The people who call themselves Zezuru are just part of the great block of Shona-speaking tribes which live in present day Southern Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa. The Zezuru are a collection of tribes, each independent of the other, which centre round Salisbury. Their language constitutes one of the main groups of dialects into which Shona is divided. Nowadays the Zezuru are a very mixed stock and include, not only descendants of the old Shona people who were discovered by the Portuguese in the early 1500s, but also descendants of the Rozwi people who conquered the old Shona empire of the Monomotapa round about 1690. Thus the Shona people of Nkwe district are called Zezuru but are of Rozwi stock. This mixture of strains and stocks is the case everywhere in Rhodesia. Every village in the country will contain its group of foreigners - that is people unrelated to the headman - and village headmen find they have to rule people who live in their villages, not because they are related to him like his brother, sons or grandchildren with their wives and children, but because they find it convenient to live with him and have received his permission to do so. Thus in a small village of 50 or 60 people you will find several strains or clans - first the dominant strain of the headman with his brothers, sons and grandchildren who all swear by their own totem-animal; secondly
you will find the strains of the people who are related to
the wives of the men of the village; they have their totem
animals; then lastly you will find the strangers who respect
their totems and who live in the village because, though
unrelated to the headman, they find life peaceful under him.
This mixed-up state of affairs which we find in every village
obtains also in the collection of villages which make up a
district and which is ruled over by a district-head or sub-chief.
He will have under him village-heads of different clans,
each with his own totem-animal and so, unrelated to him. Then
lastly the tribe over which the chief rules and which includes
many districts, will be a mixture just as the village and the
district are mixtures. The chief of the tribe is the head of
the clan to which the land belongs - but he has under him
district heads who belong to other clans. There are a number
of Zezuru chiefs today such as Chinamora, the chief of the
Shosha who live in the Salisbury district; Chiefs Zwimba
and Mangwandi who live in the Zwimba and Mrewa districts,
Chief Seke of the Harawa who lives in the Seke Reserve, and
others.

The Shona people were never very gifted in
politics or war. They were never able to combine in order to
defend themselves and so, time and time again, they were
invaded, conquered and made to pay tribute. There was the Rozwi
invasion of 1690, the Swazi and Ndebele invasions of the 1830's
and the European conquest in 1893-6. They have had to spend
a good deal of their history in the rocky fortresses which
they built in the hills from stone slabs and blocks in order to
protect themselves and their stock. These fortresses with their
walls and passages can still be seen all over the hilly
country of Rhodesia, and the people still tell stories of the
Ndebele invasions and how they had to take to the hills.
Sometimes the old and feeble could not get there in time and
were killed; sometimes the Ndebele warriors managed to storm
these fortresses. It was probably only when the Ndebele raiding ceased to be severe, or when the Shona peoples avoided being raided by paying tribute, that they took generally to living in the plains. Since then their numbers have increased considerably. However, while the Zezuru never produced a political or military genius, they practised the material arts of life in quite a high degree and were, in this respect, superior to the Ndebele who had concentrated on the developing of a warrior state. It is with the material culture of the Zezuru which we want to talk about in the remainder of this talk.

Perhaps the most remarkable art of the old Shona-speaking peoples was building—that is the building of walls of stone blocks without mortar. This is the form in which the buildings have come down to us today, as we find them in many areas in a wide arc that stretches from the north-east of Southern Rhodesia right round to the south-west of Bulawayo. The stone material for building is found widely in Rhodesia—it was obtained in this way. The action of the climate caused the enormous granite rocks to form layers which swelled up. The Shona people found it easy to break up these layers of granite into stone blocks either by dropping large boulders on the peeling layers of granite or by using wedges and fire. These stone blocks were used for building chiefly, it seems, the houses of the chiefs. As late as 1820 we know of a village built partly in stone on the Bombusi by the forerunners of the present-day Nanzo who live near Gwako. In this village, the principal houses were made of stone blocks with the usual roofs of poles and thatch. Seemingly, the walls of stone were usually covered with a cement of dogga which had continually to be renewed but which kept the wind out whilst the layer of dogga remained. About two feet from the tops of the walls themselves, the stones were arranged in a herring-bone pattern, an effect which is very like that in the stone walls of the ruins of the Great Zimbabwe near Port Victoria. Spaces were left for doors, the lintel consisting of a large block of granite, for nothing was known about the arch. These stone houses were round or square, the king's hut being the largest. His wives' and
councillors' huts were smaller, and in the same style, while the common people lived in the pole and dagga huts which are the ones familiar today where bricks are not employed. The village at the Bombuzi was surrounded by a stone wall. Structures similar to this are found all over the areas I have mentioned and it is clear that the ancestors of the present Zezuru, Manyika and Kanga x tribes were proficient in dry stone building and that they used their art for the courts of their chiefs, for defensive purposes, sometimes for constructing a smithy and doubtless for other purposes of which we know nothing. The most magnificent structure is that of the Great Zimbabwe which was probably the court of some great chief and which we know to have been used as such by the Rozwi in their greatest days. I consider that it was from the early Shona-speaking inhabitants of Rhodesia that the Rozwi learned the art of building in stone, as well as much else, including the language they now speak. Building in stone has declined among the shona mainly for two reasons. Firstly, their general way of life and national spirit was bound up with the Kingship, first, and mainly, with the most ancient Kingship of the Monomotapa, and then with the kingship of the smaller chiefs who took his place. Building in stone has tended to disappear with the disappearance of chiefly glory and state. The Nanza who built the stone village on the Bombuzi treated their chief with great respect. He was carried everywhere on a litter, and was surrounded by a bodyguard; he alone could own drums and he was saluted by his subjects with much reverence and clapping of hands and with the salutation "Ndauwe" - a salutation which is in use also among the faraway Ndau. It was the royal family which lived in the stone houses which were constructed for them. The second reason for the decline in building in stone has been the migration of many people from the rocky and hilly parts of the country to the river valleys and plains. This was the result of peace and freedom from attack. In these places stone is not abundant and houses and fences have been constructed of other materials than stone.
Examination of these stone ruins shows that they were inhabited by much the same sort of people as those who lived in Rhodesia at the beginning of this century. The iron and pottery is similar to the iron and pottery made by the Zezuru. The knowledge of iron working was passed down from father to son and each family had its own place to go to for its ore. Thus the Shawasha would go to a hill called Biri and dig out the ore; the Njanja would go to Hwedza hill and the Gowa to Chipadze. The Industry was divided into three sections. First, that of the miners. The miners bartered the ore to a second section, that of the smelters, who took the metal from the ore and made it into ingots. Lastly there was the section of the smiths who got the ingots from the smelters and beat them into hoes, choppers, axes, spears, arrow-heads, razors and wire. These objects were obtained by the people from the smiths by barter - ten hoes for a head of cattle, two for a pig, one for a hen and so on. A poor man might work for the smith and be given a hoe or an axe after his period of service was over. While, if a man were to give the smith a daughter to be his wife, the smith would be expected to produce a whole lot of iron objects for the father in law.

The other things which were found in the old ruins were pieces of pottery. The type of pots and the designs on them show that they are the same as those made by Zezuru women to day. Zezuru women were skilled too in other trades beside pottery. They wove very good baskets of many shapes and sizes. The Zezuru also made game nets and fishing nets of all shapes and sizes. They made platters and spoons, grain morters and sledges out of wood, head belts and bangles and many types of jewellery. They made blankets and garments out of bark cloth and even out of cotton which was spun and woven from the cotton plant. Here is a very old account of the Karanga written as long ago as 1590 by a Portuguese explorer dos Santos which shows that the Mashona were skilled even in
those days: He says: "There are no craftsmen among these Kaffirs except blacksmiths who make arrows, assegals and hoes, hatchets and a kind of half-sword which they call "lupanga", and weavers, who make a kind of coarse cotton cloth about the size of a moderately large handkerchief which they call "machira." This cotton is spun by the women, which is almost contrary to their usual province, their most ordinary occupation being to dig, sow and weed. Therefore Kaffirs who are careful to choose laborious wives, are the richest and have the most provisions. Some of the Kaffirs also weed, dig and assist their wives, but they are very few, for they are all indolent and lovers of idleness, given to feasting, singing and dancing; therefore they are poor, their favourite exercise being hunting wild animals, monkeys and wild beasts for food."

These remarks, written over 350 years ago, lead us to say something about hunting. The Zezuru are very clever indeed in making snares and traps for birds in the trees, for fish in the rivers, and for buck and other animals in the fields. Such traps are very skilfully made and set, and show a great knowledge of the habits of the animals which they want to catch. They make noose traps for small buck, stone traps for rats and mice — even a trap which fires an arrow into the marauding rat. There are log traps and game pits covered over with branches and grass for the large animals. The animal walks into the trap and is either crushed by the falling log or impaled on the stakes which point upwards from the bottom of the pit. Their most famous trap was the enormous game trench which took about three months to dig, so deep and wide was it. When this was dug it had long fences added on each side. Then, one day, a whole party of hunters would go out and drive game of every type into the trap — along the fences and into the trench, where the terrified animals either trampled one another to death, or were killed by spears thrown at them from above. Such a trap gave meat in abundance in the old days, enough
to tide the people over the hoeing season when all their energies had to be turned to the fields. There was meat for everyone – the heads were given to the spies who first saw the game. If an eland fell into the game trench, they carefully noted on which side it fell on to the ground, for that side belonged to the chief, the owner of the land – for it was royal meat. This day gave the hunters much to talk about later on. In the evening after __ were welcomed back by their women whose shrill cries welcomed the meat. The women could now rejoice because of the meat and also because they could now relax after the tension of the day when their men folk had been hunting and in danger.

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The country of the Bantu people known as the Wakaamba is on the Eastern slopes of the Kenya highlands, between the Tana river and the railway line which runs from Mombasa to Nairobi and on to Uganda. Ukamba, as the country is called, is divided into two parts by its only really permanent river, the Athi, which also divides the people into two groups with some marked differences in language, manners and customs. The two districts of Ukamba are known as Mochakos, West of the Athi, and Kitui, East of the Athi. The Wakaamba were the first of the inland Kenya tribes to come into contact with the British. Close by the District Commissioner's office in Mochakos township are two small pillars, all that remains of the original fort built in 1892 by the Imperial British East Africa company when it first started to open up the interior of the country. Last year, the 50th anniversary of the British administration in the Kitui district was celebrated by a parade. The first Government offices in Kitui were opened by Mr. Ainsworth in 1898.

The country round Mochakos is higher than the rest of Ukumba, being between 5,000 and 6,000 feet, but the country falls rapidly towards the South and East to little more than 3,000 feet.
There are a number of mountain ranges and solitary hills, varying in height from 1,000 to 3,000 feet above the rest of the country. A few of these mountains have good land but most of them have steep sides with deep gullies and much rock. Down from the hills and through the red earth valleys run the tortuous winding scars of wide sandy riverbeds, dry for the greater part of the year but brown raging torrents after rain. In Ukamba, there is little rain and much drought. In many places the only water supply is a hole in the bed of a sand river into which thick muddy water oozes, drop by drop.

Ukamba has been ravaged by soil erosion, brought about by over population with its consequent evils of overstocking and over cultivation. Large stretches of the country are, in fact, little more than scrub-covered desert.

Today the people have realized the dangers of their traditional agricultural methods and, guided by Government, are taking stringent measures to prevent the further deterioration of their land.

Very little is known about the early history of the Wachambas. Some say that they originally came from the coast while others think that they came from Mt. Kilimanjaro to where they had been driven by the Masai. It is certain however that they first settled in the Machakos district and it is not more than 200 years since they crossed the Athi river to Kitui.

According to their own traditions the Wachambas were originally hunters. Even today they have a high reputation as hunters, particularly of elephants. Now they are also great agriculturists and breed cattle. Originally their homes were always in the hills from which they descended in daytime to cultivate small patches of ground in the valleys and to herd cattle, sheep and goats. In the evenings they returned to the hills where they were safe from Masai marauders. The Masai lived in the wide grassy plains of Ukamba.
The Wakamba are an intelligent people, adaptable and cheerful, and they make good craftsmen. They have always been recognised as good soldiers and they supply many recruits to the Kings African Rifles and to the Kenya police. Among the attributes which make them good soldiers are their cheerfulness and their readiness to help others out of difficulties.

The languages of the Wakamba, Kikamba, is similar to that of their Bantu neighbours in the North, the Kikuyu, Meru and Umbu. These four tribes can all understand each other and have many similar customs. The social organisation of the Wakamba is based on a system of age grades. The early grades correspond to the various stages of growth from childhood to maturity and are not very clearly defined. The late grade of men, the Elders, is divided into five classes according to rank. Admission to this grade is by payment and usually takes place in middle age. The Elder can always be recognised by the little round stool hanging by a chain over his shoulder. The lowest rank of Elder is open to all on the payment of a goat to the other Elders. But after that each promotion is made only through the general consent of the other Elders and becomes valid after the payment of a bull. According to their rank the Elders are entitled to eat various parts of the beasts killed at public feasts those of the highest rank being allowed all kinds of meat. These Elders of the highest rank carry a pronged staff as a symbol of their dignity.

There are similar age grades amongst the women and the highest, that of the married women with children, is also sub-divided according to rank, those of the highest rank being entitled to help at sacrifices to ancestral spirits.

Many Wakamba, through the influence of the missions, are now Christians but their traditional religion is one of communion with the spirits of their ancestors. They believe that a man has a body and a soul. At death the body dies but the soul goes immediately to the lower regions where it continues a life similar in all its forms to that on earth. These spirits show a great interest in the lives of
those of their families still on earth and there is a very strong bond between the living and the dead. The spirits expect constant attention from their living descendants who go in fear that the spirits may be displeased and who attribute their misfortunes to the anger of the spirits. The father of a Kamba family puts aside regularly at every meal a small portion of food for the spirits, while to speed a traveller the head of the family will sprinkle on the floor of the hut a few drops of milk and water or a millet gruel mixed with ghee.

There is also a generalized, but very vague, idea of a Supreme being who was responsible for the Creation. This being lives in the sky and is entirely good; therefore the Wakamba do not worship him or sacrifice to him.

There are two ceremonies by which the Wakamba are initiated into full membership of the tribe. At the first ceremony circumcision of both males and females is carried out. The second ceremony is the most important ceremony in which young people are given full membership into the tribe. This usually takes place between the years of 12 and 20.

Until the middle of the last century Wakamba men wore no clothes/ a short apron round the waist. Later they began to wear a strip of cotton cloth bought from Arab traders and made waterproof by rubbing with grease and red ochre. They still sometimes wear this hung over their shoulders. Although the blanket is worn by most people in the remotest parts it is now giving way to European types of clothes, particularly in the towns. In Mchakeso the married women's proper dress is a goat or calf skin rubbed clean and dressed with red ochre.

They wear many personal ornaments which vary according to the wearer's age. One of the commonest is a wide belt of beads worn by girls and young married women. Many different kinds of necklaces both metal and beads are worn by men and women of all ages. They also wear metal armbands and earrings.
Many Kambo men have scars on their skins, in patterns of lines, circles, half-moons and various other designs on both the back and front of the body. The scars are made with an knife or needle and the juice of the local trees is dropped into the wound to raise the scar. Some have scars on their faces, made darker than the skin by rubbing in the powdered roots of a plant mixed with milk. Many of the older people have their front upper teeth filed to fine points. This makes the teeth decay quickly but the Kambo are very skilful at making false teeth. They level off the stump of the old tooth and bore a hole into the roots into which they put pieces of animal bone.

It is often difficult to tell the difference between false and natural teeth. This custom is now dying out with the spread of education and medical knowledge.

The Kambo are not dependent on their herds for a living but also grow many crops. The most common of these are maize and various kinds of sorghum, millet, peas and beans. Root crops include sweet potatoes, cassava and yams and, several kinds of pumpkins. Along the streams sugar cane is grown and sometimes eaten, specially by women and children. Its most important use however is for making beer.

Under tribal discipline beer drinking was the privilege of the old men but a trown up son could buy this privilege from his father by presenting him with an ox, or, if he was poor, a goat. This is another tradition which is dying now. An important export crop in the Kitui district is tobacco, most of which is sold.

While many of the old customs survive, the Kambo, after 50 years among Europeans, have shown themselves adaptable to progress. Many of the affairs of the district are managed by a Local Government body known as the Local Native Council, which has both nominated and elected members. As councillors, the senior elders of the tribe, and the outstanding you men, are able to carry on the tribal tradition of public service. Hospital and schools have been established, roads built, soil conservation measures instituted and many other services.

The young men are learning that there are other ways of living besides subsistence agriculture and are learning their living as labourers, and craftsmen, in trade, in the public services and serving in the armed forces and the police.

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