately championed because of three reasons. The first is the reluctance that has been expounded above. Second, although the Wesleyan Methodist church was aware of the brutal killing of James Anta during the Mashonaland Uprising of 1886–1887, the church took 57 years to station a minister in the Zvimba area with the first minister being Matthew Jacha Rusike ([Mujinga 2020](#), p. 7). This action would have been caused by the fear that the area was haunted or that there were no missionaries to be stationed there given that the minister who was sent there was a Black minister. Third, the Wesleyan Methodist church is one of the mainline churches with educated ministers in Zimbabwe. For example, by the end of 2022, the Wesleyan Methodist church had 381 active ministers, seven supernumeraries (retired), and 49 students in training, making a total of 435 ministers. Out of the 381 active ministers and seven supernumeraries, 21 had PhDs, 54 had master's degrees, 67 had first degrees, and more than 50 were towards acquiring Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD degrees at different high-learning institutions locally and internationally ([Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 2022a](#)). From the statistics of 21 PhDs, 54 master's degrees, and 67 honours degrees, the Wesleyan Methodist church had 142 ministers with an honours degree, and yet none of the ministers dared to give Anta his rightful place in the history of the Wesleyan Methodist church in Zimbabwe.

#### 4. Towards Re-Historicization of James Anta

The journey towards the discovery of the shrine of James Anta and the building of the monument involved both people from the church and the secular world, the priests

and the traditional leaders. Several meetings were held by Harare West District, Kadoma District, and the Methodist church in Zimbabwe itself. In this section, attention will be given to how the Anta story was simmering in different parts of the Wesleyan Methodist church and how each constituency managed to fulfil its ambition to honour James Anta, and how the Methodist church crowned the re-historicization process at its 45th Annual Conference in August 2022.

#### *4.1. Wesleyan Methodist Church's Journey towards the Discovery of Anta's Shrine: Efforts from Harare West District*

The narratives of how Harare West District engaged with James Anta were chronicled by Rev Badi Lombard<sup>1</sup> and the leadership of the district represented by its Bishop Rev Dr. Kudakwashe Paradza, the District Lay President Mrs. Sheila Mashiri, and the District Synod Secretary Rev Peace Simango. During the interview, Lombard chronicled that, in 2008, Rev Rodrick Shoko was given land through his relationships with the Nharira people, whom he had met when he was working in Norton Circuit. The land was close to Norton in the then Kilworth farm under Chief Nyamweda. Lombard went further to stress that "Rev Shoko did not want a bigger land but a small hectareage and yet he was allocated 35 hectares of land, he decided to engage the church to use part of the land and this was agreed with the Nharira people" (Lombard 2022). Rev Shoko went on to register the piece of land with the Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement in the name of the Methodist church (Paradza 2022). The Synod of 2009 agreed to build a school but unfortunately there were no resources. Rev Shoko was transferred from Harare West and the momentum ended with his transfer to Greendale Circuit in Harare East District. When he was restationed in Harare West, now working in Mufakose Circuit, the land had been occupied by St Jones Church, which had several projects with the local people reiterated Lombard. The problem arose when St Jones Church tried to register the land in their name; it was then discovered that the piece of land was registered in the name of the Methodist church in Zimbabwe and this gave power to Harare West to reclaim their land said Lombard.

The District Development and Relief Committee was given the task of spearheading the building of the school for the district on said land. The registration of the land with the Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement was finished with the land named the Kilworth plot. However, the name of the school was still needed. Lombard reiterated that several names were proposed such as Nharira High School, Methodist Church High School, and Kilworth High School, among other names, but there was no consensus. It took the district time to agree on the name. At the time of the application to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, it was clear that a proper name for the school was needed and there was no agreed name for the dream school. Paradza stressed that the district realized that a number of the proposed names were either names of the existing schools or they had political connotations as they demanded the honouring of the local people. Harare West settled for Kilworth High School.

During the same period, Warren Park circuit in Harare West was dividing and a name was needed for Zororo/Comfort Circuit. A proposal was given to name the new circuit James Anta. The name Anta was proposed as any other name that had not been honoured before (Paradza 2022). On the night before the meeting to finalise the circuit name, an article on James Anta was posted in the clergy group by General Secretary Rev Dr. Martin Mujinga. After reading the article, the next day, the Development and Relief Committee had the name of the school—James Anta and not Kilworth High School (Lombard 2022). The meeting unanimously agreed to name the school after James Anta because of the complaint raised by Mujinga (2021) that Anta was assassinated in Mashonaland West and nothing was done by the church. The Kilworth land was also in Mashonaland West and Harare West found it prudent to honour James Anta (Mashiri 2022). This action resulted in the new circuit being called Zororo/Comfort and the dream school—James Anta High School.

With all the excitement of a new name to honour a Methodist martyr, congregants in Harare West were unfortunately slow to grasp the concept of the school and the new name



that came with the project. Harare West District Standing Committee agreed to name the 2022 Synod the James Anta Synod said Paradza. The dubbing of Harare West Synod as James Anta Synod was a deliberate move by the district to retell the stories of Anta and further make the Methodist Community re-learn the new history and catch the new vision of a new school. The naming of the Synod, James Anta, which is an unusual Methodist ecclesiology and theology, was also a way of the retelling of Methodist history and the contribution of Anta as an unsung hero. James Anta Synod was also an opportunity to fundraise for the dream school. The fundraising included the printing of t-shirts, caps, stationery, and targets for circuits to continue fundraising for the establishment of the school (Simango Peace 2022).

After the District Synod, people had the zeal to know more about James Anta. Throughout the district, lessons on the history of Methodism were conducted in different men, women, and youth groups with the paper published by Mujinga (2021) being the major source of information and a point of reference. The paper was widely read and greatly appreciated by the congregants as narrated by Lombard. Lombard added that the period was a bit emotional as people wanted to know more about James Anta and why the church had pigeonholed him. In one of the Development and Relief Committees, there was a suggestion to exhume the remains of the evangelist and rebury them at the prospective James Anta High School (Lombard 2022). This drive led to the zeal to see where initially he was buried. These discussions led to the engagements of Harare West and Kadoma District to make efforts to locate Anta's place of martyrdom. These efforts led to the discovery of the martyrdom site whose details will be discussed later.

#### *4.2. Wesleyan Methodist Church's Journey towards the Discovery of Anta's Shrine: Efforts from Kadoma District*

The stories of discovering the gravesite of James Anta in Kadoma District started in 2019. The narratives were presented by Rev Acub Simba, who was the Bishop of the district. In his narratives, Simba confirmed that the issue first came into discussion in the district towards the end of 2019 when the then Presiding Bishop, Rev Dr. Solomon Zwana, visited the home of Mr. Nehemiah Ralepata, one of the senior members of the Methodist church, who was once a teacher in the Zvimba area. Mr. Ralepata (aged 98) was engaged in the trip because of his knowledge of the area and his sharp memory, although he was developing bad eyesight. In addition, he had been to the site on several occasions before, the latest being in the 1980s.

Mr. Ralepata's offer to help in identifying the gravesite of James Anta was disrupted by the outbreak of COVID-19 (Simba 2022a). The issue was reignited in December 2021 when an article on James Anta was posted in the clergy group by General Secretary Rev Dr. Martin Mujinga. The article triggered some emotions among the Methodist community, especially in the way the life, ministry, and martyrdom of James Anta and how the Methodist church had de-historicised him was presented, said Simba. Simba went further to reiterate that the paper revealed several interests that made the district think of engaging the matter seriously. The issue was discussed by the district leadership and all stakeholders agreed to intensify the search of the grave of James Anta. Kadoma District Standing Committee took the matter to the District Synod, resulting in the district recommending to the 45th Methodist Church Annual Conference to build a school and a church at the Anta gravesite. The district also learnt that Harare West was discussing the same issue seriously and the two districts agreed to contact the Connexional Office (head office) to be permitted to work together to identify the shrine of James Anta.

### **5. Journey towards the Discovery of the Gravesite**

While Harare West and Kadoma Districts were busy with their efforts towards identifying the gravesite of James Anta, other church leadership also caught wind of that one of them was Connexional Lay President Mr. Gear Hanyane. Mr. Hanyane felt obliged to engage in the matter of the minority personnel like Anta. He sent a WhatsApp message

to Rev Dr. Mujinga that read “Good evening General Secretary, your research on James Anta opened my eyes to early missionaries of the Methodist church in Zimbabwe. Your efforts to have him recognized and honoured will receive support” (Hanyane 2022b). Being a congregant in Kadoma and a national leader, Mr. Hanyane coordinated the efforts of Harare West and Kadoma Districts to have the shrine of Anta erected.

On Monday 30 May 2022, a team comprising him, Mr. Nehemiah, and Mrs. Tongasi Ralepata, Bishop Acub Simba, Bishop Kudakwashe Paradza, Rev Dr. Daniel Muzenda (Principal of Moleli High School), and Rev Badi Lombard headed towards Banket to search for the gravesite of James Anta. Unfortunately, the team went to the wrong gravesite. According to Mr. Hanyane, three reasons led them to go to the wrong grave. First, the only person who was still alive who had visited the grave before was Mr. Nehemiah Joseph Ralepata, who was 98 years old. Mr. Ralepata still had a sound memory and good hearing, but his eyesight was fading. On the way, he missed the turn-off from the main road. Coincidentally, the road led them to a similar rock outcrop. The features of the outcrop were also similar to the ones described by Matshobana (2021) and Hanyane (2024). Second, given that Anta had died as a sell-out among the Zvimba people, no one had bothered to remember where he was buried as he was not a hero in the Zvimba area. Third, the period between the year of Anta’s martyrdom and the time people were searching for his grave was over 136 years and even the local Methodists had no information or history about him. There was a big generation gap and these factors contributed to the identification of a wrong grave (Hanyane 2024).

In their lostness, the team was received by Mr. Charles Chipere, who resided in the Maryland area. Mr. Chipere claimed to know the gravesite of James Anta, which he also claimed was in his field in the Chief Zvimba area. Upon hearing of the discovery of the gravesite, Mr. Zivai Mudhege, a Methodist congregant of 97 years and resident in Banket, also doubted the gravesite that was discovered.

## 6. The Discovery of the Proper Gravesite

With the excitement of discovering the grave, unfortunately, without enough evidence of the site, the team shared the news with the church leadership and plans to erect a monument were in motion. Rev Mahla Mahla, the superintendent of Banket Circuit, highlighted the difficulties that were faced in the process of finding the proper gravesite from the time a team visited Banket. There were contrasting stories and diverging reactions about the proper gravesite as well as different directions to the gravesite being mentioned. Mahla narrated that

When I travelled to Murombedzi to see the District Administrator to inform him about the event of commemorating James Anta, I met some people from Chikaka Circuit who also believed that the site was in their circuit but were not sure of the exact place. These narratives and other issues convinced me that the Chipere site was probably not the correct there was no drilled rock in that area as explained by Mr. Ralepata and Mudhege and the direction was not correct. We therefore made efforts to investigate the issue with about a week to go before the unveiling. All the efforts were in vain. On Sunday the 10th of July one of our circuit stewards Mr. Chibi phoned me saying that he had met an old man from St Andrews compound near the Greycourt area who indicated that there was a rock marked James Anta at Greycourt. On Monday the 11th of July Mrs. Mahla and Mr. Chivi went to Greycourt and there was a place just by the roadside as described by the old man. We knew this was indeed the burial place of James Anta as there was an inscription of his name at the top of the rock and holes were visible on the rock (Mahla 2022).

Mahla’s narrative was confirmed by Bishop Simba in his explanation of going to the wrong grave and how eventually they located the proper gravesite. Simba said

Our first trip to Trelawney in Banket gave us hope. We were led to a site that resembled the true site of Anta’s gravesite. We made all the arrangements to erect a monument for James Anta there. It was only three days to the day set for landmarking the site that the correct site was identified through one old man who had lived in the area for a long time. A

church leader and his farm workers were discussing many things accidentally the Church leader (Mr. Chibi) shared about an event in remembrance of James Anta. One of the farm workers told Mr. Chibi that the place they had identified was the wrong gravesite. Mr. Chibi contacted his superintendent minister Rev Mahla Mahla and the team was led to the proper site where they found the stone written James Anta three days before the erection of the monument. This led to the team revisiting the place the following day, two days before the scheduled date to build the monument (Simba 2022b).

James Anta's grave was discovered in Trelawney–Greycourt in the thicket area in the field of Headman Savieri Dzvene where he was killed at a rock surface and placed in a hole.

When the rebellion came in the Chief Zvimba area, people arranged to kill Anta because they said it was through him that the four Chiefs were killed. Those who arranged to perform the killing were relatives of the dead Chief (Zvimba's) wife. They gathered at night at the kraal of Matare, the half-brother of the late Chief Zvimba, and they resolved to come at night and kill Anta. They came where the congregation was singing beside the campfire. Anta knew people were coming but thought that they were only visitors (Matshobana 2021; Mujinga 2021, p. 11).

### 7. The Erection of the Memorial Monument: Re-Historicization of James Anta

In his WhatsApp message after the discovery of the gravesite, Mr. Hanyane wrote

Good morning General Secretary, While the discovery of James Anta's tomb is still fresh and exciting in our minds, may I suggest itemizing the discussion at the Finance, Property and Administration Committee or Standing Committee which would hopefully result in an authorizing one of the districts (Kadoma or Harare West) to erect a memorial tombstone there to be unveiled by the Presiding Bishop on date of James Anta which in your article indicated on 18 July. Just my thoughts. (Hanyane 2022c)

Mr Hanyane's passion pushed the Wesleyan Methodist church to have the item on the Agenda of the Standing Committee. At its sitting in June 2022, the Standing Committee agreed to (i) act the 1986 Conference Resolution to erect a monument for Anta, (ii) adopt a recommendation to name the prospective school of Harare West as James Anta, (iii) officially dedicate a tombstone for Anta (Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 2022c, p. 11). The memorial and tombstone unveiling of James Anta was conducted on Saturday 16 July 2022 at Trelawney—Banket Circuit.

Present at the rite of passage were Presiding Bishop Rev George Mawire; Connexional Lay President Mr. Gear Hanyane; General Secretary Rev Dr. Martin Mujinga; Acting Mission Director and Education Secretary Rev Wilfred Dimingo; Bishops of Districts, namely Rev Acub Simba (Kadoma District), Chishamiso Nyabonda (Gweru District), Edmore Chiota (Harare East District), Kudakwashe Paradza (Harare West District), and Matthew Ncube (Bulawayo District); Revs Badi Lombard, Loveness Lombard, Gracious Mupazviribgo, Ngoni Nyanga, Laneton Shariwa, and Nkulumo Zhira; Rev Dr. Elliot Mashonganyika; Rev Dr. Daniel Muzenda; Revs Daryl Maturi, David Muleya, Linre Link Mutendzwa, Obert Shatai, Effias Munkuli, James Mtemasango, Junior Paradza, Mahla Mahla, and Obey Mavhuka; District Lay Presidents for Kadoma and Harare West Districts Mr. Perseverance Murambakanda and Mrs. Sheila Mashiri, respectively, and representatives from the Men's Christian Union Mr. John Rambakupetwa and Pardon Chihwehwe; Provisional Administrator for Mashonaland West Mrs. Cecilia Chitiyo; Mr. Nehemia Ralepata and Mrs. Tongasi Ralepata, representatives of Banket Circuit; representatives of Chief Zvimba Headman Savieri Dzvene and Mr. Charles Chipere; Headman Morgan Kazembe and Chief Stanlake Mhondoro; Sub-Chief Karigamombe; and representatives from the District Administrator's office and the community of the Greycourt area and those around Trelawney.

The Wesleyan Methodist church took the event as a time to mourn James Anta, enshrine a memorial monument, unveil the tombstone, and express long-living memories expressed in the inserting of flowers from the Youth Department, the women's movement,



Ruwadzano/Manyano, and the Men's Christian Union. The flowers were an expression of love performed through the rite of passage during the Methodist church in Zimbabwe burial rituals. The other reason for inserting the flowers was also an expression of the mourning because when Anta was assassinated, there were no proper mourning rituals that were performed including a decent burial (Mawire 2022). It was also a time for the community and the church to relive their history through the martyrdom of James Anta.

According to one of the village elders, Mr. Jacob Vhazhure, Stanlake Samkange, one of the illustrious Methodist ministers, visited the area of Anta's martyrdom and appreciated his work. He was the first graduate in Mashonaland.

In his opening remarks, Presiding Bishop Rev George Mawire said

Today, the Church has come to rebury, commemorate, celebrate, and put a memorial of the Methodist martyr James Anta. . . as the People Called Methodist, we are gathered as a people of faith to remember our history, celebrate our existence, and remember the life and sacrifice of those who came before us. It was through the Africans that Methodism was planted in Zimbabwe and yet for over 136 years, the Church had forgotten one of its heroes and martyrs—James Anta. . . on behalf of all the past heads of the church, I dedicate the tombstone and the memorial shrine of the teacher, evangelist, and martyr James Anta, a South African Xhosa, who sacrificed his job as a young man and gave his life for ministry and Methodist mission in Zimbabwe, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. AMEN (Mawire 2022)

The epitaph was written: "This monument stands in memory of James Anta a martyr born in South Africa. He came to Rhodesia in August 1892 as a teacher and an evangelist. James Anta was killed on 18 July 1896. This memorial was dedicated on 16 July 2022 by the Presiding Bishop Rev. G. T. Mawire" (Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 2022d).

The event was characterised by many revelations that led to the death of James Anta. According to Mr. Ralepata's testimony, Anta was given the daughter of Chief Zvimba, whom he was supposed to marry, and it is believed that she knew about the death plans. She told Anta about the plans and in response he said 'if they kill me, it is fine; that is the work I came to do, dying for the word of God'. His fiancée insisted, 'Can we help you escape?', to which Anta replied, 'no, I come to die for the word of God' (Ralepata 2022). The killers visited him that same night and Anta was murdered. According to Ralepata's version, Anta was shot from the back but remained standing. From the time he was shot up to around 10 am, the following day, he was alive. His spirit departed around 10 am (Ralepata 2022). After his brutal killing, Anta was left for some days before burial and his faithful dogs kept watch over his body until the Chief ordered that the corpse be shoved into a nearby antbear burrow, amongst the rocky outcrops and boulders. Thus, Anta did not receive a proper decent burial. Over time, the stone close to where he was buried was engraved with his name at the top (Ralepata 2022). Ralepata went further to narrate that

Anta was instructed by the missionaries in Harare to gather people at their flat rock waiting for Isaac Shimmin to come and preach to them. People gathered and the minister sent someone to see whether people were gathered, behind the people sent were liberation fighters who later moved to the Mugugu area in the Musengezi Purchase area. Anta was surrounded by white soldiers. He was shocked to realise that instead of the minister, freedom fighters were coming. Mugugu was the first one to know that people were going to be shot. 'Some of the chiefs who were there were the Gushungo clan, the families of Mugugu and Nyamangara. "Please forgive me I am telling the history of what happened. Gushungo and Patrick Ngonzo always called me to come to the meeting to share these stories. (Ralepata 2022)

Another speech was received from Mr. Vhazhure, one of the senior community leaders of Greycourt. Vhazhure mentioned that there are controversies among the Zvimba people on who exactly caused the death of Anta, the locals or the settlers. He expressed concern

that it was not fair to accuse the people of Zvimba for the killing of Anta and yet they are also claiming that the four Chiefs who died in cold blood are also martyrs who have to be celebrated (Vhazhure 2022). Vhazhure justified the request by mentioning that

During the brutal killing of the Zvimba chiefs, Patrick Gonzo was told to stand up. He took snuff and said shot me do whatever you want. He was shot five bullets but did not die and the soldiers were surprised whether they were shooting a human being. He was bleeding but not falling. He was pushed by one of the soldiers with the back of the gun and he fell down then he died. As a reward for their resilience for the Zvimba people the missionaries took Patrick Gonzo's son to Waddilove Institute and he became one of the first Black Court Interpreters. When the missionaries compensated the Zvimba area for standing with them, Stanlake Samkange was the first to be the minister of religion because of the influence of Anta.

The commemoration of the Anta monument did not end as an event but was a process towards the rewriting of the Wesleyan Methodist history in Zimbabwe. In his email to Martin Mujinga on 14 August 2022, Mr. Hanyane explained the role he played in the re-historicization of the Methodist history:

Soon after reading your article on martyrs and unsung heroes of the Wesleyan, I searched the internet for more information about James Anta and others. As I visited the 2022 Synods, I took it upon myself to encourage Districts to research these heroes and create more awareness of James Anta. Upon addressing Harare West and Kadoma I realized that they had plans to honour Anta. Upon realizing the interest shown by and support from the Church's Executive I assisted in further marketing and creating awareness to the Standing Committee. Meanwhile, I had been working with the Districts of Kadoma and Harare West to visit and revisit the James Anta sites and talking to the traditional leaders and those who had institutional memory like Mr. Ralepata. I did further research on Bernard Mizeki and Modumedi Moleli, particularly their burial shrines in preparation for Anta's memorial, and shared the information with the two Bishops. And I am glad the Memorial took place within such a short space of time, thanks to the hard work and funding from the two Districts, Moleli High School and Connexion. At the Conference, more marketing and awareness are required for this site and heritage to be declared a Methodist Pilgrimage. Let us continue rebuilding Anta's memorial during our leadership. (Hanyane 2022a)

The above email justifies the action of the church as the senior lay leader of the church had been moved by the undocumented history of one of the pioneers of Methodism in Zimbabwe. The 45th Annual Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church endorsed a recommendation from the Standing Committee to erect the monument of James Anta in retrospect. The Conference also agreed to grant Harare West permission to name their prospective school as James Anta High School. The Conference further agreed to keep the shrine as an annual pilgrimage where celebrations and prayers will be offered at the shrine. Moreover, the Conference agreed to build a church at the site (Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 2022b, p. 45). In 2023, the 46th Methodist church in Zimbabwe Annual Conference agreed to build a primary school at the place of Anta's martyrdom and name Bantket Circuit as James Anta Circuit (Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 2023, p. 50).

## 8. Analysis and Conclusions

The road to honour Anta had been long but was concluded at a congested time. In 1971, the Methodist church in Zimbabwe conducted a church service to honour James Anta, and Rev Andrew Ndelela, as President (now Presiding Bishop), attended. On 23 June 1986, Revs Makweshe, Charles Manyoba, and Prof Samkange visited the death spot and presumably mounted a copper plaque in memory of James Anta. In 1986, The Wesleyan Methodist Conference passed a resolution to honour Anta, to build a memorial with a

cross on it, and that a school or church be built in his honour. Finally, on 16 July 2022, the Wesleyan Methodist church implemented the 1986 resolution when Presiding Bishop Rev George T. Mawire led a large service to unveil and dedicate a tombstone for James Anta. The prolonged process was fast-tracked by the 2021 publication and it is my view that the publication was a charm that stirred the Methodist church to re-historicise the de-historicised history of James Anta.

From the narratives of Anta presented in this paper, it is true that even the blood of the African agents was also the seed of the gospel as Tertullian expressed it during the height of the persecution of the patristic period. The re-historicising of the Wesleyan Methodist historiography with Anta at the centre presents the true history of the Wesleyan Methodist church in Zimbabwe. There are lessons that the missionary churches can learn from Anta so that they will honour fellow African agents like Anta. First, Anta paid the supreme price for his obedience to Christ. Second, he was a brave man who used his gifts and graces to follow Christ and to stand between two rival groups. Third, he was a faithful teacher, preacher, and evangelist. Fourth, Anta was not concerned about remuneration but had the zeal of the gospel as a soldier of Christ, one who had determination to leave everything for the sake of the gospel. Lastly, he loved people amidst all the tempest where he finds himself as a suspect. The above lessons from Anta justify the reason for the rewriting of Methodist history where Anta speaks with a loud voice.

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, Badi Lombard was no longer a Methodist minister but for purposes of history, he will be referred to as Rev Lombard because during the period under review, he was the District Chairperson of the Development and Relief Committee responsible for the developments in the district.

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