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Traditional Leaders and Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle in Buhera District, 1976–1980

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Abstract

This article examines the role of traditional leaders during Zimbabwe's war of liberation. Contrary to the generalisations that traditional leaders and their subordinates were either absolutely supportive of the liberation war or were against it supporting the Smith regime, this paper uses the case of Buhera District to demonstrate that traditional leaders and their subordinates contributed in various ways to Zimbabwe's war of liberation. Guided by a combination of primary and secondary sources, the article argues that traditional leaders were in a dilemma because they were victims of the contending forces. However, they employed various survival tactics as they faced equally dangerous conflicting forces who put them in complex, ambiguous and contradictory relationships. The article concludes that the strategies and tactics employed by the Rhodesian Security Forces and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army guerrillas had debilitating effects on traditional leaders and their subordinates during the liberation war.

Keywords

traditional leaders – Buhera District – contribution – Rhodesian Security Forces – Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army guerrillas – survival tactics – dilemma

1 Introduction

Existing studies discussing the role of traditional leaders during the Zimbabwe war of liberation largely uphold two generalisations that traditional leaders and their subordinates were either absolutely supportive of the liberation war or were against it supporting the Ian Smith regime.¹ It is significant to realise that beyond Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) other African countries had traditional authorities who also took part in the anti-colonial insurgencies. These embody Kenya in the 1950s and South West Africa (Namibia) which was involved from the 1960s up to the 1990s. In Kenya, Percox observed that the involvement of British-appointed chiefs and headmen in the local administration system aided the colonialists to effectively shut avenues of African resistance to colonialism. Consequently, the colonial administration was concerned with improving the living conditions for chiefs and headmen in an effort to dissuade them from participating in the Mau Mau war.² However, this did not stop some affluent chiefs and headmen to support the Mau Mau.³ This underscores that the position of traditional authorities vis-à-vis supporting or opposing the liberation cause was dynamic and often changing as dictated by prevailing circumstances. Similarly, Bolliger identifies “the role of traditional authorities in military recruitment” as one of the key non-economic factors that contributed to black Namibians’ enlistment into the apartheid South Africa’s defence forces during Namibia’s fight for independence.⁴ This resulted in the majority of the chiefs and headmen being labelled anti-South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO). As a result, some of the chiefs were assassinated and abducted by SWAPO’s armed wing, the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia guerrillas from the mid-1970s. On the contrary, other chiefs supported SWAPO guerrillas.⁵ Put together, this signifies that the relationship between the colonial state and traditional leaders, as well as their acceptability among the local people and the guerrillas was unique to each environment and often changed over time.

Using the case study of Buhera District between 1976 and 1980, this paper challenges the popular notion that African traditional leaders, as paid state agents, mostly supported the Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF) during Zimbabwe’s war of liberation at the expense of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) guerrillas. It shows that chiefs’ relations with both the

1 Lan 1985, 136; Mashingaidze 2001, 103–107; Ranger 1985, 206.

2 Percox 1998, 50, 83.

3 Branch 2007, 296; Castro and Ettenger 1994, 64–65.

4 Bolliger 2018, 124.

5 Bolliger 2018, 130.

security forces and the insurgents varied and changed over time. It advances the fact that traditional leaders and their subordinates, like other areas in the country, were not a homogeneous lot who backed a single fighting force against the other. Some of the traditional leaders supported the RSF whilst others were behind the ZANLA guerrillas. There was also a third category that was double-faced in which the traditional leaders did not openly disclose their position either to the colonial government forces or to the guerrillas. However, this categorisation was at times not as neat as provided in this article. This is because in practice the traditional leaders transcended these boundaries as their relationships with guerrillas and the RSF were contextual and often changing over time. In fact, the traditional leaders and their subordinates found themselves in difficult positions given the fact that they were victims of both the RSF and ZANLA guerrillas' wartime operations respectively.

The main evidence of the study was gathered through a combination of archival and secondary sources as well as interviews that were done in 2011. These sources were used in order to reduce the challenge created by a dearth of primary sources on the district. The "sources on this district-sized native reserve are largely limited to the settler state's records."⁶ Given the lengthy period the research was done after the liberation war, the researchers interviewed those who experienced and witnessed the war in Buhera District including those practising as traditional leaders today. Our informants were made up of those who inherited the chieftainships and others who experienced the war in the rural areas as well as war collaborators and ex-combatants. Therefore, the category of informants the researchers engaged comprised the representatives of the traditional leaders as far as their experiences in the war were concerned. This makes the article a product of a combination of different critical sources better positioned to assist in explaining the complex, contradictory and ambiguous relationship between traditional leaders and the contending forces during the liberation struggle in Buhera District.

The article begins by providing a reflection on the Zimbabwean liberation war literature. The discussion then turns to the justification for the case of Buhera. It then briefly explains the impact of colonial rule in Buhera District as a prelude to the discussion on the role played by traditional leaders during the liberation war. It ends the discussion by evaluating the guerrillas and RSF's responses to the role of the traditional leaders and their subordinates during the course of the liberation war.

6 Andersson 2002, 120.

2 A Reflection on the Liberation War Literature

Studies (both published and unpublished) on the Zimbabwean liberation war concentrate on gender, the role of peasants, traditional religious mediums and mujibhas and chimbwidos (boys and girls who supported the liberation war cause by supplying the guerrillas with among other things intelligence information and food, respectively).⁷ Essentially, Nhongo-Simbanegavi discusses women's experiences and perceptions of the liberation struggle.⁸ Her work challenged the myth that had almost become factual that women made notable strides with regards to gender equality during the war. Her work compliments this research by proving, validating and challenging the dichotomous generalisation that the traditional leaders were either on the RSF side or that of the guerrillas.

Manungo in his study based on Chiweshe District emphasises that peasant grievances played a major role in deciding who was to be supported, when the peasants were confronted by the RSF on the one side and the guerrillas on the other.⁹ In the same vein, the civilians' voluntary participation in support of the guerrillas was attributed to their radical consciousness to the injustices perpetrated by the colonial regime culminating in a broad consensus between the peasants and the guerrillas.¹⁰ Traditional religious leaders also played a key role in mediating between guerrillas and the civilians. For instance, chiefs have been discredited in Dande as a consequence of their collaboration with the colonial state and subsequently Mhondoro mediums had become the focus of political action.¹¹ Clearly, these early studies on Zimbabwe's liberation war importantly celebrated the good relationship between guerrillas and spirit mediums. However, this was before other writers demonstrated that the relationship between guerrillas and rural people including traditional leaders was not always rosy as previously suggested.¹²

Moreover, Kriger using the case study of Mtoko argues that coercion or heavy handed strategies were used by the guerrillas to get support from the peasants who had conflicting agendas motivated by the differences in age, lines of lineage, gender and wealth.¹³ As a result, despite lack of popular rural support, the

7 See, Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000; Manungo 1991a; Lan 1985; Gaza 1985.

8 Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000, xix–xx.

9 Manungo 1991b, 117.

10 Lan 1985, 136; Ranger 1985, 185.

11 Lan 1985, 136.

12 Fontein 2006, 168.

13 Kriger 1992, 187–196.

Zimbabwean guerrilla war was successful. However, both scholars who argue for coercion and voluntary participation have been criticised for generalising their findings on particular districts on the whole of Zimbabwe. They ignored that the experiences of the liberation war in Zimbabwe are peculiar to each area determined by the area's geography, the political and religious institutions and the nature and degree of integration into the colonial political economy.¹⁴ By and large, the involvement of traditional leaders in the war also varied from one area to the other. Consequently, the liberation war experience in Buhera District is worth studying as it demonstrates that both coercion and peasant consciousness complimented each other in mobilising peasant and traditional leaders' support for the liberation war.

Furthermore, Robins holds a different view from both scholars who argue that there was outright coercion and voluntary participation of the local people.¹⁵ Using a case of Matabeleland, he contends that the local people's responses to the guerrillas during the liberation war varied over time and place. This makes it difficult to generalise either coercion or voluntary peasant support as the local villagers had complex, contradictory and ambiguous relationships with the guerrillas culminating in both submission to guerrilla coercion and voluntary support being witnessed. The Buheran experience whilst examined largely focusing on traditional leaders appears to point to the same scenario of complex, contradictory and ambiguous relationships observed by Robins. This is because the traditional leaders and villagers deployed various survival tactics as they responded to different, dangerous and violent contending forces namely the RSF and the guerrilla armies and their youthful 'messengers' (the mujibhas) where in all cases being found on the wrong side by either of the belligerent forces resulted in death.¹⁶ Additionally, Hove exposed the use of both coercive and voluntary co-operation methods engaged by ZANLA and the RSF in south eastern Zimbabwe to attain the backing of peasants.¹⁷ The strategies and tactics the contending forces used had devastating effects on the civilians and their traditional leadership. These works helped us to gain insights about the experiences of Zimbabwe's war of liberation in some parts of the country and situating the study in the liberation war discourse.

14 Alexander 1993, 134.

15 Robins 1996, 75–76.

16 Besides ZANLA, the military wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) there was the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, the military wing of the Zimbabwe African People's Union that mostly operated in the Midlands and Matabeleland areas. See, Robins 1996, 76.

17 Hove 2012, 193–206.

The general perception about traditional leaders, especially Chiefs during the war of liberation in Zimbabwe is that they played an insignificant role towards the war effort. This conclusion was reached because Chiefs were part of the colonial regime's system of indirect rule thus were part of the Rhodesian civil service, paid a handsome salary by consecutive settler regimes.¹⁸ More so, those who questioned settler colonial excesses, such as Chief Mangwende and Rekayi Tangwena among others were unceremoniously removed. These Chiefs resisted colonialism and sympathised with the nationalist cause during Zimbabwe's war of liberation. Related to this study, Martin and Johnson discuss Chief Chiweshe as an early supporter of the liberation war.¹⁹ This illustrates that while some traditional leaders cooperated and supported the guerrillas, others did the same for the Smith regime. Despite the fact that Martin and Johnson's work "... represented little more than a hagiography for the ruling party, an unashamed apologetic justifying the coming to power of a section of the liberation movement",²⁰ the researchers gained a lot of inspiration from them as some of the factors behind the traditional leaders' support for the guerrillas in Buhera District are compared and contrasted with those across the country.

Again, Manungo observes that there were four Chiefs in Chiweshe District.²¹ He notes that one was pro-guerrillas, that is, Chief Chiweshe. The other was against the guerrillas and in support of the government anti-terrorism propaganda. The other two Chiefs did not show open support or opposition for the guerrillas. This helped the researchers in drawing comparison on the traditional leaders' experiences in Buhera and Chiweshe Districts. Moreover, unlike Manungo who concentrated much on the role and experiences of the peasants during the liberation war, this study examines the role and experiences of traditional leaders in Buhera District. The focus on traditional leaders has been necessitated by the fact that they were recognised in local and national state structures and now receive government allowances, and enticed (although they were initially relegated) by the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ruling party) after independence, hence the need to understand their actual role during Zimbabwe's war of liberation.²² On the other hand, spirit mediums were popularised for their role in the struggle to liberate Zim-

18 Chung 2006, 226.

19 Martin and Johnson 1981, 73–74.

20 Raftopoulos 1999, 121.

21 Manungo 1991a, 179.

22 Alexander 2006, 99; Fontein 2006, 169.

babwe but were sidelined after independence since they were not part of the "land committees" during the post-2000 land reform programme.²³

Some unpublished works also exist focusing on the role of traditional leaders who include Chiefs mainly concentrating on their role in the colonial administration and others even comparing and contrasting their role in the colonial and post-colonial administrations.²⁴ Sagonda explains how Chiefs were affected by the colonial government, which used them to safeguard its interests. Furthermore, he analyses how the political sphere concerning the powers of Chiefs changed over time.²⁵ In addition, Ndabayempi discusses the transformation of traditional courts in the colonial and post-colonial period examining the changes and continuities in their operation with special reference to Lupane District.²⁶ Hadzoi also examines the continuities and changes in the powers of chiefs during the colonial and post-colonial period writing on Gutu District.²⁷ He demonstrates the continuity of the political roles of Chiefs as instruments of control and suppression of dissenting voices against the government during both colonial and post-colonial times. This study departs from these works by focusing on the role played by traditional leaders in Buhera District and the responses by the guerrillas and the RSF drawing lessons and experiences from other parts of the country.

3 Buhera District and Its Significance

Buhera District is located in the eastern part of the country in Manicaland Province, about 82 kilometres southeast of Chivhu town. Farming and cattle ranching activities are the basis of its economy. Rainfall is erratic and there are some irrigation schemes which help the people to supplement their limited harvests. Buhera District was established in 1895, as part of the Sabi District and became part of the Charter District in 1899. In 1912, a sub-station of the Charter District Office was opened at The Range, (then Sabi Native Reserve).²⁸ In 1943, the Sabi Reserve was made a full Native Commissioner's District and in 1945 the Southern part became an independent district, known as Buhera Dis-

23 Fontein 2006, 184–185.

24 Sagonda 1987; Ndabayempi 2007; Hadzoi 2003.

25 Sagonda 1987, 19–22.

26 Ndabayempi 2007, 6.

27 Hadzoi 2003, 36.

28 National Archives of Zimbabwe, hereafter, NAZ, N9/1/15 NC Charter Annual District Report 1912.

trict.²⁹ Its boundaries have remained largely unaltered since the time it became a sub-district of Charter.³⁰ It is bounded on the north and northeast by the Save River, on the south by the Devure River and on the West and southwest by the Nyazvidzi River, as illustrated on the map below.³¹

Although various scholars and researchers have written on the liberation struggle and about traditional leaders, especially Chiefs, there is little written about the role the Chiefs in Buhera District played during the liberation war. Linked to this, McLaughlin points out that pragmatism compelled ZANLA to seek allies from all sectors of the rural population irrespective of ideological, religious and regional differences.³² Thus, guerrillas entering an area for the first time sought to establish good relations with the headmen, Chiefs, spirit mediums, local pastors and expatriate missionaries. Guerrillas approached these critical stakeholders personally both to win their support and to discourage them from reporting their presence to the authorities.³³ In fact, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and its military wing, ZANLA followed a Maoist approach to the war because of its sponsorship from the People's Republic of China and this was enunciated in its Mwenje II document of 1972.³⁴ The strategy entailed, "explaining to the "masses" of Zimbabwe why ZANU wanted to fight and what" it intended to achieve by resorting to the armed struggle. Accordingly, through mass mobilisation, ZANLA established widespread support networks used "both during the initial phase of observing the enemy, cacheing weapons and supplies, and later during actual battle."³⁵ In the same vein, during Zimbabwe's war of independence Buhera District was part of ZANLA's Monomotapa and Musikavanhu sectors opened in 1976 in the Manica operational province and was thus a ZANLA sphere of influence.³⁶ It was due to the attainment of independence by Mozambique in 1975 which opened the whole eastern frontier to guerrilla infiltration into Rhodesia. The guerrillas entered the district through the Chirozva and Birchenough Bridge areas which were close to the Honde Valley and Chipinge guerrilla infiltration zones respectively. In this light, the case study of Buhera District reveals the importance of traditional leaders because they aided successful guerrilla infil-

29 NAZ, S1563 NC Buhera Annual District Report 1945.

30 NAZ, S1051 NC Buhera Annual District Report 1946.

31 NAZ, N3/8/4 District Boundaries and Beacons.

32 McLaughlin 1996, 76.

33 McLaughlin 1996, 76.

34 Mazarire, 2011, 574.

35 Reed 1987, 52.

36 Binda 2007, 172.

FIGURE 1 A map of the Buhera District showing Chiefs in the district including areas where the research was carried out
DIGITALISED BY ONE OF THE AUTHORS 2011

tration and operations in this part of the country. This is notwithstanding the existence of other traditional leaders opposed to the guerrilla cause.

The research therefore endeavours to validate the role played by traditional leaders during the liberation war in this part of the country. In addition, unlike other areas where little or nothing about the liberation war is known, Buhera District was researched but the studies have largely remained unpublished undergraduate and post-graduate dissertations. Overall, Buhera District is one of “those areas where studies have been carried out on the civilian experience in the war” but “we need more attention to class as well as gender and generation.”³⁷ Added to this, it is imperative to research on Buhera District cognisant of the reality that studying Zimbabwe’s struggle for liberation differs depending on the areas’ experience of the war, its geography, the political and religious institutions, the nature and degree of integration into the colonial political

37 Bhebe and Ranger 1995, 5.

economy as indicated earlier. Thus, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge about whether or not traditional leaders as part of the rural people participated voluntarily or through coercion in the liberation war. In fact, the study focuses on the role played by traditional leaders and the responses by the guerrillas and the RSF during the liberation struggle. In the process, we establish the extent to which wartime experiences in Buhera District were either similar or different when compared with wartime occurrences in other parts of the country.

4 The Impact of Colonialism in Buhera District

Besides being subjected to terror by the ZANLA guerrillas, some traditional leaders and some of their subordinates in Buhera District participated willingly supporting the liberation cause because of their experiences of the repressive colonial system. For instance, traditional leaders lost some of their important powers and control of their respective subordinates over whom they had authority before.³⁸ This was formalised by the establishment of the Native Affairs Department in 1894 which ensured that the Native Commissioner's (NC) authority extended over the whole economic and political life of the African people. All the important powers the African Chiefs and headmen had traditionally exercised were transferred to the Native Commissioners (NCs). In 1910 the NCs received both criminal and civil jurisdiction over Africans and Chiefs' powers and duties were reduced to those of police constables in their areas.³⁹

However, it is important to note that traditional leaders were eventually given back their general and unimportant roles which they exercised over their subordinates as before. This was confirmed in 1965 by C.W. Collett, the Buhera District Delineation Officer who said that Chiefs, headmen and kraal heads appeared to have wider powers over land which had been in use in the past and Chiefs had to authorise new blocks in the grazing areas.⁴⁰ It seems that the delineation officer's assessment is biased given that his brief was to find ways of restoring the powers of chiefs in the 1960s and wanted to paint a picture of the traditional leaders' position being not very bad. This is because most chiefs had their powers restored in the 60s and 70s in an attempt to assuage the tide of nationalism that had swept the rural areas. This was captured well in an interview with Headman Betera who pointed out that "the stripping of

38 Interview with Amos Betera 2011.

39 Weinrich 1971, 10.

40 NAZ, S2929/1/1 Delineation Reports on Buhera District 1965–1967.

powers of traditional leaders by the successive settler governments did more harm than good to Chiefs and headmen as their full recognition in all their traditional virtues was long delayed when it was eventually reinstated.⁴¹ Resultantly, the memories of the injustices done to the traditional leaders influenced the responses of some of the traditional leaders and their subordinates, especially where they turned against the colonial establishment and cooperated with the freedom fighters.

Furthermore, the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1951 which was a follow up to the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 engendered feelings of disgruntlement and resentment amongst the rural people in Buhera District and sowed the seeds of future resistance as elsewhere it was implemented in the country.⁴² Buhera District experienced the first implementation of the NLHA in 1954 and the district was divided into four main zones which were A, B (with two sub-zones), C and D (with five sub-zones).⁴³ The Act was based on the premise that production in the African reserves would be boosted through a system of private ownership of land rather than the communal or customary rights that had existed hitherto.⁴⁴ Substantial protest against the NLHA in Buhera District was witnessed. Destocking resulted in the forced compulsory sale of thousands of cattle in the late 1950s and was widely resented in the district. This was mainly because keeping stock represented a variety of symbols ranging from monetary value to being significant in other spheres of social life such as bride wealth (*roora*) payments and farming purposes.⁴⁵ Accordingly, survival tactics and strategies were adopted by the Buhera stock owners such as distributing their stock amongst relatives to circumvent the impact of the Act. This exposed the flawed assumption about individual stock ownership amongst the destocking policy's architects.⁴⁶

The better-watered northern parts of Buhera District witnessed the major opposition to land allocation under the NLHA. For instance, in Chief Chitungwe's area, opposition was so strong that armed government officials had to operate in the area. Other areas in the district witnessed minimal opposition and in the southern parts of the district the act was never implemented.⁴⁷ This could have been necessitated by the fact that this part of the district had few

41 Interview Betera 2011.

42 Ranger 1985, 158.

43 NAZ, S2827/2/2/3 Vol. 11, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1955.

44 Alexander 2006, 9.

45 Interview with Titus Mazambara 2011.

46 Andersson 2002, 139.

47 Andersson 2002, 139.

roads which hampered the surveillance of its inhabitants.⁴⁸ Thus, the NLHA's implementation undermined the rural people and their leaders' control of the land and status symbols. It cultivated fertile ground for the growth of support of the liberation struggle which earnestly began in the area in 1976. The traditional leaders and civilians supported the ZANLA guerrillas in the hope that they would regain all that they had lost due to the settler regime's presence. The inhabitants of Buhera were further motivated by guerrilla propaganda which promised removal of exploitative and racial legislation in an independent Zimbabwe.⁴⁹

Traditional leaders and civilians in Buhera District's long history and interaction with nationalists even before the war also account for their sympathy towards the nationalist cause. They were conscious about the colonial injustices and ready to render support behind those geared to dislodge the colonial regime. This is because as early as 1957, the people of Buhera District had received and participated in quasi-political rallies addressed by Benjamin Burombo of the British African National Voice Association (BANVA) formed in 1947. At its inception, it focused mainly in urban areas and began from 1948 onwards to seriously focus on rural areas in the struggle for fair treatment.⁵⁰ Burombo visited a number of rural areas in the early 1950s and set up a number of branches in 1952.⁵¹ His appeal to the rural people was aided by his ability to remain associated with them. Two factors made this possible, firstly, he had a humble and peasant background and secondly, he had experienced rural life together with its grievances which he knew first hand as an adult. Among other things, he had a herd of cattle which he refused to destock. Thus, his attempt at peasant farming exposed him to the challenges faced by many rural Africans. Furthermore, Burombo articulated the grievances of the rural people and whenever he addressed gatherings, his words echoed peasant conviction.⁵² Therefore, Burombo was able to establish many of his branches out of the specific grievances of rural people. Indeed, his meetings in the rural areas spoke on the hotly disputed issues during those days, including but not limited to: cattle destocking, policies limiting arable land among other colonial oppression, expropriation and unjust policies.⁵³

48 This problem persisted even beyond the 1950s. See, Cripps 1920, 29–33.

49 Interview with Nison Chifana 2011; Dhura 2007.

50 Bhebe 1989, 73.

51 NAZ, S2827/2/2 Vol. II, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1952.

52 Bhebe 1989, 31–43.

53 Bhebe 1989, 78–79.

In addition, after the founding of the first effective nationalist party, the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SR ANC) in 1957, the participation in politics by civilians in Buhera District became widespread. The SR ANC like Burombo's organisation successfully reached Buhera District with popularity among the rural people and their leaders. The party was introduced in Buhera District by Masotsha Ndlovu, a famous pioneer trade unionist and political activist who was originally from Thekwane area in Matabeleland.⁵⁴ He spearheaded the establishment of the first SR ANC branch in Buhera District in July 1958 after seeking permission from Chiefs Makumbe and Nyashanu.⁵⁵ However, it did not take long before three members of the SR ANC from the reserve were detained in 1959. These were Masotsha Ndlovu, chairman of the local branch, Christopher Mutandwa, vice chairman and Mandiparara Kamunga, secretary.⁵⁶ Despite that, political consciousness and the need for fair treatment had been sown in the Buherans' minds.

On the other hand, it is essential to highlight the factors behind RSF's support by some of the traditional leaders and their subordinates in Buhera District. Besides the use of the different tactics the RSF employed that are discussed below, those who supported the RSF appear to have been motivated by the general benefits they were getting from the Smith regime. In this regard, the people of the Gwebu area are a case in point. The Gwebu people were forced to relocate to Buhera from Fort Rixon, where they were allocated the well-watered lands of the northwestern part of Buhera District.⁵⁷ This development arguably compelled the people and their traditional leader, Chief Daniel Fish Gwebu to closely cooperate with the colonial administration and enjoy the support of the Rhodesian government.⁵⁸ Naturally, this area had reasonable good soil and received better rainfall as compared to other parts of the district. This was also revealed in the Buhera Land Development Officers: Monthly Reports for 1947–1950 which point out that out of the eight master farmers farming in the reserve, only two from the Gwebu area were successful in 1947 despite the severe drought.⁵⁹ Commenting on all the three Chiefs in Buhera District in 1957, the NC noted that all worked helpfully and friendly with European authorities but Chief Gwebu was the most attractive though by far the least important in

54 Mashingaidze 2011.

55 Musoni 2001, 100.

56 NAZ, S2827/2/2/7 Vol. 1, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1959.

57 Musoni 2014, 84.

58 Musoni 2001, 26.

59 NAZ, S/60DB/104/1 Buhera Land Development Officers: Monthly Reports, 1947–1950.

respect of the number of his villages.⁶⁰ It seems his attractiveness to the colonial regime was due to his unquestioning allegiance to the government. This was evident in his area's smooth settlement in terms of allocation during the implementation of the NLHA which was met with stiff resistance in some parts of the district.

Like Chief Gwebu, Chief Makiwa Nyashanu also supported the administration but unlike the former, the latter was opposed by some of his own people because of his forceful character. He cooperated with the Rhodesian administration and allocation of land in his area also went on smoothly.⁶¹ Chief Nyashanu was opposed by his people because like the majority aspects of traditional life, the Shona succession to leadership was heavily influenced by colonial rule. In this regard, the appointment of Makiwa Nyashanu as Chief was attributed to manipulation by the Smith regime in expectation of the benefits it was to get from him. He was not supposed to be chief at that particular time because the previous Chief (Gona) had been from the same house, being an elder brother of Makiwa's father. This point was disregarded because Gona died before he was inaugurated. In that case Makiwa was supposed to deputise Muzamhundu, Gona's young brother and only become Chief after he died if the correct appointment had been done.⁶² However, Makiwa disregarding tradition got the chieftainship because he was comparatively young and educated and as a result (in the Smith regime's view), likely to be more efficient in serving the colonial interests than the other claimants.⁶³ This is not an attempt to deny Chief Nyashanu any agency but to demonstrate that probably, his desire to please the colonial administration empowered him to land the chief position unperturbed. However, he later on abandoned the Smith regime for the guerrillas thus becoming a controversial figure.

Nevertheless, the Buhera District's NC, Taylor was known for completely ignoring the real pre-colonial relationships and succession hierarchy to chieftainship.⁶⁴ Consequently, the manipulative tactics of the Settler regime and Chief Nyashanu's grabbing of the opportunity to become chief before his time shows that both parties were equally active participants and responsible for the outcome (Nyashanu's successful rise to become chief). Given these intricacies, it is beyond doubt that those traditional leaders who supported the RSF when the war began in the district were motivated, to a significant degree, by their

60 NAZ, S2827/2/2/5 Vol. 1, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1957.

61 NAZ, S2827/2/2/5 Vol. 1, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1957.

62 Mashingaidze 2001, 103.

63 Interview with Titus Mazambara 2011.

64 Beach 1994, 79.

self-interests, especially the benefits they obtained from the colonial system. They supported the RSF in an effort to safeguard their sources of livelihood. Practically, those individuals and traditional leaders who supported the RSF's anti-liberation war efforts in Buhera District were mostly those whose kith and kin worked in the Smith regime's security apparatus and other government departments.⁶⁵

5 Role of Traditional Leaders during the Liberation War in Buhera District

While traditional leaders either supported or betrayed the liberation struggle, others were double-faced in a drive to survive the ruthless responses of the contending forces. This section shows that the traditional leaders including Chiefs took part in the mobilisation and organisation of the civilians, guided guerrillas during the war, ensured the provision of material, financial and moral support and supplied information about the plans and movement of the RSF. On the contrary, some Chiefs collaborated with the RSF against guerrilla operations, whereas others were double-faced thus they responded to the needs of the fighting forces.

5.1 *Mobilisation and Organisation*

As discussed earlier, there is a great deal of literature focusing on popular mobilisation during Zimbabwe's war of liberation in which voluntary participation and coercion emerge as the major discernible *modi operandi*.⁶⁶ However, in Buhera District both coercion and voluntary cooperation by the peasants was witnessed. As a result, this study does not aim to settle the issue of those who argue that voluntary cooperation and coercion were the means through which rural people supported the guerrillas but to point out that the question is difficult to answer than assumed by the earlier scholars. More so, traditional authorities such as spirit mediums, Chiefs, headmen and village heads contributed immensely in mobilisation and organisation of peasants' support for the war effort.

In Buhera District, ZANLA pursued its Maoist strategy of respecting the culture of the people and reaching them through those they trusted, mostly Chiefs and spirit mediums. As pointed out earlier, this policy was adopted as a result

⁶⁵ Interview with Ben Chemhere 2011.

⁶⁶ See, Lan 1985, Kriger 1992, Ranger 1985.

of the failure of early military operations by both liberation movements, that is, ZANU and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). These had begun operations without educating and involving the local population who often informed the police and army of the presence of the guerrillas.⁶⁷ In Buhera District ZANLA applied this strategy with significant success as the people in the area were under the control of their traditional authorities.⁶⁸ Thus, regardless of its Marxist ideology, ZANU did not despise local traditions because it employed the services of spirit mediums since 1968.⁶⁹ More so, in its 1973 war communiqué revealing its updated ideology, ZANU noted that

The current fighting ... ushers in a new advanced stage of armed struggle ... following in tactics and execution, the long-established ZANU strategy of fighting from secure areas established in the countryside after thorough and extensive political mobilisation of the masses ... these areas have grown so strong and secure that they have become indestructible [*sic*]. Zimbabwe's people fighting are within Zimbabwe itself. We have no need for external bases.⁷⁰

As a result, when the war started in Buhera District in February 1976 the guerrillas sought "popular opinion makers." These were either male elders or successful peasant farmers with some credible history of nationalist sympathies and connected the guerrillas to the village heads and the guerrillas identified themselves and explained the purpose of their presence.⁷¹

In this light, the guerrillas first approached the traditional leaders of Buhera in early February 1976 as soon as they deployed in the area. Importantly, the war did not engulf the whole district at once, instead it was experienced in the Nyashanu area before spreading to the northern and western parts of the district.⁷² The pioneer guerrillas in the Chitsunge area went to the Chief and summoned the village heads and the people giving the Chief a platform to introduce the guerrillas and their mission whilst at the Chief's homestead.⁷³ The choice of the Chief's homestead as a base was necessitated by its location. It was situated behind a mountain (Chimumvuri) where the guerrillas could

67 McLaughlin 1996, 240.

68 NAZ, S2827/2/2/3 Vol. 1, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1957.

69 Henkin 2013, 505.

70 ZANU War Communiqué, Lusaka, January 4, 1973.

71 Interview with Ben Chemhere 2011.

72 Interview with Rhoda Neshava 2011.

73 Interview with Solomon Chamatumba 2011.

easily obtain cover in the event of an enemy attack. The people and their traditional leaders were conscientised and convinced not to report the guerrillas whose mission was to liberate black Zimbabweans from colonial domination.⁷⁴ The first meetings were also used to set up support committees that were essential for logistical support, as explained below. The committees were announced after the guerrillas were convinced and confident that the people and their leaders were not sell-outs (supported the liberation struggle).

Traditional leaders also explained to their people the intricacies of ZANU's case during all night political gatherings or night vigils (*pungwes*). From such interactions the guerrillas gained a better perception of the traditional leaders and their subordinates' grievances while the traditional leaders and their followers also understood the guerrillas' mission.⁷⁵ For instance, during *pungwes* Chief Chitsunge emphasised the importance of team work in the struggle designed to set free the country from colonial bondage.⁷⁶ The *pungwes* played a crucial role in educating the masses. Fidelis Mutsakani said the *pungwes* were a success as a result of the cooperation of traditional leaders who encouraged their people to attend and to desist from reporting guerrilla presence to the enemy.⁷⁷ Instead, the peasants were supposed and encouraged to report the RSF presence to the guerrillas. It was at *pungwes* that the support committees were organised and in most cases kraal heads became chairpersons of the support committees that were formed to provide food and other wartime needs. For example, Muye Mavhimira, a head of Mujakachi village in Nerutanga was appointed chairperson of one of the support committees of the liberation struggle. He said "no one was willing to take the position because it was burdensome and risky."⁷⁸ In instances where the kraal head was advanced in years the position was filled by anyone who was capable and reliable. The issue of appointing village heads as chairpersons of the support committees varied from one area to the other and this was also the case in Mtoko District.⁷⁹

More so, the inclusion of traditional religious leaders in the mobilisation process was crucial in Buhera District and the guerrillas ascertained their involvement before they stayed long in an area.⁸⁰ The inclusion of the traditional religious leaders was a decisive move in terms of gaining popular support

74 Interview with Fidelis Mutsakani 2011.

75 Maxwell 1999, 120.

76 Interview with Crispen Chamatumba 2011.

77 Interview with Fidelis Mutsakani 2011.

78 Interview with Muye Mavhimira 2011.

79 Kriger 1992, 163.

80 Interview with Onard Ndawana 2011.

because their influence over the popular psyche was strong, especially, the peasant psyche. The peasantry constituted more than seventy percent of the black population during the liberation war hence were a critical constituency in the attainment of victory by the guerrillas.⁸¹ The spirit mediums played a vital role, especially when they brought together peasant elders, (who had hitherto held sway in rural society) and the “young” armed guerrillas, who came into each district to establish revolutionary order.⁸² Similarly, the guerrillas’ relationship with *mhondoro* mediums made their acceptance easier, quicker, more binding and more profound by allowing this new feature in the experience of the peasantry to be assimilated to established symbolic categories.⁸³ Co-operation with local spirit mediums enabled the guerrillas to turn the struggle into a people’s war, in which civilians participated wilfully by supplying information about enemy property and movement of RSF whilst feeding the freedom fighters.⁸⁴ Therefore, it was the involvement of spirit mediums, Chiefs, headmen and village heads in the mobilisation and organisation for the war effort that made the fish (guerrillas) and water (civilians) ZANLA’s guerrilla (Maoist approach) strategy viable in Buhera District.

5.2 *Collaboration*

Since the term “collaboration” has both positive and negative connotations, in this study, it is used firstly to refer to those traditional leaders who willingly severed their ties with the nationalist cause because of their cooperation with the RSF. In this regard, it refers to Chief Gwebu, in particular. On the other hand, it is also used to refer to those traditional leaders who supported, worked together and cooperated with the guerrillas. This clarification is necessary because after the liberation war the term war collaborator became largely associated with the positive as opposed to the negative meanings such as betrayal and selling out to the enemy. As a result, some of the traditional leaders in Buhera District were controversial during the liberation struggle. Of the seven Chiefs, only Makiwa Nyashanu openly collaborated with the guerrillas. His opposite equivalent was Chief Fish Gwebu who fits the stereotype of a colonial chief in all respects. The other five Chiefs, Makumbe, Chitsunge, Chimombe, Chamutsa and Nerutanga did not openly support or oppose the guerrillas.

Chief Gwebu collaborated with the RSF for several reasons some of which have been discussed above. Moreover, since the African Council of Chiefs was

81 Chung 2006, 194.

82 Ranger 1985, 189.

83 Lan 1985, 152.

84 Bhebe 1999, 40.

formed in 1960 he was one of its members and was attending all its meetings and respecting its deliberations.⁸⁵ Gwebu was also a member of two important government organisations namely, the Capricorn African Society⁸⁶ and the Council of Chiefs. This forced him to cooperate with the colonial administration in return for several privileges. As such, he received several awards and rewards with the Independence Commemorative Decoration in the Honours List in 1970 and the President's Medal for Chiefs in 1972 being good examples.⁸⁷ He among other Chiefs in the district namely, Chitsunge, Makumbe and Chamutsa with the sole exception of Makiwa Nyashanu had accepted the 1972 Pearce Commission's proposals.⁸⁸ Additionally, Gwebu's active role during the Pearce Commission proposals in Buhera District saw the Internal Affairs Department recommending and increasing his allowance to 180 pounds per year as an "appreciation of his good services to the Rhodesian government during the visit of the Pearce Commission."⁸⁹

In light of the above, Gwebu was pro-government and enjoyed the support of the state. Consequently, when the war began he unsurprisingly nominated many people to be District Security Assistants (DSAs). This was quite opposed to the nationalist delicate feelings. The Chief also prohibited meetings of nationalists in his area in the mid-1970s.⁹⁰ Additionally, Mrs Mavhimira noted that

People of the Gwebu area did not want the war because they saw in it a reversal of everything they had gained in the district. Gwebu was referred to by his people as *Baba* meaning Father because of his good leadership. The soils meant a lot. The people compared their past lives in Fort Rixon, other areas in Buhera District and saw themselves as number one as far as farming and standards of living were concerned.⁹¹

85 NAZ, S3285/45/111 Chiefs and Headmen 1972.

86 The Capricorn African Society was a multi-racial organisation intended to strengthen partnership between whites and blacks in the British colonies of Kenya, Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. It became unpopular among the African nationalists as it believed without question, in the superiority of Western culture and civilisation and regarded Africans as junior partners in the political, economic and social advancement of society. Many nationalists in Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s had been members of this organisation and left it in the late 1950s when the federation became unpopular to Africans. For details, see Mlambo 2009, 94–95.

87 Musoni 2001, 33–34.

88 Mashingaidze 2001, 60.

89 NAZ, S3285/45/111 Chiefs and Headmen 1972.

90 Interview with Muye Mavhimira 2011.

91 Interview with Mrs Mavhimira 2011.

Against this backdrop, Gwebu and a reasonable number of his people supported the RSF against the guerrillas. Like many Chiefs and people of his calibre he was in the guerrillas' language a sell-out, thus he was killed on January 12, 1978.⁹²

On the other hand, Chief Makiwa Nyashanu, unlike Gwebu, rather became opposed to the colonial administration. He became resistant to the administration's incessant demands after he became secure in his position as Chief and ensured firm hold over his people.⁹³ As noted above, unlike other Chiefs in Buhera District Nyashanu turned down the recommendations of the Pearce Commission in the area in 1972. In addition, when the war started he opposed the establishment of protected villages (PVs) in his area.⁹⁴ This angered the colonial administration which unceremoniously deposed him in September 1976 for being a symbol of resistance against colonial policies that he viewed as detrimental to the Africans.⁹⁵ However, it is important to note that Nyashanu's actions were informed by his understanding of the colonial system thus exploited it to his benefit. He dumped it when he saw fit. This demonstrates the degree to which the traditional leadership institutions were flexible and able to negotiate the choppy waters of intermediary during the colonial period and liberation war. Elsewhere in the country, there was Munhuwepayi Mangwende and Rekayi Tangwena who were well publicised in the local and international press,⁹⁶ Chief Sigombi in Matabeleland and Chief Shumba in the Victoria province—all were deposed for resisting colonialism.⁹⁷ According to the *Sunday Mail* of 1981, for Nyashanu,

The trouble had begun when the greying chief defied and resisted moves by the government to establish PVs in his area during the war. He told the authorities that he could not stand the idea of his people being cooped up and confined in a fenced area like animals. Instead he suggested they erect

92 *The Rhodesian Herald*, January 18, 1978; NAZ, MS746 Chiefs and Headmen detailed Report 1890–1985.

93 Interview with Batanai Muzokomba 2011.

94 The Chief's hatred of PVs as narrated by Mazambara, was a reaction to his experience in the compounds of South Africa where he had worked in the 1940s and early 1950s. There were bad conditions in the mines. Movement was restricted, accommodation and food were substandard and diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, typhoid and diarrhoea were widespread. Unbecoming behaviour such as gambling, prostitution and sexual abuse of younger women by older men were common features of compound life.

95 *The Sunday Mail*, December 6, 1981.

96 Manungo 1991a, 111.

97 *Zimbabwe Rhodesia Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 100, 1979, 24 July to 31 August 1979.

a fence all around the area under his jurisdiction. Angered by the chief's stubbornness, the then DC [District Commissioner] at Buhera summoned a meeting of all the people at which he denounced and deposed the chief stripping him of all his powers.⁹⁸

In this regard, despite the eulogizing language used and the time the article was written which does not exonerate it from nationalistic bias motivated by the independence euphoria of the newly independent state of Zimbabwe, Nyashanu represents a classic example of a Chief who collaborated and supported the guerrillas staying with his people.

The concept of PVs was introduced in rural Rhodesia, similar to other parts of Africa such as Kenya in the 1950s, when the liberation struggle intensified in the 1970s. According to Feichtinger, the British forces in Kenya restricted over one million Kenyans into concentration camps in an effort to separate them from the insurgents.⁹⁹ Similarly, in Rhodesia, "protected villages were designed and intended to eliminate the guerrillas and their supporters. It was also meant to win the support of the people and destroy their support for the guerrillas."¹⁰⁰ pvs began to be established in late 1973 in the Centenary and Mount Darwin districts that border with Mozambique. The RSF introduced guarded PVs as a way of designating the rural areas no-go places for guerrillas through evacuating, screening and resettling most of the rural people in other areas that were easy to control. In this connection, Cilliers observed that the first four PVs that were established "in Gudza and Mkumbura Tribal Trust Lands in the Zambezi Valley ... were not constituted as proper Protected Villages, but entailed the concentration of the local population around the main centres of each reserve to facilitate freedom of movement for the Security Forces."¹⁰¹ Thus, the majority part of the Zambezi valley turned into a no-go area because "the Commissioner of Police had the power to confiscate, seize or destroy any property in these areas that could possibly be of use to the insurgent forces. Within such designated no-go areas, Security Forces were empowered to shoot on sight."¹⁰² This demonstrates that PVs were introduced in rural Rhodesia to defend the colonial regime from guerrilla incursions rather than to safeguard the African civilian population who were relocated into them. They were one of the key desperate measures the RSF resorted to with the intention to prevent the spread of the

98 *The Sunday Mail*, December 6, 1981.

99 Feichtinger 2017, 46.

100 Mazambani and Mashingaidze 2014, 80.

101 Cilliers 1985, 83.

102 Cilliers 1985, 83.

nationalist teachings among communities, particularly those living adjacent to Zimbabwe's border with Mozambique, among others.

In essence, PVS would not have worked in the Nyashanu area because of the Chief and were proposed to be set up in Chamutsa area where they also failed because of guerrillas. The guerrillas were determined to thwart all efforts by the RSF to establish PVS for a purpose. As Kriger notes, unlike Malaysia and Kenya, Zimbabwe had no high altitude forests that could provide the guerrillas with food and cover while reducing their dependence on civilians.¹⁰³ Thus, in Buhera District the guerrillas were able to avert efforts by the RSF to establish PVS with the aid of the traditional leaders. This was achieved because, "to counteract the Maoist strategy of guerrilla warfare of using the civilian population as the sea in which the guerrillas as the fish could swim, the RSF established PVS to drain Mao's 'sea' away from the guerrilla 'fishes'."¹⁰⁴ Therefore, it was the Maoist strategy of guerrilla warfare which the ZANLA guerrillas used that prevented the establishment of PVS by the colonial administration in Buhera District.

In addition, Nyashanu also fed the guerrillas in his area. According to Betera, "Chief Nyashanu's homestead was a base of the guerrillas and the Chief killed his own beasts to feed them. His church which allowed polygamy made the feeding not problematic as the many wives helped and provided huge quantities of food without many difficulties."¹⁰⁵ The polygamous aspect of Nyashanu is confirmed by the NC's reports for 1957 that point out that Nyashanu followed the cult of the Zionist church¹⁰⁶ and the parliamentary debates of 1979 highlight that he had more than forty wives.¹⁰⁷ Probably, it was his demotion that encouraged him to actively participate in the war like no other Chief in the area. His homestead as a base was mainly as a result of its nearness to kopjes where the guerrillas could easily obtain cover whenever they came under attack.¹⁰⁸

The other five Chiefs, that is, Makumbe, Chamutsa, Chingombe, Nerutanga and Chitsunge did not openly show which side they collaborated with and as a result they survived the war. They kept on getting salaries which they partly spent on guerrillas' expenses.¹⁰⁹ Headmen in the district such as Mombeyarara among others followed and subscribed to the middle course response adopted by their Chiefs. In this way, the traditional authorities certainly participated

¹⁰³ Kriger 1992, 147.

¹⁰⁴ Moorcraft and McLaughlin 1982, 64.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Amos Betera 2011.

¹⁰⁶ NAZ, S2827/2/2/7 Vol. 1, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1957.

¹⁰⁷ Zimbabwe Rhodesia Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 100, 1979, 24 July to 31 August 1979.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Amos Betera 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Crispin Chamatumba 2011.

in the same way as the rest of the peasants. They did not dare to openly state their views because they were afraid of falling victims to any one of the fighting forces. In fact, these Chiefs and headmen were double-faced and hence appeased the guerrillas by buying them a number of provisions which they could have anticipated to get from support committees such as clothes, soap, towels, sewing thread, needles, cigarettes cooking oil, vaseline, pairs of scissors, books and pens, and beer.¹¹⁰ This was done as a survival strategy because during the war exposing one's affiliation meant death or serious consequences from either of the fighting forces.

Villagers in the Chitsunge area considered Chief Chitsunge to be in the same category with Nyashanu despite their inability to explain why Chitsunge remained on the Rhodesian government pay roll. It is apparent that Chitsunge was double-faced. Commenting about the role Chitsunge played during the war of liberation, Chamatumba said:

Chief Chitsunge was always present where the guerrillas needed his assistance. He had rejected PVS and had refused to be protected by DSAs. In 1964 Chitsunge had been involved in the rejection of the then District Commissioner of Buhera to speak to the people at Chirwire and he was thoroughly beaten. This incident led to the capture of a number of people who today claim to be ex-detainees. His house was also painted and inscribed, '*Chief Chitsunge Gandanga Bafere House*' (Chief Chitsunge a terrorist) even before the guerrillas became known as '*magandanga*' (terrorists) by the Smith regime.¹¹¹

Chief Chitsunge's position like that of Nyashanu was also controversial. Indeed, his house still bears the inscription as told by an informant. In addition, the Chitsunge area was classed as the most politically minded area in the district in 1965 thereby confirming Chamatumba's observation. The Delineation Reports of 1965–1967 further note that many of the community members were restricted over the past few years and the area had also witnessed various political incidents.¹¹² Probably, the political problems had to do with the implementation of the NLHA as indicated earlier on. Despite the informant claims, the researchers classify Chitsunge in the category of those Chiefs who were double-faced because he interacted with both the RSF and the guerrillas.

110 Interview with Crispin Chamatumba 2011.

111 Interview with Solomon Chamatumba 2011.

112 NAZ, S2929/1/1 Report on the Chitsunge Headmanship and Communities; Chief Makumbe; Sabi Tribal Trust Land, in the Buhera Delineation Reports 1965–1967.

5.3 *Guidance*

In Buhera District traditional leaders played a pivotal role in guiding or leading the guerrillas in their areas. The guerrillas were given access to sacred places where rituals were performed to mitigate bloodshed during the war. As Ranger observed in Makoni District, spirit mediums performed rituals which gave guerrillas access to the area's holy places—burial caves, sacred mountains—whose secrets had previously only been known by the elders and headmen.¹¹³ Such rituals did not just provide the fighters with excellent hide-outs but also bestowed upon them the legitimacy of the past. Similarly, in the Masvingo area “‘sacred landscapes’ of groves, caves and mountains, were normally restricted but made available to ancestrally guided freedom fighters.”¹¹⁴ Accordingly, in the Chitsunge area rituals were carried out by the Chief in the Chimumvuri Mountain which had caves in the east and west. During the ritual snuff was spilled on the ground and on a black cloth.¹¹⁵ In the Chief's absence, the village head and the detachment commander would perform the ritual. Related to this, Rhoda Neshava revealed that as mediums they were compelled to attend *pungwes* and traditional beer drinking gatherings where people would sing and dance to *mbira* (thumb piano) until they were possessed by the spirits and went into trance explaining how the people should proceed.¹¹⁶ Guerrillas highly respected them and they observed almost all the regulations outlined by the spirit mediums. Among other restrictions, guerrillas were warned against spilling of innocent blood and informed of impending enemy attack. As a result, Henkin portrayed the role of spirit mediums saying:

... spirit mediums had an extremely important role in the opening stage of the war. Without them, it is highly probable that someone would have surrendered the news of ZANLA fighters' presence to the Rhodesians, resulting in a serious setback for ZANU. The first groups lacked the power to enforce their will on the population, and premature violence could compromise them. The mediums, lending their approval and support, enabled the guerrillas to lay the foundations for the campaign without the need to resort to wide-scale violence. Mediums also placed limitations on guerrillas, from limitations on blood shedding to prohibiting guerrillas from eating certain foods or engaging in sexual relationships with local women.¹¹⁷

113 Ranger 1985, 208–209.

114 Fontein 2006, 175.

115 Interview with Solomon Chamutumba 2011.

116 Interview with Rhoda Neshava 2011.

117 Henkin 2013, 507.

This assisted in averting and lessening social disarray during the war and reduced hostility that could have triggered opposition to guerrillas.

Spirit mediums discouraged the killing of the innocent. This was mainly because at the beginning of the war so many people were killed by the guerrillas on flimsy grounds and because they were reported to the guerrillas as traitors by those who were either jealousy or had disagreed with them. A case in point was the beating of the Dirikwi medium by the guerrillas after they were misled by Chief Nyashanu that the medium was a traitor. They later realised that the medium was innocent but Nyashanu had a grudge with the medium because the medium was opposed to Makiwa's imposition as Chief Nyashanu.¹¹⁸ Spirit mediums saved many lives of people that were castigated as traitors due to hatred and local jealousies. During the early days of the war the guerrillas had no means or time to ascertain the truth and they were not aware of the local conflicts. As a result, they tended to believe and depend on what they were told by those who cooperated with them. The guerrillas' respect of spirit mediums was beneficial as the latter's recommendations over those involved in witchcraft or conspiracy were often heeded.¹¹⁹ This dovetails into the idea that the mediums during the war safeguarded the interests of the different social categories of the society from which they derived their following.¹²⁰ However, as the guerrilla rank and file became established, a willingness to break taboos agreed by both guerrillas and spirit mediums became more rampant. This reinforces the fact that the war became more violent as it progressed, with the final months of the war being the worst of all.¹²¹

Be that as it may, revealing the extent to which spirit mediums were respected in Buhera District, Betera said:

I was a teacher and was forewarned by a spirit medium when I wanted to go to join the guerrillas in Mozambique. I was told that my life was going to be in danger and was supposed to only support the war in the country which I did. I took the position of acting village head and educated my people about the importance of the war on behalf of my father who was a headman.¹²²

118 Mashingaidze 2001, 69.

119 Interview with Rhoda Neshava 2011.

120 Maxwell 1999, 135.

121 Ranger 1986, 386–390.

122 Interview with Amos Betera 2011.

Added to this, spirit mediums were not only respected but even sanctioned if the food to be given to the guerrillas was safe or not.¹²³ Thus they saved many lives by forewarning impending dangers, interfering with guerrillas' punishing innocent people and seeking ancestral guidance and intervention in the daily lives of their areas and the execution of the war without which the war could have been bloodier than it was. Therefore, spirit mediums and traditional authorities through their guidance and ritual performance played a pivotal role in aiding the war effort in various parts of the country including Buhera District.

5.4 *Moral and Logistical Support*

Coordinating many contributions in kind and deed during war conditions was a remarkable achievement for both guerrillas and civilians in Zimbabwe.¹²⁴ By late 1978 the guerrillas had established hegemony in Buhera District and the area was a liberated zone. It provided an enabling environment for such developments. The guerrillas had unfettered access into the area because of Buhera's remoteness from white areas of economic and strategic significance such as mines, farms and towns.¹²⁵ More so, the area's communication network was still poor, for as late as 1961 total road mileage in the district was a mere 845 miles.¹²⁶ This militated against the RSF's counterinsurgency operations, especially ground operations. In addition, Buhera District as the NC had noted in 1957, was very well wooded and timber growth actually outpaced consumption and afforestation schemes were not needed.¹²⁷ All this proved a key benefit for guerrilla warfare which thrives in numerous inaccessible spots where any form of communication becomes bad as a result of forests, swamps and mountainous areas.¹²⁸ These factors including the escalation of the war motivated the traditional authorities to support the guerrillas in the struggle to liberate the country.

In their first encounters, the guerrillas informed traditional leaders and their subordinates that they were not '*gandangas*' (terrorists) (as propounded by the government's propaganda machinery), but freedom fighters. It is important to note that guerrillas were terrorists in the eyes of the Ian Smith's regime and freedom fighters to the oppressed majority black people. During *pungwes* the RSF propaganda was discredited by the guerrillas who also used their own

¹²³ Interview with Rhoda Neshava 2011.

¹²⁴ Kriger 1992, 116.

¹²⁵ Mashingaidze 2001, 66.

¹²⁶ NAZ, S2827/2/2/7 Vol. 1, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1961.

¹²⁷ NAZ, S2827/2/2/5 Vol. 1, NC Buhera Annual District Report 1957.

¹²⁸ Gaza 1985, 10.

propaganda. The guerrillas made vivid introductions, spelling out their mission and outlining the forms of support they needed and this included food and information. A huge number of guerrillas got into Buhera District and these required a broad base of logistical support and food requirements. It became largely impossible for the guerrillas to continue keeping their presence concealed. According to Mashingaidze, *pungwes* provided an administrative platform for logistics to ensure effective guerrilla operations. Moreover, *pungwes* provided an opportunity to civilians and guerrillas to establish alternative administrative structures parallel to those of the colonial regime.¹²⁹ Added to this, existing administrative entities such as villages and chiefdoms became political administrative entities. For example, cells replaced villages and village heads that were originally accountable to headmen and Chiefs became accountable to guerrillas during the struggle.¹³⁰ Josiah Tungamirai echoed the same sentiments when he noted that, ZANLA operated on the basis of two types of structures which were military and political.¹³¹ For the operational military structure, provinces were divided into sub-regions called sectors which were further subdivided into detachments. Political structures included a cell or village, a branch, and then a district and the cells were made up of villages.¹³² Cells were small because the guerrillas were afraid of the security forces and were the basis upon which the feeding of the guerrillas was organised and executed with slender chances of interception by the RSF.

Support committees were set up in Buhera District like in other areas to improve efficiency of logistical support and ensure that the same villagers would not be asked to provide supplies to many guerrillas. In Buhera District, support committees were mainly composed of those who were capable and reliable.¹³³ The support committees were hierarchical such that at the lowest level was the village or cell committee that was headed, in most cases by the village head. Above it was a branch committee usually composed of six villages and above the branch was a district which had two branches. However, the latter category only came into being towards the end of the war.¹³⁴ The village head as the chairperson, not the organiser was responsible for handling guerrillas' grievances relating to the food provided. Linked to this, Mavhimira outlined the wartime duties of the village head saying "It was the duty of the

129 Mashingaidze 2001, 75.

130 Mashingaidze 2001, 75.

131 Bhebe 1999, 94.

132 Bhebe 1999, 94.

133 Interview with Nison Chifana 2011.

134 Mashingaidze 2001, 80.

village head as the chairperson to even borrow money to meet the guerrilla expenses if the dollar-dollar contribution by the villagers was not commensurate with the expense at hand.”¹³⁵ The support committees collected money which was used, (as recorded in the book of village head Mujakachi) to buy necessities for the guerrillas that included but were not limited to: soap, towels, sewing thread, needles, books and pens, and beer.¹³⁶ Therefore, chairpersons in Buhera District, like those in Mutoko District, ensured that, “even when the circumstances were beyond their control, chairmen were responsible for meeting demands for food and other resources.”¹³⁷ Overall, whilst the traditional leaders in Buhera District responded differently using various tactics when the war began in the area, what remains apparent is that they largely played a significant role in aiding the prosecution of the war.

6 The Contending Forces’ Responses to the Role of Traditional Leaders

The fighting forces’ responses were aimed at winning the support of the traditional leaders and their subordinates in a drive to ultimately win the war. It is evident that in engaging the various tactics, the fighting forces placed the traditional leaders and their subordinates in a dilemma.

6.1 *Terror*

ZANLA guerrillas used terror entailing the killing and torture of traditional leaders and civilians perceived to be and accused of collaborating with the RSF. According to Gann and Henriksen, African society far from being united in the struggle was fragmented. The guerrillas because of that reason found themselves in the face of a complicated puzzle where they had to fight both black and white opposition.¹³⁸ Such a scenario could have fuelled the violence that characterised the war, particularly in the late 1970s given the freedom fighters’ determination to accomplish the objectives of the war. However, some of the violence was due to the decrease in the length of guerrillas’ training in 1978.¹³⁹ Admittedly, while the guerrillas set out on the struggle without a predisposition

¹³⁵ Interview with Muye Mavhimira 2011.

¹³⁶ Authors’ own reading from Village head Mujakachi’s wartime records.

¹³⁷ Kriger 1992, 155.

¹³⁸ Gann and Henriksen 1981, 90.

¹³⁹ Maxwell 1999, 141.

to violence and drawing popular support from the African society, that never really happened as the actual conduct of the war proved otherwise.¹⁴⁰

An example of such violence in Buhera was the killing of Chief Gwebu in 1978 by the guerrillas after a determination that he had been supporting the RSF. Before the Chief was killed, the guerrillas had not been able to operate in the area for fear of being betrayed to the RSF via the DC's Buhera Office. Moreover, the Chief was guarded by DSAs whom he occasionally used to terrorise those accused of supporting the guerrillas in other parts of the district. The death of the Chief heralded the onset of the war in the Gwebu area and guerrillas were able to operate with limited hindrance.¹⁴¹ Mrs Mavhimira explained how Chief Gwebu was killed:

The guerrillas came to the Chief's homestead during the day acting as if they were DSAs from the DC's Buhera office. They asked the Chief if the guerrillas were not troubling him. The Chief replied in the affirmative convincingly expressing his bitterness against the guerrillas and unwavering allegiance to the Smith regime. Little did he know that he was talking to the guerrillas? The guerrillas then left and came back during the night overpowering the defence of the DSAs taking the Chief and killing him some distance away from his homestead.¹⁴²

It seems likely that Chief Gwebu was killed as a tactic of compelling traditional leaders and the civilian population that supported the Smith regime to desist from such a practice. It was also designed to inculcate fear to would be collaborators. To all the residents of Buhera District, it became a lesson that the ultimate price for selling out or collaborating with the RSF was death. Chief Gwebu's death was a crushing blow to his community and the Smith regime because guerrillas transformed the area into an operational area. The guerrillas only came three months after the Chief's death and were largely based in the Gwebu area. They took such a period of time because they had to first of all ascertain that the RSF reaction had subsided.¹⁴³

Apart from the killing of Chief Gwebu, village head Manyonda and his wife in Chief Nerutanga area were also killed in front of the people on account of selling out. According to Mavhimira,

¹⁴⁰ Gann and Henriksen 1981, 90.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Manyame Mutumwa 2011.

¹⁴² Interview with Mrs Mavhimira 2011. For a slightly different version of how and why Chief Gwebu was killed by the ZANLA guerrillas, see Musoni 2014, 93–94.

¹⁴³ Interview with Ben Chemhere 2011.

Village head Manyonda and wife were killed by the guerrillas when they had sold out the Gijima base near Gwirambira hill. A bloody skirmish ensued where two freedom fighters died. The RSF had attacked the base with both air and ground force. Two days after the skirmish at a pungwe, the guerrillas first beat all village heads responsible for the Gijima base when they were asked and failed to give an answer on who had sold out the base. This was done in front of the villagers at the pungwe. The ZANLA forces already had the information that Manyonda and wife had visited the DC's Buhera Office a day before the skirmish occurred. They had attended the pungwe and went on to conspire with the RSF. They did this for a reward of money. On Manyonda and wife's return journey they had been drunk and shouting, confessing that they had sold out the Gijima base and that guerrillas were going to be flushed out once and for all by the superior RSF.¹⁴⁴

The mujibhas and chimbwidos or the ZANLA guerrillas themselves identified the culprits who were killed. The target of village head Manyonda and wife illustrates guerrillas' efficiency in their effort to stem the flow of information to the enemy. This compliments Bhebe's conclusion that those who willingly collaborated with the regime were apprehended, tried in front of their own people and if found guilty as traitors executed or severely punished.¹⁴⁵

In addition, spirit mediums that were caught in the act of helping the RSF, like anyone acting this way were deemed to be sell-outs. When the war started in Buhera District the guerrillas wanted to kill Chief Makiwa Nyashanu on the premise that he supported the Rhodesian government. However, the area's Base Committee defended him and explained to the freedom fighters that he was indeed a nationalist. After gaining confidence of guerrillas Chief Nyashanu used his "favoured" position to manipulate the guerrillas to engage physical violence against the Dukuta medium.¹⁴⁶ He accused him of supporting the RSF. This was because in the early days of the war in the district both the guerrillas and RSF had consulted the medium. The guerrillas severely assaulted the medium and threatened to return to kill him if he continued supporting the RSF. Later they learnt that although the RSF had consulted the medium he was a victim of rivalry between his family and the Chief.¹⁴⁷ Clearly, no one was immune to being called a sell-out. Again, local jealousies and previous rival-

144 Interview with Muye Mavhimira 2011.

145 Bhebe 1999, 43.

146 Mashingaidze 2001, 107.

147 Mashingaidze 2001, 107.

ries were manifest in the liberation war. In the guise of performing duty for the guerrilla cause, innocent people at times were viewed as sell-outs yet this was sometimes just as a result of local conflicts, hatred and jealousy pursued to settle old scores.

Furthermore, besides traditional leaders, civilians were also mercilessly killed under the banner of being traitors in Buhera District. In 1976, a Rhodesian Railways messenger was assaulted and later killed by the guerrillas after being accused of resisting nationalist orientation in the Nyashanu area.¹⁴⁸ In addition, a DSA who was single and twenty three years old, Masungu Tsaurya was killed by the guerrillas in January 1978.¹⁴⁹ Again, Svosve who was a grinding mill owner was killed after being accused of duplicity in an attempt to survive the intricacies of the war.¹⁵⁰ In all these deaths, civilians witnessed their relatives, neighbours and friends being killed and learnt to avoid being duplicitous.

6.2 *The Carrot and Stick Approach*

The traditional leaders who failed to perform or fulfil the Smith regime's expectations were induced with money and if they failed to change their minds they were unceremoniously deposed. The carrot and stick approach of the Smith regime was clearly demonstrated in the regime's strategy towards Chiefs Gwebu and Nyashanu. The former enjoyed the regime's privileges due to his submissiveness whilst the latter was removed from power for among other reasons predominantly his refusal to continue supporting the Smith regime's unrelenting demands. Chief Nyashanu was deposed in 1976 when he ceased to comply with the regime's relentless demands despite being compliant prior to the beginning of the war.

As indicated earlier, the Smith regime's double standards were revealed when Chief Makiwa Nyashanu was appointed against tradition and the will of his people. He was appointed in the hope that he could serve their interests and not because he was supposed to be a chief at the time. Added to this, Nyashanu was also accused of making inept judgments, using threats and subordinates

148 ZANU Archives: Manica Province Operational Reports, Monomotapa Sector Nyashanu, Buhera, 10/08/76.

149 *The Rhodesia Herald*, January 11, 1978.

150 Interview, with Chifana, who narrated the story as follows: Svosve oftenly fed the comrades, killing his own beasts. However, he went on to inform the RSF about the presence and movement of the comrades in Gwiranenzara mountain, in Headman Mombeyarara area when he went to buy diesel at Dorowa. He was responsible for the bloody Gwiranenzara skirmish in 1978 which resulted in the death of many comrades and the terrorising of villagers by the RSF when they attacked with both air and ground force.

had to pay money for their cases to be heard and at times paid amounts in excess of the normal customary tribute.¹⁵¹ Those who could not pay were sent away unassisted and this was one of the sources of opposition from his people.

Despite these anomalies, the government had conveniently turned a blind eye in view of the support it had been receiving from the Chief. Once its interests were threatened they quickly capitalised on the massive resentment against him and expelled him from office. Due to unresolved people's grievances since the colonial era, Makiwa was finally removed by the post-independence government of Zimbabwe in 1981 despite his support for the liberation war.¹⁵² Therefore, Chief Nyashanu's removal and/or demotion by the Rhodesian government was mainly caused by his opposition to the Rhodesian regime's interests. His active participation in support of the guerrillas might have been an attempt to secure his position as Chief in post-independence Zimbabwe. What cannot be taken away from him is that he broke his alliance with the colonial administration and rallied the Nyashanu people towards the guerrilla cause of liberating the country.

6.3 *Collective Punishment and Brutality*

In addition to the "carrot and stick approach", the RSF also responded by collective punishment and brutality on Chief Nyashanu and his people for supporting the guerrillas. The *Sunday Mail* of 6 December 1981 notes that during the war the RSF persecuted the Chief.

One day at the height of the war, in 1977, a helicopter carrying Rhodesian soldiers and police with their dogs landed in the village. The soldiers and police harassed the Chief who was bitten on the legs and head by the dogs. The dogs also bit two of his wives, one of them on the breast which became septic. A child she was breast-feeding fell sick and died.¹⁵³

Despite the fact that this quotation is drawn from a 1981 paper long after the events, it is beyond doubt that brutal punishment was executed by the RSF

¹⁵¹ Mashingaidze 2001, 103.

¹⁵² Interview with Amos Betera 2011. However, it is critical to note that the post-independence government did not initially fully recognize the traditional leaders because of their perceived informal alliance with the Smith regime in its quest to gain some traditional legitimacy but only to revert to use them the same way they were used by the Smith regime following the waning of its legitimacy and electoral support. The passing of the Traditional Leaders Act of 1988 marked this re-traditionalisation of politics. See Alexander 2006, 99 and Hammar 2007, 408.

¹⁵³ *The Sunday Mail*, December 6, 1981.

on the Chief and his wives for opposing the Rhodesian regime. The fundamental aim of the RSF was to win the war against freedom fighters by direct military means, torture, psychological terror and winning the hearts and minds of the civilians.¹⁵⁴ These strategies were applied in Buhera District like in other war affected areas in the country with profound repercussions. Innocent civilians were collectively punished for offences committed by guerrillas. As a result, despite sanctions, Rhodesia further violated human rights through acts of murder, brutality against the civilian population, expropriation and/or destruction of civilian property which were provided for by the Emergency Powers Act of 1960 and Compensation Act of 1975.¹⁵⁵

The RSF repression through brutality and harassment of the traditional leaders and the civilian populace in Buhera District dovetails into the Brazilian guerrilla leader, Carlos Marighella's assertion that guerrilla attacks on government installations provokes the government to retaliate with repressive measures that will anger the general population.¹⁵⁶ Marighella was a leader of the Communist Party in Brazil in the post-World War II era but later parted ways with it in 1967.¹⁵⁷ He saw only two objectives as important for an urban guerrilla war to be successful. These are: physical elimination of the security forces and the seizure of government properties and those owned by the big capitalists for the sustenance of both the individual guerrillas and in the long run the revolution itself.¹⁵⁸ Accordingly, the practical erosion of the ruling government capacity to ensure security for itself and its citizens, particularly through the incapacity of law enforcement agencies to stop the guerrillas would result in the people rejecting it.¹⁵⁹ Thus, in Buhera as in other parts of the country, the regime's responses incensed the population which threw its support behind the guerrillas. To this end, harsh or ill-treatment and harassment of the rural population was ill-conceived, cruel and therefore in a large measure counter-productive. Deprivation and oppression by the colonial regime over the years was so intense that when the rural people saw their own sons armed with guns and willing to die, they also resolved to endure whatever counter measures adopted by the Rhodesians.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, tough action or show of military strength failed to easily win over the rural masses.

¹⁵⁴ Bhebe 1999, 110–111.

¹⁵⁵ Bhebe 1999, 111.

¹⁵⁶ Marighella 1969, 54; Harmon 2001, 40.

¹⁵⁷ Deakin 1974, 22.

¹⁵⁸ Marighella 1969, 9.

¹⁵⁹ Deakin 1974, 23.

¹⁶⁰ Bhebe 1999, 42.

Further, the Roman Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace's publication, *Man in the Middle* summed up the traditional leaders and civilian's predicament as,

A campaign against terrorists could not be assisted by punishing the innocent victims of terrorism who under the threat of reprisals lack the necessary courage to report. The loyalty of the man in the middle could not be won by beating, torturing and maiming him, by shattering his home with bombs from the air, by destroying his crops and driving off his cattle, but by restoring and respecting his dignity as a human being and by jealously guarding the rule of law based on those Christian principles which Rhodesia publicly claimed to respect and professed to maintain.¹⁶¹

The RSF, by harassing traditional leaders and their subordinates rather than the guerrillas, alienated itself from the traditional authorities and by extension their followers. Arguably, the traditional leadership and the civilian population in Buhera District became sympathetic and committed to the guerrilla cause as a result of the RSF brutal responses.

6.4 *Dusk to Dawn Curfew*

According to Mushonga, curfew generally refers to a time after which people must stay indoors and is usually enforced during wartime situations. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines curfew as referring to an order or regulation enjoining withdrawal of persons from streets, or closing of business establishments or places of assembly at a stated hour, usually, though not exclusively, in the evening.¹⁶² The Smith regime imposed curfew in most parts of the country during the struggle to liberate Zimbabwe as a desperate effort to curb the threat of guerrillas in the affected areas. Dusk to dawn curfew regulations were part of the Martial law which created a virtual licence for the RSF to kill anyone found moving after the specified hours. According to Ellert, by late 1978 and in 1979 nearly ninety-five percent of Rhodesia fell under the jurisdiction of Martial Law.¹⁶³ It was a desperate measure which had been implemented to weaken and even hold back the enemy. The military and police commanders were given sweeping judicial powers enabling them to try security offenders and pass a sentence. The martial courts were also empowered to impose the death penalty but even though many such death

161 Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia 1999, 1–3.

162 Mushonga 2005, 172.

163 Ellert 1989, 51.

warrants were signed, none of the accused was executed.¹⁶⁴ The commonest penalty consisted of detention in Martial law holding centres. In Buhera District, the dusk to dawn curfew was implemented with much severity, especially in the Nyashanu area because of the Chief's open support of the guerrillas. However, the collective and brutal punishments the RSF meted out to Chief Nyashanu, his wives and people mobilised most civilians towards the guerrilla objectives.

Among other things, traditional leaders and their civilians did not have enough time to cultivate and tend their crops and graze their animals because of the law. Moreover, the compulsory unpaid labour work done for Chiefs had already been forbidden by 1972 because the RSF believed that it was just a way of furnishing propaganda on behalf of guerrillas.¹⁶⁵ This shows that the strategies pursued by the Smith regime instead of curtailing the menace of guerrillas threatened civilians and their traditional leadership thus alienating itself from them. The guerrillas also used the repressive laws as a tool to alienate the rural people from the Smith regime. Thus, the guerrilla leadership responded by explaining their mission and outlined the grievances of the masses while Rhodesian military leadership strove to project the image of the "simple soldier."¹⁶⁶ That is why the guerrillas enjoyed the support of the traditional leaders and their followers at the expense of the RSF.

Put together, the ZANLA guerrillas and the RSF responded differently to the role traditional leaders played during the liberation struggle in Buhera District. The main aim of each force was to win the support of both the traditional leaders and their subordinates. The two fighting forces employed different strategies and tactics which had varying degrees of effectiveness and success. Terror by the guerrillas was an important tool used to gain support and forestall potential defectors and collaborators. However, it is vital to note that both coercion and consciousness legitimised the guerrillas in Buhera District. Traditional leaders and their people cooperated with the guerrillas partly because of fear and as a result of grievances they harboured against the colonial regime. More so, it was not a simple equation where traditional leaders and all their subordinates supported guerrillas. There were many instances of subordinates who were accused of being sellouts whilst their leaders backed guerrillas. Several cases of sellouts were prevalent in areas where the Chiefs supported both the guerrillas and the RSF. However, the number of cases of

164 Ellert 1989, 51.

165 NAZ, S3285/45/111 Chiefs and Headmen 1972.

166 Moorcraft and McLaughlin 1982, 63.

betraying guerrillas decreased as Buhera District became one of the liberated zones. The RSF responded with heavy-handed tactics such as the carrot and stick approach, rigid legislation, collective punishment, terror and the dusk to dawn curfew laws in an effort to curb guerrilla dominance. Consequently, the Smith regime alienated the civilian population and their traditional leaders prompting them to throw their support behind the guerrillas.

7 Conclusion

The purpose of the study has not been to revitalise, mythologise and romanticise the role of traditional leaders during Zimbabwe's war of liberation in Buhera District. Nor was it to play down the fact that spirit mediums were predominantly in support of the guerrillas as opposed to Chiefs, headmen and village heads. Accordingly, its central aim has been to correct our understanding of the generally accepted notion that traditional leaders were opposed to the war of liberation and supported the settler regime. It stresses that traditional leaders participated differently in assisting the guerrillas. They were involved in the mobilisation and organisation, provision of moral, financial and material support and rendered guidance for the nationalist cause. In addition, although only Nyashanu openly showed sympathy to the nationalist cause (motivated by both self-interests and a real hatred of the colonial injustices), it may be worth noting that the majority of the traditional leaders in Buhera District except for Chief Gwebu supported the guerrillas but did so with restraint due to fear of reprisals from the RSF. It is also important to note that traditional leaders in Buhera District participated in the war in support of the guerrillas either voluntarily or for ulterior motives as in the case of Makiwa Nyashanu or were coerced to do so due to fear of being killed. The NLHA's provisions led to the loss of land and cattle, more importantly authority and dignity and other adverse effects associated with colonial rule encouraging some traditional leaders to support the nationalist cause. Chief Gwebu was opposed to the liberation war because he viewed it as a threat to the benefits he obtained from the colonial regime. For the majority of the Chiefs in Buhera District who dealt with both the guerrillas and the RSF, they feared reprisals from either side of the contending forces, thus were double-faced. Unlike Chiefs Gwebu and Nyashanu who fell victims of the guerrillas and the Rhodesian government respectively, the other Chiefs survived the war.

The guerrillas and the RSF responded differently to the role traditional leaders played during the liberation struggle in Buhera District. Both forces wanted

to win the loyalty and support of both the traditional leaders and their subordinates and ultimately the war. Beyond doubt, the tactics used by the contending forces left the traditional leaders and their civilian followers in a dilemma since they suffered brutal responses from the fighting forces. It is evident that during the wartime situation traditional leaders and civilians were compelled to respond flexibly to the fighting forces in a drive to survive. As a result, while we categorise three groups of traditional authorities 1) those who worked with the RSF 2) those who supported the guerrillas 3) those who were double-faced or supported both, the categorisation was clearly not as neat as we provided but vital for this presentation. This is because traditional leaders indeed transcended these boundaries as their relationships with guerrillas and the RSF were contextual and often changed over time.

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