

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE POLITICS OF CHIEFTAINCY  
AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL  
ZIMBABWE, 1950-2010**

by

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## DECLARATION

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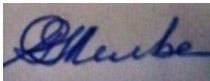
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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



1 SEPTEMBER 2020

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BSAC	British South Africa Company
BSAP	British South Africa Police
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CNC	Chief Native <sup>1</sup> Commissioner
DA	District Administrator
DC	District Commissioner
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSA	District Security Assistants
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FRELIMO	<i>Frente de Libertacao Nacional de Mocambique</i> ; the Portuguese name for the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, the Mozambican guerrilla movement that fought a liberation war against the Portuguese colonial regime from 1964 to 1975
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INTAF	Internal Affairs Ministry of Rhodesia
LAA 1930	Land Apportionment Act 1930

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<sup>1</sup>The use of the term ‘Native’ in this work is restricted to references to specific policies, institutions, and pieces of legislation which were labelled at the time of their use as ‘Native’, e.g. the Native Department, Native Commissioners, Native Regulations, Native Policy, the Native Question, and the Native Land Husbandry Act. This term was a key aspect of the discourse of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial administrators throughout Britain’s African Empire and was widely used in Southern Rhodesia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term’s inheritance and wide use by Southern Rhodesia’s early colonial administrators in racist and segregationist discourse gained it a derogatory inflection that warrants its general disuse.

MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MIEC	Movement of Independent Electoral Candidates
NC	Native Commissioner
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NDP	National Democratic Party
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NLHA 1951	Native Land Husbandry Act 1951
PCC	People's Caretaker Council
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
RBZ	Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe
RDC	Rural District Councils
RDR	Rhodesia Defence Regiment
RF	Rhodesian Front
RSF	Rhodesian Security Forces
RTV	Rhodesia Television
SFA	Security Force Auxiliaries
SRANC	Southern Rhodesia African National Council
TCA 1969	Tribal Courts Act 1969
TILCOR	Tribal Trust Land Development Organisation
TLA	Tribal Land Authority
TTL	Tribal Trust Land
TTLA 1967	Tribal Trust Lands Act 1967
UCRN	University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UFP	United Federal Party
VIDCO	Village Development Committee
WADCO	Ward Development Committee
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)

ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZNLWVA	Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association
ZUD	Zimbabwe Unity of Democrats
ZUM	Zimbabwe Unity Movement
ZUPO	Zimbabwe United People's Organisation

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<i>Amabutho</i>	Ndebele military regiments
<i>Amadlozi</i>	Ndebele ancestral spirits
<i>Basikatongo</i>	Tonga lineage spirit-custodians
<i>Chimbwido</i>	A Shona word that evolved in ZANU/ZANLA terminology during the liberation war against Rhodesian white minority rule, describing a girl who helped the ZANLA guerrillas by cooking food for them, carrying their weapons, and gathering intelligence on the movements of the Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF).
<i>Chimurenga</i>	A word derived from the Shona word ‘ <i>murenga</i> ’, meaning ‘rebel’ or ‘fighter’. It was first applied to the Shona uprisings of 1896-7 which became known as the First <i>Chimurenga</i> . Zimbabwe’s liberation war of 1966-1979 is generally referred to as the Second <i>Chimurenga</i> in historical scholarship on Zimbabwe.
<i>Chisi</i>	A weekly agricultural rest-day whose strict observance was enforced by traditional leaders in Shona traditional culture
<i>Dare</i>	An enclosed space or courtyard used for the administration of justice in the traditional Shona court system.

<i>Hondoyeminda</i>	A Shona word that was popularised during the violent take-over of white farms in 2000, which translates to, ‘a war for the recovery of the land’.
<i>Ilanga lokuzila</i>	A weekly agricultural rest-day whose strict observance was enforced by traditional leaders in Ndebele traditional culture
<i>Indaba</i>	An Nguni word that is widely used in Southern Africa in reference to a ‘meeting’, ‘discussion’ or ‘council’.
<i>Induna</i>	Ndebele traditional chief (plural: <i>izinduna</i> )
<i>Inkundla</i>	Ndebele term for an enclosed space or courtyard used for the administration of justice in the traditional Ndebele court system
<i>Ishe</i>	Shona traditional chief
<i>Izigaba</i>	Sub-divisions of the Ndebele kingdom (provinces) that were ruled by <i>izinduna</i> (traditional Ndebele chiefs)
<i>Izikhulu</i>	The Ndebele state’s prominent men
<i>Jambanja</i>	An informal Shona word describing widespread chaos and violence
<i>Lobola</i>	African custom whereby a man intending to marry a woman has to pay a bride-price to the woman’s parents

before marriage. The payment is generally regarded as gratitude to the bride's parents for bearing him a wife.

- Masvikiroenyika* Spirit mediums of the chiefdom or land in Shona traditional beliefs
- Mhondoro* Ancestral spirits of deceased Shona chiefs that are believed to reside in mane-less lions until they identify a living human descendant to possess, who then becomes the spirit medium (*svikiro*) who intercedes between the deceased and living descendants. They are also known as lion-spirits. They are believed to be concerned with matters of chieftaincy and the territorial chiefdom.
- Mudzimu* Shona ancestral spirit
- Mujibha* A Shona word that was widely used during the war of liberation in reference to a boy that acted as a spotter of Rhodesian Security Forces' movements on behalf of the guerrillas and also conveyed guerrilla messages to villagers about upcoming nocturnal political meetings.
- Mwami* Tonga chief
- Pungwe* Shona term for an all-night event that commences at dusk and proceeds throughout the night until the dawn of the next day. During the Second *Chimurenga* the word was used to refer to all-night political meetings that were convened by ZANLA guerrillas in the bush as mean of

politicizing the rural people on the motivations and goals of the armed struggle.

- Sabhuku* Traditional village-head
- Svikiro* A spirit-medium of the Shona people who, when possessed by ancestral spirits, communicated messages to the people as an agent of the ancestors
- Umphakathi* Inner circle of the Ndebele king's councillors
- Uphawulwenkosi* Royal earmark used to identify the Ndebele King's cattle herds
- ZunderaMambo* A traditional Shona food-security system, by which agricultural produce was collected during times of plenty and stored in the chief's granary for re-distribution among the needy during drought or famine.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis historicizes the paradox of the survival of the institution of chieftainship in Zimbabwe from near demise at independence in 1980, when it was largely considered as a discredited institution due to its former alliance with colonial administrations, to its revival and current importance where it is an integral part of Zimbabwe's constitutional and political structure and wields considerable power. It explores the political manipulation of African chiefs in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s by the colonial state in its efforts to combat African Nationalism, and reveals how the alliance of chiefs with the colonial state drove a political wedge between the chiefs and Nationalists during the anticolonial struggle, a development that made chieftaincy a discredited institution at independence. The thesis argues that the fall-out between the chiefs and Nationalists that was precipitated by the chiefs' close association with the Smith regime reversed a promising start that had been forged between them in the late 1940s and early 1950s when chiefs had actively supported the emerging Nationalist movements like the African People's Voice Association.

The thesis also examines the sources of the enduring power of the institution of chieftaincy under the onslaught of powerful political and ideological forces that have sought to transform it since the advent of colonial rule, such as colonialism itself, modernism and nationalism, and identifies the sources of its resilience in its mutability. It offers an interesting comparison of colonial and postcolonial intentions in local administrative policy. It not only unveils how colonialism transformed the institution of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe but also builds a case of how the postcolonial state continued to re-invent the same institution for partisan and political expediency purposes. It notes that the Rhodesian state's retreat from its authoritarian attempts to restructure traditional African society in the 1940s and 1950s, and its reversion to traditional communal land tenure, was a concession to the indispensability of traditional authority structures in rural local governance. Similarly, the postcolonial government's restoration of chiefs' powers in 2000, after sidelining them for two decades, also signified their indispensability to the postcolonial state's control of the rural populations when it was confronted by political challenges from a rising tide of opposition movements that sought to capture the rural constituencies.

**Key Words:** Traditional Authorities, Colonialism, Local Government, Manipulation, Transformation, Communal Areas, African Nationalism, Liberation Struggle, African Councils, Decentralization



## CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH OUTLINE

### Introduction

This thesis is a comparative study of the role accorded to African chiefs in rural local administration by the colonial and postcolonial state in Zimbabwe in the last three decades of colonial rule (1950-1979) and the first three decades of independent Zimbabwe (1980-2010) respectively, with particular focus on how *state politics* in the colonial and postcolonial eras remoulded and transformed African chieftainship from its precolonial form. It examines the changing political circumstances under which traditional leadership institutions in Zimbabwe were co-opted by bureaucratic governments in the colonial and postcolonial periods in their bid to legitimate and undergird their hegemonic control over rural populations and resources. The thesis takes the form of an analytic narrative organized chronologically by historical episodes. This *longue duree* analytical approach was chosen because studying the entire chronological spectrum offered the advantage of a comparative analysis of the fluctuating fortunes of the institution of chieftaincy under broader political changes in different epochs.

Theoretically, the thesis deploys the invention of tradition approach to advance knowledge on how the chiefly institution was re-invented by colonialism to redefine rule over conquered Africans. It posits the colonial project of the Rhodesian state as an ambitious cultural project that sought not only to invent colonial chiefs in line with white settler interests, but also to re-organise the Africans' way of life. The thesis however reveals that there were certain limitations to the state's power in its bid to invent colonial chiefs that were imposed on it by the agency of African chiefs as politically conscious historical actors who often subverted their colonial relationship with the state

to advance their own ends.

It draws from Carolyn Hamilton's revisionist critique of the invention of tradition thesis which emphasizes the power of historically-shaped local traditions to limit colonial inventions. Hamilton argues that, largely due to the resilience of local ideas that were steeped in African culture, colonial rule did not completely obliterate precolonial African traditions of governance and customary laws, and many of these traditions remained antagonistic to the colonial project.<sup>2</sup> It proffers this as one of the explanations for the resilience of institution of chieftainship in Africa. The thesis's analysis of the postcolonial state draws parallels with the colonial era by arguing that chieftainship has once again been re-invented by the postcolonial state in an endeavour to capture the rural peasant constituency politically, and sustain political incumbency. But, as in the colonial period, chiefs have exploited their alliance with ZANU PF to further their interests and to draw financial benefits from the relationship.

Despite its focus on the period from 1950 to 2010, the thesis prefaces its examination of that period with a detailed historical background of key political events in the earlier colonial period (1890-1940s) which shaped the pattern of African governance that defined the position chiefs in the white administration and remodelled their role to serve colonial interests. The general thrust of the thesis is to examine the dynamics of the wider political background that shaped the relations between the state and traditional institutions at various periods of Zimbabwe's history. The study seeks to underline the fact that changing political circumstances have changed the nature of traditional authority in various ways. It observes that traditional

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<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1998)

leadership has always had a complex relationship with governments, especially those whose legitimacy is threatened and during periods of transitions.

This thesis analyses the dynamics of the changing political circumstances under which traditional leadership institutions in Zimbabwe were co-opted by bureaucratic governments in the colonial and postcolonial periods as an embedded aspect of local government structures in their bid to legitimate and undergird their hegemonic control over rural populations and resources. It deploys the invention of tradition thesis to highlight how colonialism transformed the institution of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe and builds upon a large body of recent critiques of the ‘traditional’ or ‘customary’ powers that were arrogated to chiefs in the colonial period. It shows that the structures of institutional dualism laid down by the early colonial state in local government provided a powerful institutional legacy that was inherited by the postcolonial state at independence, resulting in practices of local government and development strategies that were not dissimilar to colonial practices of local government in many respects.

It highlights the evident resilience of the institution of chieftaincy over time and its paradoxical political trajectory from a discredited institution at independence in 1980 due to its partisanship with Rhodesian repression, to its revival and current importance in Zimbabwe today, where chiefs are now publicly courted by government officials and the media. The resilience of chieftaincy in the postcolonial period is explained by the fact that scarcely any permanent damage seems to have happened to the legitimacy of the institution among its subjects despite its association with colonial regimes in the past, save for the brief disempowerment of chiefs in the early decades of independence. The resurgence of chiefly power in Zimbabwe toward the end

of the 1990s is attributed to the postcolonial state's official courtship of traditional authorities when it was confronted with a legitimation crisis and was politically beleaguered by growing political opposition to its rule due to a deepening economic meltdown, severe poverty, hyperinflation and unemployment.

The thesis also examines the interactive process between chiefs and elected local government bodies that were introduced at independence, and highlights the competition for power and legitimacy between these institutions. It contrasts the widespread disinclination of rural communities to participate in rural development programmes that were championed by elected Village Development Communities (VIDCOs) with the popular following that was commanded by chiefs, which tended to undermine the work of the VIDCOs in many areas. It links the unpopularity of the elected rural local government bodies to imposition of VIDCOs through top-down processes that ignored the boundaries of traditional communities, and also to the general failure of decentralisation due to the overbearing influence of central government and the ruling party in rural local government.

### **Justification of the Study**

The thesis was motivated by the dearth of comparative historical studies on the dynamics of the relationship between the institution of chieftaincy and the state in the late colonial and independence eras, and how the transition to independence impacted on that relationship. The comparative *longue duree* analytical approach adopted for this study contributes significantly to our understanding of the evolution of the institution of chieftainship over a much longer period than most previous works have done. To this end, the thesis sets out by providing an indispensable historical background on the institution's

evolution from the precolonial era and its cultural values, through its remodelled and embedded role in colonial rural administration, to its contended partisan role in the electoral politics of postcolonial Zimbabwe. It historicizes the processes by which the precolonial social and political power of African chiefs and their authority were harnessed by modern bureaucratic governments before and after independence to extend hegemony over rural communities. Methodologically, the thesis pushes forward the frontiers of historical knowledge by situating the study of chieftainship within the wider political background that shaped the history of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe.

### **Significance of the Study**

This thesis is written against the background of current debates over the history of the role that was played by chiefs against the forces of democratisation in the colonial era, and questions about their role in democratic governance in the postcolonial era in Zimbabwe and Africa in general. In Zimbabwe that debate has been spurred; firstly, by the perception that colonial chiefs were strategic allies of the Rhodesian Front regime in the repression of African Nationalist influence in the ‘Tribal Trust Lands’ through the criminalization of membership to these organizations and de-legitimization of their political messages about freedom from colonial rule; and secondly, by the perception that chiefs in independent Zimbabwe are aligned to the ZANU PF government and are instrumental in securing electoral victories for the party in rural constituencies.<sup>3</sup> Both perceptions of

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<sup>3</sup> Nathan Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 31; A.K.H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 69-72; J.F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118; C. Banana, ‘Provincialization: Rhodesia Front Design for Deepening Apartheid’, *Moto*, 26 August 1972: Document 22 in E. Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem. A Documentary Record 1923-1973* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975) 123; Pius Nyambara, ‘Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District, 20-41; M. Bratton, *Beyond Community Development* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1978) 50; B. Sundkler, ‘Chief and Prophet in Zululand and Swaziland’, in M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen, *African Systems of Thought* (London, Oxford University Press, 1966) 276; Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah & the Chiefs: the Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-60* (Accra, F. Reimer Book Services, 2000) 113, 126, 176; Chengetai Zvanya, Parliamentary Editor,

the colonial and post-colonial partisanship of chiefs have generated significant criticism from many quarters about their relevance to modern democratic governance in Zimbabwe and Africa in general.<sup>4</sup> This thesis contributes significantly to these discourses through a historical examination of the basis for these contentious questions and critical analysis of the substance of the discourses.

To this end, the thesis deploys historical analysis to enhance our understanding of the ways in which the institution of chieftaincy in its current form was historically constituted through the exercise of state power, to facilitate rural local government policies that were designed to secure state control over rural populations. It begins by examining the colonial policies and theoretical approaches that underpinned the formulation of Rhodesia's system of African administration and the ways in which traditional chiefly power was restructured to suit the interests of settler control of the rural populations. It then makes a comparative examination of the ways in the independent state of Zimbabwe has continued to re-invent the institution of chieftaincy for its own partisan and political expediency purposes. At another level, the thesis assesses the roles and functions which chiefs can play in the modern era of change and development, such as in the traditional management

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'Govt. to splash on chiefs' cars', *Daily News*, Sat. 04 October 2014; Reporter, 'Four Chiefs Made ministers', *The African Times*, vol. 11, No. 5, May 5, 1976, p.1; Norbert Musekiwa, 'The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition', in E. Masunungure & Jabusile Shumba (eds.) *Zimbabwe: Mired in Transition* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2012) 241; Godfrey Ncube, 'Crisis of Communal Leadership: Postcolonial local government reform and administrative conflict with traditional authorities in the communal areas of Zimbabwe, 1980-2008', *African Journal of History and Culture*, Vol.3, No. 6, July 2011, 89-95; ZANU Publicity Dept., *Zimbabwe News*, Vol.10, No. 4, July-August 1978; Feature, 'Chiefs now mere pawns in Zimbabwe's political minefield', *Daily News*, 24 August 2004; Chengetai Zvauya, Parliamentary Reporter, 'Government to splash on chiefs' cars', *Daily News*, Saturday 04 October 2014; Prosper Ndlovu, 'Chiefs Demand to be resettled on farms', *The Chronicle*, 08 March 2012; Edna Machirori, 'Get chiefs off the gravy train', *Daily News*, Wednesday 14 March 2012; News Report, 'Zimbabwe: Chiefs Demand to Run Mines', *Zimbabwe Forum*, Saturday 25 February 2012. (AllAfrica.com); Pindai Dube, 'Chiefs' Conference a Zanu PF Congress', *Daily News*, 12 March 2012; George Maponga & Francis Machivenyika, 'Zim Chiefs push for Polls', *The Southern Times*, 13/01/ 2012 ([www.thezimbabwemail.com](http://www.thezimbabwemail.com)); MISA, 'Chiefs should get out of politics', *The Zimbabwean*, 03/11/2010; Economic Commission for Africa, *Relevance of African Traditional Institutions of Governance*, 10.

<sup>4</sup>Economic Commission for Africa, *Relevance of African Traditional Institutions of Governance* (Addis Ababa, ECA Publications, 2007)

of natural resources in the Communal Areas through traditional sanction and indigenous knowledge systems. It argues that traditional institutions are capable of adapting to the hybrid governmental systems that were created at independence.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. The general aim of the study is to investigate the political transformation of African chieftaincy by the new roles that were defined for it as an embedded aspect of local government in the colonial and postcolonial period, from 1950 to 2010.

2. The study also aims to examine the ways in which the precolonial ideology of African chieftainship and chiefly obligations and relations with their subjects were transformed by the colonial invention of salaried administrative chiefs who owed allegiance to the colonial regime.

3. It seeks to unveil the administrative policies and political circumstance which determined the rehabilitation of traditional authorities to suit local governance ends of the state

4. The study also seeks to highlight the agency of chiefs as historical actors in their relationship with the state, and to reveal the ways in which they exploited their official position within the bureaucratic governments to advance their own interests and sometimes subverted their relationship with central government as a form of resistance. It aims to investigate the political and socio-economic circumstances which led certain chiefs to collaborate with the colonial regime and others to actively support the Nationalist movements.

5. The thesis aims to examine the nature of the political wedge that was driven between chiefs and African Nationalists by the colonial state's strategic alliance with the chiefs against the Nationalists, and unveil the lasting consequences of their strained relationship

6. Furthermore, the work seeks to analyse the impact of the disempowerment of chiefs in rural local administration in the first decade of independence, their relationship with the new bureaucratic structures of rural administration, and the peasants' response.

7. Finally, the thesis aims to unveil the underlying political, economic and social issues that compelled the re-empowerment of chiefs in Zimbabwe at the end of the 1990s, the political relationship between chiefs and the ruling party, and their relevance to the modern democratic dispensation.

### **Research Questions**

1. How did the grafting of traditional authority structures to colonial power structures, as an embedded aspect of local government, transform chiefs?

2. What were the political intentions and goals of the colonial state and the postcolonial state in rural local government?

3. How committed were the white settlers to the administrative policy of Indirect Rule through African chiefs?

4. The extent to which the authority of chiefs was eroded by the establishment of Popular Village Committees and People's Assemblies by the guerrillas during the war of liberation?



5. What was the impact on chieftainship of the forced movement of Africans into Protected Villages by the RSF in the 1970s?

6. How did the collapse of rural local administration and the para-militarisation of District Administration during the era of the liberation war affect the functioning of chiefs in rural areas?

7. To what extent was the concept of 'traditional culture' appropriated as a source of political legitimacy by modern politicians in Zimbabwe in the 1990s?

8. What is the relevance of retaining traditional authorities in a modern democratic system? Are they capable of adapting to the hybrid local governmental system?

## **Literature Review**

Rhodesia's system of African governance and its co-optation of chiefs in its rural local government have been analysed by several historians of the colonial era and some of them have drawn parallels between the status of chiefs in Rhodesia and other British colonies in Africa.<sup>5</sup> Others have drawn comparisons between Rhodesia's 'Native' Administration and the British policy of Indirect Rule that was adopted as the standard approach of rural local government in the British Empire in Africa, in such areas as Northern Nigeria. There is a consensus in these comparative analyses that Rhodesia's

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Bourne, *Catastrophe: What Went Wrong in Zimbabwe* (London, Zed Books, 2011) 11; William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa: A Case Study of Economic Development in a Dualistic Society* (London, Greenwood Press, 1984); Barber, J., *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion* (London, Oxford University Press, 1967) 120-121

system of rural local government differed significantly from what obtained in other parts of British Colonial Africa.

Much of the literature on Rhodesia's 'Native' Administration makes it clear that the settler administration never formulated a definite policy or theoretical approach to African governance apart from the insistence on the racial difference between Europeans and Africans, and the use of race as the key organizing tool in the construction of colonial governance.<sup>6</sup> Several studies of Rhodesia's system of African administration have indicated that Rhodesians eschewed the Lugardian conception of Indirect Rule through traditional chiefs that was practiced throughout the rest of British Tropical Africa. Neither did the Rhodesians have a clearly formulated definition of the racial divisions upon which their society was based, unlike what prevailed in South Africa where the Afrikaaner government had a clearly enunciated ideological and religious basis for its doctrine of racial separateness or *Apartheid*.

Nevertheless, like all the other colonial governments in British Colonial Africa, Rhodesia's rural local administration was dependent on pre-existing structures of traditional authority. And, like South Africa's system of *Apartheid*, Rhodesian society was founded on a system of racial segregation built up over the years since the foundation of the country in the 1890s.

Several studies of Rhodesia's system of African administration have

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<sup>6</sup> M.C. Steele, 'The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933', PhD thesis, Department of History, Fraser University, 1972; R. Austin, *Racism and Apartheid in Southern Africa: Rhodesia* (Paris, The UNESCO Press, 1975); L. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia: White Power in an African State*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973; J.R.T. Wood, *The Welensky Papers: A History of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (Durban, Graham Publishing, 1983); J.R.T. Wood, *So Far and No Further: Rhodesia's Bid for Independence during the Retreat from Empire, 1959-1965* (Victoria BC, Trafford, 2005); J.R.T. Wood, *A Matter of Weeks Rather Than Months: The Impasse between Harold Wilson and Ian Smith; Sanctions, Aborted Settlements and War, 1965-1969* (Victoria BC, Trafford Publishing, 2008); William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa: A Case Study of Economic Development in a Dualistic Society* (London, Greenwood Press, 1984); Barber, J., *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion* (London, Oxford University Press, 1967)

highlighted significant differences between Rhodesia's approaches to African administration from the theory and practice of the administrative policy of Indirect Rule. An examination of the theory of Indirect Rule as it was formulated by Frederick Lugard is imperative, before we turn to the literature on Rhodesia's system of African governance.

Frederick Lugard is widely credited with formulating the theory and practice of Indirect Rule and his book, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* was viewed by most British colonial administrators as a manual for the implementation of the policy.<sup>7</sup> *The Dual Mandate* outlined his imperial vision of local government by means of traditional chiefs and rulers, which was based on his administrative experiences in Northern Nigeria and Uganda from 1900 to 1919. The concept advocated the preservation and incorporation of pre-existing African traditional political institutions into the colonial administrative system as the 'Native Authority' so as to achieve a more efficient system of African administration. It was widely adopted throughout Britain's African colonies such as Northern Nigeria, Uganda and the Gold Coast as the standard instrument of administration.<sup>8</sup>

The philosophical reasoning behind Indirect Rule through Native Authorities was inspired by the belief that the European and the African were culturally distinct, and therefore Africans were best governed through institutions that they had devised for themselves. Therefore the European colonial powers should govern their African subjects through their own political institutions. In practice, Indirect Rule laid very heavy emphasis on the role of the chief in the government of African peoples. In Lord Lugard and Donald S. Cameron's

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<sup>7</sup> F. D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London, Frank Cass, 1965)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-150

conception, Indirect Rule was to be a dynamic system of local government.<sup>9</sup> The indigenous political institutions would be continually developed into more efficient units of administration, under the guidance of the resident European political officer. They would be responding to the new situations created by colonial rule and adapting themselves accordingly.<sup>10</sup> According to this ideal, White administrative officers concentrated on keeping the peace and remedying obvious miscarriages of justice, while leaving African chiefs to collect taxes and run local courts. Ultimately, the British retained the power to appoint the chiefs.<sup>11</sup>

W.J. Barber argues that Rhodesia's approach to African administration stood in contrast to the Lugardian-Cameron approach to African administration both in terms of the spirit and intentions of the doctrine of Indirect Rule. He points out that both Lugard and Cameron had argued for a view of Indirect Rule which involved more than the mechanics of routine daily administration. They had envisioned the use of 'tribal' institutions as the foundations upon which higher forms of African self-government with wider responsibilities could be built. Theirs had been a philosophy of empowerment through political development, in which traditional institutions of government formed the base for political advancement of the indigenous peoples. Lugard and Cameron had envisioned autonomous African self-government as the ultimate goal, as later came to be applied in Nigeria and Ghana.<sup>12</sup>

There is a consensus among several scholars that have reviewed the Lugardian-Cameron theory of Indirect Rule on the view that the formulation of the policy had envisioned the maintenance of strong African institutions in

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<sup>9</sup> Donald Cameron, *Principles of Native Administration and their Application* (London, Government Printer, 1931)

<sup>10</sup> F.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 149-150

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> W.J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21

rural local governance.<sup>13</sup> They show that during Lugard's tenure as Governor-General of Nigeria from 1912 to 1918 and Donald Cameron's tenure as Governor of Tanganyika from 1925 to 1931, they both strongly advocated for the policy of Indirect Rule as the best system of African administration because it empowered chiefs to administer effectively on behalf of the empire.

This contrasted strongly with what prevailed in Rhodesia. Barber shows that, in Rhodesia, the retention of 'tribal' institutions as the instruments of rule did not imply that the tribal authorities were allowed much scope for decision-making. Instead, chiefs were reduced in stature to mere conduits through which the European governing officials communicated their instructions.<sup>14</sup> J.F. Holleman in his pioneering study of chieftainship in Rhodesia, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, and James Barber in *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, concur that African administration in Rhodesia disempowered African chiefs and converted them into minor state functionaries who were tasked with the maintenance of law and order.<sup>15</sup> Barber maintains that the Rhodesian interpretation of Native Administration differed significantly from the Lugardian concept of Native Authorities in that it did not embrace the long-term goal of African self-government as a form of empowerment.<sup>16</sup>

This has prompted other historians like M.C. Steele, Richard Bourne and Larry Bowman to conclude that in Rhodesia, the system of rural administration was more akin to direct rule by the Native Commissioner.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> James D. Graham, 'Indirect Rule: The Establishment of "Chiefs" and "Tribes" in Cameron's Tanganyika', in Gregory Maddox (ed.) *The Colonial Epoch* (London, Routledge, 1993); Z.O. Apata, 'Lugard and the Creation of Provincial Administration in Northern Nigeria, 1900-1918', *TransAfrican Journal of History*, Vol. 21, 1992, 111-123

<sup>14</sup> W.J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21

<sup>15</sup> J. F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner* (London, Oxford University Press, 1969) 118; James Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 20-21

<sup>16</sup> James Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 20-21

<sup>17</sup> M.C. Steele, Richard Bourne, *Catastrophe: What Went Wrong in Zimbabwe* (London, Zed Books, 2011) 27; L. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia*, 11

Authority was concentrated in the hands of the Native Commissioner who was the key figure of the administration, with a paternal role responsible for good order and good government in the countryside. All the colonial government's activities in African administration radiated from him. He supervised the chiefs, chaired the meetings of chiefs in the Native Councils, and enforced the regulations of the Native Affairs Department in the Reserves such as dipping cattle, controlling livestock populations, collecting taxes and recruiting African labour, and trying African cases.<sup>18</sup> The NC also wielded extensive powers which included the powers to depose all African chiefs who were deemed ineffective in the furtherance of colonial interests, and their replacement by new chiefs.

Other scholars have aptly observed that African chiefs in Rhodesia did not enjoy the same prestige or power given to chiefs under the British Colonial Office's system of Indirect Rule in other parts of the British Empire.<sup>19</sup> R. Kent Rasmussen's work unveils an interesting fact that when the white settlers of Southern and Northern Rhodesia first made their demands to the British government for the creation of a federation with Nyasaland in the 1930s, the Bledisloe Commission (1938-1939) which had been set up to investigate settler and African opinion on the proposed Federation, found that Africans in the two northern territories were strongly opposed amalgamation with Southern Rhodesia because they feared, not only the extension of Southern Rhodesia's land and tax laws to them, but more significantly, they feared Rhodesia's political emasculation of chiefs.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> James Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion* (London, Oxford University Press, 1967) 120

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 121; R. Kent Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia: African Historical Dictionaries No. 18*, (London, The Scarecrow Press, 1979) 34

<sup>20</sup> R.K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 34

Valuable insights into the exercise of white power over the African population in the colonial era were gleaned from a wide variety of theoretical approaches that have been deployed by other scholars who have studied colonial governance in Africa. One of the key approaches that have been employed to this end is institutional dualism, or what has been alternatively termed the bifurcation of the colonial state by Mahmoud Mamdani. Mamdani and Bridget O’Laughlin have shown how the generic colonial state, from its very conception, was bifurcated, broadly dividing colonial society along racial lines into White ‘citizens’, who were deemed more human, and the broad masses of ‘native’ ‘subjects’, who were less human.<sup>21</sup> This dualistic conception in the construction of the colonial state underpinned its Native Administration policies of discrimination, economic exploitation, forced labour, racist social segregation and indirect rule through African chiefs, presided over and controlled by European Native Commissioners. Colin Stoneman and Lionel Cliffe have argued that the motive behind the racialized administration was that of controlling Africans rather than fostering local development.<sup>22</sup>

This colonial ideology of Separate Development essentially meant social closure against African people.<sup>23</sup> Sabelo J. Gatsheni’s review of Mamdani’s work clearly points out that colonialism by its very nature created an apolitical duality which consisted on the one hand of a "parliamentary democracy" and civil society for the citizens, the white settlers, in the cities" and, on the other hand, a "colonial regime" in the countryside where African subjects lived

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<sup>21</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Oxford, James Currey, 1996); Bridget O’Laughlin, ‘Class and the Customary: The Ambiguous Legacy of the *Indigenato* in Mozambique’, *African Affairs*, No. 99, 2000, 99, 5-42

<sup>22</sup> Colin Stoneman & Lionel Cliffe, *Zimbabwe: Politics, Economics and Society* (London, Pinter Publishers, 1989)

<sup>23</sup> O. Nnoli, *Introduction to Politics*, Revised Second Edition (Enugu, Snaap Press Limited, 2007)

under the "decentralized despotism" of indirect rule systems.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Mutizwa-Mangiza and Jennifer Mohamed-Katerere have observed that there was a legal and administrative duality in colonial Zimbabwe, where racist settler colonial rule was characterized by dual structures in the social, economic and political spheres, and a legal duality with separate laws for whites and blacks, all of which formally excluded blacks from civil and economic society.<sup>25</sup>

Historical works by a variety of scholars on the colonial governance of Africans in Rhodesia, such as Richard Gray in *The Two Nations*, Tawsie Jollie in 'Native Administration in Southern Rhodesia', and Elaine Windrich in *The Rhodesian Problem: A Documentary Record, 1923-1979*, unveil that this dualistic conception of the colonial state was evident in the adoption of the Two-Pyramid policy of parallel racial development which emphasized the separation of African and European facilities through territorial segregation and the development of local government structures that were specifically for 'natives' within 'native spheres', viz. Reserves and Native Purchase Areas.<sup>26</sup> This concept of parallel racial development provided the political context within which indigenous political institutions operated in the African Reserves during the colonial era.

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<sup>24</sup> Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Review of Gloria C. Passmore. Hidden Conflict: A Documentary Record of Administrative Policy in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1950-1980* (Westport, Praeger, 2002) H-Net Book Review, Published by H-SAfrica@h-net.msu.edu (April, 2002)

<sup>25</sup> N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, 'Decentralization and District Development Planning in Zimbabwe', *Research and Development Division of the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (HABITAT)*, Kenya, 2006; J. Mohamed-Katerere, "Participatory Natural Resources Management in the Communal Lands of Zimbabwe: What Role for Customary Law?" *African Studies Quarterly* 5, no.3: [online] URL: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v5/v5i3a7.htm>: accessed 17/6/2012

<sup>26</sup> Elaine Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem: A Documentary Record, 1923-1973*, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1975, xvii; Tawsie Jollie, 'Native Administration in Southern Rhodesia', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 83, No. 4319, August 30, 1935, 982; Richard Gray, *The Two Nations* (London, Oxford University Press, 1960) 152



Amanda Hammar's review of the practice of colonial rural local government in Zimbabwe indicates that the ulterior political aim of the racialized system of colonial rural local government was to stifle African competition with Europeans in all spheres of life by segregating the races spatially, socially, economically and politically.<sup>27</sup> This bifurcation was institutionalized by the provisions of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which became the effective basis for the political dominance of white settlers over indigenous populations, and the proscription of African political ambitions.<sup>28</sup> Because the segregationist policies were implemented through the institutions of rural local government such as the Native Affairs Department and key personnel such as the District Commissioners, these institutions and their personnel became key targets of the Nationalist guerrillas during the guerrilla war in the 1970s.

This development is analysed in Ngwabi Bhebe's study of the war of liberation in *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe* and Hammar's review of colonial governance cited above. Both maintain that the Nationalists clearly understood that these institutions and their personnel were pivotal to the Rhodesia's mode of governance.<sup>29</sup> Hammer emphasizes that,

It had been clear to many Nationalists during the colonial era that gaining control of and changing the institutions, policies and procedures of local government was an essential step in national liberation'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Amanda Hammar, 'The Making and Unmasking of Local Government in Zimbabwe', in Amanda Hammar, Brian Raftopoulos & Stig Jensen (eds.) *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2003) 134

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> N. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1999) 67, 97-98; Amanda Hammar, 'The Making and Unmasking of Local Government in Zimbabwe', 132

<sup>30</sup> Amanda Hammar, 'The Making and Unmasking of Local Government in Zimbabwe', 132

Sabelo J. Gatsheni-Ndlovu has emphasized the importance of mapping out the limits of colonial governance and cautioned against exaggerating the omnipotence of the colonial state because such an approach does not credit Africans with agency as historical actors. He maintains that Africans were not just passive and weak people who were hapless victims of the omnipotent forces of colonialism.<sup>31</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues for a more nuanced understanding of the processes that characterized the imposition and consolidation of European rule over African societies than the rather simplistic paradigm of ‘domination’ and ‘resistance’ that was popular in the Nationalist inspired-scholarship of the 1960s. He outlines clearly how the scholarship of the 1960s that relied heavily on colonial archives tended towards a Eurocentric interpretation of the making of the early Rhodesian state, in which white agency was given prominence over the agency of the Africans as historical actors.<sup>32</sup> The pitfalls of this interpretation lay in the portrayal of Africans as objects of European colonization, rather than as active and rational historical actors, whose activism was evidenced by the African uprisings of 1896-7, the formation of African Nationalist movements in the 1950s, and the waging of the war of liberation in the 1970s.

This critical view is corroborated by many other scholars who have shown that the processes involved in the making of the early Rhodesian state were, indeed, complex and shaped by African reactions.<sup>33</sup> Recent scholarship has

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<sup>31</sup> Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation, Reflections on Hegemony, Memory and Historiography*, (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2009) 159-163

<sup>32</sup> Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ‘Mapping Cultural and Colonial Encounters, 1880s-1930s’, in B. Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo (eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Precolonial Period to 2008* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009) 39-41

<sup>33</sup> P.S. Nyambara, ‘Immigrants, “Traditional” Leaders and the Rhodesian State: The Power of “Communal” Land Tenure and the Politics of Land Acquisition in Gokwe, Zimbabwe, 1963-1979’, *Journals of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4, December 2001, 780-787; Jocelyn Alexander, ‘Things Fall Apart, the Centre Can Hold: Processes of Post-War Political Change in Zimbabwe’s Rural Areas’, in Ngwabi Bhebe & Terence Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War* (Oxford, James Currey, 1996) 185; J. Makumbe, ‘Local Authorities and Traditional Leadership’, in Jaap de Visser, Nico Steytler & Naison Machingauta (eds.) *Local*

challenged conventional analyses of the omnipotence of state power by revealing the role that local perspectives and practices played in shaping the nature of the state. As noted above, Carolyn Hamilton's revisionist critique of the invention of tradition thesis in *Terrific Majesty* has emphasized the power and ability of local precolonial traditions to resist the colonial project.<sup>34</sup>

Recent methodological innovations by historians using post-structural methodologies, and the work of anthropologists, have added new perspectives to the manner in which the colonial state was constituted by revealing how Africans participated in processes of state formation through interpreting, undermining, and at times mobilizing the state's power for their own purposes. Their works have made it evident that the deployment of the British policy of Indirect Rule through local chiefs was structured by local practices because these policies were often interpreted and reconfigured by Africans for local purposes.<sup>35</sup>

Gloria C. Passmore's book, *Hidden Conflict* unveils the evolution of Rhodesian local government of rural African areas between 1950 and 1980 through an examination of official administrative documents that were generated by civil servants who were influential in shaping policy at the time.<sup>36</sup> Her documentary history draws heavily from rarely accessible material from the colonial archives of Rhodesia and examines administrative

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*Government Reform in Zimbabwe: A Policy Dialogue* (Cape Town, University of the Western Cape, 2010) 92; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Mapping Cultural and Colonial Encounters, 1880s-1930s', 39; L. Russell, (ed.) *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001) 4-7; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 159

<sup>34</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1998)

<sup>35</sup> Clifton C. Crais, *The Culture of Power in Southern Africa: Essays on State Formation and the Political Imagination* (Portsmouth, N.H., Heinemann, 2003); Clifton C. Crais, *White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-industrial South Africa: The Making of the Colonial Order in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991); Clifton C. Crais, *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002); Phillip Abrams, 'Some Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1988, 58-89

<sup>36</sup> Gloria C. Passmore, *Hidden Conflict: A Documentary Record of Administrative Policy in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1950-1980* (Westport, Connecticut, Praeger Publishers, 2001)

policy concerning the role of chiefs in key issues such as land allocation, land conservation and Community Development through an examination of contemporary administrative documents such as official reports, minutes, circulars, directives and legislation, to which she was granted rare privileged access.

*Hidden Conflict* unveils the dichotomous approach towards African administration in Rhodesia that manifested itself as an ideological conflict between the democratic liberal politics in the civil service originating from the last years of the UFP government under David Whitehead, and the conservative right-wing policies of the RF regime under Ian Smith that came into power in December 1962. It shows that the RF regime sought to involve patrimonial traditional leadership of chiefs and headmen more closely with the government's local development programmes and in national affairs in order to counter Nationalist influences. Elsewhere, in "Beyond Independence: Unfettered Community Development", Gloria Passmore expands on the paradox inherent in the politically conservative RF government's local government policy in the 1960s and 1970s by showing that; while the government was increasingly more determined to concentrate authority in hereditary African chieftainship in its administration of the rural areas, it simultaneously embraced Community Development in the Tribal Land Authorities, a liberal policy which sought to promote democratic local representative institutions in rural communities.<sup>37</sup> The paradox lay in the decision of the right-wing RF government to inherit and promote the liberal policy of Community Development from the previous UFP administration, whose liberal intentions stood in stark contrast to the conservative RF's

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid; G.C. Passmore, 'Unfettered Community Development in Zimbabwe', *Zambezia*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, 1980, 85-99

determination to entrench the political ascendancy of traditional chiefs in African rural administration.

Passmore provides the historical background to the adoption of the policy of Community Development and argues that it had been formulated as a liberal and democratic policy to foster “a better understanding and more effective promotion of African ambitions” in response to the wide-spread seething rural unrest in Rhodesia that had been triggered by opposition to the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951.<sup>38</sup> Her book also reveals the paramilitary character of rural local government in the country at the height of the war of liberation in the 1970s, which was characterised by the assignment of armed security personnel for the protection of chiefs in the rural areas as a response to the incursions of guerrilla units of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), and the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) into the country from neighbouring Zambia and Mozambique. It highlights the RF’s strategy of increasing the powers of chiefs in local administration as an enticement to win them over in the settler regime’s fight against the growing influence of African nationalism in the rural areas.

A.K.H Weinrich’s *Chiefs and Council in Rhodesia*, one of the pioneering studies of chieftainship in Zimbabwe, reveals how traditional leaders were manipulated by successive Rhodesian governments, resulting in the deterioration of their traditional prestige.<sup>39</sup> Although the book’s particular focus is on the RF government of Ian Douglas Smith, it still gives a clear categorization of the fluctuations in relations between chiefs and successive colonial administrations between 1890 and 1969. She subdivides the period

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<sup>38</sup> G.C. Passmore, ‘Unfettered Community Development in Zimbabwe’, *Zambezia*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, 1980, 85-99

<sup>39</sup> A. K. H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia: Transition from Patriarchal to Bureaucratic Power* (London, Heinemann, 1971)

into four episodes, each with a distinct theme of relations between the traditional African chiefs and the central government. These periods are given as 1890 to 1923; 1923 to 1953; 1953 to 1963; and 1963 to 1969. She asserts that between 1890 and 1923, chiefs lost power and influence among their people and were progressively downgraded and replaced by Native Commissioner as leaders in their areas.<sup>40</sup>

This initial disempowerment of African chiefs was rooted in the European settlers' suspicions and fears of another general African insurrection similar to the Ndebele and Shona uprisings against the BSA Company in 1896-7, which had been spearheaded by the chiefs. On the whole, chiefs were reduced in stature and were made to work as constables under the NCs. Weinrich relates how in the 1950s the UFP government began to seek the support of the chiefs for the impending creation of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and how the subsequent RF regime of Ian Douglass Smith forged a strong alliance with the chiefs between 1963 and 1969 to thwart Nationalist inroads into the rural populace.<sup>41</sup>

The invidious position in which chiefs were placed by their co-optation into colonial administrative service as low-ranking civil servants, which conflicted with their customary esteem as highly regarded hereditary traditional rulers, is unveiled in J.F. Holleman's equally pioneering study of chieftainship in Rhodesia.<sup>42</sup> His work reveals the role that the settler government played in changing the traditional role of chiefs from championing the interests of their people to becoming agents of the colonial government in the enforcement of unpopular instructions and policies. Holleman maintains that colonialism turned traditional chiefs into colonial puppets who consequently ceased to

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<sup>40</sup> A. K. H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 69-72

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> JF Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*,

command respect among their followers.<sup>43</sup> As such, chiefs were in an invidious dilemma as to which constituency best to serve. In the unenviable situation that chiefs found themselves in, they chose to align themselves more with the European administration most probably for the financial rewards they were given and for the fear of deposition, as befell Chief Mangwende in 1963, for example, for his support of African nationalism and his increasing opposition of District Commissioners.<sup>44</sup>

Julie Frederikse's analysis of the rapprochement between chiefs and the RF regime in the 1960 and '70s argues that the major reason for the massive elevation in the status of chiefs during this era was Rhodesia's need for allies to help it block the penetration of nationalist influence into the TTLs. Her work documents Rhodesia's struggle to counter the growth of African Nationalist opposition to settler rule through primary sources such as newspaper excerpts and other media sources from the period. Frederikse observes that the plan to counter nationalism by empowering chiefs significantly influenced the colonial government's decision to form the Council of Chiefs in 1962. The political fruits of this strategy came to be evident when the Council of Chiefs became pivotal in buttressing settler rule and rubber-stamped unpopular decisions and policies of the Rhodesian Front government up to the mid-1970s.<sup>45</sup>

The precarious position in which traditional leaders and civilians found themselves during the liberation struggle is captured by the works of Dawson Munjeri, Joshua Chakawa and David Lan.<sup>46</sup> Their research, which focussed

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<sup>43</sup>J. F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118

<sup>44</sup> Robert Cary & Diana Mitchell, *African Nationalist Leaders in Rhodesia: Who is Who?* (Bulawayo, Books of Rhodesia Publishing Company, 1980) 270

<sup>45</sup>Julie Frederikse, *None but Ourselves. Masses vs. Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (Harare, Anvil Press, 1982) 371

<sup>46</sup>Dawson Munjeri, 'Sheep in wolf skin-the onslaught on oral history/traditions', *Proceedings of the Second Biennial Seminar held at the University of Zimbabwe, 11-15 September 1989*, (Harare, OTASA, 1989);

on relations between traditional chiefs and guerrillas in the main theatres of the war in eastern Zimbabwe in the 1970s, has illuminated our understanding of the dangers that that civilians and traditional leaders who were caught between the belligerents in this war faced. Dawson Munjeri's study of the Dande area in north-eastern Zimbabwe, which was a common operational area for both ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas, has significantly enhanced our understanding of who a 'sell-out' was during the war by revealing that the military rivalry between the two liberation forces also accounted for the deaths of many peasants for supporting the 'wrong' liberation movement.<sup>47</sup>

In 1989 Munjeri's research in Dande challenged David Lan's 'narrow' definition of who a 'sell-out' was during the liberation war, which definition was generally limited to victims of the major conflict between the RSF and the guerrilla armies. Munjeri's oral research revealed that the constant shift in the control of these operational areas confused the local populace, chiefs, the spirit mediums and even the established networks of *chimbwidos* and *mujibhas*, to the extent that the word 'sell-out' came to equally apply to peasants who collaborated with ZIPRA or ZANLA depending on which group of guerrillas was in control of the operational area at a particular time.<sup>48</sup>

Munjeri gave the example of Chief Dendera and his entire village that were wiped out by ZIPRA guerrillas in 1979 for the crime of supporting the 'wrong liberation movement'.<sup>49</sup>

The fate of chiefs at the dawn of independence in 1980, because of their contentious past, and their downgraded status have been widely analysed in

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Joshua Chakawa, 'The Environment and ZIPRA Guerrilla Warfare in Hurungwe District, 1972-1979', M.A. thesis, History Department, Midlands State University, 2007; David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985)

<sup>47</sup> Dawson Munjeri, 'Sheep in wolf skin-the onslaught on oral history/traditions', 50

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Dawson Munjeri, 'Sheep in wolf skin-the onslaught on oral history/traditions', 50



John Makumbe's book, *Democracy and Development in Zimbabwe*, which deals at length and in depth with the issue of relations between traditional chiefs and central government in post-independence Zimbabwe.<sup>50</sup> He traces the downgrading of the status of chiefs from as early as in 1980 when the District Councils Act was passed, which reduced the powers of chiefs and headmen over the granting of land and trying cases, and transferred those powers the new District Councils that were formed from the consolidation of more than 200 African Councils into 55 District Councils. The book also unveils the significant reduction of the powers of chiefs in independent Zimbabwe by the promulgation of Prime Ministers' Directive in 1984, which replaced the chiefs' role in rural development with new elected participatory structures that organised people for development at the village, ward, district and provincial levels, and had become the modern bureaucratic hierarchy in rural local government under Provincial Governors.<sup>51</sup>

In many ways, the proclamation of the Prime Minister's Directive amounted to a direct affront towards indigenous traditional institutions because of its wholesale adoption of Western values and systems in rural local governance. Jocelyn Alexander's work unveils how operations of the new VIDCOs and WADCOs met with resistance from the chiefs who were determined to recover their past influence among the peasantry which they had lost in the war.<sup>52</sup> Alexander's analysis is corroborated by the works of Jeffrey Kurebwa and David Maxwell who provide evidence that peasants from many districts throughout the country refrained from supporting the new elected bodies because they felt that they were autocratic and had been imposed from above

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<sup>50</sup>John Makumbe, *Democracy and Development in Zimbabwe: Constraints of Decentralization* (Harare, SAPES Books, 1998)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> J. Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, The Centre Can Hold', 175-179;

without regard to traditional boundaries of chiefly authorities.<sup>53</sup> It is clear from many studies of the early decades of independence that this adherence of the rural peasantry to their traditional institutions and the chiefs' determination to reassert their legitimacy contributed significantly to the resilience of the institution of chieftaincy and the remarkable restoration of its powers at the end of the 1990s, when the legitimacy of the ZANU PF government became shaky due to its growing unpopularity.

Comparative material on the fate of chiefs in other countries in post-independent Africa was drawn from a number of sources, such as, Richard Rathbone and Maxwell Owusu's studies of the politics of chieftaincy in Ghana, and Francis B. Nyamnjoh's study of chiefly institutions in Botswana and Cameroon, among other sources.<sup>54</sup> Rathbone's work revealed that, despite sustained efforts by the government of Kwame Nkrumah after independence to "crush and control" the traditional chiefs in Southern Ghana using all the means and arsenal at his disposal, he failed. The reason for Nkrumah's determination to destroy Ghanaian chieftaincy was their former association with colonial oppression, which resonates with ZANU (PF)'s perception at independence that all chiefs were former supporters of the colonialists who were doomed to go with the end of Rhodesia.

Francis Nyamnjoh's case studies of chieftaincy in Botswana and Cameroon reveal that instead of being side-lined by the modern bureaucratic

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<sup>53</sup> Jeffrey Kurebwa, 'A Review of Rural Local Government System in Zimbabwe from 1980 to 2014', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, Feb. 2015, 105; David Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe: A Social History of the Hwesa People c. 1870s-1990s* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University, 1999) 151, 178; Jocelyn Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, The Centre Can Hold', 183-184

<sup>54</sup> Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah & the Chiefs: the Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-60* (Accra, F. Reimer Book Services, 2000); Maxwell Owusu, 'Self-Government or Good Government: Traditional Rule and the Challenge of Constitutional Democracy and Development in Africa', Research paper presented at *Conference on Designing Constitutional Arrangements for Democratic Governance in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities*, Bloomington, Indiana University, March 30-31, 2006; Francis B. Nyamnjoh, 'Might and Right: Chieftaincy and Democracy in Cameroon and Botswana', Paper prepared for CODESRIA's 10th General Assembly on *Africa in the New Millennium*, Kampala, Uganda, 8-12 December 2002

governments in these two countries after independence, chieftaincy survived through ‘a display of remarkable dynamism’ and adaptability to changing circumstances, to become a central cogwheel’ in the efforts of the modern governments of Cameroon and Botswana to deliver democracy to the peasantry.<sup>55</sup> Nyamnjoh’s study rendered a seminal verdict on the mutability and resilience of chieftaincy under changing circumstances, and its relevance to modern governments. He noted that,

Chieftaincy is a dynamic institution, constantly re-inventing itself to accommodate and be accommodated by new exigencies, and has proved phenomenal in its ability to seek conviviality between competing and often conflicting influences.<sup>56</sup>

The indispensability of traditional institutions of governance is also reiterated in Maxwell Owusu’s study of the possible roles that traditional chiefs can play in Africa’s new constitutional democracies and how they can foster development.<sup>57</sup> Owusu’s comparison of the post-colonial constitutional histories of Ghana and Botswana, two countries that inherited strong chieftaincy traditions from their precolonial past, argues for the accommodation of modified traditional chiefly authorities in modern government because they can perform ‘usefully’ in modern democracies. He cites this indispensability of institutions of traditional governance to post-independence governments in Africa as the key determinant of their resurgence and incorporation in the constitutions of many African countries after independence.

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<sup>55</sup> Francis Nyamnjoh, ‘Might and Right: Chieftaincy and Democracy in Cameroon and Botswana’, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Maxwell Owusu, ‘Self-Government or Good Government: Traditional Rule and the Challenge of Constitutional Democracy and Development in Africa’, Research paper presented at *Conference on Designing Constitutional Arrangements for Democratic Governance in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities*, Bloomington, Indiana University, March 30-31, 2006

In the same vein, this thesis also argues that traditional leadership institutions have proved to be indispensable to modern bureaucratic forms of government, not only in Zimbabwe in Africa generally. It substantiates this argument through a detailed study of the disempowerment of traditional chieftaincy at independence in Zimbabwe, and its subsequent resurgence in the third decade of independence under challenging political circumstances that threatened the state's control of the Communal Lands. It reveals that the resurgence of traditional chieftaincy in Zimbabwe has belied all the predictions of its demise and abolition by new democratic politics at independence, as had been prophesied during the war. Contrary to the predictions of doom, institutions of traditional chieftaincy have proved to be more relatable to rural African populations.

## **Methodology**

This thesis deployed a qualitative methodology which combined the use of structured and unstructured interviews with a broad sample of respondents that ranged from former combatants in the war of liberation to District Administrators, traditional leaders, cultural experts, rural teachers and peasants. Unstructured interviews enabled the research to investigate complex issues such as memories from the war of liberation, where the researcher had little prior knowledge of the interviewee's political standpoint. Thus unstructured interviews proved more fruitful in exploring complexities that were beyond the scope of more controlled approaches like the structured interviews, where the researcher could deploy prepared questions. In general the qualitative research design proved to be the best suited to the study of political history and the reasons behind human action because it permitted easier collection of perspectives from different people. Other primary data was obtained from reading primary and secondary written documents, which

were then processed through historical analysis. The mode of historical analysis was mainly inductive, i.e. using known facts to produce broader historical interpretations.

Empirically, the thesis innovatively brings together insights from archival documents, oral interviews, and policy documents to advance knowledge on the history of rural local governance in Zimbabwe. The primary documentary evidence used in this thesis was collected from various administrative files from the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare and Bulawayo and some Acts of Parliament that had a relevance to the study of chieftainship. Archival documents that were consulted on the subject of chieftainship during the colonial era were mostly produced by the Native Affairs Department (NAD), which was renamed the Ministry of Internal Affairs (INTAF) in 1973. The archival sources that were consulted included Reports on the Delineation of Communities, Monthly and Annual Reports of Native Commissioners, documents on the Assemblies of Chiefs, and Historical Manuscripts that were deposited by individuals such as I.G. Cockcroft, and C.L. Carbutt, among others. Material on the subject of chieftainship featured prominently in most of these documents due to routine surveillance of African political activity by the colonial state, and the political objective of using the chiefs to control rural Africans. Extensive desk research was also conducted, comprising mostly of consultation of published secondary sources on Rhodesian and Zimbabwean government and politics.

## **Dissertation Layout**

### **Chapter 2: Chieftaincy in the Precolonial Period and the Foundation of the Colonial Administration of Africans in Rhodesia, 1894-1950**

Chapter 2 provides a necessary foundation to understanding the politics of the colonial state and the consequences of co-optation of indigenous traditional authorities into colonial rural local administration. It looks at various aspects of the relations between chiefs and the colonial state up to 1950, including a brief examination of chieftaincy in the precolonial period, the new roles of chiefs under colonial rule, and the relations between chiefs and African Nationalists.

**Chapter 3: Chieftaincy and Rural Local government in Rhodesia in the era of the Nationalist Challenge to European Minority Rule, 1950-1979.**

Chapter 3 explores the political manipulation of African chiefs in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s by the UFP regime of David Whitehead and the successor RF regime of Ian Douglas Smith in their efforts to prevent the spread of African Nationalism to rural communities. It reveals the political strategy of the RF government which was focused on combating the growth of African nationalism and the threat of guerrilla war in the country through a combined agenda of outlawing all the African Nationalist movements and detaining their leadership; while actively seeking allies among the chiefs.

**Chapter 4: Post-Independence Reforms in Rural Administration and the Side-Lining of the Traditional Authority of Chiefs, 1980-1990**

Chapter 4 explores the interactive process between the new decentralized bureaucratic structures that were introduced into rural local governance at independence and the traditional authority of chiefs and headmen in the first two decades after independence, and argues that this interactive process was mainly characterized by competition for power and legitimacy. It reveals the

enduring animosity felt by the Nationalists against chiefs at independence due their colonial history, which resulted in their disempowerment in 1980.

**Chapter 5:** The Resurgence of Chiefs as Political Actors in Zimbabwe, 1990s- 2010.

Chapter 5 addresses a significant paradox in African studies that has drawn the attention of many scholars in chieftaincy studies in the last two decades, i.e. the revival and growing influence of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe today despite their association with colonial regimes before independence. It explores the evident resilience of the institution of chieftaincy over time and its paradoxical political trajectory from a discredited institution at independence in 1980 because of its former alliance with colonial forces, to its revival and current importance in Zimbabwe today, where chiefs are publicly courted by government officials and the media.

**Chapter 6:** Conclusion

The concluding chapter is a summation of the main arguments advanced in this thesis which was compiled from individual chapter conclusions. It also goes further to suggest the need for further research on the question of the relevance of African traditional institutions to modern democratic governance. It mulls on the ways in which these institutions can complement government's efforts in mobilizing rural populations for participation in rural development projects.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHIEFTAINCY IN THE PRECOLONIAL PERIOD AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION OF AFRICANS IN RHODESIA, 1894 TO 1950

#### Introduction

This chapter provides a necessary background to understanding the politics of the colonial state and the consequences of the co-optation of indigenous traditional authorities into colonial rural local administration. It forms an essential background for a deeper understanding of the issues that are discussed in the thesis's main focal period, viz. 1950-2010, in chapters 3, 4, and 5. The chapter historicizes the processes by which the precolonial social and political power of African chiefs and their authority were harnessed by the early colonial state in its efforts to extend hegemony over the conquered indigenous populations.

It unveils the loss of sovereignty by precolonial African chiefdoms through a combination of imperialist manoeuvres that included military invasion and destruction of precolonial states, the physical removal of resisting traditional leaders by execution or deportation, and the co-optation of traditional leaders into the colonial administrative network to further the interests of colonial rule. The collusion of the British Colonial Office with the white settlers is revealed in its acquiescence to the banishment of the Ndebele princes to the Union of South Africa in order to prevent the revival of the Ndebele monarchy which posed a real threat to the security of white power.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Martin Chanock, *Unconsummated Union*, 88; A. M. Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia: The White Conquest of Zimbabwe, 1884-1902* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queens's University Press, 1983)



The chapter prefaces its analysis of the transformation of chieftainship by colonial rule with a brief examination of the exercise of traditional political power in the precolonial period. It examines the precolonial sources of chiefly authority and legitimacy, and precolonial modes of traditional governance in order to highlight the changing meaning and politics of chieftaincy since precolonial times. It notes that, unlike in the precolonial era when the sources of the legitimacy and power of traditional leaders were firmly rooted in the spiritual sanction that they received from ancestral spirits through lineage spirit mediums, in the colonial era, chieftainship underwent a secularization that divorced it from its spiritual foundations of the precolonial era, resulting in far-reaching implications on the legitimacy of colonial chiefs. Under colonial rule African chiefs came to wield powers of coercion over their followers that were largely alien to the precolonial ideology of chieftainship. The duties of salaried African chiefs which were outlined by the High Commissioner's Proclamation of 1910 increased their powers over their subjects to facilitate the colonial state's tax and labour demands and ordered chiefs to perform new coercive tasks on behalf of local administration.

The chapter evaluates the significance of the token concessions made by the settler regime to African self-government during the era of Responsible Government through the enactment of the Native Councils Act 1937, which allowed Native Councils to make rules and regulations within their own areas, and the Native Law and Courts Act 1937, which granted the chiefs powers to exercise semi-autonomous jurisdiction in their domains. It argues that these concessions to African administrative autonomy were half-hearted and rather limited because of the reluctance of the colonial government to adequately fund the Native Councils and empower traditional authorities with financial

responsibilities.<sup>59</sup> It concludes that this reluctance to financially empower the Native Councils underscores the point that the political motive of colonial local government was that of central control rather than local development.

The alliance that was forged between chiefs and Nationalists in the 1950s is also examined and it reveals their common opposition to the colonial state's authoritarian intervention in African rural life, where it compelled and coerced the rural folk into widely unpopular conservation activities like building conservation contour ridges, filling galleys and destocking their cattle herds. It unveils how these colonial attempts to restructure traditional African society triggered the resistance of chiefs and the general rural populace and made them to forge common cause with the grievances of the Nationalists who had long complained about the poor quality and inadequate quantity of land in the Reserves.<sup>60</sup>

The discussion also highlights the agency of chiefs during this period, when they emerged as historical actors who stood for popular peasant causes against the colonial state and notes that their opposition to compulsion by the state in this era belies their conventional portrayal as colonial stooges. It views both the Rhodesian state's retreat from its authoritarian attempts to restructure traditional African society's agriculture and settlement patterns in the 1940s and 1950s, and its abandonment of the NLHA in 1962 in response to widespread African opposition, as tacit concessions to the indispensability of chiefs in rural local governance.

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<sup>59</sup> William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa: A Case Study of Economic Development in a Dualistic Society* (London, Greenwood Press, 1984) 21

<sup>60</sup> J. McGregor, 'Conservation, Control and Ecological Change: The Politics and Ecology of Colonial Conservation in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe,' *Environment and History*, 1, 3, 1995, 257-279; W. Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas about Development: A Southern African Exploration, 1900-1960,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, 1, 1984, 52-83.

The colonial state's response to the widespread rural political consciousness that began to emerge among traditional leaders in the 1940s and 1950s is also analysed. The state responded through the introduction of a countrywide programme that restructured African chieftainships by deposing all the chiefs who were opposed colonial rule, and notes that this exercise was accompanied by a parallel process that sought to win the support of chiefs through financial rewards for loyalty. The chapter ends by noting that the colonial government's strategy of taking away the chiefs from radical African politics proved to be a turning point, not only in the relationship between the state and chiefs, but also in the relations between chiefs and Nationalists as it drove a political wedge between them that lasted throughout the colonial period.<sup>61</sup>

### **Chieftaincy in Precolonial Zimbabwe**

There is a consensus in the literature on the evolution of the traditional authority of chiefs in precolonial Zimbabwe that it was connected to land and ancestral spirits that owned the land, and that the power of precolonial chiefs was related to a rural agricultural way of life.<sup>62</sup> Leadership during this era was based on an ideological system that involved divine or spiritual sanction and entailed a close relationship between religious and temporal power. M. F. C. Bourdillon's discussion of chiefly spirits in precolonial Shona chiefdoms emphasizes the role of the spirit elders of the chiefdom, originating from the founders of the chiefly dynasty, as the guardians of the chiefdom and the guarantors of the political position of the chief. These were the most important spirits of the chiefdom because they were the owners and rulers of the land.

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<sup>61</sup> T. Ranger, 'Tradition and Travesty: Chiefs and the Administration in Makoni District, Zimbabwe, 1960-1980', *Africa*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 1982, 21; S327/1 Chiefs and Headmen: Recommendations, abolishment of redundant chiefs, 26 March 1950; S3700/74 Recognition of tribal leaders 1951; Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 69-72

<sup>62</sup> M.F.C. Bourdillon, *Where Are the Ancestors? Changing Culture in Zimbabwe* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1993) 64

Precolonial political authority was largely based on hereditary membership to a lineage and it was on that basis that individuals could be selected to hold office. According to African custom, the chief wielded his leadership position based on his appointment by his ancestors who supported him. As a result, in most chiefdoms the chief was the senior descendant of the ancestors that had founded the chiefdom.<sup>63</sup>

The powers exercised by all subsequent chiefs within the lineage of succession were believed to derive from the founder ancestors. It was believed that it was these spirits that provided the chiefdom's subjects with strong and good rulers who could forge harmonious relations among their followers and defend them from their enemies. There were certain qualities that a chief had to be imbued with that made him suitable for the position, such as integrity and uprightness, and these features did not only bear on material interests. As a result, at every succession to the chieftainship, the successor underwent a traditional ritual that was designed to show the people that he had the approval of the chiefly spirits. This ceremony was believed to symbolize the receipt of the ritual powers by the successor to the chieftainship that was necessary for the maintenance of his political position.<sup>64</sup>

Michael Gelfand's study of the *mhondoro* cult of the Shona also underlined the spiritual foundations of chieftainship in the precolonial period.<sup>65</sup> He noted that *mhondoro* spirits were the ones that were concerned with 'tribal' affairs/matters, whether social, political, medical or economic. The ancestral spirits determined succession to chieftainships among many Shona groups. It

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<sup>63</sup>Gilbert Pwiti, 'The Evolution of Precolonial Systems of Governance', in Gilbert Pwiti, Godfrey Tabona Ncube & Eldred Masunungure, *African Leadership in Historical Perspective* (Forthcoming 2020) 59-61

<sup>64</sup>M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'Traditional Religion in Shona Society', in J.A. Dachs (ed.) *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, Vol. 1, (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1973)

<sup>65</sup>M. Gelfand, 'The Mhondoro Cult of the Shona-speaking People of Southern Rhodesia', in M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen (eds.) *African Systems of Thought* (London, Oxford University Press, 1965) 342

was a strongly held belief among the various Shona groups that the pattern of succession to chieftainship had been determined by these spirits since time immemorial. It was then laid down which families were concerned and from which the next chief would come. Consultation of the *mhondoro* by the chief was critical to the well-being of the community because it was believed that the spirits held the power to provide good rainfall, fertility of the soils, and good harvests. The consequences of annoying the *mhondoro* spirits could be droughts and epidemics.<sup>66</sup>

However, although the precolonial chief had wielded great power by his relationship with the ancestral spirits of the land, his power over his people was limited by several factors and was not absolute. As will be shown below, most of the traditional rulers had depended upon their people to maintain their position. Firstly, most of the precolonial chiefdoms were commonly small, especially among the Shona, and vulnerable to the fissiparous tendencies that were quite common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and protest out-migrations from unpopular chiefs, by some disgruntled subjects to join other chiefs were also common. Because the chief had no standing army, it was always difficult for him to enforce his decisions upon reluctant subjects. Bourdillon has shown how the people could also demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the chief by failing to cooperate fully with his festivals in honour of the ancestral spirits.<sup>67</sup>

Secondly, even in his judicial role where the chief presided over the settling of disputes, his powers had been limited in the precolonial period because every man had the right to have his say, and the chief only passed the final judgement, which in most cases was just a summation of the agreement that had been reached. Finally, even in the distribution of land to his subjects, the

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<sup>66</sup>M. Gelfand, 'The Mhondoro Cult of the Shona-speaking People of Southern Rhodesia', 342

<sup>67</sup>M.F.C. Bourdillon, *Where Are the Ancestors?* 59-61

chief's control had been limited because once he had granted land to a subject; the chief had no right to take it away again. Consequently, although the chief's authority had been great in the precolonial period, his power was limited by his dependence upon the support of his followers.<sup>68</sup>

Studies of chieftainship in other precolonial societies in Zimbabwe reveal a similar ideological system that involved divine or spiritual sanction to the exercise of temporal power. This was the case among the Tonga of the Zambezi Valley where the precolonial political authority of chiefs derived from a close relationship with ancestral spirits. This close connection was evident in that the Tonga chief, known as *mwami* in chi Tonga, frequently doubled up as the lineage's spirit custodian (*Basikatongo*) in the chiefdom.<sup>69</sup> All the numerous scattered, small-scale Tonga chiefdoms within the Middle Zambezi Valley believed that the *mwami* embodied the spirit/soul of the ancestor-chief who had founded the chiefdom. The incumbent chief was believed to have constant communion with the ancestor-*mwami* and this greatly enhanced his political authority.<sup>70</sup>

However, as was also the case in all the small Shona chiefdoms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tonga chiefs had very limited powers of coercion over their subjects. The precolonial Tonga chief's powers have been likened to those of 'ecclesiastical jurists whose chief function was to pass judgement on matters of ethnic law and its spiritual associations'.<sup>71</sup> His authority over his people was paternal and persuasive rather than coercive.<sup>72</sup> The limited powers of

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<sup>68</sup>M.F.C. Bourdillon, *Where Are the Ancestors?* 59-61

<sup>69</sup>Godfrey Tabona Ncube, 'A History of North-western Zimbabwe, 1850-1960s: Comparative Change in Three Worlds', M.Phil. thesis, History Department, U.Z., 1995, 44

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*44

<sup>71</sup>G.T. Ncube, *A History of Northwestern Zimbabwe, 1850-1960*, 6

<sup>72</sup>CO 14/1/1 I.G. Cockcroft's file: NGB 2/4/1 Military Intelligence, Acting N.C Gokwe to Chief Staff Officer, Commandant General's Office, Salisbury, 21/03/1919; Valdermar Gielgud, 'Report of a Patrol Along the Zambesi River', *BSA Company Reports on the Administration of Rhodesia, 1897-1898*, 380; Elizabeth Colson, *Social Organisation of the Gwembe Tonga* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1960) 188;

coercion possessed by precolonial Tonga rulers seems to have been typical of most rulers of small groups in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the case of the small-scale Shona polities on the Zimbabwe plateau discussed above also shows.

Similarly, the Ndebele king's authority derived from his ancestral spirits, *amadlozi*, who were venerated and propitiated at all the national ceremonies as the protectors of the state. The invocation and veneration of the king's ancestors underpinned Ndebele national cohesion and the exercise of kingly power.<sup>73</sup> As in the Shona and Tonga societies, the Ndebele king was not an absolute ruler with all power concentrated in his hands, but was the leader of a system of governance that was consultative and based on the institution of the *inkundla*, a consultative forum in which collective decisions were made.<sup>74</sup> Faber-Clarke and Nyathi support this view by maintaining that the king's power was limited by the relatively strong and independent *izinduna* that headed the provinces of the state which were structured around regimental towns that were bases of Ndebele military regiments that were referred to as *amabutho*.<sup>75</sup>

Although Ndebele kings were powerful, their power was checked by that of powerful *izinduna* who commanded great power in their respective areas of jurisdiction within the kingdom.<sup>76</sup> These powerful figures, which included the *indunankulu yesizwe* who was the equivalent of a prime minister or chief

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G.T. Neube, 'A History of North-western Zimbabwe, 1850-1950s' 44; S2929/5/1-2 Report on the Delineation of Communities, Binga District, Ministry of Local Government, Division of District Administration, 1966; S2929/5/1-2 Report on the Delineation of Communities, Binga District, 1966

<sup>73</sup>S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 73

<sup>74</sup>Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Dynamics of Democracy and Human Rights among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe', 2; Anthony Chennells, 'The Image of the Ndebele and the Nineteenth-Century Missionary Tradition', in M.F.C. Bourdillon (ed.) *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, Vol. 2 (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1977) 43-68; Oliver Ransford, *Bulawayo: Historic Battleground of Rhodesia* (Cape Town, A.A. Balkema, 1968) 44; Antony Thomas, *Rhodes: The Race for Africa* (Harare, African Publishing Group, 1996) 182-203.

<sup>75</sup>Marieke Faber-Clarke & Phathisa Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo: Queen of the Ndebele* (Bulawayo, Amagugu Publishers, 2010) 26

<sup>76</sup>J.R.D. Cobbing, 'The Ndebele under the Khumalos, 1820-1896', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976

adviser to the king; and the *Umphakathi*, a powerful inner circle of the king's personal confidantes that included the king's relatives and other wise men, used their influence to sanction the king. Outside this inner circle, there was a larger circle of the king's advisers that comprised prominent elderly men collectively known as *izikhulu*.<sup>77</sup> All these groups acted as checks and balances on the king's power to the extent that the Ndebele king could largely be regarded as having been a ceremonial head of state presiding over many powerful advisory officials in the state structure.

In conclusion, it is evident that as a political system, the precolonial African chieftaincy was founded on an ideology that closely linked spiritual and temporal power and did not command society by coercive force. Chieftainship in the precolonial era generally reflected hierarchically organised consultative governance based on the institution of the *dare* in Shona societies, and the *inkundla* in Ndebele society, where issues were discussed and the decisions made on a course of action were a collective responsibility. The following sections will unveil how the white settlers broke up the power of all the precolonial chiefdoms and structures of traditional authority that they found in the country and replaced them with their new colonial administrative structure that subordinated chiefs. They will also outline the new powers and duties that African chiefs came to wield in the service of the Rhodesian administration were largely alien to the precolonial ideology of chieftainship outlined above, such as the powers of coercion and the severance of the link between temporal power and the spiritual sanction of the ancestors.

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<sup>77</sup>Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 76; Marieke Faber-Clarke & Phathisa Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo: Queen of the Ndebele*, 26



## **The Occupation of Mashonaland, BSA Company Misrule, and Early Shona Resistance, 1890-1898**

Mashonaland was invaded and occupied by the BSA Company in September 1890 in the hope that it was endowed with vast gold deposits equivalent to those that had been discovered at the Witwatersrand in 1886. However, in the early years of the BSA Company's occupation of Mashonaland (1890-1894), the Company was not able to make money from mining largely because their prospecting activities failed to disgorge the fabulous gold reefs that they had hoped to strike first in Shona country, and later in Matabeleland. As a result of the Company's financial difficulties and the general financial struggles of the pioneers, the BSA Company encouraged them to use forced labour at very low wages and even organised it for them. It also encouraged and legitimized cattle seizures as tax-payment in kind. Cattle-raiding as a punitive measure against tax defaulters was one of the most detested and unpleasant measures meted out against the Shona in the 1890s because it depleted Shona livestock which provided food security in the event of crop failure. The severity with which it was implemented led many Shona dynasties to join the uprising against the whites in 1897.<sup>78</sup>

From the inception of colonial rule white settlers began experiencing great difficulties in securing labour for their mining enterprises and farms. This shortage of labour was a recurring frustration in the first years of occupation until finally in early 1894 the BSA Company Administration decided to introduce the Hut Tax as a way of stimulating the supply of labour to the mines and farms. When Europeans first settled in Mashonaland in 1890 they had generally assumed that African labour would be easily forthcoming. The labour difficulties experienced by the settlers were largely due to African

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<sup>78</sup>D.N. Beach, 'The Politics of Collaboration: The Southern Shona, 1896-1897', 69.

prioritization of their own household production during the agricultural season.<sup>79</sup> Thus, in the early 1890s the settlers tended to resort to forced labour. But the Shona felt a great animosity towards labour coercion because it tended to coincide with the agricultural work-season and therefore diverted valuable Shona labour from their subsistence production.<sup>80</sup>

Consequently, early white expectations of readily available labour supplies among the conquered indigenous groups were met by a general unwillingness among the Shona to work for the settlers. The assumption of the white settlers that the Shona were ignorant of the value of money also proved to be misplaced because the Shona had experienced precolonial regional labour migration in the late nineteenth century. From the 1870s until the 1880s, the southern Shona had engaged in long distance labour migration to the Kimberley and Witwatersrand mines, and this trend continued after the European occupation of Mashonaland in 1890. The Shona were already linked to migrant labour in South Africa and were knowledgeable about the wages that were offered there, which were about £2-3 per month.<sup>81</sup> By contrast, the wages offered to African workers in Rhodesia were considerably lower than those offered in South Africa, amounting to about 10/- per month for working in the mines, where the work was generally dangerous because of insufficient safety precautions. Rhodesian white farmers had even less to offer, sometimes only a blanket or 7/6 d for adult males, and 1/6 d. for boys.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, Shona labour was not forthcoming.

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<sup>79</sup> Godfrey T. Ncube, 'The Early History of Wage Labour and Worker Consciousness in North-western Zimbabwe, 1898-1940', *The Dyke*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2012, 155-177

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 69-76; D.N. Beach, 'Rhodesian rule over the Shona and Ndebele, 1890-6', History Department, U.Z., 1995 (unpublished lecture notes in this author's possession)

<sup>81</sup> D.N. Beach, 'The Politics of Collaboration: The Southern Shona, 1896-1897' 76; D.N. Beach, 'Rhodesian rule over the Shona and Ndebele, 1890-6', History Department, U.Z., 1995

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

White settlers expected the Company administration to assist them in securing African labourers. However, before the formation of the Native Affairs Department in 1894, which became largely responsible for governmental relations with Africans, the BSA Company government lacked the personnel to recruit forced labour for the mine-owners on a large scale.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, many mine-owners resorted to recruiting forced labour for themselves. T. O. Ranger cites the widespread use of forced labour at Tebekwe mine in Selukwe before 1896.<sup>84</sup> Reports of a tendency towards compulsory labour and flogging of Africans by mine owners and farmers were received from various parts of the country. Cases of forced labour were recorded in Hartley in August 1891 and in Mazoe in March 1893.<sup>85</sup>

Faced with this labour problem, the white settlers also tried to get Shona chiefs to supply them with labour, but this failed, even when the bribe of a blanket was offered.<sup>86</sup> Most Shona traditional rulers had no desire to compel their subjects to sell their labour to the settlers for the low wages offered. The frustration experienced by the White settlers in Rhodesia in the 1890s in their attempts to secure cheap African labour for their farms and mines finally led them to introduce the Hut Tax in March 1894, as a way of stimulating wage labour. The Hut Tax was copied from the Cape Province in South Africa. It incorporated tax on polygamous African marriages. In Southern Rhodesia this tax was inaugurated by Ordinance No. 5 of 1894 which demanded that the head of each household should pay a tax of 10 shillings for every hut in his homestead (in cash or kind) and an extra 10 shillings, if the man was

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<sup>83</sup> D.N. Beach, 'The Politics of Collaboration: The Southern Shona, 1896-1897', 76

<sup>84</sup> T. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7: A Study in African Resistance* (London, Heinemann, 1967) 292-4

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> D.N. Beach, 'Rhodesian rule over the Shona and Ndebele, 1890-6', unpublished, History Department, U.Z., 1995

polygamous, for each extra wife's hut.<sup>87</sup> Africans had to find money to pay these taxes, and so were forced to enter the colonial money economy.

Initial African refusal to enter the white economy led to some of the earliest conflicts between the Shona traditional rulers and the settler administration. The general reaction of most Shona chiefdoms to the imposition of the BSA Company's harsh local administration was to resist this foreign domination. Among the southern Shona, Chief Chirumhanzu Chinyama refused to supply labour to the whites in September 1894 and his intransigence almost invited a raid on him by CNC Brabant in December 1894. In December 1894 NC Weale of Chilimanzi District and Native Police made an unsuccessful attempt at disarmament of Chief Chirumhanzu.<sup>88</sup> In the end, however, some of the chief's modern guns were taken by the Company and he was 'pacified'.<sup>89</sup>

The extension of BSA Company rule to north-eastern Zimbabwe was generally met with stiff resistance to the collection of the Hut Tax by the more than eleven Shona dynasties that ruled the territory adjoining the lower Ruya and Mazoe valleys, which included the Dotito dynasty of the Nyombwe area, the Chioko dynasty of the lower Ruya, and many other powerful rulers in the region such as, Kandeya, Matope, Madziwa, Chimanda, Chigango, Kachidza, Makuni, Rusambo, Magaranhewe and Chiutsi.<sup>90</sup> Chimanda, in particular, was so opposed to Company rule that he threatened to kill any white man who entered his land.<sup>91</sup> His stiff resistance prompted the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) Mashonaland, H.M. Taberer to intervene and disarm

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<sup>87</sup>J.H. Chaplin, 'A Note on African Taxes and Tax Stamps', *The Northern Rhodesian Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 5, 1961, 443; Giovanni Arrighi, 'Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia', *The Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, April 1970, 208

<sup>88</sup>D.N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1840-1900*, 76; D.N. Beach, 'Rhodesian rule over the Shona and Ndebele, 1890-6', unpublished, History Department, U.Z., 1995

<sup>89</sup>D.N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1840-1900*, 79

<sup>90</sup>N9/4/1 Monthly Reports of NC Mtoko, September/October 1898; N9/1/6 Statistical Report of NC North Mazoe, 31 March 1900

<sup>91</sup>N9/3/2 Quarterly Report, NC North Mazoe, 30 June 1898

him in 1898, after which he was turned and began to collaborate with the Company administration.<sup>92</sup> From that time on, Chimanda was vilified by Maondera and all the Shona rulers in the lower Ruya for supporting the white settlers.<sup>93</sup> Many other traditional Shona rulers in the region of the lower Ruya and Mazoe valleys in the north and north-eastern part of the Zimbabwean plateau, who opted to collaborate with Company administration, were ostracized by most of the resisting rulers in that region and were often raided as punishment.

In these early years of BSA Company rule over the Shona, the Company had no administrative framework to formalize European dealings with the Shona or even a plan to rationalize or formalize these dealings. Consequently, between 1890 and 1894 the embryonic BSA Company administration's relations with the Shona were characterized by *ad hoc* responses to individual situations.<sup>94</sup> African 'Administration' as such was narrowly defined the minimalist judicial channel that was suggested by the Charter, which simply stated that the Chartered Company was to "preserve peace and order", administer justice and respect the religion and customs of the African people.<sup>95</sup> The other reason that explains the absence of a formal administrative structure to regulate relations between the invaders and the conquered was a Proclamation that was issued by the High Commissioner in terms of an Order-in-Council in June 1891, which exhorted that formal contact with the Shona, should be kept minimal.<sup>96</sup> The Proclamation stated that magistrates could try African cases only where Europeans were involved, or where this would be

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<sup>92</sup>N3/1/12 CNC to NC North Mazoe, 1 May 1899; NC North Mazoe to CNC, 4 August 1898; N3/33/8 NC North Mazoe, 31 March 1900; N3/1/13 NC South Mazoe to CNC, 13 April 1900

<sup>93</sup>D.N. Beach, *Maondera: Heroism and History in Northern Zimbabwe, 1840-1900* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1989) 41

<sup>94</sup>P. C. Coggin, 'Don't Worry Headquarters', *NADA*, Vol. XI, No. 2, 1975, 128; Stigger, "The Emergence of the Native Department in Matabeleland, 1893-1899", *Rhodesian History*, vol. 7, 1976

<sup>95</sup>Beverly White, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Harare, David Burke, 1990) 95

<sup>96</sup>C. Coggin, 'Don't Worry Headquarters', *NADA*, Vol. XI, No. 2, 1975, 128.

‘in the interests of peace’.<sup>97</sup> This administrative lacuna gave the BSA Company a free hand to misrule the Shona and permitted the police and administrators to bully and generally abuse them.

In the Royal Charter that was granted to the BSA Company by the Crown in 1889 (which paved the way for the occupation of Mashonaland in 1890) there was no reference to any intention on the part of either the British Government or the British South Africa Company to set up administrative machinery to deal with Shona/settler affairs at all. C. Coggin, a senior archivist in Rhodesia in the 1970s who utilised his intimate knowledge of *Rhodesiana* to publish many articles on the early history of the country, reveals that in the early 1890s the BSA Company had “no plan to rationalize or formalize European dealings with the African inhabitants of the region”.<sup>98</sup> There were only vague references in Paragraph 14 to the administration of justice over the Shona by the Company administration. It stated that justice was to be administered according to the ‘customs and laws’ of the various indigenous groups in the country.<sup>99</sup>

In those early years of BSA Company rule (1890-1894), the policy towards the indigenous people was merely to preserve law and order and leave them undisturbed in their ‘tribal setting’.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, contact between whites and blacks remained basically of an informal nature because there was no clearly stated formal, uniform policy regarding relations with the “natives”.<sup>101</sup> This gave Leander Starr Jameson, the Administrator of the new Southern Rhodesia colony, a free hand to impose a harsh local administration that

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<sup>97</sup>C. Coggin, ‘Don’t Worry Headquarters’, 128.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 128

<sup>99</sup> Government of Rhodesia, *The Statute Law of Southern Rhodesia, from the Charter to December 31, 1898*, 3

<sup>100</sup>Gloria C. Passmore, ‘Historical Rationale of the Policy of Community Development in the African Rural Areas of Rhodesia, *Zambezia*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1971, 61

<sup>101</sup>Beverly White, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, 95

dispossessed the Shona of their land, coerced labour out of the Shona and seized their cattle at will if they refused to enter the monetized white economy. According to Warhurst, the law and order that was enforced by the BSA Company administration in the early 1890s was applied with a severity that was to become traditional in Rhodesia due to its adoption by later administrations.<sup>102</sup>

To achieve total white control, Leander Starr Jameson, did not brook any form of African resistance to white dominance and frequently meted out brutal punishment including the execution of Shona chiefs that resisted Chartered Company rule.<sup>103</sup> The basic imperative of Company rule in the first few years of the occupation of Mashonaland was to impose total European dominance over the numerous Shona populations that far exceeded the population of the invaders.<sup>104</sup> Jameson's heavy-handed misrule of the Shona, and later the Ndebele, has been cited by some historians as a key cause of the outbreak of the 1896-7 Ndebele-Shona uprisings. The Ndebele and Shona insurgents killed about 10% of the Europeans in the country during the risings and almost brought the BSA Company to a point of collapse.<sup>105</sup> The defeat of the military resistance of the Shona in the 1896-7 uprisings was followed up by the execution of the resisting traditional leaders such as Chief Chinengundu, and spirit mediums Nehanda and Kaguvi; and the imprisonment of several other chiefs. The 'pacification' of the Shona paved the way for the imposition of Native Commissioners who exercised wide powers over the indigenous populations and forged alliances with collaborating groups,

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<sup>102</sup> P.R. Warhurst, 'The History of Race Relations in Rhodesia', *Zambezia*, Vol. 3, No. 1, December 1973, 16

<sup>103</sup> Anthony Thomas, *Rhodes: The Race for Africa*, 305-306

<sup>104</sup> R.K. Rasmussen estimates that there were only 1,500 Europeans in Rhodesia in 1891. R. K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 85-86

<sup>105</sup> Anthony Thomas, *Rhodes: The Race for Africa* (Harare, African Publishing Group, 1996); R. K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 264

primarily drawn from the chiefs and headmen, to further the interests of colonial rule.

### **End of the Khumalo Monarchy of the Ndebele and Banishment of King Lobengula's Heirs into Exile, 1893-1934**

The destruction of the Ndebele kingdom resulted from the imperial war of conquest that was waged against King Lobengula by combined forces of Rhodesian settler volunteers and the British Bechuanaland Border Police in 1893 after Lobengula had launched a punitive raid against a Shona chief, Bere, who lived close to the white settlement of Fort Victoria, allegedly for stealing Ndebele cattle. Leander Starr Jameson, who had long desired to break the power of the Ndebele state in the west, seized the opportunity presented by the Ndebele-Bere incident to manufacture a war to end Ndebele power in the west of the country on the grounds that Ndebele warriors had made an invasive intrusion into Mashonaland.<sup>106</sup>

After a series of military engagements between the Company forces and the Ndebele, the largest actions of which were the battles of Shangani and Mbembesi in October 1893, the Ndebele *amabutho* were overwhelmed and Lobengula was forced to flee north towards the Zambezi river with a large entourage, hoping to seek refuge among the Ngoni of Mpezeni north of the Zambezi in what is now eastern Zambia.<sup>107</sup> The Company forces occupied the

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<sup>106</sup>Sabelo J. Gatsheni Ndlovu, *The Ndebele Nation*, 145; Marieke Faber-Clarke & Phathisa Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo: Queen of the Ndebele*, 71

<sup>107</sup>C.K. Cooke, 'Lobengula: Second and last King of the AmaNdebele-His Final Resting Place and Treasure', *Rhodesiana*, No. 23, December 1970, 3-53; R. K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 157, 225; Marieke Faber Clarke & Phathisa Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo. Queen of the Ndebele*, 82-94, 105; Sabelo J. Gatsheni-Ndlovu, *The Ndebele Nation*, 147; Martin Chanock, *Unconsummated Union*, 88; Phathisa Nyathi, *Mthwakazi: Imbali YamaNdebele, 1820-1894* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1995); B. Lindgren, 'Power, Education and Identity in Postcolonial Zimbabwe: Representations of the fate of King Lobengula of Matabeleland', *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2002, 46-47.



Ndebele capital, Bulawayo, claimed territorial authority over Matabeleland by right of conquest and declared the end of the Ndebele kingdom.

Soon after the conquest of the Ndebele kingdom, the settler administration banished Lobengula's heirs into exile in South Africa and made it clear to the remaining Ndebele *izinduna* that there was not going to be a new Ndebele king.<sup>108</sup> Following the banishment of the monarchy, Ndebele leadership became fragmented into the smaller chiefly units and traditional power structures became focussed on the chiefs and their smaller domains. Most of these *izinduna* were later transformed into colonial chiefs who came to owe their allegiance to the Company administration.

By the turn of the century the resistance of traditional leaders in Matabeleland had been broken and they were reported to be cooperating with the Company administration. In 1902, the Chief Native Commissioner for Matabeleland, reported that,

The subsidized chiefs have proved of immense value in assisting in the administration of their people. They are diligent in their work and appear regularly at the office of the Native Commissioner to report on matters pertaining to their immediate office.<sup>109</sup>

After the defeat of the Ndebele, the BSA Company orchestrated a massive looting of Ndebele cattle, some of which they distributed to white volunteers who had participated in the war against the Ndebele in accordance with an agreement that had been made between the volunteers and Jameson, called the

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<sup>108</sup>R. K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 157; Martin Chanock, *Unconsummated Union: Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa*, 88

<sup>109</sup> S323.16892 DG/NAT Report of Herbert Taylor, Chief Native Commissioner Matabeleland for the 2 years ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1902.

Victoria Agreement. After the conquest, Ndebele chiefs were forced by the colonial authorities to collect the 'King's cattle' from reluctant peasants in their domains and surrender them to the 'loot kraals' that had been established in Bulawayo. They were also ordered to cooperate with the BSA Company's demilitarization programme by disarming their own regiments and handing over their weapons to the Native Commissioner's offices. Furthermore, the chiefs were forced to recruit cheap wage labour for white mines and farms from among their followers and present them to the Native Commissioner.<sup>110</sup> Severe punishment, ranging from deposition to military attacks by white patrols, was meted out to those chiefs who refused to carry out these colonial orders. In some recorded cases, resisting chiefs were summarily executed.

In June 1894 Jameson unleashed military violence against all Ndebele chiefs who disobeyed the Company's orders to disarm and surrender their cattle when he sent out large detachments of the BSA Police armed with the dreaded Maxim machine guns to punish the resisters. Among cases of Ndebele chiefs that were executed by the Company police was one Kalanga chief in the Nata area in June 1894, and chief Maphungo Mabhena of the Inyathi district.<sup>111</sup> In the case of chief Mabhena, the Native Commissioner of the Inyathi District, A.M. Graham, had ordered the Ndebele chief Maphungo Mabhena of Mnquma to surrender the king's cattle to the BSA Company, but the chief refused because of the loyalty that he still felt to the dislodged Ndebele king. As punishment, NC Graham ordered that the chief be tied up and dragged by galloping horses over rough terrain, which resulted in the chief's death from a crushed skull.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> M. Faber-Clarke & P. Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo: Queen of the Ndebele*, 42; Charles L Norris-Newman, *Matabeleland and How We Got It* (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1895) 207-208

<sup>111</sup> N. Jones, *Rhodesian Genesis: The Story of the Early Days of Southern Rhodesia from the Reminiscences of the Pioneers* (Bulawayo, Rhodesia Pioneers & Early Settlers' Society, 1953) 113; Marieke Faber-Clarke and P. Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo. Queen of the Ndebele*, 110; S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 149

<sup>112</sup> Marieke Faber-Clarke and P. Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo. Queen of the Ndebele*, 110

Faber-Clarke and Nyathi also cite an incident where tax-collectors, while rounding up the 'Company's cattle', shot dead four Ndebele women who had refused to inform them where the cattle were hidden.<sup>113</sup> By 1896, white looting had depleted the Ndebele herds to only 40,000 out of a national herd that had originally numbered 300,000.<sup>114</sup> The cattle-looting episode formed the core of Ndebele against the BSA Company administration in the uprisings of 1896-7 and aggravated the seething anger the Ndebele still felt about the destruction of their state in 1893.

However, some Ndebele traditional rulers collaborated with the colonial forces in the destruction and looting of their kingdom. The most prominent Ndebele traditional chief to openly support British occupation of the country was Gampu Sithole. He was one of Lobengula's most powerful chiefs and had led the Amagogo regiment during the 1893 war. According to C.J. Zvobgo, Gampu Sithole had been greatly impressed by white military power during the 1893 war and became convinced that it was useless to continue the struggle against the whites because they were too strong. This explained his loyalty to the government in the Ndebele rising of 1896.<sup>115</sup>

When the Native Department began looting Ndebele cattle in 1894, collaborationist chiefs like Gampu Sithole and his followers assisted the BSA Company in rounding up the Ndebele herds and, in return, they were rewarded with some of the loot cattle and became wealthy.<sup>116</sup> When the Ndebele rising broke out in 1896, Gampu Sithole sided with the British forces and fought the rebel Ndebele warriors in many battles to suppress the uprising. Chief Gampu

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<sup>113</sup> Marieke Faber-Clarke and P. Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo. Queen of the Ndebele*, 109

<sup>114</sup> Anthony Thomas, *Rhodes. The Race for Africa*, 306-7

<sup>115</sup> Chengetai J.M. Zvobgo, 'Shona and Ndebele Responses to Christianity in Southern Rhodesia, 1897-1914', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 8, Fasc. 1, 1976, 45

<sup>116</sup> Lawrence Tshuma, 'Law, State and the Agrarian Question in Zimbabwe', PhD., University of Warwick, May 1995, 108

Sithole came to own immense herds of cattle, showing that many of the looted cattle had passed into his hands from the White settlers.<sup>117</sup>

Gampu, who benefitted greatly from collaboration with the white settlers, even went as far as opposing the restoration of the Ndebele monarchy.<sup>118</sup>

However, other Ndebele chiefs and the Matabele Home Society continued to agitate for the revival of the Ndebele kingship, the return of the cattle that had been looted by the settlers, and a homeland for the Ndebele. They combined with members of the royal family to form protest associations and convened clandestine meetings to discuss the issue of kingship, even though such meetings had been banned by the colonial administration and were punishable under colonial law<sup>119</sup>

The British Colonial Office and the white settlers banished the Ndebele princes to South Africa in order to prevent the revival of the Ndebele monarchy which was, potentially, a threat to the security of white power.<sup>120</sup>

The banishment of the princes was maintained by the successor administration of Southern Rhodesia under Responsible Government which upheld the ban on the return of the Ndebele princes, Mpezeni, Njube and Nguboyenja. The settlers feared that Lobengula's heirs could become a rallying focus for the people in Matabeleland in some future insurrection to get back their country and livestock.

The British High Commissioner for Southern Africa, Lord Selborne, gave his reasons at length for denying the Ndebele request, basing his argument on

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<sup>117</sup>N.M.B. Bhebe, 'Missionary Activity among the Ndebele and Kalanga - A Survey', in J.A. Dachs (ed.) *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, Vol. 1 (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1973) 47

<sup>118</sup>R. Kent Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 97, 238

<sup>119</sup>Enocent Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe. Transformations in Kalanga and Ndebele Societies* (New York, University of Rochester Press, 2012) 167; Sabelo J. Gatsheni-Ndlovu, *The Ndebele Nation*, 169-170

<sup>120</sup>A. M. Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia: The White Conquest of Zimbabwe, 1884-1902* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queens's University Press, 1983); Martin Chanock, *Unconsummated Union*, 88

Britain's recent colonial experiences in other countries of Southern Africa. He noted that the restoration of a defeated monarch was only 'permissible' in the case of African chiefdoms/kingdoms that had not been conquered militarily, such as the Sotho and Tswana chiefdoms. But in the case of states like that of the Ndebele and Zulu which had been destroyed by military invasion and conquest, there was no longer any place for a bitter defeated monarch. He was also of the firm opinion that, as a royal prince, Njube Lobengula, who was next in the line of succession after King Lobengula, could not be trusted to serve the new white government in the new subordinate role of a salaried chief.<sup>121</sup>

Thus, denied both the revival of their monarchy, and a new role in the white administration as salaried Company chiefs, the Ndebele princes were doomed to the same fate as the Zulu royals after the destruction of the Zulu kingdom in 1879, viz., to live out their lives in exile in Cape Town. Martin Chanock summed up the Ndebele predicament in the following words;

For the Ndebele therefore, a form of Indirect Rule which preserved a centre of legitimate African authority was inadmissible, as it posed a threat to the security of the white man's country.<sup>122</sup>

The Company's political objective in exiling Lobengula's heirs to South Africa was that the process of alienation would, in the long term, lead to a decline of the concept of a royal family in Matabeleland. A large part of this strategic downgrading of the importance of former Ndebele royalty entailed limiting contact between Lobengula's sons and Ndebele chiefs. Although many Ndebele chiefs had thronged Bulawayo Location when Lobengula's son

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<sup>121</sup> Martin Chanock, *Unconsummated Union: Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa*, 88-89

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 89

Njube returned briefly from South Africa in 1900, in later years the Native Affairs Department actively discouraged its salaried chiefs from paying respects to Lobengula's grandsons. In 1926 the Native Commissioner of Sebungwe District reported that;

During the year a few Shangwe chiefs had received messages said to have emanated from a chief of the Gwelo District, advising them of the return of Lobengula's grandsons to the colony/Southern Rhodesia. They were told to attend upon them and warn other chiefs of the district to do likewise. One chief only from Sebungwe attended and reported later that nothing of a political nature had been discussed.<sup>123</sup>

The poor turn-out for the reception of the former royal was due to the fact that the all the chiefs of Sebungwe District were notified by the Native Affairs Department that there was no obligation to attend since Lobengula's grandsons held no position of authority under the colonial Government, which alone could give Lobengula's grandsons the right to summon chiefs to attend.<sup>124</sup>

However, despite the proscription of political contact between Lobengula's heirs and Ndebele peasants for decades, the concept of a Ndebele royal family nevertheless lingered on among the Ndebele for more than forty years after the destruction of their kingdom in 1893, and ordinary Ndebele cattle-owners continued to put the royal earmark (*uphawulwenkosi*) on the progeny of the once royal cattle that had been looted and given to them by the BSA Company in 1895.<sup>125</sup> For over thirty years after the cattle looting episode of 1894-1896,

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<sup>123</sup> S235/504 District Annual Reports 1926. Report of NC Sebungwe 1926

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.; T. Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning: The Social History of a Southern African City, 1893-1960*, Weaver Press, Harare, 2010, 39-40

<sup>125</sup> R.S. Roberts, 'The End of the Ndebele Royal Family', History Seminar Paper No. 73, History Department,

the Khumalo clan, led by King Lobengula's descendants, particularly the descendants of Lobengula's son Njube, championed a sustained campaign to reclaim the royal cattle from peasants in Matabeleland and to regain some of the Khumalo family's past status and wealth through organizations dedicated to the restoration of the monarchy.<sup>126</sup>

After decades of failure to secure Rhodesian and British recognition of the Ndebele monarchy, the Ndebele royal political movement gradually dissipated in the 1940 and 1950s.<sup>127</sup> The BSA Company's strategy of exiling the Ndebele princes combined with other developments in African politics in the 1950s to finally achieve the Rhodesians' goal of fostering a decline of the concept of a Ndebele royal family in Matabeleland. One crucial factor that augmented this process was the fragmentation of the centralised authority of the Ndebele state under the Khumalos after the banishment of the royal progeny of Lobengula. With the loss of their king, who had been the linchpin of their society, and their forced movement into the first Native Reserves of Gwayi and Shangani under different *izinduna*, the cohesion of the state had been utterly destroyed and Ndebele pride had been broken.

Changing political circumstances in the country in the era of the advent of mass Nationalist movements which were led by a new generation of African leaders that did not hail from royal lineages also contributed significantly to the decline of the concept of a royal Ndebele family by the 1950s. The rise of African Nationalists to prominence in most Southern African countries in the post-World War II era overshadowed the importance of traditional leaders in national politics. These developments therefore combined with the white

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University of Zimbabwe, April 1988, 1-8

<sup>126</sup>Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 169-177

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

settlers' refusal to address Ndebele demands for the restoration of their monarchy to seal the defeat of the Ndebele cause in the colonial era.

### **The Foundations of a Regular African Administrative System after the Ndebele-Shona Uprisings, 1898-1923**

The uprisings of the Shona and Ndebele against BSA Company rule in 1896-7 were of key importance in shaping the nature of later African administration in Southern Rhodesia. After the uprisings, the settler administration worked furtively to address two primary concerns that had been stirred up by the risings. One was white fears of the recurrence of the risings because of the threat they posed to the internal security of the white population. This concern prompted the settler administration to strip the African chiefs of most of their traditional political and judicial powers, and to re-invent their roles to perform colonial administrative duties like collecting taxes and securing cheap African labourers for white enterprises. The other concern was fear of the revocation of the Royal Charter by the British Government following a damning report on BSA Company misrule of the Africans which was issued by Britain's Resident Commissioner in Rhodesia after the risings in 1898.

The Resident Commissioner, Sir Richard Martin, laid the blame for the outbreak of the risings on BSA Company misrule of the Africans and inequitable land distribution. The report prompted the BSA Company to make efforts to create a more effective, regular administration that would be agreeable to British oversight. In the aftermath of the risings, the British Government reserved imperial oversight and some powers to interfere in Southern Rhodesia affairs to protect African interests and supervise the work



and staffing of the Native Affairs Department.<sup>128</sup> To achieve this end, Imperial authorities introduced the 1898 Order-in-Council, which brought all the activities pertaining to African administration under the High Commissioner for South Africa's approval.<sup>129</sup>

The British Government also introduced the 1898 Constitution which it believed to be fair to the BSA Company, the settlers and the Africans. The 1898 Constitution introduced the convention of racial separation and social segregation that came to underpin the practice of African administration by later White administrations in the country. The principle of "Separate Development" and land division according to race that was introduced by the 1898 Constitution came to be applied to every aspect of Rhodesian society throughout the colonial period.<sup>130</sup> The segregationist policies that were institutionalised by the 1898 Constitution were augmented by the Southern Rhodesia Native Regulations which were also promulgated in 1898, which denied Africans the franchise and legislative representation that was granted to European settlers.<sup>131</sup>

The main objective of African administration in the early decades of settler rule was the 'gradual differential development' of the colony's races, in other words, the development of the African in his own areas.<sup>132</sup> However, unlike in South Africa (from whence the Company had adopted the convention of racial segregation) the Rhodesians never formulated any clear ideological or religious basis for their doctrine of racial divisions upon which their society was based.

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<sup>128</sup>James Barber, *Rhodesia. The Road to Rebellion* (London, Oxford University Press, 1967) 68

<sup>129</sup>M.C. Steele, 'The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933', PhD thesis, Department of History, Fraser University, 1972, 5

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., xviii

<sup>131</sup>Beverley White, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, 95

<sup>132</sup>M.C. Steele, 'The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933', 1-2

The settler administration took steps to regularize its African administration through the Native Department, which accelerated its drive to co-opt all African chiefs into its rural local administration between 1894 and 1908 as salaried chiefs in order to consolidate white security.<sup>133</sup> The colonial officials also made efforts to rehabilitate the African traditional institutions that had been disrupted by conquest and remoulded them to suit colonial administrative purposes. They introduced measures to harness African traditions and their social, legal and political culture as a basis for Indirect Rule.<sup>134</sup> These measures included the codification of African customs to craft the Native Code of Law which became an essential part of the implementation of Indirect Rule through chiefs.<sup>135</sup> The codification of African traditional laws and customs has been criticised for introducing rigidity into African traditional systems that had previously been fluid and dynamic.<sup>136</sup>

With salaried chiefs serving in the Native Affairs Department, the settlers were better able to execute their policies of labour recruitment and tax collection because white Company agents were not numerous enough to administer the districts effectively without the aid of African chiefs. Because of the Native Affairs Department's policies, its personnel were greatly resented by the Africans, which made it necessary for tax patrols and NCs to be accompanied by armed Native Police details for protection against frequent attacks. Each NC was backed by a force of irregular armed policemen who

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<sup>133</sup>A. M. Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia: The White Conquest of Zimbabwe*, 530-531; Martin Chanock, *Unconsummated Union*, 88; N.M.B. Bhebe, 'Missionary Activity among the Ndebele and Kalanga', 45; NGB2/1/1 NC Sebungwe to CNC Bulawayo, 15 July 1908

<sup>134</sup>N.M.B. Bhebe, 'Missionary Activity among the Ndebele and Kalanga', 47

<sup>135</sup>Angela Cheater, 'The Ideology of "Communal" Land Tenure in Zimbabwe: Mythogenesis Enacted?', *Africa*, 60, 2 1990; T. Ranger, "The Communal Areas of Zimbabwe", in T. Bassett & D. Crummey (eds.) *Land in African Agrarian Systems* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1993)

<sup>136</sup>Pius Nyambara, 'Immigrants, "Traditional" Leaders and the Rhodesian State, 780; Gilbert Tarugarira, 'A historical study of Zimbabwe's African elite configurations, networks of amity and their contemporary transitions: The Case of Gutu, c. 1900-2013,' PhD thesis, Department of History, Midlands State University July 2015

resided in the districts all year-round, effectively becoming an occupation force that ensured compulsion of Africans to obey colonial laws. Timothy Stapleton's study of African policemen in colonial local government underlines the fact that European colonial rule in Africa could not have taken place without the active cooperation of Africans as security force personnel.<sup>137</sup>

White fears of the recurrence of the risings led to close supervision and surveillance of African politics in the rural areas. African chiefs lost most of their traditional political and judicial powers and, as we saw above, their role was reinvented to perform key colonial duties such as labour recruitment, and tax collection. Traditional ethnic boundaries were frequently realigned in order to consolidate and rearrange African chiefdoms to serve colonial local government ends.<sup>138</sup> The Native Affairs Department interfered in the internal politics and disputes of African chiefdoms and came to largely control the nomination and installation of African chiefs.<sup>139</sup> It elaborately compiled detailed files on chiefs and headmen in each district, with focus on chiefly genealogies and 'tribal' history, in order to service the interaction between the Rhodesian administrators and chiefs in the event of claims to chieftainship and succession disputes.<sup>140</sup> The fate of the Ndebele monarchy, discussed above, has unveiled how Rhodesia's approach to African administration was influenced by fear that a strong centralised traditional authority could be a powerful alternative authority to that of the colonial state.

The chiefs' colonial administrative role as appointed officials of government compromised their respect as traditional leaders and significantly weakened

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<sup>137</sup> Timothy Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1923-1980* (New York, University of Rochester Press, 2011) 1

<sup>138</sup> R. K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 71

<sup>139</sup> D.N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1840-1900*, 77

<sup>140</sup> T. Ranger, 'Tradition and Travesty: Chiefs and the Administration in Makoni District, Zimbabwe, 1960-1980', *Africa*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1982, 20

their traditional esteem in the eyes of their followers. The auxiliary role that they came to play as an embedded aspect of the colonial administration fundamentally transformed their precolonial functions. The institution of chieftaincy underwent a process of secularization during the colonial era that divorced it from its spiritual foundations of the precolonial era.<sup>141</sup> The assumption of the selection and appointment of chiefs by the state from spirit mediums grossly undermined the legitimacy of colonial chiefs. In 1927 the settler administration instituted the Native Affairs Act which granted Rhodesian courts of law the right to appoint whoever the state considered suitable to a chieftainship without consulting traditional customs.<sup>142</sup> In some cases, new chieftainships were created as a convenient and necessary instrument of local administration.<sup>143</sup>

These changes amounted to a desecration of the precolonial ideology of chieftainship which was founded on a close relationship between religious and temporal power, and regulated succession to chieftainship. One of the consequences of the appointment of salaried chiefs by colonial authorities was that the office of chief came to be coveted as a lucrative post and induced a more individual quest for wealth and power in every clan, which consequently fuelled recurrent chieftainship wrangles and succession disputes within kinships.<sup>144</sup>

Under colonial rule African chiefs came to wield powers of coercion in the execution of their administrative tasks that were largely alien to the

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<sup>141</sup> J. F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118

<sup>142</sup> Native Affairs Act, 1927; Robert I. Rotberg, *Suffer the Future: Policy Choices in Southern Africa* (Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1980) 236

<sup>143</sup> NGB2/1/1, Chiefs and Headmen

<sup>144</sup> M. Gelfand, 'The Mhondoro Cult of the Shona-speaking People of Southern Rhodesia', 342; G. Bishi, 'The Colonial Archive and Contemporary Chieftainship Claims: The Case of Zimbabwe, 1935 To 2014', MA thesis, University of The Free State 2015, 48-53; M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona*, , 33, 66, 81, 131, 245, 251

precolonial ideology of chieftainship. The High Commissioner's Proclamation of 1910, which defined the salaries and duties of salaried chiefs, gave chiefs new powers over their subjects that ordered them to perform new coercive tasks on behalf of local administration. The engagement of chiefs in the prosecution of unpopular colonial policies such as cattle seizures, forced labour recruitment, and destocking underlined their complete transformation from representatives of their people to servants of the colonial local administration whose powers now derived from the colonial state. In comparative terms, precolonial leaders were more accountable to their people for their actions than colonial chiefs because the source of chiefly legitimacy in colonial period derived from the state, not the people.<sup>145</sup>

The system of African administration that was adopted in Rhodesia differed significantly from the policy of Indirect Rule that was implemented in other British colonies in Africa. Although the Settler administration retained African chiefs in their governmental system, they did not govern through them. In Rhodesia the Native Commissioners had direct power and the traditional chiefs were subordinated.<sup>146</sup> Authority was concentrated in the hands of the NC who was the key figure of the administration, with a paternal role responsible for good order and good government in the countryside. All the colonial government's activities in African administration radiated from him. He supervised the chiefs, guided the work of the Native Councils (comprised of chiefs but chaired by the NC), coordinated all the work of the Native Department such as collecting revenue, and he heard some cases.<sup>147</sup> The NC also wielded extensive powers which included the powers to depose

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<sup>145</sup>Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 83; C. Ake, 'Rethinking African Democracy', *Journal of African Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1991; J. Cobbah, 'African Values and Human Rights: An African Perspective', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1987

<sup>146</sup>Richard Bourne, *Catastrophe: What Went Wrong in Zimbabwe* (London, Zed Books, 2011) 27; L. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia*, 11

<sup>147</sup>James Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 120

all African chiefs who were deemed ineffective in the furtherance of colonial interests, and their replacement by new chiefs. Consequently, African chiefs in Rhodesia did not enjoy the same prestige or power given to chiefs under the British Colonial Office's system of Indirect Rule.<sup>148</sup>

The African administrative system introduced by colonial legislation in 1898 remained virtually unchanged throughout the colonial period, and many of the segregationist provisions enshrined in the 1898 Constitution remained in effect in all subsequent Rhodesian Constitutions until 1961. A key white consideration that shaped the pattern of African administration 1898 also remained integral to subsequent Rhodesian Administrations. This was white fear of a general African insurrection similar to the 1896-7 uprisings, which would end white power. This concern with the internal security of the white population remained central to the construction of all African administrative systems until the last days of Rhodesia in 1979.<sup>149</sup>

### **Parallel Racial Development and the Establishment of Structures for African Local Self-government in the Reserves, 1923-1950s**

When Southern Rhodesia was granted the status of Responsible Government by the Crown in 1923 after the end of BSA Company rule, the new Constitution gave the colony a sizeable amount of self-determination that gave it the right to legislate, operate an independent bureaucracy, and maintain an army. This autonomy made Rhodesia unique in British Colonial Africa because, unlike in other British colonies, Rhodesia had its own police, civil service and armed forces firmly under the settlers' control.<sup>150</sup> The British

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<sup>148</sup>James Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 121

<sup>149</sup>L. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia*, 4

<sup>150</sup>Robin Ellis, 'End of Empire: Rhodesia', Television Documentary, Granada, U.K., 1985; Godfrey T. Ncube, 'A History of North-western Zimbabwe, 1850-1960s', 148

government, however, reserved powers of oversight over ‘Native’ legislation. It is significant to note that none of these powers of oversight over African administration, or the right to veto Rhodesian legislation, were ever exercised during the era of Responsible Government, despite the passing of the racially segregationist Land Apportionment Act of 1930. Although the 1923 Constitution forbade the enactment of “differential” legislation which discriminated between white and black, Southern Rhodesia continued to discriminate throughout the era of Responsible Government in various ways, such as territorial segregation and the development of local government structures that were specifically for ‘natives’ within ‘native spheres’, viz. Reserves and Native Purchase Areas, without remonstrance from the Imperial Government.<sup>151</sup>

Under Responsible Government the pattern of African administration in Southern Rhodesia underwent remarkably little change from that of the preceding BSA Company. The system of racial segregation which had been built up over the years since the foundation of colonial rule was perpetuated, and the BSA Company’s principle of land division according to race became institutionalized by the LAA 1930.<sup>152</sup> The pattern of African administration in the 1930s continued the trend towards racial and territorial segregation under the policy of the ‘gradual, differential development’ of the African and European in separate areas.<sup>153</sup> In the 1950s the policy was implemented under slightly different terminology, such as ‘Parallel Development’, which was preferred by Godfrey Huggins and the Establishment Party.

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<sup>151</sup>Tawsie Jollie, ‘Native Administration in Southern Rhodesia’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 83, No. 4319, August 30, 1935, 982

<sup>152</sup> Elaine Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem: A Documentary Record, 1923-1979* (London, Routledge & Kegan, 1975) xvii xviii; William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21

<sup>153</sup>M.C. Steele, ‘The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933’, 100, 102

Sir Godfrey Huggins, who became the Prime Minister of Rhodesia from 1933 to 1953, has been dubbed ‘the architect of white Rhodesia’ because it was he who espoused the Two-Pyramid policy of parallel racial development in Rhodesia. Huggins’s Two-Pyramid policy emphasized the separation of African and European facilities and claimed that the African was free to advance to any position he was capable of in the designated African areas, but his government generally failed to provide sufficient facilities and conditions conducive to African prosperity in the Reserves.<sup>154</sup> Fortuitously for the survival of African chieftaincies, Huggins’s Two-Pyramid policy more or less guaranteed a continued role for African traditional authority structures in the Reserves because the colonial government had no other means of controlling Africans in the Reserves.

The logic of the racial trend in Huggins’s Two-Pyramid administrative policy eventually compelled the colonial government to make several significant concessions to African self-government in the Reserves. These concessions to African self-rule were a significant development because the Rhodesian government generally eschewed the concept of Indirect Rule, preferring Direct Rule by white Native Commissioners. Although the 1923 Constitution of Southern Rhodesia recognised the need for African self-government institutions in the Reserves, the idea of African traditional leaders and other selected African individuals running their own local representative institutions and making regulations was not welcomed by many senior officials in the Native Affairs Department, who believed that Africans were not yet sufficiently advanced for such representative bodies and could not handle public moneys.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup>Richard Gray, *The Two Nations* (London, Oxford University Press, 1960) 152

<sup>155</sup>William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21; M.C. Steele, ‘The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933’, 89-93; 94-96



Although the Rhodesian government never officially acknowledged Indirect Rule in its African local governance, it made significant concessions to African local self-government by vesting much responsibility in chiefs through its Native Boards and Native Councils policy in the 1930s. The creation of the Native Boards and Native Councils marked a significant policy shift towards the creation of separate local government facilities for the races in Rhodesia that emphasized the bifurcation of colonial society along racial lines. The general neglect of African facilities by the Rhodesian government that was institutionalized by the dualistic structures in local government became evident in the general poverty of the African Councils when compared with the affluent Rural Councils for whites. While African Councils could not secure funds independently and were wholly dependent on grants from the central government, the white Rural Councils were better funded because they were permitted to collect their revenue by taxes on the white farmers, and from beer levies on beer halls in the commercial farming areas.<sup>156</sup>

In 1924 the Native Department introduced formal Chiefs and Headmen's Meetings in all the Reserves to solicit the grievances of rural Africans. These meetings were chaired by the NC and were introduced as an interim measure before the establishment of formal Native Councils, which the government considered to be an urgent matter. An early attempt by the Rhodesian parliament to set up the Native Councils in 1929 was blocked by a constitutional hurdle that revealed that such local government structures in the Reserves could only be established by High Commissioner's Proclamation issued in terms of Section 47 of the Constitution, and that any legislation passed by the Rhodesian Parliament on this matter would be 'void and

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<sup>156</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, *State Politics in Zimbabwe* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1990) 188

inoperative'.<sup>157</sup> Consequently, informal Native Boards were established as an alternative forum that would serve a similar purpose until the more formal Native Councils were eventually established at a later date.<sup>158</sup>

A key reason for the Rhodesian government's hurried efforts to establish formal African representative structures in the Reserves, which would serve as forums for soliciting rural grievances, lay in the discovery of the clandestine political activities of early Nationalist organizations like the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), which were making forays into the rural areas to draw membership by tapping into rural grievances. The Native Department moved quickly to counter the radicalizing political influence of these early Nationalists by establishing Native Boards which would become fora for chiefs and headmen to freely express African political sentiments in a conservative setting. This move was a political strategy devised by Chief Native Commissioner, C.L. Carbutt, and the Native Department to use the Native Boards to undercut the anti-colonial activities of the I.C.U. in the rural areas by providing an alternate outlet for African grievances through traditional leadership structures.<sup>159</sup> The move sought to increase chiefs' control over their subjects so as to shield them from nationalist influences.

The organisational structure of the Native Boards comprised all the traditional leaders of the district and an equal number of literate Africans who were appointed to the Board from nominations that were made by local communities and submitted to the NC.<sup>160</sup> The operations of the Boards closely resembled the earlier assemblies of Chiefs and Headmen which had discussed various subjects affecting peasants. Quarterly meetings were held

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<sup>157</sup>M.C. Steele, 'The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933', 102, 178

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 500

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, *Community Development in Pre-Independence Zimbabwe: A Study of Policy with Special Reference to Rural Land* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publishing, 1985) 60

at which a broad range of subjects were discussed including, duties and responsibilities of chiefs, education of chiefs, government regulations on cattle ownership and carrying capacity regulations, the increasing delinquency of youths in the Reserves, among many other matters of local interest.<sup>161</sup>

The prominent grievances were economic issues such as the low prices that Africans received for selling their cattle and maize, the burden of taxation and dip fees. Land was the major grievance, and all the Boards variously adopted resolutions calling for the augmentation of the Reserves.<sup>162</sup> Although the Boards had been envisaged as a medium for ascertaining African grievances, their effectiveness as truly representative forum for chiefs and headmen to freely express African political sentiments was limited by the domineering presence of the NC. His presence prevented the chiefs and headmen from airing their true sentiments.<sup>163</sup> In the end the Native Boards turned out to be ineffectual structures for African local self-government.<sup>164</sup>

After the constitutional setback of 1929, no attempt was made to introduce the Native Councils by legislation until 1937, after the powers of the High Commissioner had been withdrawn. In 1937 the British Government relinquished some of its reserved powers to interfere in Southern Rhodesian affairs, including a substantial part of the claim to supervise the staffing and work of the Native Affairs Department.<sup>165</sup> The Native Councils Act of 1937 allowed Native Councils to make rules and regulations within their own areas, while the Native Law and Courts Act of 1937 granted chiefs more powers to

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<sup>161</sup>S2796/2/1 Assemblies of Chiefs General, Minutes of Fourth Chiefs Assembly Midlands Province Held at Gwelo, 28th June 1954

<sup>162</sup>M.C. Steele, 'The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933', 100

<sup>163</sup>Ibid. 97, 102

<sup>164</sup>N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, *Community Development in Pre-Independence Zimbabwe*, 60

<sup>165</sup>Gloria C. Passmore, *Hidden Conflict*, 68; M.C. Steele, 'The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933', 96

try cases and exercise jurisdiction in their domains.<sup>166</sup> This was a significant departure from Rhodesia's general proclivity for Direct Rule. The results of this concession to African administrative autonomy were however very limited because of the reluctance of the Southern Rhodesian government to promote a sense of political responsibility among its African population, as was evidenced by its delay in granting to Native Councils any financial responsibilities. The Native Councils were only granted funds to spend in 1943, after languishing for six years.<sup>167</sup> This reluctance to financially empower the Native Councils underscores the point that the settler administration's concessions to African self-government were granted begrudgingly.

### **Chiefs' Support for Early Nationalist movements and the Colonial State's Response, 1945-1950s**

This section relates how the unpopular, disruptive intervention of the colonial state in African rural livelihoods in the 1930s and 1940s fomented widespread African agitation against the conservation policies of the state and drove many rural Africans and their traditional leaders to support early Nationalist movements. By the 1950s, the previous two decades of compulsion that had been experienced by rural Africans, which had greatly undermined all semblances of traditional African political and economic autonomy, had engendered strong anti-colonial sentiments in the countryside. A widespread rural political consciousness began to emerge among chiefs and the rural populace that caused them to throw in their lot with long-standing grievances of the Nationalists who had long been dissatisfied with land distribution between whites and Africans and the poor quality of the land in the Reserves.

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<sup>166</sup> William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21; M.C. Steele, 'The Foundations of Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1933', 522

<sup>167</sup> William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21

Ranger suggests that another reason that led chiefs to oppose the Native Land Husbandry Act was that it undercut their powers over land distribution by introducing individual land ownership in the Reserves.<sup>168</sup>

During this period there was a notable agency on the part of African chiefs in championing the peasants' rural grievances and seeking to gain concessions for their people from the colonial state, notably the demand for land.<sup>169</sup> The image of chiefs among Nationalist leaders and peasants at this time got a brief boost because they came to be viewed as representative of popular local causes rather than enforcers of unpopular colonial directives. The Matabeleland Home Society, whose origins were strongly linked to Ndebele royalty, echoed the chiefs' demands for an end to destocking and emerged as the voice of the chiefs, championing their cause and lamenting about their declining powers in their new role as subalterns under the direct rule of the white Native Commissioners.<sup>170</sup>

The growing Nationalist sentiments among traditional leaders and the general rural populace began to alarm some Native Department officials. In 1949 the Provincial Native Commissioner for Matabeleland, E.L. King-Hall sounded a warning to the Native Affairs Department about the growing 'race consciousness' in the African population, which he said was primarily due to the inequitable land distribution between whites and blacks and the tremendous reductions of African cattle herds caused by destocking.<sup>171</sup>

Compulsory destocking, in particular, which is estimated to have reduced African herds by 59, 614 cattle in the first two years of its implementation

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<sup>168</sup> T. Ranger, 'Tradition and Travesty: Chiefs and the Administration in Makoni District, Zimbabwe, 1960-1980', *Africa*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 1982, 21

<sup>169</sup> Gerald Chikozho Mazarire 'A Social and Political History of Chishanga: South Central Zimbabwe c.1750-2000', PhD thesis, History Department, University of Zimbabwe, 2009, 35

<sup>170</sup> Enocent Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe. Transformations in Kalanga and Ndebele Societies*, 167

<sup>171</sup> *The Bantu Mirror*, June 11, 1949; *The Bantu Mirror*, June 18, 1949

after introduction in 1945, was deeply detested due to the socio-economic and cultural value of cattle in African society, as we saw in the discussion of the looting of Ndebele cattle above.<sup>172</sup>

At a meeting convened by the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, Sir John Noble Kennedy, with Ndebele chiefs in Filabusi in April 1949, Chief Sibasa lamented the economic and cultural impact of the destocking exercise on the livelihoods of the Ndebele peasantry in the district. He listed the Ndebele grievances in the following words:

In recent years the Government has decreed that we must limit our stock. Stock is our natural wealth and our prosperity. We cannot breed cattle if we have small holdings. We are led to believe that our unmarried sons cannot own cattle and that they should go to the mines and farms to work. They also desire to own some cattle in order to comply with our lobola custom.<sup>173</sup>

By 1949, even the colonial officials were beginning to register concern that destocking had proceeded to a stage where it threatened the economic viability of African traditional livelihoods. King-Hall warned that the ‘tremendous reductions’ of African herds may have gone too far because the ‘numbers were getting rather low’.<sup>174</sup> This opinion was shared by the Director of the Native Agriculture Department, E.D. Alvord, who reported in June 1949 that;

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<sup>172</sup> S 1217/9 Summary of Destocking Results 1947

<sup>173</sup> *The Bantu Mirror*, April 16, 1949

<sup>174</sup> *The Bantu Mirror*, June 11, 1949

If we carry out our original programme of destocking native herds by 40 per cent of their 1944 level, we shall reduce the native to a sub-economic standard of life.<sup>175</sup>

The reduction of African cattle herds through destocking since 1945 had indeed been ‘tremendous’.<sup>176</sup> Prior to the commencement of destocking, a Government Notice issued in 1945 had revealed that out of a total of 98 Reserves in the country, 49 were overstocked and therefore were to be subjected to the destocking exercise. The Government Notice estimated the total number of cattle owned by Africans in these 49 Reserves at 927,000, yet the total number of cattle that the Reserves could carry was 645,000; thereby necessitating a reduction of 282,000.<sup>177</sup>

The general African opposition to the compulsive colonial policies of the 1940s and 1950s prompted the chiefs and the African political organisations to forge a common cause against colonial rule. When Benjamin Burombo’s British African People’s Voice Association, Abraham Chirimuuta’s Southern Rhodesia Native Association, and Charles Mzingeli’s I.C.U. entered the rural areas to tap into peasant grievances in the early 1950s they received overwhelming support from African chiefs in Matabeleland, Midlands and Mashonaland provinces due to the unpopular agrarian policies of the colonial regime.<sup>178</sup>

Because of the support of the traditional chiefs, it became relatively easy for Burombo’s African Voice Association to expand its influence throughout the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces, where African agitation against

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<sup>175</sup> *The Bantu Mirror*, June 11, 1949

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Nathan Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia* (London, Deutsch, 1965) 31; Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe, 1947-1958* (Harare, The College Press, 1989) 74

destocking and evictions was considerable in the 1950s. The Voice Association assisted farmers to resist government destocking measures through legal action and achieved some success in opposing the implementation of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951.<sup>179</sup> Burombo's Voice distributed circulars throughout these provinces outlining the objectives of the Voice and encouraging traditional leaders to form branches of the association in their domains. Consequently, several branches of the Voice were formed by chiefs and headmen because they identified with the Voice's opposition to the colonial regime's rural policies, especially destocking.<sup>180</sup>

In 1951 the colonial government began to sense danger in Burombo's wide influence in the countryside and moved quickly to destroy the alliance between the Nationalists and chiefs so as to undercut the growing influence of the African Nationalists in the countryside. Firstly, the government banned all meetings organised by the Voice in Bulawayo that had congregated chiefs from every corner of the country in the city. Secondly, Burombo's Voice Association was banned in 1952, under the terms of the Subversive Activities Act of 1950.<sup>181</sup> In 1951, the government completely reconfigured African chieftainships to suit colonial interests through country-wide depositions of some chiefs and headmen, accompanied by promotions of favourable chiefs to political ascendancy.<sup>182</sup> 89 chieftainships out of 323 that had been registered in 1914 were abolished. 26 chiefs were demoted to the rank of headmen, while 11 were pensioned off.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup>Ngwabi Bhebe, *Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 74; R. K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 44

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup>R. K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 44

<sup>182</sup> S327/1 Chiefs and Headmen: Recommendations, abolishment of redundant chiefs, 26 March 1950.

<sup>183</sup> S3700/74 Recognition of tribal leaders 1951; Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 118



The Native Department also seized upon the opportunity provided by the depositions of 1951 to demote many chiefs to headmanships on the flimsy excuse that their followings of tax-payers had dwindled.<sup>184</sup> The response of the chiefs to the great depositions of 1951, however, varied greatly, as some chiefs refused to accept demotions to headmanships under other chiefs. For example, when the Rhodesian colonial authorities deposed Chief Ranthas of Dibilishaba TTL in 1951, and demoted him to a headmanship under Chief Marupi, Ranthas and some of his followers objected to being subordinate to Chief Marupi. Consequently, they chose to move away from the Dibilishaba TTL to Shashi Block TTL in 1952 “because they considered Chief Marupi of Dibilishaba to be of an inferior house”.<sup>185</sup>

Those chiefs who survived the culling of 1951 were awarded salary increases and their powers within their jurisdictions were enhanced, thereby further reinforcing their strategic alliance with the settler regime.<sup>186</sup> African rural administration in the 1950s became focussed on efforts to counter the growing influence of Nationalist organisations in the rural areas by drawing the chiefs away from the radical politics of the Nationalists through monetary incentives and increased powers. The annual salaries and allowances that were granted to chiefs and headmen in 1951 exceeded the wages that were commonly received by Africans in that era by far. Chiefs’ annual salaries were raised from £60 to £144, their allowances rose from £30 to £60. The annual salaries of headmen were raised from £12 to £18.<sup>187</sup> They were also granted larger arable land-holdings and more livestock than ordinary peasants.<sup>188</sup> The strategy of taking away the chiefs from radical African politics proved to be a turning point, not only in the relationship between the state and chiefs, but

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<sup>184</sup>Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 26

<sup>185</sup>S2929/6/5 Delineation Report on the Gwanda District, 1963-1964

<sup>186</sup>S1562, Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, 1950

<sup>187</sup>Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 96, 126

<sup>188</sup>*Ibid.*, 96

also in the relations between chiefs and Nationalists as it drove a political wedge between them that lasted throughout the colonial period.<sup>189</sup> This issue is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

The destabilisation of African chieftaincies by the restructuring exercise of 1951 was soon followed by an even greater calamity in the early 1950s when chiefs and their followers were uprooted from their traditional lands on the fertile Zimbabwean plateau and resettled in the marginal lowlands to the north of the country to make way for post-World War II development of white agriculture. The whole fertile Highveld was cleared of Africans to make way for white agriculture. In the Midlands province, the Rhodesian colonial authorities evicted thousands of Karanga communities from Rhodesdale Crown land and forcibly loaded them onto waiting government trucks and transported to the lowlands of the Sanyati and Gokwe districts which were hot, tsetse fly-infested and malarial.<sup>190</sup> Many of the Shona chieftaincies that were affected by this forced movement lost a significant proportion of their traditional followers who were fragmented and scattered to different resettlement destinations throughout the northern portions of the country on an unprecedented scale.<sup>191</sup>

In Matabeleland, many Ndebele chiefdoms in the Insiza, Fort Rixon, Essexvale, and Matobo districts were torn apart during the removals and fragments of their populations were deposited by government lorries in the Mwenezi, Belingwe, Gwanda, Nkayi, Lupane, Selukwe, Wankie and Gokwe

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<sup>189</sup> Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 97

<sup>190</sup> P. Nyambara, "That Place was Wonderful!" African Tenants on Rhodesdale Estate, Colonial Zimbabwe, c. 1900-1952, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2005, 267-299; P. S. Nyambara, 'Immigrants, "Traditional" Leaders and the Rhodesian State', 780-787

<sup>191</sup> Godfrey T. Ncube, 'Rural Dimensions of Frontier Communities as a Source of Conflict in Zimbabwe', in Ngwabi Bhebe (ed.) *Historical Perspectives on Violence, Conflict and Accommodation in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Midlands State University Press, 2016) 170-198; P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District in the 1980s and 1990s', Seminar paper, Economic History Department, University of Zimbabwe, 1997, 1-41

districts.<sup>192</sup> All the Ndebele evictees that were relocated to the Kalahari sandveld of Matabeleland North faced an acute agrarian crisis due to the general shortage of surface water throughout the region, severe livestock losses due to the infestation of the region with carnivorous wild animals and stock diseases, and crop failures due to the marginal fertility of the soils and poor rains. Some of the worst losses of livestock were experienced by Ndebele communities under Chief Siphoso who were moved into the dry Gwayi Western Area of Nyamandlovu District bordering Botswana and the Wankie Game Reserve. The area was also infested with carnivorous animals from the adjacent Wankie Game Reserve which preyed on the livestock. The severity of the plight of the Ndebele groups that were banished by the colonial regime to this wilderness eventually spun off secondary protest migrations by many families out of the Gwayi Western Area to the Binga, Nkayi and Wankie districts in the 1960s and 1970s, where conditions were relatively more tolerable.<sup>193</sup>

Most of the early evictees were settled in villages under their original traditional leaders, although formally under the jurisdiction of the indigenous chiefs of the new areas. In such areas, they often constituted a majority of the population.<sup>194</sup> But in other instances, chiefs did not end up with all their former followers in the resettlement areas and found themselves leading a minority community under the original chiefs of the resettlement areas.<sup>195</sup> An example of the friction that could arise between new settlers and indigenes is

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<sup>192</sup> Godfrey T. Ncube, 'Rural Dimensions of Frontier Communities as a Source of Conflict in Zimbabwe', 170-198.

<sup>193</sup> G.T. Ncube, 'Banished to the Wilderness: The Case of the Western Area of the Gwayi Reserve, Matabeleland, 35-44; S2929/5/6 Report on the Delineation of Communities, Nyamandlovu District; Report on Siphoso Chieftainship, Gwaai Western Area TTL, 1965

<sup>194</sup> Eric Worby, "Remaking Labour, Reshaping Identity: Cotton, Commoditization, and the Culture of Modernity in Northwestern Zimbabwe", Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1992, 321-22; P. Nyambara, "That Place was Wonderful!" African Tenants on Rhodesdale Estate, 267-299

<sup>195</sup> Jocelyn Alexander & Joann McGregor, 'Modernity and Ethnicity in a Frontier Society: Understanding Difference in Northwestern Zimbabwe,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 23, Number 2, June 1997, 189

provided by the conflict that broke out in the Wankie District between the Nambiya followers of Chief Hwange and immigrant Ndebele groups from Essexvale under Headman Abednico Mvutu between 1954 and 1965.<sup>196</sup>

A dispute over traditional leadership, accompanied by ethnic friction, emerged in the extreme north-western portion of the Wankie District where a large group of Ndebele evictees, comprising some 400 families, had been resettled on Nambiya lands to the south of the Victoria Falls after being moved from different farms and crown land areas in Matabeleland South, such as Essexvale, Matobo and Gwelo districts in 1954/55. The main group, however, comprised of evictees from Essexvale district. When the Ndebele arrived in the Wankie District they were originally placed under the traditional leadership of a Nambiya Headman, Mkosana, but the Ndebele were loathe submitting themselves to the leadership of a different ethnic group and requested the colonial government for permission to select their own Ndebele headman. They selected Abednico Mlotshwa, whom was the eldest son of Tebele Mlotshwa, who had been Chief Mvutu in the Essexvale district before his death in 1953, after which the Mvutu chieftainship had been abolished by the Native Affairs Department and reduced to a headmanship.<sup>197</sup>

After the Ndebele resettlement in the Wankie district, there was a strong agitation among Abednico's followers for the re-instatement of the Mvutu chieftainship. However, the neighbouring autochthonous Nambiya communities were strongly opposed to such a move as they considered the Ndebele to be intruders into their area and, as such, the Nambiya could not tolerate the appointment of Abednico to the chieftainship. In the

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<sup>196</sup> S2929/5/7 Report on the Delineation of Communities, Wankie District: A.D. Elliot, Delineation Report on the Abednico Mvutu Community, Wankie Tribal Trust Land, 23rd March 1965

<sup>197</sup> S2929/5/7 Delineation Report on the Abednico Mvutu Community, Wankie Tribal Trust Land, 23rd March 1965

circumstances, the Native Affairs Department, which had previously abolished the Mvutu chieftainship in Essexvale, was content to leave Abednico in the position of a headman, owing allegiance to Chief Hwange, and his people were supposed to integrate themselves into the traditional authority structures of the Hwange chieftainship.<sup>198</sup> However, this integration of the ethnic groups proved to be difficult, as Elliot observed in his Delineation Report in 1965;

In actual fact he [Abednico] has made no effort to do so, and the differences in the tribal background of the people concerned make such a move incompatible. There is a certain amount of friction between these two groups of people, and at present there is very little co-operation.<sup>199</sup>

By 1965 there was an even stronger movement among the Ndebele of Wankie district for the restoration of the Mvutu chieftainship and this had been tentatively agreed to by the Rhodesia Front government of Ian Smith, but this triggered similar claims from the Nambiya for the restoration of the two chieftainships of Nemananga and Nekatambe that had been downgraded to headmanships upon the restoration of a unitary Hwange chieftainship in 1950.<sup>200</sup> The Nambiya demanded the upgrade of the headmanship of Siampanda to Chief Nekatambe; headman Hlegiso of the Leya to Chief Dingane; and Mkosana to Chief Neluswi. They argued that if the Ndebele chieftainship was revived, theirs too should be revived because they could not tolerate ‘an intruder’ gaining power while their leaders remained headmen.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> S2929/5/7 Delineation Report on the Abednico Mvutu Community, Wankie Tribal Trust Land, 23rd March 1965.; Moffatt Tabona, Village Head, Monde Village, Chief Mvutu’s area, Hwange Communal Lands, Hwange District, 13 June 2017

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Honye Herbert Sansole, former District Administrator, Hwange District, Ministry of Local Government, 1983-1991, Interviewed in Chibondo, Hwange, July 2018

<sup>201</sup> S2929/5/7 Delineation Report on the Abednico Mvutu Community, Wankie TTL 23rd March 1965

By 1954, more than 64,000 Africans had been forcibly removed from their traditional chiefly territories throughout the country and resettled in the marginal lowlands of the country in order to clear the Zimbabwean plateau for white farmers.<sup>202</sup> The Ndebele evictions of the 1950s to the remote Lupane and Nkayi districts engendered great bitterness because they fragmented Ndebele traditional leadership structures and suppressed their political activism for the restoration of the monarchy.<sup>203</sup> The general dismemberment of African chieftaincies throughout the country in this era became a major cause of African opposition to colonial rule in the late 1940s and 1950s because it entailed not only land dispossession but also the fragmentation of communities and great losses of livestock during the movements.

The widespread African bitterness that was fomented by the evictions contributed significantly to the formation of African Nationalist movements in the late 1950s. Deteriorating conditions in the Reserves became fertile recruiting ground for supporters by the African Nationalism in the 1960s. The colonial government responded to this ‘danger’ by deploying a two-pronged strategy that entailed banning African Nationalists from entering the Reserves to recruit supporters for their political parties, while on the other hand, initiating efforts to woo the African chiefs to become supporters of the colonial government and guardians of its rural administration. The strategies deployed by the United Federal Party government in the 1950s and the Rhodesian Front government in the 1960s and 1970s to combat the spread of African nationalism in the countryside are discussed fully in Chapter 3.

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<sup>202</sup> G.C. Passmore, *Hidden Conflict*, 5; Joanne McGregor and Terence Ranger, ‘Displacement and Disease: Epidemics and Ideas about Malaria in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 1945-1996’, *Past & Present. A Journal of Historical Studies*, No. 167, May 2000, 212; Godfrey T. Ncube, ‘Banished to the Wilderness: The Case of the Western Area of the Gwayi Reserve, Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 1952-1980’, *The Dyke: Journal of the Midlands State University*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2004, 35-44.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

This chapter has revealed that the establishment of colonial rule over the indigenous African populations in Zimbabwe in the 1890s was largely achieved by violence. Even in the case of Mashonaland which was initially seized by the BSA Company through occupation, the subsequent subjugation of resisting Shona chiefs was achieved by violent means. It revealed that the imperialist goal of Company rule was to impose a new colonial order of total indefinite European dominance over the more numerous indigenous populations by breaking up the power of all the precolonial structures of traditional authority that it found in the country. In pursuance of this goal the Chartered Company imposed a harsh local administration over the Shona and Ndebele that did not brook any form of African resistance to white dominance. The Company administration frequently meted out brutal punishment for even the slightest of African misdemeanours, which routinely involved military action and the execution of African chiefs that resisted Company rule. The severity with which law and order was enforced by the Company administration in the early 1890s was to become traditional in later Rhodesian African administrations as a way of quelling African dissent.<sup>204</sup>

The chapter also argued that despite the fact that the white settlers never officially acknowledged the administrative system of Indirect Rule as policy in African local governance, their adoption of the system of separate racial development nevertheless guaranteed African chiefs a key role in the White structures of rural local government. Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins's insistence on parallel racial development in his Two Pyramid policy was fortuitous to the survival of the institution of chieftainship in Rhodesia because the policy implied the preservation of African structures of traditional

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<sup>204</sup> P.R. Warhurst, 'The History of Race Relations in Rhodesia', *Zambezia*, Vol. 3, No. 1, December 1973, 16

authority in the Reserves and a continued role for African chiefs in local administration.

The chapter noted that the concessions to African administrative autonomy that were made by Huggins's government through its Native Boards and Native Councils policy were half-hearted and rather limited because of the reluctance of the Southern Rhodesian government to adequately fund the Native Councils and empower traditional authorities with financial responsibilities.<sup>205</sup> Consequently, the results of these concessions were very limited because the colonial government did not want to promote a sense of political and financial responsibility among its African people since it wanted to maintain central control of all African affairs.<sup>206</sup>

It highlighted the chiefs' identification with popular Nationalist causes in the 1950s due to their opposition to the unpopular agrarian policies of the colonial regime and its authoritarian project to restructure traditional society which took away some of the chiefs traditional powers.<sup>207</sup> The chapter concluded that despite the colonial state's exaggerated omnipotence in the literature on colonial governance of Africans, it could not really fully control the chiefs, as was evidenced by their pro-Nationalist activities during this period. The stance adopted by chiefs against colonial rule during this era unveils the complex history of chieftaincy during the colonial era, which has too often been simplified by historians. It is evident that in many cases the apparent compliance of the chiefs with the directives of the colonial administration was merely a pragmatic strategy that many chiefs deployed in pursuance of

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<sup>205</sup>William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21

<sup>206</sup>Ibid.

<sup>207</sup>E. Kushinga Makombe, 'Developing Rural Africa: Rural Development Discourse in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1944-1979', in Joseph M. Hodge, Gerald Hodl & Martina Kopf (eds.) *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth Century Colonialism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2014) 165; Nathan Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 31; Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 74



furthering their own interests.<sup>208</sup>

During this period there was a notable agency on the part of most African chiefs in championing the peasants' rural grievances and seeking to gain concessions for their people from the colonial state, notably the demand for land.<sup>209</sup> The image of chiefs and headmen among Nationalist leaders and peasants at this time got a big boost because they came to be viewed as representative of popular local causes rather than enforcers of unpopular colonial directives. The political activity of the chiefs during this era even drew support from the Matabeleland Home Society which voiced its support for the chiefs' demands for an end to destocking. In some way, the political bond that was forged between chiefs and Nationalists in the 1950s can be said to have survived the onslaught of government measures to destroy it. Despite measures such as the restructuring of chieftainships, deposing anti-colonial chiefs, abolishing some chieftainships, and promoting pliant chiefs to ascendant positions in local government, many chiefs continued to harbour pro-Nationalist political views, while others, as will be shown in Chapter 3, abdicated their colonial chieftainships and later joined the liberation struggle.

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<sup>208</sup>P.S. Nyambara, "Immigrants, 'Traditional' Leaders and the Rhodesian State", 781

<sup>209</sup>Gerald Chikozho Mazarire 'A Social and Political History of Chishanga, 35

## CHAPTER 3

### CHIEFTAINCY AND RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN RHODESIA IN THE ERA OF THE NATIONALIST CHALLENGE TO WHITE MINORITY RULE, 1950-1979

#### Introduction

This chapter exposes the political manipulation of African chiefs in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s by the UFP regime of David Whitehead and the successor RF regime of Ian Douglas Smith in their efforts to combat the spread of African Nationalism into the rural African population in Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). It reveals that under the Rhodesian Front regime the duties assigned to chiefs deviated from their traditional role of representing the interests of their subjects because chiefs were assigned new political roles that resonated with the political mission of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (INTAF) of combating African Nationalism.<sup>210</sup> It argues that INTAF's political strategy of promoting the prominence of chiefs in African politics as the culturally-mandated spokesmen for African political opinion in the country was designed to undercut the radical influence of African Nationalists among the peasantry and guarantee firm state control over rural populations. During this era chiefs were accorded a very important role in Rhodesian politics as conservative allies of the government to guard against and counter the radical insurrectionist politics of the African Nationalists that were permeating the countryside.

In the era after UDI, the internationally-isolated and domestically-embattled RF regime furtively struggled to maintain its control of the rural areas by

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<sup>210</sup> Elaine Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem*, 123

granting chiefs a paramilitary role to combat the growth of African nationalism among the peasants and thwart the threat of guerrilla war in the country. At the same time, the RF government deployed a political strategy that had a combined agenda of outlawing all the African Nationalist movements and detaining their leadership; while actively promoting the political prominence of chiefs in African politics. A key element of this strategy involved consulting the African chiefs as the only true representatives of the African people and showcasing their support to Britain so that Rhodesia could gain independence without majority rule; while simultaneously ostracizing and delegitimizing the political challenge of the externally-based liberation movements led by ZAPU and ZANU.

The chapter unveils that in most cases African Nationalists and guerrillas generally perceived African chiefs and headmen as ‘sell-outs’ because of their cooperation with the colonial regime and that they often became targets for armed attacks in their homesteads. It reveals how the chiefs generally found themselves in an unenviable political predicament during the war of liberation when they were torn apart in the struggle for the allegiance of the rural populace between the RSF and the guerrillas. It also shows that in many rural areas which were ‘liberated’ by the guerrilla forces during the war, the guerrillas supplanted the rural administrative tentacles of the settler state by rejecting the traditional authority of chiefs and headmen and replacing them with wartime village committees. The establishment of the alternative popular Village Committees posed a direct challenge to the legitimacy of both the chiefs and settler authority.<sup>211</sup> These Village Committees emerged mainly because many traditional leaders had become so unpopular as a result of their association with the government that they no longer commanded the respect of their people.

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<sup>211</sup>P. Nyambara, ‘Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District’, 26

The chapter argues, however, that the characterisation of chiefs and headmen as ‘sell-outs’ by the African Nationalists should be qualified because the position of chiefs during the liberation struggle was difficult due to the continual surveillance of their political activities by the colonial regime, which made open support for the Nationalists a very dangerous political choice. The obsessive Rhodesian documentation of chiefly histories, lineages and political activities that is evident in the monthly and annual reports of Native/District Commissioners kept by the National Archives of Zimbabwe bears testimony to this close surveillance of chiefs. Consequently, only a few chiefs such as Rekayi Tangwena and J.M. Mangwende dared to openly challenge the colonial regime in support of the Nationalist movements, and became agents of democratic transition. The rest of the chiefs opted for a more surreptitious political course, whereby, although apparently complying with colonial government policies, they used their newly acquired powers to undermine policy and further their own interests.<sup>212</sup>

### **Chieftaincy and Rural Local Government in Southern Rhodesia under the United Federal Party (U.F.P.), 1953-1962**

This section seeks to demonstrate how the institution of chieftaincy was consciously and systematically reconstructed by the colonial state in the 1950s and ‘60s in response to the emergence of nationalism in Southern Rhodesia. It reveals how the Chiefs’ Councils of the 1950s and 1960s became instruments of state power, and how the institution of chieftaincy became an entrenched organ of settler control in the rural areas. Faced with the upsurge in African Nationalist activity in this era, the settler regime strategically began to actively seek allies among the chiefs and to promote them as the true spokesmen for

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<sup>212</sup>J. Makumbe, ‘Local Authorities and Traditional Leadership’, 92; P. Nyambara, ‘Immigrants, “traditional” leaders and the Rhodesian state’, 780-787

the Africans in Rhodesia so as to undercut the growing influence of African nationalism. The challenge posed to white power by nationalism in the 1950s therefore significantly changed the relations between chiefs and the colonial state in Rhodesia.

During the greater duration of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953-1963), the territorial government of Southern Rhodesia was ruled by the United Federal Party (U.F.P.) under the Premiership of Garfield Stephen Todd (1953-1958) and then Edgar Whitehead (1958-1962), before it lost power to the RF in the general election of 1962, after which the RF oversaw the demise of the Federation. The era of the Federation coincided with the formative era of mass nationalism in Zimbabwe which witnessed the birth of the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC) in 1957, the National Democratic Party (NDP) in 1959, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in 1961, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in 1963.<sup>213</sup> This period recorded a significant turning point in the relations between the colonial state, chiefs, and the Nationalists, resulting in the rapid empowerment of chiefs in order to make them a bulwark to counter the influence of the Nationalists in the countryside.<sup>214</sup>

In the federal era the territorial government of Southern Rhodesia under the U.F.P. strove to retain control of the countryside by precluding African Nationalist penetration of the African Reserves and strengthened their alliance with African chiefs to secure their grip on the countryside. The forays of the African Nationalists into the countryside posed a very serious challenge to

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<sup>213</sup>J. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion* (London, Oxford University Press, 1967); J.R.T. Wood, *So Far and No Further: Rhodesia's Bid for Independence During the Retreat from Empire, 1959-1965* (Victoria BC, Trafford Publishing, 2005); J.R.T. Wood, *A Matter of Weeks Rather Than Months: The Impasse between Harold Wilson and Ian Smith; Sanctions, Aborted Settlements and War, 1965-1969* (Victoria BC, Trafford Publishing, 2008); W.J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21

<sup>214</sup>A.K.H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 10-19

Rhodesia's rural local administration because they brought intense pressure to bear against the white settlers' authority in the rural areas, and ultimately challenged the Rhodesian Native Affairs Department's longstanding mode of rule in the rural areas.<sup>215</sup> Sensing the threat to its control of the countryside, the Rhodesian state responded by declaring a nationwide State of Emergency in 1959, and the introduction of new legislation banning Nationalists from the SRANC from holding open meetings in the Reserves. This was enforced by sweeping army and police action in 1959 which closed off the African Reserves from all Nationalist political activity.<sup>216</sup> This action followed an incident in 1957 when the SRANC had managed to enter the African Reserves and successfully organized African resistance to the unpopular N LHA (1951), before its activities were discovered by the state. The Reserves were to remain legally closed to all the Nationalists from 1959 until the end of Rhodesia in 1979.<sup>217</sup>

Another aspect of the U.F.P.'s scheme to undercut the African Nationalist influence inside the country entailed the extension of the franchise to a limited number of moderate and conservative Africans inside the country so as to create the illusion of active African involvement in the electoral politics of Rhodesia. The scheme had two approaches. The first approach was to grant voters' rights to a limited African middle class to give the appearance of African political participation, but albeit within a political system where the franchise was manipulated to prevent jeopardizing white dominion. This middle-class strategy was associated with a highly restricted franchise and the idea that only "civilized and responsible" Africans, those with a certain

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<sup>215</sup> Nathan Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 31

<sup>216</sup> L. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia*, 51-58

<sup>217</sup> Nathan Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 31; Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 74

‘standard of sophistication and education’ should be allowed to vote.<sup>218</sup> This strategy also entailed the promotion of a limited number of moderate internal African parliamentary parties in order to counter any criticisms of African political exclusion by the radical, extra-parliamentary Nationalist parties (ZAPU and ZANU). However, many studies of Rhodesian electoral politics have unveiled a system that was predicated on discriminatory franchise legislation that effectively alienated the majority of Africans from established politics so as to guarantee the security of white power.<sup>219</sup>

The second part of this strategy focused on the promotion of the chiefs as the true spokesmen for all the Africans in Rhodesia and using them as a buffer against the spreading influence of the Nationalists in the Reserves. However, from the time the Federation was created in 1953, the territorial government of Southern Rhodesia had an uneasy relationship with the chiefs because the NLHA had largely disempowered the chiefs. Under this Act, chiefs lost their land allocation powers to the state which took over the responsibility of trying to arrest the deteriorating conditions and potential environmental disaster in the African Reserves.<sup>220</sup> The colonial state’s authoritarian implementation of the NLHA provoked African agitation against the Act in the Reserves which reinforced the growing Nationalist resistance against White rule.<sup>221</sup> Increasing African agitation against the NLHA contributed significantly to the restoration

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<sup>218</sup> L. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia*, 51-58;

<sup>219</sup> E. Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem: A Documentary Record 1923-1973*, 1975; H.P.W. Hutson, *Rhodesia: Ending an Era* (London, Springwood, 1978); C.C. Crocker, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe* (Washington D.C., Georgetown University, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1977); G.C. Kinloch, *Racial Conflict in Rhodesia: A Socio-Historical Study* (Washington, D.C., Univ. Press of America, 1978); P. O’Meara, *Rhodesia: Racial Conflict or Coexistence?* (Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1975); M. Hudson, *Triumph or Tragedy: Rhodesia to Zimbabwe* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1981); E. Dumbutshena, *Zimbabwe Tragedy* (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1975); P.L. Moorcraft, *A Short Thousand Years: The End of Rhodesia’s Rebellion* (Salisbury, Galaxie, 1979); M. Meredith, *The Past Is Another Country: Rhodesia 1898-1979* (London, Andre Deutsch, 1979).

<sup>220</sup> N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, *Community Development in Pre-Independence Zimbabwe*, 60

<sup>221</sup> J. Makumbe, *Democracy and Development in Zimbabwe*, 112

of the chiefs' land allocation powers at the end of the decade and the ultimate abandonment of the state's coercive environmental restoration measures.<sup>222</sup>

The origins of the environmental disaster in the Reserves can be traced back to the racial division of land by the Land Apportionment of 1930, which had resulted in the concentration of vast African populations and their livestock in relatively small Reserves that had limited agricultural potential. This had created very serious land shortages, in the Reserves. The agricultural crisis in the Reserves came to the fore in the 1940s, when the Rhodesian government's conservationists raised the alarm about rate at which the African Reserves were deteriorating due to land degradation. The conservationists' reports indicated that African agricultural production per person per unit piece of land was dwindling, resulting in frequent famines in the Reserves.<sup>223</sup> Ngwabi Bhebe has accurately documented the dismal conditions in the Reserves during the colonial period. He shows that by the 1940s many Reserves were showing signs of human and livestock overcrowding, leading to overgrazing, soil erosion and declining productivity.<sup>224</sup>

However, the colonial government chose to blame the environmental disaster in the Reserves on poor African farming methods, which it considered to be unscientific, wasteful, and destructive to the environment. Consequently the Native Land Husbandry Act aimed to 'provide for the control of the utilization and allocation of land occupied by natives and to ensure its efficient use for agricultural producers and to require the natives to perform labour for conserving natural resources'.<sup>225</sup> It was largely because of colonial

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<sup>222</sup> N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, *Community Development in Pre-Independence Zimbabwe*, 60

<sup>223</sup> Nathan Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 31; Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 74; E. Kushinga Makombe, 'Developing Rural Africa: Rural Development Discourse in Colonial Zimbabwe', 162-165

<sup>224</sup> Ngwabi Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 1-160

<sup>225</sup> E. Kushinga Makombe, 'Developing Rural Africa: Rural Development Discourse in Colonial Zimbabwe', 162-165



misconceptions of communal land tenure that the Southern Rhodesian government introduced the NLHA of 1951.

Essentially, the Act aimed to abolish what the Rhodesian authorities perceived as the ‘destructive’ communal land tenure system in the rural areas, and replacing it with individual land rights. Under this Act, rights of ownership to small plots of land in the Reserves were to be allocated to registered residents and colonial agricultural rules were to be enforced. It was hoped that once implemented, the traditional customs regarding land use and land transfer in African society would give way to market forces. As Yudelman pointed out, “The use of land was to be regulated in accordance with the economic principles in practice elsewhere in the capitalist world”.<sup>226</sup> Colonial values that associated private property regimes with better management of arable land and improved productivity sought to replace communal land tenure in the Reserves.

The implementation of the NLHA was greatly accelerated in 1955 and aroused great African opposition between 1956 and 1961. However, because the environmental restoration enacted by the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) entailed the destruction of African capital (e.g. destocking), and was carried out in a highly authoritarian manner, it was stiffly opposed in the Reserves.<sup>227</sup> During the federal period, the UFP government of Sir Edgar Whitehead found itself grappling with a rural administrative system on the verge of collapse mainly due to rising rural discontent with the (NLHA) and Nationalist opposition. There were pressures upon the Native Affairs Department to carry out a major overhaul and reorientation of rural African

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<sup>226</sup> M. Yudelman, *Africans on the Land* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1964) 236-7

<sup>227</sup> I. Scoones and F. Matose, “Local woodland management: constraints and opportunities for sustainable resource use” in P.N. Bradley et. al. (eds.) *Living With Trees: Policies for Woodland Management in Zimbabwe* (Washington D.C., World Bank, 1993, 157-198

Administration. Confronted with growing African agitation in the Reserves due to opposition to the NLHA, which was beginning to feed into the growing Nationalist movement and helping to fan resistance against White rule, the colonial government was forced to abandon its coercive environmental restoration measures and restore of the chiefs' land allocation powers at the end of the decade.<sup>228</sup> The widespread rural opposition to the NLHA led to its abandonment in 1962. At the time of the suspension of the NLHA in 1962 due to African opposition, it had only been implemented in 42% of the Reserves.<sup>229</sup>

It is clear that it was the failure of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 that played a key role in the return of chiefs' traditional powers over the allocation of land, and powers to try civil and some limited criminal cases in the 1960s. The NLHA failed both because the African population in the Reserves was far too large for the economic utilization of the land to be possible, and also because there was never any serious attempt to provide permanent homes in the urban areas for those Africans who had left the Reserves as 'migrants', upon which the success of the NLHA had critically depended.<sup>230</sup> The Rhodesian state's retreat from its authoritarian attempts at technical restructuring of African agriculture and rural society by abandoning the NLHA in 1962 was a significant turning point in relations between the state and chiefs in that it began a flow back towards empowering traditional leadership of rural communities.<sup>231</sup> After the failure of the NLHA and its replacement by the Tribal Trust Lands Act of 1967, the colonial state began to stress the power of 'communal' land tenure, in part, in order to shift the

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<sup>228</sup> J. Makumbe, *Democracy and Development in Zimbabwe*, 111-112

<sup>229</sup> P. Nyambara, 'Immigrants, 'Traditional' Leaders and the Rhodesian State, 781

<sup>230</sup> Victor E.M. Machingaidze, 'Agrarian Change from above: The Southern Rhodesia Native Land Husbandry Act and African Response', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1991, 557-588

<sup>231</sup> J. Makumbe, *Democracy and Development in Zimbabwe*, 112

responsibility for land shortages in rural areas from the state to traditional leaders. The occupation and use of land in the tribal areas became vested in Tribal Land Authorities (TLAs) which were headed by chiefs and administered land in accordance with ‘tribal custom’.<sup>232</sup>

The Nationalist challenge to white minority rule prompted the Rhodesian government’s decision to restore the chiefs’ powers in the later years of the UFP administration, viz. from the late 1950s to 1962, because the state wanted to increase its grip on the rural areas and shut out the political activities of Nationalists in the Reserves. From the late 1950s, the U.F.P. government began courting chiefs through a variety of incentives, empowerment measures and concessions. In 1957 the African Councils Act was passed by the U.F.P. government, which broadened the mandate of African Councils to include powers to make bye-laws and collect rates. Through this empowerment the Chiefs’ Council came to wield powers similar to those of a Town Council.<sup>233</sup>

In the same year, the chiefs’ allowances got a hefty increase. In 1958 the government organised a joy plane-ride for all chiefs around the country which flew over all the major cities and took the chiefs to see the new hydro-electric project at the Kariba Dam site which had just been completed. At the government’s invitation, the chiefs also attended the opening of Parliament in 1958. Later in the same year, the chiefs toured the new University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which had admitted its first intake of students in

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<sup>232</sup>P. Nyambara, ‘Immigrants, ‘Traditional’ Leaders and the Rhodesian State, 780-787

<sup>233</sup>N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, Decentralization and Local Government Administration: An Analysis of Structural and Planning Problems at the Rural District in A.H.J. Helmsing (ed.) *Limits to Decentralization in Zimbabwe: Essays on the Decentralization of Government and Planning in the 1980s* (Hague, Institute of Social Sciences, 1991)

1957.<sup>234</sup> In return, the chiefs openly expressed their support of the U.F.P government against the African Nationalists.

This massive rise in the position of African chiefs in Rhodesia in the 1950s was spurred by the U.F.P. government's efforts to use them to achieve total control of the rural populace and deny the Nationalists access to the peasantry.<sup>235</sup> However, despite all these efforts by the U.F.P. regime, the political influence of the African Nationalists continued to increase in the countryside. In 1961 the Secretary for Native Affairs reported that many chiefs had been singled out for specific attack by the Nationalists during the year, and gave an example of Chief Charewa of Mutoko who had died as a result of an arson attack on his homestead on 18 October 1961. The Secretary for Native Affairs lamented that 'The murder of this young and able chief ...who had achieved prominence in the Council of Chiefs...shocked the whole country'.<sup>236</sup>

### **Chieftaincy and Rural Local Government under the RF Regime, 1962-1979**

By the time Ian Douglas Smith's RF regime came to power in 1962, the institution of chieftaincy had long become an entrenched organ of settler control in the rural areas under the previous U.F.P. administration (1953-1962). However, there was a significant shift of focus by the RF from the dualistic strategy that had been pursued by the U.F.P. regime under David Whitehead (i.e. the combined strategy of granting a limited franchise to a small number of the African middle-class on one hand; with the

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<sup>234</sup> A.K.H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 69-72

<sup>235</sup> A.K.H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 69-72; J.F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118

<sup>236</sup> Secretary for Native Affairs, Native Affairs Annual Report 1961, in *NADA*, Vol. 40, 1963, 104

empowerment of chiefs, on the other) to solely focusing on the courtship of chiefs, and promoting them to be the only true African spokesmen. The political strategy of the RF government was focused on combating the growth of African nationalism and the threat of guerrilla war in the country, through a combined strategy of outlawing all the African Nationalist movements and detaining their leadership; while actively seeking allies among the chiefs.<sup>237</sup>

The RF party was formed in 1962 as a right-wing, exclusively white party, and acceded to power in the 1962 general election, ending a generation of rule by the U.F.P. It won the elections on a platform policy of ‘Separate Development’ for the races of the country, and a commitment to attaining Rhodesian independence from Britain. Once in power, the RF moved quickly to reverse the policies of non-racialism espoused by the previous U.F.P. government, e.g. the ‘partnership policy’, favouring instead the Separate Development of the races.<sup>238</sup> The preamble to a document published by the party in September 1973, outlining the policies and principles to which the RF was committed, stated clearly that;

The RF recognizes that the members of each racial group are desirous of preserving their own identities, traditions, customs and ways of life. Respecting these differences, the RF introduced the 1969 Constitution and the Land Tenure Act. This legislation affords the opportunity to each race to develop to its fullest extent in its own Area and in accordance with its own social structure, without intrusion upon its privacy and rights by any other race. It will set the example by

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<sup>237</sup> Elaine Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem*, 123

<sup>238</sup> James Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 223.

providing separate facilities for the different races in State Offices and Institutions.<sup>239</sup>

As a virtually exclusive white party that was committed to defending Europeans' rights and privileges, the RF aimed to retain the spatial separation of the races under the existing racial land division of the LAA 1930 and resisted all motions in Parliament to repeal this Act. Consequently, the RF's relations with Africans were shaped by this strong commitment to retain a bifurcated society, broadly divided along racial lines into White 'citizens', who were deemed more human, and the broad masses of 'native' 'subjects', who were less human and were granted a limited franchise.<sup>240</sup> According to James Barber, the decision to retain the LAA 1930 implied that, although the races of Rhodesia would continue to work together, they would live in separate areas, and therefore would develop and be governed in distinct ways.<sup>241</sup>

This bifurcation of Rhodesian society by the Land Apportionment Act was strongly supported by William Harper, who was Minister of Internal Affairs under the RF government and was a well-known strong believer in the Separate Development of the races of Rhodesia as being part of an evolutionary process.<sup>242</sup> On 6 October 1964, he affirmed his dualist beliefs in the Legislature where he maintained that, "so long as there is a Land Apportionment Act there will be a tendency that Africans will run their part of the country and the Europeans substantially run their part".<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>239</sup>THE RHODESIAN FRONT, *Principles and Policies*, Salisbury, September 1973

<sup>240</sup> James Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 223-224; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Oxford, James Currey, 1996); Bridget O'Laughlin, 'Class and the Customary: The Ambiguous Legacy of the *Indigenato* in Mozambique', *African Affairs* (2000), 99, 5-42

<sup>241</sup>J. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 223

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 224

<sup>243</sup>Government of Southern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly, *Hansard*, 6 Oct. 1964, Column 1291

In 1969 Smith's RF government was heavily criticised by the Forum Party and the Centre Party for its adherence to the policy of Separate Development. Smith responded to the criticism by making an evening radio broadcast on Friday 13 December 1969, in which he defended the policy of Separate Development. In the radio broadcast Smith denied accusations that Rhodesia's policy of Separate Development was like the policies of racial partition which were conducted in South Africa, India and Israel. He brushed aside such criticisms as deliberate "distortions and exaggerations" by Rhodesia's detractors.<sup>244</sup> Smith went on to defend the policy of Separate Development of the races of Rhodesia by arguing that it was a unique solution that prevented conflict between the races, and it had been endorsed by the British Government. He historicized the adoption of this policy by noting that it dated back to the Two-Pyramid policy that had been adopted by Godfrey Huggins's government during the era of Responsible Government. Smith added that the Two-Pyramid policy itself had been founded on the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which had created separate areas of settlement for Africans. He concluded that all that his Rhodesia Front Government had done was to adopt Huggins's policy and rename it 'Community Development'.<sup>245</sup>

From its assumption of power in 1962, one thing above all others stood out in the RF's policy of African administration, and that was the increase in the powers, prestige, and rewards of the chiefs. In 1963, the Minister of Internal Affairs, John Howman, told the Legislative Assembly that

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<sup>244</sup> J.R.T. Wood, *A Matter of Weeks Rather Than Months: The Impasse between Harold Wilson and Ian Smith*, 619

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

“Our whole purpose is to try to restore the power and authority of the chiefs as the head of the community in matters religious or spiritual and judicial and in the allocation of land”.<sup>246</sup>

Although Howman’s statement implied an enhanced importance of the chiefs’ traditional role only, there were indications that the RF government actually intended to extend the chiefs’ powers even further than their traditional role.

The RF government wielded considerable influence and power over chiefs and for any African to be regarded as a chief came to depend upon government approval. This power of the government over African chiefs was clearly spelt out and underlined in the Native Affairs Act of 1927 which stated that; ‘The chief in charge of a tribe shall be appointed by the Governor and shall hold office during his pleasure and contingent upon good behaviour and general fitness’.<sup>247</sup> Even succession disputes in many chieftaincies were now settled with the arbitration of the District Commissioner and not spirit mediums as in the past. One consequence of this power of the District Commissioner was that customary succession to chieftainship was violated. Barber cites evidence showing that in the 1960s three of the seven Ndebele chiefs that sat on the Chiefs’ Council were not customary heirs to the chieftainship but had been appointed at the pleasure of the colonial government. He cites the case of Chief Simon Sigola who had succeeded to a chieftainship that had been virtually created for his father because of his good service as a government messenger.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly *Hansard*, 29 August 1963, Cols. 185-6

<sup>247</sup> Native Affairs Act, 1927; Robert I. Rotberg, *Suffer the Future: Policy Choices in Southern Africa* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1980) 236

<sup>248</sup> J. Barber, *Rhodesia. The Road to Rebellion*, 233



Consequently, whereas in the past, and according to traditional custom, the power of traditional leaders had emanated from the people in keeping with their culture and beliefs, now this power was going to emanate from Parliament. In the political circumstances that emerged in the 1960s, characterized by the growth of Black Nationalism and the threat of guerrilla war, the beleaguered RF regime manipulated African chieftainship to secure its control over the rural populace so much that they no longer acted as true traditional leaders but largely as mere extensions of INTAF.<sup>249</sup>

From the time that Smith assumed the premiership of Rhodesia in 1964, his overarching aim was to prevent black rule in Rhodesia by bulldozing Britain to quickly grant his minority regime independence in order to avert the inevitability of majority rule by universal suffrage. His strategy for getting independence from Britain was two-pronged, either through negotiations or, if that proved impossible, through a unilateral declaration of independence. Smith had entertained hopes of achieving independence from Britain by consent, through talks, although the possibility of unilateral action had remained on the table, as a last resort. This strategy for Rhodesia's road to independence is clearly outlined in his memoirs published in 2008, entitled *Bitter Harvest*, where he states categorically that,

it was clearly necessary for me to go through all the actions of trying to reach agreement with the British. Obviously, this was our first choice, with the alternative of unilateral action as a last resort, and only after we were satisfied that all other possible avenues had failed.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup>Elaine Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem*, 123

<sup>250</sup>Ian Smith, *Bitter Harvest. Zimbabwe and the Aftermath of its Independence*, (London, John Blake, 2008)

As had been the case with the U.F.P. in the 1950s, Smith's strategy also granted African chiefs official recognition as the only true representatives of African opinion in the country who deserved to be consulted in negotiations with Britain over Rhodesia's bid for independence, not the Nationalists. From the time the RF assumed power, its government frequently turned to the Council of Chiefs to elicit manifestations of African support for its actions. However, Smith clearly had no intention of consulting the leadership of the African Nationalist parties and firmly held the view that the chiefs were the true spokesmen for all the Africans in the country, and not the Nationalists. Consequently, the RF regime adopted a strategy of undercutting support for the Nationalists, while simultaneously promoting the African chiefs and headmen as the only true representatives of the African people.<sup>251</sup>

The implementation of this strategy brought intensified repression of the Nationalist organizations in the country, coupled with an acceleration of the RF government's political courtship of the African chiefs in the 'Tribal Trust Lands' (TTLs) in an attempt to stem the Nationalist tide that was swirling in the countryside. The implementation of this strategy saw the declaration of a State of Emergency in August 1964, which resulted in the incarceration of more than 600 supporters, and most of the leadership of the Nationalist parties. This was quickly followed in October 1964 by the banning of ZANU and the People's Caretaker Council (PCC) which was the successor to the banned.<sup>252</sup> By courting African chiefs instead of the new African Nationalist leaders and their organizations, the Smith's regime wanted to demonstrate that the chiefs represented the true views of Africans in Rhodesia, and that the

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<sup>251</sup> Judith Todd, *An Act of Treason: Rhodesia 1965* (Harare, Longman, 1982) 122

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 132

Nationalist leaders were ‘aberrant, educated upstarts, subverted by the Communists and supported by thugs and hooligans’.<sup>253</sup>

After the collapse of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1963, Smith flew to London on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1964 to press further for Rhodesia to be granted independence under white minority rule. In the meeting that he held with the British Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas Home on Monday, 7 September 1964, Ian Smith told the British Government that he was confident that ‘the greater majority of the African population’ supported the Rhodesian government’s wish to achieve independence on the basis of the 1961 Constitution, and that he felt confident that an indaba to assess African opinion through the traditional leaders, the chiefs and headmen, would yield a majority of at least 75%, perhaps 90%, in favour of independence.<sup>254</sup> He also informed the British government that only the opinion of the rural Africans through their chiefs would be sought, and that the urban Africans would not be consulted, adding that Africans who lived in the urban areas would be ignored. According to Ian Smith, the Africans in the urban areas had had the opportunity to enrol on the ‘B’ roll of the voters’ register so that they could vote on the issue but had refused to do so. As a result, they did not deserve to be consulted. Smith also told the British government that only the urban Africans supported the African Nationalist movement.<sup>255</sup>

In his response, the British Premier expressed strong reservations about Smith’s method of gauging African opinion on the issue of Rhodesia’s independence and made it clear that the methods Smith proposed to use in gauging African opinion were quite inadequate. Douglas-Home said he did not believe that an indaba of the chiefs and headmen would convince the

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<sup>253</sup> Julie Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 75

<sup>254</sup> J. Todd, *An Act of Treason: Rhodesia 1965*, 101, 122

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 122

world that the African people as a whole supported Smith's claim for independence.<sup>256</sup> However, once back in Rhodesia, Smith and the RF's presentation of the outcome of the September London talks with Home was strategically interpreted as a promise of independence if the Rhodesian government could demonstrate African acceptance of independence on the basis of the 1961 Constitution. Smith made no mention of the British government's reservations about his consultative method which focused on traditional leaders only.<sup>257</sup>

In the two months following the September London talks there was a flurry of political activity in Rhodesia as Smith moved with speed to orchestrate an *indaba* ('council') of African chiefs and headmen that would demonstrate African approval. The strategy of the RF government was to attempt to stampede the British government to grant Rhodesia independence before Christmas 1964. Smith himself was quoted as saying "Let our united aim be – Independence by Christmas 1964".<sup>258</sup>

On October 14, 1964 Smith notified the British High Commissioner in Salisbury of the planned *indaba* and asked the British government to send observers to the *indaba* proceedings. The British government declined to send observers, underlining its desire for an expanded consultation process that included representatives from the Nationalist parties. The British communication that was sent to the Rhodesian government declining the invitation noted that sending British observers to the *indaba*,

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<sup>256</sup> J. Todd, *An Act of Treason: Rhodesia 1965*, 123, 196; J. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 258, 262.

<sup>257</sup> J. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 258-259.

<sup>258</sup> Government of Southern Rhodesia, *Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. 58, 9 September 15, 1964, 279-280; L. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia*, 72

might be interpreted as implying a commitment on the part of the British Government to accepting your consultation as representing the opinion of the people as a whole”.<sup>259</sup>

This British response angered the RF government which, as shown above, had no wish of consulting the Nationalists, and had conveniently locked them away in its prisons two months earlier, in August 1964, during a crackdown on African nationalists in the African townships of Salisbury.<sup>260</sup> As shown above, this strategic suppression of Nationalist opinion in the country was pursued simultaneously with the strategy of empowering African chiefs and headmen in the TTLs so as to secure white power.<sup>261</sup>

The appointment of William Harper as Minister of Internal Affairs was one huge step towards the fulfilment of this strategy. Harper was a renowned racist, ultra-right-winger, and a leading spokesman for white supremacy who was opposed to any kind of African Parliamentary representation.<sup>262</sup> As shown above, he was also a firm believer in the political and spatial bifurcation of the races of Rhodesia, and a key architect of the RF’s policy of actively seeking allies among the chiefs and promoting them as the true spokesmen for the Africans, as part of its two-pronged strategy to undercut the African Nationalists. Smith is known to have relied greatly on the staff of INTAF who claimed to know the thinking of the African people. They generally regarded themselves as the “African experts”. Many of Smith’s decisions between 1964 and 1979, when he was faced with growing African

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<sup>259</sup>J. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 262; Government of Zimbabwe, *The Domboshawa Indaba*, (Salisbury, Government Printer, 1965) 10; *Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. 58, 9 September 15, 1964) 279-280; L. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia*, 72;

<sup>260</sup>J. Todd, *An Act of Treason: Rhodesia 1965*, 132

<sup>261</sup>Tor Sellstrom, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa: Solidarity and Assistance: A Concerned Partnership, 1970-1994* (Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, December 1999) 305

<sup>262</sup>R. K. Rasmussen. *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 112

nationalism and the guerrilla war, were made under influence of these ‘African experts’.<sup>263</sup>

To convince Britain that the African population supported Rhodesia’s demand for independence, INTAF convened a meeting of some 600 chiefs and headmen from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 1964 at Domboshawa School, outside Salisbury, for a five-day long *indaba* to discuss the issue “according to tribal custom and tradition”.<sup>264</sup> The *indaba* was not publicly announced until it opened on October 21, 1964 because of fears that supporters of the nationalism movements would disrupt the proceedings. The proceedings of the *indaba* were closed to the press and the area was sealed off by military forces. At intervals, the chiefs were subjected to Rhodesian propaganda and awed by the army and air force displays of Rhodesian military power, which were euphemistically presented as ‘entertainment’.<sup>265</sup>

William Harper, the Minister of Internal Affairs, personally oversaw the proceedings of the *indaba*, at the end of which the traditional leaders announced their unanimous endorsement of the Rhodesian government’s plans for UDI.<sup>266</sup> The patronizing presence of William Harper at the Domboshawa *indaba* undoubtedly weighed in heavily on the outcome of the consultative process. This was hardly surprising as the chiefs were dependent on the government for their own power, and their salaries. Even Sir Godfrey Huggins, former Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, said the *indaba* was a ‘swindle’.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup>H. Ellert, *The RF War: Counter-insurgency and guerrilla warfare, 1962-1980* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1989) 15

<sup>264</sup>Tor Sellstrom, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, 305; J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 77; K. R. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 78

<sup>265</sup>Julie Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 77

<sup>266</sup> Assa Okoth, *A History of Africa: African Nationalism and the Decolonisation Process, 1915-1995*, vol. 2, (Nairobi, East African Educational Publisher, 2006) 135; K. R. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 78; Julie Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 77

<sup>267</sup>J. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 230-32

The RF's strategy of hiding behind chiefs and utilizing their traditional powers to back its policies drew a lot of criticism from different quarters both inside and outside Rhodesia. Inside Rhodesia it drew criticism from academics at the local university, some officers within the INTAF who thought the whole strategy was ill-advised, and African Nationalist movements. The colonial government's decision to recognize chiefs as the main representative organ of African opinion and a channel for the implementation of government policy had generated severe criticism even under the previous U.F.P. administration, but the critical voices reached a crescendo during the RF's Domboshawa indaba.<sup>268</sup>

Part of the criticism focused on the hereditary nature of the chief's office, the extent of its traditional powers over an African society that was in rapid transformation and had undergone enormous changes within the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the degree to which it could be familiar with or was even in contact with contemporary African opinion. Questions were raised whether it could be regarded as a representative voice on such contemporary issues as independence.<sup>269</sup> On 22 September 1964 a group of sociologists and anthropologists from the local university published an article in the *Rhodesia Herald* criticizing the RF government's method of testing African opinion on contemporary national problems such as independence through chiefs noting that, "In Southern Rhodesia Africans are no longer organized solely on the basis of a tribal system", and that approximately half of the adult African population no longer lived within a 'tribal system', but lived and worked 'outside the tribal areas at any one time'. They concluded that 'African opinion on the national issue of independence cannot be tested within the

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<sup>268</sup>*The Rhodesia Herald*, 22 September 1964; J. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 230-32; Government of Zimbabwe, *The Domboshawa Indaba*, 34

<sup>269</sup>J. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 230-32

framework of this system'.<sup>270</sup>

Another criticism, which had also first surfaced during the U.F.P. days but had become amplified by the events of the mid-1960s surrounding the RF's Domboshawa indaba, questioned how the chiefs could reconcile their increasing administrative role and new civil service functions, with their claim to represent African, and not government, opinion. This problem was stressed in parliament in 1963 by Dr. Ahrn Palley, a radical Independent Member of the Legislative Assembly who had a history of fighting solo battles against government's policies since the days of the United Federal Party (U.F.P.) government. He argued that chiefs were no more than government puppets because they were dependent on the government for their salaries and allowances, and that 'it would be a brave chief who would run counter to Government political policies and express them independently'.<sup>271</sup>

Nevertheless, the criticism did not deter the RF government from its strategy of placing emphasis on the chiefs in its African administration. In 1965 the government reiterated its stance that chiefs, and chiefs alone, could represent African opinion, and that they were the sole voice of African aspiration. The government responded to the criticism of its consultative method by arguing that most Africans still lived in a communal, 'tribal' community, therefore they required a different approach of consultation from the individualistic European.<sup>272</sup> Therefore it was better to consult the chiefs because they had 'time-honoured methods of sounding opinion' and could speak out not only for themselves but for all the Africans. A post-indaba booklet published by the government in 1965 entitled *The Domboshawa Indaba* quoted one African chief saying;

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<sup>270</sup>*The Rhodesia Herald*, 22 September 1964

<sup>271</sup>Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly, *Hansard*, 27 August 1963, col. 184

<sup>272</sup>Government of Zimbabwe, *The Domboshawa Indaba*, 34



According to our custom it is not permissible for such an important matter [independence] to be discussed by youngsters [a condescending reference to Nationalists]. We are the right people who should discuss the important matters in connection with this land. Many people say that it is not proper that we, the tribal leaders, should become involved in politics, but we always had the power to govern. These people who have so much to say are the youngsters.<sup>273</sup>

Another chief quoted in the long report on the proceedings of the Domboshawa *indaba* could not even brook the idea of traditional leaders and the Nationalists being invited to sit at the same table in negotiations with the British government. The chief is quoted saying;

If they expect us to sit at the same conference table as these upstart children of ours, we will dismiss these children because it is not our custom to discuss matters of importance with minors”.<sup>274</sup>

During the course of the *Indaba* Smith's government reiterated its stance on its preferred method of consulting African political opinion on national issues, noting that, it considered chiefs and headmen to be their true spokesmen. It noted that this recognition of tribal leaders and acceptance of the principle of consulting them on important matters had a long and unbroken history that dated back to the pacification of the Ndebele and Shona insurgencies in the late 1890s. In a White Paper that it circulated in, the Smith regime maintained that;

Consultation goes back to the famous *indaba* held by Rhodes in the

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<sup>273</sup> Government of Zimbabwe, *The Domboshawa Indaba*, 34

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

Matopos Hills, when agreement was reached to terminate the rebellion...The Rhodesian government accepts the indaba system as a more appropriate method of ascertaining the views of the mass of tribal Africans than alien practices which the British government and others desire to force the people to accept in the guise of 'the vote.'<sup>275</sup>

The RF government's choice of chiefs for consultation on matters African independence was politically convenient to because it was guaranteed of the chiefs' support on all matters since they on its payroll. In late October 1965, on the eve of the pronouncement of UDI, a group of 30 senior chiefs were sent by the Council of Chiefs to make the case for independence in London. The British Prime Minister however chose to meet them informally, emphasizing that his sole purpose was just to gather information on the political situation in Rhodesia. Dressed in their formal colonial regalia of red gowns and white pith helmets, the chiefs made a detailed presentation on the nature of the institution of chieftaincy and that they perceived their role as partners with the RF government as that of preserving law and order in the country. They also claimed that, as natural hereditary leaders, they represented every African in Rhodesia.<sup>276</sup>

It became evident that the entourage of chiefs were mere mouthpieces of the RF government in its last-ditch attempt to achieve independence from Britain by consent, through talks, without resorting to UDI, and had been sent to London to showcase support for the RF claims that they had the support of most of the Africans in the country. The chiefs made a case for Rhodesia's independence based on the 1961 Constitution and indicated that they were in favour of the Constitution because it had created the Constitutional Council

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<sup>275</sup>Julie Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 77

<sup>276</sup>J.R.T. Wood, *So Far and No Further: Rhodesia and the Retreat from Empire*, 243

(on which chiefs sat in an advisory capacity) and the Council of Chiefs. Significantly, the chiefs expressed their opposition to the African Nationalist leaders, who they condescendingly viewed as ‘youngsters’, and rejected the idea of a referendum of all African voters on the question of independence based on ‘one man, one vote’.<sup>277</sup>

Commenting on the reasons given by the chiefs for rejecting a universal referendum, Woods notes that, ‘They rejected ‘one man, one vote’, not just because of the multi-racial nature of Rhodesian society, but since its implementation would signal the departure of the Whites and the killing of Africans as had happened in Kenya and the Congo. One prominent opponent of the principle of ‘one man, one vote’ who was in this entourage was Chief Khayisa Ndiweni, whom Smith was to later appoint to a Cabinet post because of his loyalty. Chief Khayisa Ndiweni argued that if the British Government granted ‘one man, one vote’ it would be as unkind an act ‘as a man who casts a meatless bone for hungry dogs to fight over’. The chiefs also deplored the African Nationalists for recruiting youths for military training outside the country.’<sup>278</sup>

The alliance between Ian Smith’s regime and African chiefs can be understood in the context of the threat posed by African Nationalist movements to the authority of both the traditional African elite (i.e. chiefs and headmen) and the colonial regime. To the traditional African elite of chiefs and headmen, the emergence of the African Nationalist movements in the 1950s had given birth to an alternative source of elected African leadership that not only competed with the hereditary nature of chieftainship, but also had the capacity to garner mass support that transcended the boundaries of

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<sup>277</sup>J.R.T. Wood, *So Far and No Further: Rhodesia and the Retreat from Empire*, 243

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

chiefdoms. In the political circumstances of the 1960s, characterized by the growth of African Nationalism and the threat of guerrilla war, the new African political leaders and their organizations began questioning the authority of the chiefs in the rural areas, and in many ways, posed the same threat to white power as to the traditional chiefs and headmen.<sup>279</sup> Consequently, the majority of African chiefs were opposed to the Nationalist movements and the guerrilla war, because they feared a radical change of the political landscape and the erosion of their power in the event of a Nationalist victory. A key example of this opposition is provided by Chief Jeremiah Chirau who was a staunch supporter of the colonial regime of Ian Smith and was widely known to be opposed to the guerrilla war.<sup>280</sup>

To the colonial regime, the demand by African Nationalists for an unrestricted franchise based on the principle of ‘one man, one vote’, threatened to end white minority rule. In a bid to maintain white domination of the country, both the UFP government of David Whitehead and the RF government of Ian Smith, strove to deny Africans universal suffrage in order to prevent them from attaining majority rule. Consequently, from the advent of mass nationalism in the early 1950s, until the end of white power in 1979, African political participation in Rhodesia was characterized by discriminatory franchise legislation that alienated most of the Africans from established politics and granted voters’ rights to a limited African middle class in the so-called ‘B’ Voter’s Roll, in order to ensure that white dominion was not jeopardized. This African political exclusion in the internal electoral politics of Rhodesia, coupled with the highly repressive legislative, judicial and police apparatus that frequently imprisoned and detained African Nationalists, was

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<sup>279</sup>J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 75-6

<sup>280</sup>Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ‘The Last Days of Rhodesia and Transitional Politics in Zimbabwe, 1977-1980’, in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Godfrey T. Ncube, *Aspects of Zimbabwe’s Past: Slavery, Famine, The Transition to Colonial Modernity, And Postcolonial Developments* (Unpublished Manuscript, Forthcoming, 2019)

designed to ensure that Africans would never achieve majority rule. Smith himself famously declared in 1976 that he did not ‘believe in black majority rule ever in Rhodesia . . . not in 1000 years.’<sup>281</sup>

The RF’s policy of undermining the Nationalist movement and refusing to consult the Nationalist leaders on the question of independence provided indubitable evidence to the Nationalists that the chiefs were mere puppets of the RF government. However, Smith and the RF’s self-delusion that the chiefs were the only true spokesmen for all the Africans in the country was rudely refuted when thirty African chiefs who had gone to London to argue the case for independence, were dismayed by the refusal of the British Prime Minister to enter into talks with them, preferring to meet instead with the Nationalist leaders of ZAPU, Joshua Nkomo, and ZANU, Ndabaningi Sithole.<sup>282</sup>

In a secret memorandum entitled ‘Tribal Organisation’ and dated 27 February 1961, the Native Commissioner of Rusape, L. G. Ross underscored the common sense of vulnerability felt by the traditional authorities and the settler administration in the face of the growing influence of the African Nationalists in the 1960s. He noted that;

Their [the chiefs] attitude is a conservative one and up to now their loyalty to Government has been staunch. They realize that without the support and backing of our administration, the Nationalist extremists would campaign fiercely in the tribal areas and would endeavour to undermine their authority in every field and so bring our administrative machine to a standstill. That would mean their death knell and the breakup of all tribal unity, loyalty and structure. They are opposed to

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<sup>281</sup>*The Sunday Mail*, 21 March 1976

<sup>282</sup>J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 75-6

the native politician being permitted into the rural areas because they know that their (communist) objective is to destroy tribal control and cohesion.<sup>283</sup>

Elsewhere in the same memorandum, Ross wrote;

The only bulwark still standing between the black extremists in the urban areas of Southern Rhodesia, and the conservative African peasantry of the rural areas, is the present administration by the Native Department which itself depends on the cooperation of the traditional tribal leaders. If their loyalty and allegiance is lost, then they themselves and our Administration will crash around us. If we fail to hold the two millions of rural Africans to the tribal loyalties, we lose the conservative portion of our African population – the people whom the black Nationalists, under Communist guidance, are endeavouring to subvert to their own advantage.<sup>284</sup>

Because of the common threat that the traditional leaders faced with the settler administration from the Nationalists that sought to undermine both the authority and legitimacy of the chiefs and the settler administration, the chiefs became unwavering supporters of the government against the African Nationalists.<sup>285</sup> The colonial regime and African chiefs had a shared interest in undercutting the African Nationalists by increasing the powers of chiefs and promoting the view that the traditional elites of chiefs and headmen were

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<sup>283</sup> NC Rusape, Secret Memorandum entitled 'Tribal Organisation', 27 February 1961, reproduced in G.C. Passmore, *Hidden Conflict*, 156-159

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> E. Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem*, 123

the true representatives of African opinion, while portraying the Nationalists as Communist-inspired trouble-makers.<sup>286</sup>

In July 1965 Harper reported to the Legislative Assembly that the chiefs' administrative and advisory functions had been extended, their authority over the allocation and use of land had been restored, they had been provided with special chief's messengers to assist them, and that there were plans to introduce direct representation of chiefs in Parliament. Harper also revealed that several chiefs had been appointed to important Councils and Boards, such as the Constitutional Court, and that the Chiefs' Council had been made a government advisory body.<sup>287</sup> In the period between 1963 and 1965, Rhodesia witnessed a massive elevation of the chiefs' position.<sup>288</sup>

On the other hand, the general feeling among the Zimbabwean Nationalists at the time was that, because chieftaincy had been appropriated by colonialism, it was therefore doomed to die with colonialism and would even be abolished in the postcolonial era.<sup>289</sup> Commenting on the appropriation of chieftaincy by the RF regime, the Deputy President of the African National Council, and prominent Nationalist of the time, Canaan Banana, wrote in an article that appeared in *Moto* magazine on 26 August 1972 that;

The truth of the matter is that in Rhodesia, and unfortunately, the role of the chiefs has long been seriously negated to the extent that they no longer act as true traditional leaders but have, by and large, become mere extensions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>286</sup>J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 75-76

<sup>287</sup>Government of Southern Rhodesia, *SRLA Hansard*, 23 July 1965, col. 1341; Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion*, 230

<sup>288</sup>A.K.H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 20

<sup>289</sup>Pius Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District, 20-41

<sup>290</sup>C. Banana, 'Provincialization: Rhodesia Front Design for Deepening Apartheid', *Moto*, 26 August 1972: Document 22 in E. Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem. A Documentary Record 1923-1973* (London,

Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain on 11 November 1965 isolated it from the outside world for its last 15 years (1965-1979) and created a legitimization crisis on the domestic scene.<sup>291</sup> The last days of Rhodesia were characterized by dying settler colonialism under the threat of the swirling Nationalist tide. In the efforts to counteract growing nationalism in the post UDI period, chiefs were reinvested with two imperative powers that had been lost under conquest and came to feature prominently in Rhodesia's domestic politics as the internationally isolated Rhodesian Front government strove to shore up its legitimacy on the domestic front.<sup>292</sup> The Tribal Trust Land Act of 1967 gave the powers to chiefs to allocate land, and the African Law and Tribal Courts Act of 1969 gave chiefs the powers to judge civil and certain criminal cases. The Rhodesian Front government underlined that local government in Rhodesia was very much part of the 'traditional tribal government'.<sup>293</sup> It has been observed that the transfer of authority over land allocation from the District Commissioner to traditional leaders under the TTLA (1967) was partly in order to shift the responsibility for land shortages in rural areas from the state to traditional leaders.

The TTLA emphasized the power of 'communal' land tenure and the role of traditional leaders in community development and helped to consolidate the power and prestige gains by the chiefs of colonial Rhodesia.<sup>294</sup> In terms of the TTLA, the occupation and use of land in the tribal areas vested in tribal land authorities comprising the chief of the area and other 'tribesmen' nominated by him in accordance with 'tribal custom'. The tribal customs referred to were a colonial invention of tradition and customs because the idea of 'traditional'

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Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975) 123

<sup>291</sup> H. Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War*, 124

<sup>292</sup> N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, *Community Development in Pre-Independence Zimbabwe*, 60; J.F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118

<sup>293</sup> M. Bratton, *Beyond Community Development* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1978) 26

<sup>294</sup> John Makumbe, *Democracy and Development in Zimbabwe*, 112



land tenure was largely a colonial construction aimed at bolstering the powers of chiefs in order to construct an effective basis for Indirect Rule and the control of land resources through chiefs. The Tribal Courts Act (TCA) of 1969 took the policy of reviving ‘traditional’ authorities in the TTLs a step further in the invention of tradition by investing chiefs with legal powers. The idea that ‘customary’ land law in general was created under colonial rule has gained wide currency among historians and anthropologists.

The diplomatic isolation of the RF regime after UDI led it to an even stronger alliance with African chiefs in the 1970s, as it sought internal legitimacy to counter its international illegitimacy. Throughout the 1970s African chiefs continued to rise to unprecedented prominence under the Rhodesian Front regime as they were being courted to shore up legitimacy for the internationally isolated UDI regime.<sup>295</sup> Traditional leaders were further empowered by the 1970 Constitution which emphasized the devolution of powers to the Provinces of Matabeleland and Mashonaland in which Africans would have much autonomy in their areas under the leadership of their chiefs.<sup>296</sup>

In 1972, when the British government demanded a testing of African opinion on new settlement proposals by the Pearce Commission, the RF regime once again advanced the chiefs as the sole arbiters of African opinion. A delegation of British officials came to Rhodesia in early 1972 and spent two months testing African opinion on the agreement. The Smith regime was confident of the approval of the settlement and deployed its trusted propaganda machine to

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<sup>295</sup> N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, *Community Development in Pre-Independence Zimbabwe*, 60 ; Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118

<sup>296</sup> R.K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 246-249; Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (Harare, SAPES Books, 2001) 143-145; J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 76-77; J. Mtisi, M. Nyakudya & T. Barnes, ‘War in Rhodesia, 1965-1980’, in B. Raftopoulos et.al. (eds.) *Becoming Zimbabwe*, 141-143

work. Protest demonstrations against the planned consultation of chiefs by the Pearce Commission were staged at Salisbury airport on the arrival of the Commission members.<sup>297</sup> The visit by the Pearce Commission to the country had provided a rare opportunity for the Africans to openly protest against the regime and to publicly express their rejection of chiefs as the sole spokesmen for the Africans. Prior to the arrival of the Commission, Rhodesia's tough laws had made it difficult for Africans to protest against the co-optation of chiefs.<sup>298</sup>

In the end, most of the Africans resoundingly rejected the Pearce Commission proposals as an inadequate basis for a settlement. The resounding negative African response came as a shock to Rhodesia's White population. Joshua Nkomo, the veteran leader of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and its military wing the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), remarked in his autobiography entitled *Nkomo: The Story of My Life*, that;

Smith and the British government must have believed that Lord Pearce would do as they wanted and report that the Smith-Home deal was acceptable to African opinion, and then all would be over. They were badly mistaken. From the first public meeting, the judge was left in no doubt that the vast majority of Africans entirely rejected the handing over of power to the tiny white electorate.<sup>299</sup>

The British government's collusion with Smith's strategy was betrayed during a meeting that was held between Sir Alec Douglas-Home (the British Foreign Secretary) and Joshua Nkomo at Marimba House, the British representative's

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<sup>297</sup> Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life*, 143-145; R.K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 246-249

<sup>298</sup> R.K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 246-248

<sup>299</sup> Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo. The Story of My Life*, 144

residence in Salisbury, in November 1971, where Home simply told Nkomo that Britain had come to an agreement with Smith, and that there would be a Commission to inquire whether this agreement was agreeable to the African people of Rhodesia, and that Nkomo was free to give evidence to the Commission. Nkomo told Home that the deal would never be acceptable to the African people because it had not been negotiated with the Nationalists ‘who represented the African population’. Home’s response to Nkomo’s claim that the African Nationalists were the true representatives of African opinion betrayed his collusion with Smith. Home told Nkomo;

The people have completely forgotten you. They no longer recognize you. You do not represent anybody now. What we have done is reasonable, and if you do not accept it you will be left out.<sup>300</sup>

This was not just a reference to Nkomo’s long absence from the political scene due to his incarceration, but also betrayed Home’s collusion with Smith’s strategy of raising the profile of chiefs far above that of the Nationalists.

The Conservative Party which had come to power in Britain in 1970 was eager to relieve itself of the Rhodesian problem by recognizing the internationally ostracized Smith regime through a deal that would ‘not look like a surrender’ but would have ‘an appearance of legality’ achievable through consultations with African leaders.<sup>301</sup> Following Nkomo’s refusal to accept the deal he was returned to prison and, in order to save face, the British and Smith agreed that although Nkomo and the other African leaders would

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<sup>300</sup> Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo. The Story of My Life*, 144

<sup>301</sup> R.K. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 247; J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life*, 142

remain in prison, there would be a test of Africa opinion on the proposed constitutional changes headed by a British judge, Lord Pearce.<sup>302</sup>

Despite overwhelming African rejection of the Pearce proposals, the *Rhodesia Herald* had already reported on 6 January 1972 that the Council of Chiefs had given its unanimous endorsement for the Anglo-Rhodesian settlement proposals.<sup>303</sup> Once again, as had been the case with their support for the U.D.I., the Council of Chiefs had lent its support to a stand that had been overwhelmingly rejected by the African majority. The result of the regime's co-optation strategy was to totally discredit the chiefs involved.

On 28 April 1976 Ian Smith made Ministerial Appointments that promoted four chiefs, namely, Jeremiah S. Chirau, Khayisa Ndiweni, T. C. Mangwende, and Z. Charumbira, to the posts of Cabinet Ministers.<sup>304</sup> Chief Khayisa Ndiweni, of Ntabazinduna, in Matabeleland, had a long history of collaboration with the colonial regime which had earned him several top-level Government assignments dating back to 1960 when he had been selected as one of the delegates to the London Federal Constitutional Conference. In 1961 he was once again invited by the Prime Minister to serve as a representative at the Southern Rhodesia Constitutional Conference in Salisbury.<sup>305</sup> The inclusion of chiefs in delegations to these international fora was meant to give the impression that the colonial government was supported by the traditional leaders within the country.

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<sup>302</sup> J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life*, 143

<sup>303</sup> Ian Mills, Political Reporter, 'It's a unanimous endorsement: Council of Chiefs backs terms', *The Rhodesia Herald*, 6 January 1972

<sup>304</sup> Reporter, 'Four Chiefs Made Ministers', *The African Times*, vol. 11, No. 5, May 5, 1976, 1; Robert Cary & Diana Mitchell, *African Nationalist Leaders in Rhodesia*, 288; *The Rhodesia Herald*, 30 December 1976

<sup>305</sup> Secretary for Native Affairs, Native Affairs Annual Report 1961, in *NADA*, Vol. 40, 1963, 91

On 29 December 1976, a group of prominent chiefs founded a conservative African political party, the Zimbabwe United People's Organisation (ZUPO) which was headed by Chief Jeremiah Chirau, the President of the Council of Chiefs.<sup>306</sup> ZUPO described itself as an independent, multiracial Rhodesian national party that supported the attainment of majority rule by peaceful negotiations as opposed to the guerrilla war. It claimed to have the support of the majority of Africans in Rhodesia. The party, however, aligned itself with Smith's government on most substantive political issues and had very little popular support among Africans. From December 1977 into early 1978 Chirau represented ZUPO in the internal constitutional negotiations with Ian Smith, Abel Muzorewa, and Ndabaningi Sithole that resulted in the signing of the Internal Settlement (also known as the March 3 Agreement) in 1978.<sup>307</sup> The Internal Settlement was contrived to create the illusion of a transfer of power from Whites to Blacks, so as to undercut the external Nationalist movements, ZANU and ZAPU and make them less relevant.<sup>308</sup>

However, most analyses concur that the three black signatories to the March 3 Agreement were in a weak position and their power derived from Smith himself.<sup>309</sup> The inclusion of Chief Jeremiah Chirau, a salaried Smith supporter, in the Internal Settlement of 1978 was meant to give the impression that Smith's internal settlement was supported by the traditional leaders within the country, while Sithole's inclusion was meant to create the impression that the external liberation forces were agreeable to the Internal Settlement, since he still claimed to be the leader of ZANU and ZANLA (its military wing).<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> K.R. Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 71-2

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 364-365

<sup>308</sup> J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 247; Fay Chung, *Re-living the Second Chimurenga, Memories from Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2007) 226

<sup>309</sup> J. Mtisi, et. al., 'War in Rhodesia, 1965-1980', 162-163; M. Meredith, *The past is Another Country*, 336-338; J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 247; Fay Chung, *Re-living The Second Chimurenga.*, 226; J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life*, 193

<sup>310</sup> F. Chung, *Re-living The Second Chimurenga*, 226; J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life*, 193

Chief Chirau was known to be opposed to the guerrilla war. He frequently appeared on Rhodesia Television (RTV) speaking out against ‘terrorism’ in his role as the leader of the Council of Chiefs.<sup>311</sup> Like the majority of African chiefs, he feared a radical change of the political landscape that would be brought about by the Nationalist movements. Although Chief Chirau’s ZUPO publicly postured as a Nationalist movement, it was viewed in Nationalist circles as a front created by Ian Smith to co-opt the traditional chiefs into supporting the internal settlement.<sup>312</sup> This active collaboration by the chiefs with the Smith regime is what engendered the enduring animosity that Nationalists felt towards chiefs that lasted throughout the era of the war of liberation (1976-1979), and well into the early decades of independence. Criticisms of traditional leadership and predictions of its ultimate demise and irrelevance after independence were widespread during the liberation war.<sup>313</sup>

The prospect of decolonisation therefore did not augur well for chiefs all over Africa, as B. Sundkler famously quipped in 1966,

The wind of change in present-day Africa is not blowing in the direction of chiefs – unless it be to sweep them away. The role of the chiefs is becoming increasingly precarious.<sup>314</sup>

The general feeling among Zimbabwean Nationalists at the time was that, because chieftaincy had been appropriated by colonialism, it was therefore doomed to die with colonialism. Michael Bratton, writing in 1978, also

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<sup>311</sup> J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 124-125

<sup>312</sup> J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life*, 193; F. Chung, *Re-living The Second Chimurenga*, 226

<sup>313</sup> B. Sundkler, “Chief and Prophet in Zululand and Swaziland”, 276; M. Bratton, *Beyond Community Development*, 50; N. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1999) 77; Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 97

<sup>314</sup> B. Sundkler, “Chief and Prophet in Zululand and Swaziland”, in M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen, *African Systems of Thought* (London, Oxford University Press, 1966) 276

captured this feeling among the Nationalists when he confidently predicted that;

One thing that is clear from recent Rhodesian history...is that chiefs have lost claim to represent peasants because of their collective decision to join forces with the settlers against Zimbabwean nationalism. Chiefs cannot be rehabilitated. No major administrative role awaits them in Zimbabwe.<sup>315</sup>

In the last days of Rhodesia, as the interaction between the regime and chiefs became more intense than it had ever been before, it also became increasingly clear that both chieftaincy and Rhodesia were declining powers that were destined for a common demise in the face of the looming victory of the Nationalist forces. On the eve of Zimbabwe's independence the institution of chieftaincy appeared to be on the brink of demise and being side-lined by the incoming Nationalist government that heralded a new democratic era whose leaders viewed chiefs as 'anti-democratic local despots'.<sup>316</sup> Richard Rathbone's study of relations between nationalists and chieftainship in Ghana reveals that a similar fate had awaited chiefs in Ghana at the end of colonial rule. Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah's determination to destroy Ghanaian chieftaincy after colonial rule was similar to the ZANU (PF) attitude to chieftaincy at the end of the war when chiefs were perceived as supporters of the colonialists who were doomed to go with the end of Rhodesia.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> M. Bratton, *Beyond Community Development*, 50

<sup>316</sup> Kate Baldwin, *The Paradox of Traditional Chiefs in Democratic Africa* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016) 3

<sup>317</sup> Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah & the Chiefs: the Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-60* (Accra, F. Reimer Book Services, 2000)

## **The ‘Men in the Middle’: The Precarious Position of Chiefs and Peasants between the Belligerents in the Liberation War, 1972-1979<sup>318</sup>**

The struggle to win the allegiance and support of the African peasants and their traditional leaders was at the heart of the war between the guerrilla forces and the RSF. As the rural areas became the centre stage of the struggle, chiefs, headmen and peasants found themselves torn between the belligerents’ quest for their political allegiance.<sup>319</sup> Chiefs became key targets for attacks by guerrillas during the liberation struggle because they were viewed as collaborating African personnel under the employment of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (INTAF). In most cases African Nationalists and guerrillas generally lumped Rhodesia’s African soldiers and police together with African chiefs and headmen as ‘sell-outs’ because they were employed by the government. Accusations were frequently levelled against them by some members of rural communities that they were ‘sell-outs’.<sup>320</sup>

The logic of the guerrillas in attacking chiefs, headmen and peasants was based on their perspective that the war was being fought on behalf of the people, so they expected all the African people to support them. It was in this context that the guerrillas saw all those who did not lend them the necessary support as enemies of the people and lackeys of the regime who deserved to be attacked.<sup>321</sup> On the other hand, the Rhodesian administration demanded the political allegiance of chiefs as a matter of course and relied on them to be

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<sup>318</sup>The phrase ‘Men in the Middle’ is adopted with a slight variation from the title of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Report of 1975 which was published in 1999 under the title, *The Man in the Middle*. See Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, *The Man in the Middle; Civil War in Rhodesia: Torture, Resettlement & Eviction* (Harare, CCJP, 1999)

<sup>319</sup>M. Bratton, *Beyond Community Development*, 35-38

<sup>320</sup>Timothy Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1923-1980* (New York, University of Rochester Press, 2011) 1

<sup>321</sup>M. Mushonga, ‘Curfew and the Man in the Middle in Zimbabwe’s war of liberation, with special reference to the eastern areas of Zimbabwe, 1977-1980’, Cheryl Hendricks & Lwazi Lushaba, *From National Liberation to Democratic Renaissance in Southern Africa* (Dakar, CODESRIA, 2005) 171-190



gatekeepers against the political influence of the Nationalists on the rural population. As a result, chiefs were placed in an invidious position where their allegiance and political role was always being questioned by both the guerrillas and the RSF. Peasants, in general, found themselves in a very difficult position during the war, caught between two diametrically opposed demands of the contending forces viz. the RSF on one hand and the guerrillas on the other. Using anti-insurgency techniques learnt during Southern Rhodesia's military involvement with the British Army in the Malayan Emergency from 1948-1960, the RSF frequently hit hard at villagers and their leaders suspected of sheltering guerrillas.<sup>322</sup>

The difficult position in which traditional leaders were placed by the conflict between the Nationalists and the settler regime was vividly captured by the veteran Nationalist Joshua Nkomo in his autobiography, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life*, in which he narrated an incident when the colonial government issued orders to District Commissioners to instruct all the chiefs to bar the Nationalists from entering their traditional domains in the TTLs. According to Nkomo, this colonial injunction to the chiefs prompted the Nationalists to counteract it by approaching the chiefs with their own instructions to the effect that the chiefs should disobey the District Commissioners and support the anti-colonial struggle. Nkomo's account maintained that,

the District Commissioners put pressure on the local chiefs to use their traditional authority to keep us out. In return I went to the chiefs themselves and reminded them that they held their authority by custom and descent, while the District Commissioners were only civil servants—servants of the chiefs as well as of the government. It was remarkable

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<sup>322</sup>R. Ellis, *End of Empire: Rhodesia*, Television Documentary, Granada, U.K., 1985

how even the most passive of the chiefs responded to this reminder that they, not the administrators, were the rightful rulers of their districts.<sup>323</sup>

The RF regime's line on the role of the chiefs in the counter-insurgency war was disseminated throughout the rural areas via the Ministry of Information's bi-weekly propaganda newspaper, *The African Times*. In the *African Times* of 25 September 1974, chiefs were warned about the penalties they would incur if they harboured 'terrorists' or failed to disclose the presence of 'terrorists'. They were also reminded of the attractive cash awards which they could receive if they secretly informed the authorities of the presence of 'terrorists'.<sup>324</sup> Mobile cinemas were also deployed in the rural areas by the Ministry of Information to show free films that were designed to undercut rural support for the guerrillas. The practice of showing free films to African audiences in the rural areas had originated in the mine compounds of the 1920s. This practice was revived in 1966 when the Ministry of Information established the Branch of Internal Services whose purpose, according to the report of the Secretary for Information of 1966, was to 'counteract subversive propaganda and expose the false policies of so-called African nationalism'.<sup>325</sup>

As the intensity of the guerrilla war grew in the 1970s, the Rhodesian government decided to provide extra security for chiefs in the war zones by giving them guns and security details from the District Security Assistants unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This policy of arming the chiefs became a key strategy in colonial government's effort to retain control of the rural areas and buttress its rural local administration system which had begun to collapse. The Information Minister in Smith's regime, P. K. van der Byl, articulated this strategy as an empowerment of chiefs so that they could

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<sup>323</sup> J. Nkomo, *Story My Life*, 96

<sup>324</sup> J. Frederikse, *None But Ourselves*, 79-80

<sup>325</sup> J. Frederikse, *None But Ourselves*, 79-80

achieve total control of their areas by having their own armed militia to back up their traditional power. It was hoped that this empowerment initiative, which in fact transformed the chiefs into rural despots, would help the white settlers to combat the growth of African nationalism and the guerrilla war, and also prevent the rural black people from ‘stepping out of line and getting subversive’.<sup>326</sup>

The co-optation of chiefs into Rhodesia’s counter-insurgency strategy was emphasized by P.K. van der Byl during the installation ceremony of a Tonga chief in the Zambezi valley in 1973, where the Minister of Information stressed the new role of chiefs as the vanguard in Rhodesia’s counter-insurgency war in the TTLs. Watched by a crowd of 4,500 that had turned up to witness the installation of Petros Dumbula as the new Chief Mola, in the Kariba District, Van der Byl warned about the possibility of guerrillas infiltrating his chieftom and stressed that the chief and his people were duty-bound to report the guerrilla presence to the authorities at once.<sup>327</sup>

These warnings that were issued to peasants and traditional leaders against supporting guerrillas were accompanied by significant changes in Rhodesia’s counter-insurgency strategy which swung from an initial relatively pacific approach that aimed to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of African rural populations, to a military strategy that routinely used force against all who cooperated with the Nationalist guerrillas.<sup>328</sup> Consequently, all Rhodesian counter-insurgency operations came to use violence against civilians routinely. The logic was that civilians who supported terrorists, were themselves considered terrorists, and as one could not differentiate between ‘supporting’ and ‘neutral’ civilians, the guilt and punishment must be

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<sup>326</sup> J. Frederikse, *None But Ourselves*, 75

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.* 80

<sup>328</sup> KatriPohjolainen Yap, ‘Power and Thought in the Practice of Citizenship’ 4

collectively borne. Chiefs and headmen who supported Nationalists were not spared. Whereas most chiefs collaborated with the colonial government because of the monetary privileges they received from the colonial government, several other chiefs found themselves in detention for their alleged support of the guerrillas.<sup>329</sup>

Although discussion of the atrocities committed by guerrillas against peasants is generally avoided in patriotic and Nationalist discourses of the war, several scholarly works have documented such instances that occurred during the war, which show that the use of force was not limited to the RF Government alone because guerrillas also frequently meted out capital punishment to many who were accused of being sell-outs by other villagers.<sup>330</sup> Chakawa cites the case of Chief Phillip Nyamhunga who was killed by ZIPRA guerrillas in Hurungwe District in 1978 for supporting the colonial government. Chief Phillip Nyamhunga was killed because of the prosperity that he had accumulated from his allegiance to the colonial government, which included owning a car, a grocery shop, a bottle store and butchery. The guerrillas regarded him as a sell-out because he had fled from his rural homestead and lived in Karoi town, from whence he made weekly visits by car to his chieftaincy to hold court and try cases. They eventually caught him on one of these visits and shot him, leaving his body to decompose in his butchery with strict instructions that he should not be buried.<sup>331</sup>

At times the RSF also prevented the burial of those they had killed on suspicion of being guerrilla sympathisers. On one occasion Chief Marange was compelled to defy such RSF instructions and ordered the burial of the

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<sup>329</sup> KatriPohjolainen Yap, 'Power and Thought in the Practice of Citizenship' 4

<sup>330</sup> Joshua Chakawa, 'The Environment and ZIPRA Guerrilla Warfare in Hurungwe District, 1972-1979', M.A. thesis, History Department, Midlands State University, 2007, 74-76

<sup>331</sup> J. Chakawa, 'The Environment and ZIPRA Guerrilla Warfare in Hurungwe District, 74-76

bodies of two of his people that had been dumped by the Rhodesian in the open for more than two at Marange Township. In this particular instance Chief Marange was lucky to get away with a caution from the government soldiers, who often killed chiefs for supporting Nationalists.<sup>332</sup>

Chief Dendera of Hurungwe District was also killed by ZIPRA guerrillas in 1978 because he had openly influenced his followers against supporting ZIPRA, largely out of fear of reprisals against his people by RSF troops who had established a base at Magunje in the vicinity of his chiefdom. All villagers were summoned to witness his public beating and execution, and as in the case of Nyamhunga, the corpse was abandoned to decompose in the open with strict instructions from the guerrillas that he should not be buried.<sup>333</sup>

However, Dawson Munjeri's account of the murder of Chief Dendera suggests that he was a victim of the contest between ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrillas for political domination of Hurungwe District, where both guerrilla armies operated. Munjeri maintains that "An entire village including Chief Dendera was wiped out for owing allegiance to the 'wrong' liberation movement".<sup>334</sup> Munjeri therefore makes it clear that Chief Dendera was killed as a 'sell-out' by ZIPRA because he supported ZANLA guerrillas.

There is evidence that in the areas where both the guerrilla forces of ZIPRA and ZANLA operated, such as in the Hurungwe District and in the Dande Valley, some chiefs were killed by the guerrillas for owing allegiance to the opposite guerrilla force. Both the studies of Munjeri in Dande and Joshua Chakawa in Hurungwe have shown that guerrillas that operated in these areas comprised of both ZANLA and ZIPRA, and also that there was serious

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<sup>332</sup>M. Mushonga, 'Curfew and the Man in the Middle in Zimbabwe's war of liberation, 184

<sup>333</sup>Ibid.

<sup>334</sup>Dawson Munjeri, 'Sheep in wolf skin-the onslaught on oral history/traditions', *Proceedings of the Second Biennial Seminar held at the University of Zimbabwe, 11-15 September 1989*, (Harare, OTASA, 1989) 50

contestation for allegiance between these liberation movements in these operational areas.<sup>335</sup> Consequently, peasants frequently found themselves in a dangerous predicament as they were constantly forced to demonstrate support for each of these forces as ‘the boundaries of spheres of influence in such areas shifted constantly depending on the strength and logistics of the forces at any given time’.<sup>336</sup> As we saw above, frequent changes in the control of these operational by different guerrilla armies confused the allegiance of the local inhabitants and those who collaborated with ZIPRA began to ‘sell-out’ others who supported ZANLA, and vice-versa, resulting in horrendous punishments and even execution.<sup>337</sup>

Soon after the end of the Zimbabwe war of liberation in December 1979, Diana Mitchell recorded the oral testimony of several African chiefs early in 1980 on the impact of the war on rural communities and the functioning of traditional authorities in the 1970s, and garnered some valuable insights into some of the changes that were brought about by the war. The significance of the timing of these interviews lies in the fact that memories of the war were still fresh in the minds of the chiefs therefore relatively accurate information could be gleaned in early 1980. Her oral research provides some valuable insights into the precarious position of chiefs during the war. Among the chiefs she interviewed was Senator Chief Myinga Dakamela of Nkayi District in Matabeleland North. The Senator Chief revealed that from the mid-1970s until the end of the war the security situation in Matabeleland had deteriorated to the extent that it became impossible for traditional chiefs to travel by road to attend Parliament in Salisbury, and they had to be ferried there by air.

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<sup>335</sup> J. Chakawa, ‘The Environment and ZIPRA Guerrilla Warfare in Hurungwe District, 74-76; D. Munjeri, ‘Sheep in wolf skin-the onslaught on oral history/traditions’, 50

<sup>336</sup> D. Munjeri, ‘Sheep in wolf skin-the onslaught on oral history/traditions’, 50

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

During the same period, two District Commissioners and one policeman were killed by guerrillas in Chief Dakamela's area.<sup>338</sup>

Chief Dakamela revealed when the war first reached his area he had initially chosen to remain in his rural homestead but as the war intensified after 1976 he found himself in great danger because the ZIPRA guerrillas considered him to be a sell-out. Dakamela was one of the chiefs that were most despised by Nationalists during the war for his overt support for the Smith regime. One edition of ZANU's *Zimbabwe News* even described him as 'the feudal despot of Bubi – with goggles that try to hide eyes reddened by racist-inculcated savagery against his own people'.<sup>339</sup> During this time he was attacked three times by ZIPRA guerrillas for his intimate association with the RF regime but suffered no loss of life in his household. The RF government assigned armed District Security Assistants to his homestead to protect him, but despite their protection, his house was burned down and he lost all of his property. 40 of his cattle were taken and never seen again, and schools in his area were closed, but not destroyed.<sup>340</sup>

Another Chief interviewed by Diana Mitchell in 1979 was Mtozima Gwebu of Essexvale district (present-day Esigodini), about 80 kilometres south-east of Bulawayo. Chief Gwebu revealed that at the height of the war of liberation in 1978 he was targeted by ZANLA guerrillas and forced to flee from his rural homestead to seek safety and refuge at the District Commissioner's offices. When the war escalated in 1979 and it became unsafe to even venture into his area, the chief completely abandoned his rural homestead and stayed in the Sibomvu Township of Esigodini. During his absence ZANLA guerrillas killed

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<sup>338</sup> Diana Mitchell, *Makers of History. Who's Who 1981-82. Nationalist Leaders in Zimbabwe*, Diana Mitchell Publishers, Salisbury, 1981, 47

<sup>339</sup> ZANU, *Zimbabwe News*, Vol.10, No. 4, July-August 1978

<sup>340</sup> Diana Mitchell, *Makers of History. Who's Who 1981-82*, 46

his Headman after accusing him of being a sell-out who informed the District Commissioner about the whereabouts of guerrillas. After being forced to abandon his people by the war, Chief Gwebu could only travel during the day to hold the traditional court to attend to cases, but he could no longer stay in his homestead overnight.<sup>341</sup>

By the late 1970s, many chiefs and headmen in Matabeleland North had been moved to the District Administrative centres for their protection. Those chiefs, who resided at homes that were located far from the administrative centres, risked their own lives, as well as those of their families. Between 1977 and 1978 several headmen who were considered by ZIPRA to be sell-outs were killed in Nkayi District. Many chiefs and headmen were forced to flee to Nkayi Centre during this period because the situation had become very tense and both the guerrillas and the Rhodesian forces had become very dangerous. Some traditional leaders, like Headman Jojo, found themselves caught between the horns of dilemma when they were targeted by both the RSF and the guerrillas on suspicion of aiding the other party. The guerrillas suspected him of being a sell-out, while the government forces suspected him of harbouring guerrillas.<sup>342</sup>

Following the killing of several headmen who were considered to be sell-outs in Nkayi in 1978 by guerrillas, the administration evacuated all those chiefs and headmen who did not already live near the administrative centres and protected sub-offices, to the district administrative centre. Other traditional leaders in Nkayi moved of their own accord, including many headmen, and chiefs Madliwa and Sivalo. Chief Sivalo was forced to leave his homestead after two attacks from guerrillas in late 1977 in which he and his relatives

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<sup>341</sup> Diana Mitchell, *Makers of History. Who's Who 1981-82*, 48-49

<sup>342</sup> J. Alexander, J. McGregor & T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, Weaver Press, Harare, 2000, 149-150



suffered beatings and rapes, and his house and car were destroyed. Others, such as Chief Sikhobokhobo, were warned to move out by guerrillas. Only Chief Menyezwa stayed with ZIPRA during the war, after escaping from the protected sub-office to which he had been forcibly moved by the government. On the whole, however, most headmen, who formed the lowest rung of the Rhodesian local administration, on the whole stayed on in their rural homes throughout the war, and threw in their lot with the Nationalists, many in fact doubled up as ZAPU chairmen.<sup>343</sup>

Precisely because of the Rhodesian policy of arming chiefs in the war zones, chiefs in general became targets of guerrilla attacks.<sup>344</sup> Guerrillas and their sympathizers in the Gokwe district attacked several Shangwe chiefs for enforcing the colonial government's conservation measures and extracting fines from their subjects that had violated the colonial conservation laws. A Shangwe chief, Matenganyika Nemangwe, who was a well-known strong supporter of the Smith government and a disciplinarian who did not brook political interference of Nationalists in his domain, became a prime target of ZIPRA guerrillas operating in Gokwe. ZIPRA guerrillas accused him of being overzealous in the implementation of the colonial government's conservation measures and regarded him as a 'sell-out'. Fearing for his life, Chief Nemangwe fled to Gokwe South's administrative centre at Gokwe where he sought refuge in the District Administrator's offices.<sup>345</sup> Another Shangwe chief, Goredema was shot and killed by guerrillas in 1979 for enforcing the colonial conservation measures. Other chiefs were attacked for accepting cheques for growing cotton.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>343</sup>J. Alexander et.al., *Violence and Memory*, 150

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. 148; P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District', 26; Ranger, 'Tradition and travesty: Chiefs and the Administration in Makoni District, Zimbabwe, 1960-1980', *Africa*, 52 (3), 1982, 20-41; J. Mtisi et. al. 'War in Rhodesia', 157

<sup>345</sup> P.S. Nyambara, "Immigrants, 'Traditional' Leaders and the Rhodesian State", 787

<sup>346</sup>P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District', 2, 20-41

As the respect for chiefs generally waned, guerrillas began to command greater respect and following among the rural populace and enjoyed the blessings of the spirit mediums.<sup>347</sup> This was evident in many operational areas of the liberation struggle where the guerrillas delegitimised the ancestral authority of chiefs and preferred to work instead with spirit mediums. Ranger, Lan and Spierenburg reveal that during the war spirit mediums effectively usurped traditional leadership of the rural masses from the chiefs in the Dande Valley, and that there was widespread distrust of the chiefs because of their intimate connection with the Smith regime. The growing influence of the spirit mediums in the 1970s prompted the guerrillas to invest more trust in them in their strategies of winning over the rural populace to their cause.<sup>348</sup> These political considerations clearly influenced the decision by first group of ZANLA guerrillas to operate in the Dande area of the Zambezi Valley in 1971 to introduce themselves first to the Nehanda sipirit medium, Kunzaruwa, instead of approaching any one of the many Korekore chiefs in the Valley.<sup>349</sup> According to Lan this action underscored the changing politics of tradition in the Dande valley because ‘the mediums had taken the place once held by the chiefs as the focus of political action within Dande’.<sup>350</sup>

The changes that were occurring in the Dande valley were but a microcosmic reflection of much larger changes that were occurring in the politics of tradition in Shona society as a result of the war. Ranger and Lan have highlighted the ascendance of spirit mediums as alternate sources of traditional leadership to counter-balance the compromised traditional

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<sup>347</sup> Mtisi et al. ‘War in Rhodesia’, 157; D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985, 176; T. Ranger, ‘Religion in the guerrilla war’, in N. Bhebe & T. Ranger (eds.) *Society in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War*, University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, 1996, 45

<sup>348</sup> T. Ranger, ‘Religion in the guerrilla war’, 45; D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, 176; M. Spierenburg, ‘Re-Emergence of Traditional Authorities in the Struggle for Control over Land in Dande,

<sup>349</sup> D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, 176

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

leadership of chiefs, in a general political situation where chiefs had been rendered impotent by their co-option into the Rhodesian civil service.<sup>351</sup>

### **Collapse of Rhodesia's Rural Administration and the Rejection of Chiefs' Legitimacy and Authority by Popular Village Committees and People's Assemblies set up by Guerrillas, 1976-1979**

The escalation of the war and increased infiltration of the TTLs by ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas between 1976 and 1979 led to the collapse of District Administration all over the country. Increasingly, the RSF lost control of large areas of the countryside and could no longer provide protection to personnel of rural local government such as Chiefs, District Administrators, Land Development Officers, and institutions such as African Councils, which were critical to the administration of the TTLs. Ngwabi Bhebe has shown how the large numbers of guerrillas that had been deployed throughout the eastern half of the country along three operational provinces and sectors by 1978, destroyed most of the colonial administrative infrastructure and turned the rural population, through politicization and mass mobilization, against the colonial authorities and the chiefs.<sup>352</sup> In the war zones in the eastern and south-eastern districts of the country the key strategy of ZANLA forces was to reduce the countryside to an ungovernable state by turning the rural peasants against White authority as well as that of replacing the colonial administrative institutions with ZANU party structures.<sup>353</sup>

Similarly, Alexander, McGregor and Ranger have traced the collapse of rural local government in Matabeleland North in the mid-1970s due to the

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<sup>351</sup>T. Ranger, 'Religion in the guerrilla war', in N. Bhebe & T. Ranger (eds.) *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, 1996, 45; D. Lan, *Guns and Rain*, 176

<sup>352</sup> T. Ranger, 'Religion in the guerrilla war', 45

<sup>353</sup> Amanda Hammar, 'The Making and Unmasking of Local Government in Zimbabwe' 144

increased intensity ZIPRA guerrilla attacks on colonial administrative institutions and shown that, due to the deterioration of the security situation in Matabeleland North, it became impossible for the Chiefs and Headmen to perform their normal administrative duties or even stay in their rural homesteads.<sup>354</sup> The impact of the liberation war on local administration was evident in Matabeleland North Province between in the 1970s, where local administration effectively became paralyzed after 1976, and came to be characterized by the increasing use of force as the settler regime came to depend on police and army action for the effectiveness of African administration.

Government development work was paralyzed after 1976 as officials came under attack, and the minimal array of administrative tasks which could still be carried out came to rely on armed escorts.<sup>355</sup> After 1976, district administrative centres became increasingly isolated and reliant on armed units. Administration in remote parts of the Nkayi district was undertaken from garrisoned ‘protected sub-offices’ at strategic roadside locations. These were established to provide an ‘administrative base in an area badly affected by terrorism’, a base for the police and army, and protection for chiefs and headmen. In Nkayi, Zwelabo, Dakamela, and possibly a third site were designated as protected sub-offices. In Lupane, protected sub-offices were created at Ciwale in the north of the district, and at Jotsholo, near the TILCOR (state farm) estate which functioned throughout the war.<sup>356</sup>

Senator Chief Dakamela revealed that from the mid-1970s until the end of the war the security situation in Matabeleland deteriorated to the extent that it became impossible for traditional chiefs to travel by road to attend Parliament

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<sup>354</sup> J. Alexander, et.al., *Violence and Memory*, 148

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 149

in Salisbury, and they had to be ferried there by air. He also revealed that during the same period two District Commissioners and one policeman were killed by guerrillas in his area.<sup>357</sup> By the late 1970s, many chiefs and headmen in Matabeleland North had been moved to the District Administrative centres for their protection. The garrisoned sub-offices were few in number and their influence was limited to nearby areas. Government centres in Nkayi and Lupane were largely populated by armed forces, civil servants, chiefs and headmen; and detainee populations numbering in the hundreds. The government centres also attracted people who were labelled sell-outs by guerrillas or ZAPU party committees.<sup>358</sup>

By 1977 the colonial administration of Matabeleland North Province could no longer rely on chiefs and councils to provide even a minimum of administration in the outlying rural areas. Chiefs' councils were placed under the District Commissioner's 'management' because they had largely collapsed. Chiefs often had to be brought to meetings by plane as the roads could no longer be safely traversed. It became impossible for many chiefs to continue to perform government tasks. From 1976 to 1979 the District Commissioners in Matabeleland North relied ever more heavily on their paramilitary forces i.e. the District Security Assistants (DSA) from 1976 and the Security Force Auxilliaris (SFA) in the last desperate years of 1979. Under Martial Law which was introduced in 1978, African "administration' in rural areas came to mean the enforcement of the regulations by punishing peasants in the area of an ambush, landmine or damaged dip tank, and by the collection and sale of cattle from these areas as compensation for the damage done to government property.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Robert Cary & Diana Mitchell, *African Nationalist Leaders in Rhodesia: Who's Who?*, 47

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

Due to the unrelenting influx of ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrillas in the late 1970s, increasing areas of the country were declared military zones. The RSF began to experience serious logistical problems in its defence of the expanded theatre of war, especially after the collapse of Portuguese power in Mozambique opened up the whole eastern border of the country to ZANLA incursions. Consequently, the RSF either abandoned the defence of the communal areas in order to go and defend what were considered to be vital settlers' economic interests in the urban areas or it withdrew to a few base camps at selected administrative centres.<sup>360</sup> Due to the Smith regime's loss of control of large areas of the TTLs to the guerrillas, it could no longer rely on chiefs and African Councils to even provide minimal administration.<sup>361</sup> Consequently, by 1976 district administration throughout Rhodesia had become largely a military process.<sup>362</sup> The withdrawal of colonial local administrative structures from the rural theatre of the liberation war left vast ungoverned spaces, into which the guerrillas entered and established an alternate system of Village Committees.

By the time immediately before the declaration of the ceasefire in 1979, rural local government structures all over the country had collapsed due to the escalation of the war. In November 1978 the *Herald* newspaper reported that, 951 black primary schools had closed, leaving 230,000 children without schooling. 35 secondary schools had similarly closed and caused 9,000 pupils to lose their education.<sup>363</sup> By early 1979 it was reported that most cattle dips, had entirely ceased to operate, raising the spectre of rampant livestock disease proliferation in the rural areas.<sup>364</sup> The report revealed that only 1,500 out of

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<sup>360</sup> Robert Cary & Diana Mitchell, *African Nationalist Leaders in Rhodesia: Who's Who?*, 47

<sup>361</sup> J. Alexander et. al., Ranger, *Violence and Memory*, 148

<sup>362</sup> G. C. Passmore, *Hidden Conflict*, 80

<sup>363</sup> The Herald, 22 November 1978

<sup>364</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, *Southern Rhodesia Elections, February 1980: Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group*, 28-29

8,000 cattle dips were still in operation, resulting in the loss of an estimated one-third of all the African-owned cattle in the country to diseases.<sup>365</sup> The disruption of normal food production by the war, coupled with Rhodesia's security policy of blocking food supplies to the TTLs out of fear that they would end up in the hands of guerrillas, had introduced widespread starvation and malnutrition in the rural populations.<sup>366</sup>

Large areas of the country no longer had any veterinary and medical services. Rural bus services between towns and the TTLs had virtually collapsed due to the landmine scare. White farmers in the eastern province of Manicaland had completely abandoned their farms and fled the war.<sup>367</sup> All in all, the Rhodesian administration had lost control over much of the rural areas by the late 1970s and was forced to resort to the imposition of martial law over 90% of the country.<sup>368</sup> By the eve of the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference units of both ZIPRA and ZANLA were in effective control of the rural areas in their respective operational zones.<sup>369</sup>

In many TTLs in the eastern districts of the country, the guerrillas gradually supplanted the traditional leadership structures of chiefs and headmen and established alternative popular Village Committees, thereby undermining the authority and legitimacy of the chiefs and settler authority.<sup>370</sup> The wartime Village Committees administered judicial authority over the rural communities which bore no resemblance to the traditional justice.<sup>371</sup> A new line of command was established, with the guerrillas at the top, the party

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<sup>365</sup> W.H. Morris-Jones (ed.) *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: Behind and Beyond Lancaster House* (London, Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1980) 120

<sup>366</sup> Ibid. 119; Alois S. Mlambo, *A History of Zimbabwe* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014) 167

<sup>367</sup> Matthew Preston, 'Stalemate and the Termination of Civil War: Rhodesia Reassessed', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 1, January 2004, 65-83

<sup>368</sup> Matthew Preston, 'Stalemate and the Termination of Civil War: Rhodesia Reassessed', 65-83

<sup>369</sup> N. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare*, 68

<sup>370</sup> P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District', 26

<sup>371</sup> P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District', 26

district committee in between and the Village Committees at the bottom. This development was especially evident in ZANLA's operational areas in the east at the close of the war. .

Although this phenomenon was apparently less common in the western provinces of Matabeleland North and South, and other ZIPRA operational areas, there are nevertheless several recorded cases where it did happen.<sup>372</sup> In early 1980 Diana Mitchell recorded an interview with a chief from Matabeleland North who bemoaned the loss of his judicial power in the late 1970s to People's Assemblies that were established by ZIPRA. The ZIPRA guerrillas actively undermined the traditional authority of collaborator chiefs like Dakamela, by supplanting the traditional judicial role of chiefs' courts with alternative people's assemblies, derogatively labelled 'Kangaroo courts' by Rhodesian newspapers during the war, where 'justice' was administered by guerrillas. Chief Dakamela bemoaned this loss of power to the new courts, which barred the attendance of chiefs' courts.<sup>373</sup>

These ZANLA Village Committees and ZIPRA People's Assemblies emerged mainly because many chiefs and headmen had become so unpopular as a result of their association with the repressive Smith regime that they no longer commanded the respect of their people. By the late 1970s the authority of the chiefs in the rural areas had been so seriously eroded to the extent that they were largely viewed as mere extensions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>374</sup> The other reason why these Village Committees were deemed necessary ZANLA and ZIPRA leadership was to curb the rampant killing of innocent villagers due to false accusations by feuding neighbours of being 'sell-outs'. It

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<sup>372</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, *Southern Rhodesia Elections, February 1980: Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group*, 29

<sup>373</sup> Diana Mitchell, *Makers of History. Who's Who 1981-82*, 47

<sup>374</sup> Elaine Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem*, 123



became apparent that certain *mujibhas* (the predominantly youthful assistants to the guerrilla armies) were misusing their power by labelling personal enemies but quite innocent civilians as “sell-outs”, so that the guerrillas would mete out “instant justice” in the form of death or a heavy beating.<sup>375</sup> Prior to the setting up of the Village Committees guerrillas had problems in distinguishing between the so-called ‘sell-outs’ and the non-sell-outs. Many innocent people were labelled sell-outs and killed by guerrillas largely as a result of feuds with their neighbours, friends and relatives. Chakawa maintains that, to date, some families in the Hurungwe District still do not see eye to eye as a result of these wartime vengeful acts.<sup>376</sup>

These committees took over the functions of the discredited chiefs and performed various functions that ranged from hearing cases involving marriage, divorce, and witchcraft, to assessing the truth of allegations levelled against people regarding their involvement with the government. They also coordinated the provision of food and clothing to the guerrillas in the bush in order to replace the old *modus operandi* where the guerrillas and their *mujibhas* had directly approached villagers demanding food and clothing. The committees relayed the messages and requests of the guerrillas to the villagers and collected the contributions for onwards submission to the guerrillas. Due to the development of these “people’s tribunals” the traditional courts came to deal only with cases of a petty nature and chose to refer difficult cases to the committees. Some traditional leaders were co-opted into the new structures, depending on their popularity with the people and the guerrillas. In those cases, there was a partial merging of, and close association and liaison between, the traditional leaders and the committees.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Elaine Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem*, 123

<sup>376</sup> Joshua Chakawa, ‘The Environment and ZIPRA guerrilla warfare in Hurungwe District’, 75

<sup>377</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, *Southern Rhodesia Elections, February 1980: Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group*, 29-30

A fundamental change that was introduced by these wartime committee structures was generational, in the sense that, whereas in the past traditional authority structures had generally been headed by gerontocratic senior members of the community who had ascended to chieftainship by heredity and wielded limited powers of coercion over their subjects, the new Village Committees were generally headed by younger men, who wielded absolute power to mete out punishment. Due to this significant change, the traditional structures of power and influence at the local level were negated and rendered moribund by the new Village Committees. Above the Village Committees was the District Committee which acted as a court of appeal, while the guerrillas were the final court of appeal. Neither the Village Committees nor the District Committees had any power to pass a death sentence, as this was a prerogative of the guerrilla courts.<sup>378</sup> When the war ended and a ceasefire was declared in 1979, the withdrawal of the guerrillas to Assembly Points left a chaotic administrative vacuum in the TTLs in the absence of viable traditional authority structures.<sup>379</sup> The Village Committees were eventually demobilized after independence, between 1980 and 1981.

### **Fragmentation of Chieftaincies and Disruption of Traditional life in Eastern and South-Eastern Zimbabwe by Forced Movement into Protected Villages, 1974-1979**

The total collapse of Rhodesian rural local administration under pressure from the guerrilla war became more evident in the late 1970s in the general paramilitarization of District Administration in the eastern parts of the country. More than three quarters of a million peasants that resided in the

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<sup>378</sup> M. Mushonga, 'Curfew and the Man in the Middle in Zimbabwe's war of liberation, with special reference to the eastern areas of Zimbabwe, 1977-1980' in Cheryl Hendricks & Lwazi Lushaba, *From National Liberation to Democratic Renaissance in Southern Africa* (Dakar, CODESRIA, 2005) 172-179

<sup>379</sup> P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District', 26

eastern parts of the country which bordered Mozambique and Zambia were evacuated into fenced settlements that were administered by the RSF in a large-scale operation that was meant to prevent peasant-guerrilla contact. The fragmentation of African chieftaincies, which resulted from the forced removal of African populations from their traditional lands and their resettlement in the so-called 'Protected Villages', seriously eroded the influence that chiefs had formally exercised in their unitary domains. .

The evictions into the Protected Villages tore apart many African chieftaincies and destroyed the basis for the exercise of chiefly authority by partitioning the chiefs' followers to suit Rhodesian security interests. The quasi-military atmosphere that prevailed in the protected villages where many activities were regimented and centralised contributed significantly to the erosion of the chiefs' authority. The government's command structure demanded maximum co-operation from the chiefs, headmen and kraal heads, who had little real alternative but to comply with most official requests. By submitting to the RSF personnel in this way, the traditional leaders rapidly lost their popularity and grip on the people.<sup>380</sup>

Protected Villages were small fenced enclosures that were surrounded by a security fence and guarded by a 24-hour military watch to prevent contact between guerrillas and the peasants. The fenced villages were also known as 'Keeps' in the Rhodesian parlance of the mid-1970s. All the movements in and out of the Protected Village were controlled and closely monitored by the military in the form of the District Security Assistants (DSAs) and the Guard Force which directly reported to the District Administrator of the Region.<sup>381</sup> By 1977 there were over 200 Protected Villages scattered all over Rhodesia,

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<sup>380</sup>P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District', 29-30

<sup>381</sup> H Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War*, 124

with over half a million Africans living behind their fences under guard. In 1979 the number of peasants who were restricted in the Protected Villages had risen to 750,000.<sup>382</sup>

The 'Protected Villages' programme was part of the RSF's counter-insurgency response to the spread of the war and the increasing influence of the guerrillas among the peasants in the TTLs. By 'Protected Villages' the Rhodesians meant 'protected' against contact with the armed insurgents of the African Nationalist movements who commonly relied on the civilian population for information, food, clothes and manpower in terms of recruitment for guerrilla training in Mozambique and Zambia. The PVs were effective to large extent in minimising peasant-guerrilla contact during the night but did not completely eliminate such contacts during the daytime when Africans were permitted to attend to their fields outside the perimeter of the camps. The influence of the guerrillas, though considerable, was not as penetrative at night. Contacts between villagers and the guerrillas were restricted to daylight hours when the villagers would leave the villages to work their land. Communication between the groups was partially or completely cut during the night.<sup>383</sup>

In the Chipinge District of Manicaland, Chief Edgar Tiveni Musikavanhu and his people were removed from their traditional land in 1975 by the RSF due to the increasing number of young people from his area who were abandoning school and crossing the border into Mozambique to join ZANLA. During the forced removal of the chief and his followers, his people were separated by being sent in small groups to each of the 16 Protected Villages that had been set up in Chipinge. The Chief was sent to one of these PVs with only a

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<sup>382</sup> Alois S. Mlambo, *A History of Zimbabwe*, 167-68

<sup>383</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, *Southern Rhodesia Elections, February 1980: Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group*, 29

fraction of his people.<sup>384</sup> The people of Chiweshe were also punished by the government for harbouring guerrillas, by closing down facilities such as schools, shops, grinding mills, clinics and beer-halls. Then in July 1974 the entire population of Chiweshe numbering about 44,000 were uprooted from their traditional lands and penned in 21 Protected Villages to prevent their interaction with guerrillas. A further step that was taken to prevent guerrilla-peasant interaction was the declaration of a dusk-to-dawn curfew in all the TTLs that were contiguous to Zimbabwe's border with Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia in 1975. During this period of the curfew the RSF killed civilians with impunity in the name of combating terrorism.<sup>385</sup>

The government of Rhodesia frequently organized guided tours of some of their Protected Villages that were not located in war zones as a showcase to foreign journalists and insisted that Africans liked the keeps and that they wanted to be protected from the 'terrorists'. However Africans saw things differently. They generally resented their internment in these crowded small settlements and compared it to being penned like animals.<sup>386</sup> They viewed it as the destruction of their way of life for white ends, not black.<sup>387</sup> The Africans were the ultimate losers in this conflict because their forced movement into the 'keeps' by the Rhodesian government resulted in their loss of a lot of livestock and their farmlands.

### **African Chiefs that Opposed the Smith Regime**

Despite the general view that was held by Nationalists in the 1970s that chiefs were 'sell-outs' because of their manipulation by the settler regime, there were

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<sup>384</sup>D. Mitchell, *Makers of History. Who's Who?*, 60

<sup>385</sup>M. Mushonga, 'Curfew and the Man in the Middle in Zimbabwe's war of liberation', 172-179

<sup>386</sup>J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves*, 84-85

<sup>387</sup>Thames Television, *Zimbabwe/Goodbye Rhodesia/1979*, Television Documentary, 11/01/1979

many chiefs that had supported the Nationalist movements in the formative era of African protest politics, as we saw in Chapter 2. The pro-Nationalist political activities of chiefs during that era had openly subverted their relationship with the colonial government and prompted the colonial government to terminate many chieftaincies in the restructuring exercise of 1951. Likewise, there were many chiefs who supported the guerrillas in the 1970s and consequently became targeted by the colonial state because of their political activities. It is evident that in many cases the apparent compliance of the chiefs with the directives of the colonial administration was merely a pragmatic strategy the many chiefs deployed while simultaneously using their newly acquired powers to undermine colonial policies and further their own interests.<sup>388</sup>

Jocelyn Alexander has argued that the criticism of traditional leaders by the Nationalists during the liberation war stemmed from an oversimplification and misunderstanding of their role during the colonial period. She argues that the role of chiefs during the war was complex because, although some chiefs and headmen clearly collaborated with the RF regime, many others played a surreptitious supportive role during the war by collaborating with the guerrillas.<sup>389</sup> Ngwabi Bhebe also maintains that, in general, African Nationalists tended to judge chiefs by the criterion of their political stance in relation to the colonial regime, i.e., they were judged on the basis of their opposition, collaboration, or neutral posture vis-à-vis the regime's policies.<sup>390</sup> Alexander, Pius Nyambara and John Makumbe concur that the position of chiefs during the liberation struggle was more complex than that of government stooges because a number of traditional leaders collaborated with

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<sup>388</sup> P.S. Nyambara, "Immigrants, 'Traditional' Leaders and the Rhodesian State", 781

<sup>389</sup> J. Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, The Centre Can Hold', 185

<sup>390</sup> N. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare*, 77

the Nationalist movements and became agents of democratic transition.<sup>391</sup> Thus, although many chiefs and headmen apparently collaborated with the RF regime, many others played a supportive role during the war, collaborating with guerrillas and spirit mediums. Others even abdicated their chieftainship and assumed positions in the Nationalist parties.<sup>392</sup>

A case study of an African chief who became a leading Nationalist is provided by Chief J. M. Mangwende. Originally a Rhodesian chief, J. M. Mangwende was deposed in 1963 due to his support for the Nationalists and his increasing opposition to the District Commissioner.<sup>393</sup> He subsequently left Rhodesia to join the liberation struggle where he held several key posts in the ANC and ZAPU between 1973 and 1979. From 1973-75, Mangwende held the post of Secretary for Chieftain Affairs in the ANC. In 1975 he became a member of the Central Committee of the ANC, and simultaneously held the position of Secretary for Chieftain Affairs in the party, positions that held until 1976. In December 1975 Mangwende was a member of the ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo's negotiating team for the constitutional conference that was convened in London.<sup>394</sup>

Another case study is provided by the resistance of the Tangwena people, led by their chief Rekayi Tangwena against forced removal from their ancestral lands in the mountains of Inyanga by the Rhodesian Front regime in the 1960s. The ancestral land of Chief Tangwena (Dzeka Chigumira) and his people was sold to a private Company without his knowledge by the BSA Company in 1905 and was later declared to be European land under the Land

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<sup>391</sup> J. Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, The Centre Can Hold', 185; J. Makumbe, 'Local Authorities and Traditional Leadership', 92; P. Nyambara, 'Immigrants, "traditional" leaders and the Rhodesian state', 787

<sup>392</sup> Jocelyn Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, the Centre Can Hold', 185; Robert Cary & Diana Mitchell, *African Nationalist Leaders in Rhodesia: Who's Who?* 270

<sup>393</sup> J. F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118

<sup>394</sup> Robert Cary & Diana Mitchell, *African Nationalist Leaders in Rhodesia: Who's Who?* 270

Apportionment Act of 1930. The land was later sold to the Gaeresi Ranch Company, which generally left Tangwena to live on their ranch without disturbance. However, when the Rhodesian Front government came to power in 1962, it pressured the Gaeresi Ranch Company to evict the Tangwena in 1963. A decade long struggle between the Tangwena people and the RF government ensued as the Tangwena under their new chief Rekayi (son of Chigumira), who was not officially recognised by the RF government, refused to be moved to the adjacent to Holdenby Tribal Trust Land.<sup>395</sup>

The Rhodesian government lost a legal battle in the courts with the Tangwena in 1968 and then issued a special proclamation in order to evict them legally. From 1969 to 1972 the Rhodesian government attracted international criticism by burning and bulldozing the homes of the Tangwena people and confiscating their cattle as a way of forcing them out of Gaeresi Ranch. Chief Tangwena, however, remained resolute in his resistance to the forced eviction efforts of the Smith regime, despite enduring many hardships.<sup>396</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter unveiled how the era from the 1950 to the 1970s witnessed a massive rise in the position of African chiefs in Rhodesia which was spurred by the U.F.P. government's efforts to use them to achieve total control of the rural populace and deny the Nationalists access to the peasantry.<sup>397</sup> It also showed how in the era of the Rhodesian Front government the state went further than just seeking allies among African chiefs in its fight against

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<sup>395</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, *Southern Rhodesia Elections, February 1980: Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group on Elections leading to Independent Zimbabwe*, (London, Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, 1980) 68-69; N. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare*, 68; Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 317

<sup>396</sup> Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 317

<sup>397</sup> A.K.H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia*, 69-72; J.F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118



African nationalists by deploying a strategy of outlawing all the African Nationalist movements and detaining their leadership. The strategy of suppressing all the Nationalist parties by delegitimizing their political messages, and criminalizing membership to these organizations was a corollary political scheme to the promotion of chiefs to be above the African Nationalists in consultations of African political opinion. It enabled Smith deny the Nationalists a voice in negotiations with the British government regarding Rhodesia's drive attain independence under white minority rule.

It revealed how the UFP and RF regimes sought to perpetuate white hegemony in the country by forging a strategic alliance with chiefs and manipulating them to support Rhodesia's efforts to be granted independence a sham independence by Britain, mainly in order to forestall the granting of independence by Britain to the Nationalist parties ZAPU and ZANU as had happened in Zambia and Malawi in 1964. During settlement talks with the British government regarding UDI Smith repeatedly stated that he had no intention of consulting the leadership of the African Nationalists because chiefs were the true spokesmen for all the Africans in the country, and not the Nationalists. The chief political objective of the white minority regime was to secure white power indefinitely and hedge it from the demands of the radical African Nationalists for an unrestricted franchise based on the principle of 'one man, one vote', which threatened to end white minority rule.

A major political objective of the Rhodesians' alliance with the chiefs was to showcase their support in order convince the British government that the settlers' bid for independence under white minority rule had the support of the majority of the Africans in the country. From the time the RF assumed power, its government frequently turned to the Council of Chiefs to elicit manifestations of African support for its actions. It quickly became evident

that the chiefs were now the mouthpiece of the Smith regime when delegates of the chiefs were sent to London to make a case for independence under white rule. The diplomatic isolation of the RF regime after UDI led it to an even stronger alliance with African chiefs in the 1970s, as it sought internal legitimacy to counter its international illegitimacy. Throughout the 1970s African chiefs continued to rise to unprecedented prominence under the Rhodesian Front regime as they were being courted to give some legitimacy to the internationally isolated UDI regime. Smith even promoted some chiefs to Ministerial posts in his government.

This close association of chiefs with the Smith regime after UDI precipitated political fallout between the chiefs and Nationalists and reversed the promising alliance that had been forged between them during the struggle against destocking and the Native land Husbandry Act. The souring of relations between them deteriorated even further during war of liberation when some chiefs became targets of attacks by the ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrillas on accusations of being 'sell-outs', prompting many guerrillas to reject the legitimacy and authority of chiefs. The emergence of alternate structures of rural leadership in the form of ZANLA Village Committees and ZIPRA People's Assemblies occurred mainly because many chiefs and headmen had become so unpopular as a result of their association with the repressive Smith regime that they no longer commanded the respect of their people. By the late 1970s the authority of the chiefs in the rural areas had been so seriously eroded to the extent that they were largely viewed as mere extensions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, as indicated above, the history of chieftainship during the colonial era was complex and has often been oversimplified because there are many recorded cases of chiefs who openly supported the Nationalist struggle and even assisted the guerrillas.

## CHAPTER 4

### POST-INDEPENDENCE REFORMS IN RURAL ADMINISTRATION AND THE SIDE-LINING OF THE TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY OF CHIEFS, 1980-1990

#### Introduction

This chapter reveals how the socialist policies adopted by the new government of Zimbabwe in 1980 defined the relations between the state and traditional institutions in the first decade of Zimbabwe's independence. It maintains the argument that ZANU PF's ideas of socialist transformation, and lingering memories of the collaboration of chiefs with the regime of Ian Douglas Smith in the 1970s, were key factors in the new Government of Zimbabwe's decision to disempower the chiefs in 1980. More radical voices within government even mooted the idea of banning the patriarchal authority of chiefs altogether. The chapter also examines the performance of the new decentralized bureaucratic structures that were introduced into rural local governance at independence and their interaction with the traditional authority of chiefs and headmen in the first two decades after independence is examined.

The chapter unveils how this interactive process was mainly characterized by a dichotomous clash between the traditional land administration of chiefs and the land use policies of official local government structures, which resulted in competition for power and legitimacy, mutual mistrust and an inability to foster accelerated rural development.<sup>398</sup> The chapter maintains that this

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<sup>398</sup> M. Spierenburg, 'Re-Emergence of Traditional Authorities in the Struggle for Control over Land in Dande, Northern Zimbabwe', Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2002; Marja Spierenburg, "We

conflict reflected a hostile encounter not only between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, but also between ‘entangled sovereignties’ of chiefs and government bureaucrats whose powers emanated from different sources of legitimacy.<sup>399</sup> It concludes that these conflicts were the underlying cause of land disputes in most rural areas during first decade of independence.

It shows that the postcolonial state’s efforts to establish a powerful state bureaucracy in the countryside through the imposition from above of new elected local administration bodies, the Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) and the Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) through the Prime Minister’s Directive of 1984, resulted in lack of popular participation of the peasantry in the work of these rural committees that were out of their control. Real control over the rural development programs of these new local government bodies rested with the ruling party hierarchy and central government because these bodies were critical to the state’s political strategies of controlling and ordering rural populations and resources. However, the new local bodies met with resistance from the resurgent institutions of traditional authority in the early 1980s which were recovering from their loss of influence in the 1970s.<sup>400</sup> There is evidence from many districts in Zimbabwe that in the first two decades of independence the VIDCOS and WADCOs suffered from a lack of local support and community participation due to peasant resistance to the autocratic manner in which these elected bodies operated, and the arbitrary manner in which the VIDCOs had been delineated without regard to pre-existing community boundaries.<sup>401</sup>

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fought the war to return to the old ways”. Conflicts about land reforms in Dande, Northern Zimbabwe’, in Sandra Evers, M. Spiereburg & Harry Wels, *Competing Jurisdictions: Settling Land Claims in Africa* (Leiden, BRILL Publishers, 2005) 103-127

<sup>399</sup> Donald S. Moore, *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2005) 157

<sup>400</sup> J. Alexander, ‘Things Fall Apart, The Centre Can Hold’, 175-179;

<sup>401</sup> Jeffrey Kurebwa, ‘A Review of Rural Local Government System in Zimbabwe from 1980 to 2014’, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, Feb. 2015, 105; David Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe: A Social History of the Hwesa People c. 1870s-1990s* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh

The chapter also unveils the resilience of the chiefs and their struggle to re-assert themselves after their disempowerment in the early decades of independence. It ponders on the continued appeal of chiefs and headmen in the postcolonial period and the ironic fact that no permanent damage seems to have happened to their legitimacy among their subjects despite their former association with the Rhodesian Administration. It reveals that in many areas of the country traditional leadership structures re-emerged after the end of the war and re-asserted their authority because, unlike the wartime Village Committees that had usurped the powers of chiefs in the late 1970s, the organisational base of traditional chieftainship had not been based on the war context but on a more permanent foundation, the traditional lineage structure. Consequently, in the localised struggle for authority between the elected bodies and chiefs, the lack of participation by peasants in the work of VIDCOs became a clear indication of not only their preference for traditional leadership structures, but also of their alienation by the new bureaucratic structures that were imposed from above without local-level participation.

### **Administrative Conflict between Bureaucratic Structures and Chiefs in the Communal Areas**

Inspired by the international socialist movement and its concomitant ideas of socialist transformation, the new government that was formed by ZANU PF at independence adopted modernist policies that sought to restructure and reform rural local government by disempowering the traditional patriarchal authorities of chiefs and headmen, which had collaborated with the colonial regime, and replacing them with new democratic structures. Consequently, its policies after independence the government systematically excluded the roles of traditional leaders in land administration, and transferred these roles to

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University, 1999) 151, 178; Jocelyn Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, The Centre Can Hold', 183-184

District Councils, Ward Committees, and Village Development Committees, which came to consider themselves as the exclusive authorities over all communal land. The institution of chieftaincy was treated with great indifference and generally considered as an archaic anachronistic institution that “must simply be allowed to wither away”.<sup>402</sup>

With the advent of the decolonisation of Africa in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many in-coming postcolonial African governments, inspired by Marxist-Leninist revolutionary thought, were critical of all traditional institutions, particularly chieftaincy, because they had been appropriated (and in many cases created) by colonial rulers, and used to advance colonial interests such as labour recruitment, taxation, and repression. The advent of decolonisation was a major watershed in the definition of relations between the institution of chieftaincy and the new African state. The majority of the first generation of African Nationalist leaders who emerged in the postcolonial period viewed chiefs as former functionaries of the colonial order and the institution of chieftaincy as “an anachronistic vestige of the old Africa that had no place in the postcolonial landscape”.<sup>403</sup> Consequently, the new elite of African Nationalist leaders that emerged with the independence of African states in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not wish to accommodate traditional institutions of governance in their new bureaucracies, and quite often viewed traditional authorities as contending sources of power. In countries like Zimbabwe, Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania, Guinea and Burkina Faso, attempts were made in the first decades of independence to strip chiefs

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<sup>402</sup> Lazarus Nzarayebani, Member of Parliament for Mutare South, quoted by Terence Ranger in ‘Democracy and Traditional Political Structures in Zimbabwe, 1890-1999’ in Bhebe and Ranger (eds.) *The Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe Vol. 1: Precolonial and Colonial Legacies*, (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 2001) 47

<sup>403</sup> Economic Commission for Africa, *Relevance of African Traditional Institutions of Governance* (Addis Ababa, ECA Publications, 2007) 8

of most of their authority over rural communities, or even to abolish chieftaincy altogether.<sup>404</sup>

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, during the colonial period, African chiefs had been co-opted by European administrations and suffered a subsequent loss of legitimacy in the eyes of their own people. In some instances, the colonial administrations had actually created chieftaincy structures where they did not previously exist, and given them non-customary rights that fused legislative, administrative, and police functions; all in an attempt to create local hierarchies through which they could exert power. Consequently, in the post-independence era, several countries throughout Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone Africa exhibited great hostility to the institution of chieftaincy. Norbert Musekiwa has shown that traditional leadership have always had a complex relationship with governments, especially during periods of transitions.<sup>405</sup>

During the transition from colonial rule to black-ruled governments in Africa, the fate of chieftaincy institutions hung in the balance as many new African leaders exhibited great political aversion to the continued existence of the traditional authority of chiefs. This attitude towards chieftaincy was most evident in postcolonial Marxist-Leninist-inspired governments in countries like Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Ghana. After the attainment of independence most postcolonial regimes in Africa that had imbibed Marxist-Leninist revolutionary thought were initially hostile to the institution of chieftaincy and its association with ethnic identities, which the modernist

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<sup>404</sup> Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah & the Chiefs: the Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-60* (Accra, F. Reimer Book Services, 2000); M. Anne Pitcher, "Chiefs, Companies And Cotton: Observations From Rural Nampula", *Southern Africa Report*, Vol. 12, No 1, November 1996; Bridget O'Laughlin, 'Class and the Customary: The Ambiguous Legacy of the *Indigenato* in Mozambique', *African Affairs*, 99, 2000, 5-42

<sup>405</sup> Norbert Musekiwa, 'The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition', in E. Masunungure & Jabusile Shumba (eds.) *Zimbabwe: Mired in Transition* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2012) 241

thought of the new African leaders regarded as divisive. In postcolonial Mozambique, the Third FRELIMO Congress accused chiefs of collaborating with the Portuguese during the colonial period and condemned their customary practices as "obscurantist" and "traditional." The Congress labelled chiefs as divisive and reactionary elements of an archaic tribal-feudal structure and charged them with exploiting local communities for their own gain. The government then outlawed chiefs and replaced them with Village Presidents and Party Secretaries.<sup>406</sup> Similarly, in postcolonial Ghana, the government of President Kwame Nkrumah attempted to systematically destroy the institution of chieftaincy and actually incited people against the chiefs.<sup>407</sup> A similar situation unfolded in Zimbabwe in 1980 where rural local government reform measures adopted by the new Government sought to undermine the authority of traditional institutions in judicial and land matters in the Communal Areas (former TTLs) largely because of their perceived pre-independence role as functionaries of colonial oppression.<sup>408</sup>

An examination of the dynamics of the relations between the new Nationalist leaders of independent Zimbabwe and the traditional chiefs in the early decades of the postcolonial era reveals a continuation of the animosity that liberation movements felt against chiefs during the war of liberation, and a determination to marginalize and delegitimize the traditional leadership structures in rural local government. At independence in 1980, the new ZANU-PF-led government had unquestioned legitimacy, having won the 1980 General Elections convincingly. Consequently, the new government had no need for allies in the form of traditional leadership and treated them with

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<sup>406</sup> M. Anne Pitcher, "Chiefs, Companies And Cotton: Observations From Rural Nampula", *Southern Africa Report*, Vol. 12, No 1, November 1996, 26

<sup>407</sup> Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah & the Chiefs*, 113, 126, 176

<sup>408</sup> Godfrey Ncube, 'Crisis of Communal Leadership: Postcolonial local government reform and administrative conflict with traditional authorities in the communal areas of Zimbabwe, 1980-2008', *African Journal of History and Culture*, Vol.3, No. 6, July 2011, 89-95



disdain.<sup>409</sup> The predominant perception within the liberation movement at independence largely viewed the traditional leaders as former ‘collaborators’ with the colonial government, and therefore, ‘sell-outs’. They were regarded as instruments that had been used by the colonial government to resist democratic transition.<sup>410</sup>

As shown in Chapter 3, the active collaboration by the chiefs with the Smith regime engendered enduring animosity towards chiefs among the Nationalists that lasted throughout the era of the war of liberation (1976-1979), and well into the early decades of independence. Criticisms of traditional leadership and predictions of its ultimate demise and irrelevance after independence were widespread during the liberation war.<sup>411</sup> Despite the fact that some traditional leaders had actively supported the liberation war, the institution of chieftainship as a whole was, nevertheless, discredited, both towards the end of the war, and in the first decade of independence. Examples of this political disdain for chiefs abound. For example, although in the Makoni District the family of Chief Chendambuya was linked with radical nationalism, and Chiefs Tandi and Makoni had supported the people’s right to repossess their land which had been stolen by the colonisers, the people’s political attitude towards the institution of chiefship as a whole continued to regard them as traitors, and many chiefs and headmen were killed during the war in Manicaland Province.<sup>412</sup> The general feeling among Zimbabwean Nationalists at the time was that, because chieftaincy had been appropriated by colonialism, it was, therefore, doomed to die with colonialism.

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<sup>409</sup> N. Musekiwa, ‘The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition’, 242

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-242

<sup>411</sup> M. Bratton, *Beyond Community Development*, 50; C. Banana, ‘Provincialization: RF Design for Deepening Apartheid’, *Moto*, 26 August 1972: Document 22 in E. Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem. A Documentary Record 1923-1973*, 123

<sup>412</sup> Fidelis Duri, ‘The role and status of Mutasa traditional rulers during the colonial era, 1898-1979’, M.A. thesis, History Department, U.Z., 2000

Jocelyn Alexander has argued that this criticism of traditional leaders by the Nationalists stemmed from an oversimplification and misunderstanding of their role during the colonial period, especially during the war of liberation. She argues that although some chiefs and headmen clearly collaborated with the RF regime, many traditional leaders had played a supportive role during the war, collaborating with guerrillas and spirit mediums, and others even held party positions.<sup>413</sup> However, not all chiefs supported the liberation struggle. Such leaders were abducted and even murdered by the liberation fighters. For example, headmen Kurewa of Mutasa and Chikomba of Chivhu were murdered on suspicion that they sympathised with the colonial government.<sup>414</sup> Therefore, it could be that the government of Zimbabwe ignored the chiefs because some of them collaborated with the colonial masters.<sup>415</sup>

The predominant feeling among the Nationalists was that the majority of the chiefs had actively collaborated with the Smith regime and therefore were 'sell-outs'.<sup>416</sup> The selection and appointment of chiefs by the settler regime had delegitimized their hereditary authority. Consequently, the authority of colonial chiefs had become so closely associated with the colonial government which supported them that, when Zimbabwe achieved its independence in 1980, the new government tried to do away with the powers of the chiefs. Government created primary courts to take over the judicial role of the chiefs and it created village and ward committees to control the distribution of land. The new dispensation intended to maintain chiefs only as custodians of

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<sup>413</sup> Jocelyn Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, the Centre Can Hold', 185

<sup>414</sup> Fidelis Duri, 'The role and status of Mutasa traditional rulers during the colonial era, 1898-1979', M.A. thesis, History Department, U.Z., 2000

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> C. Banana, 'Provincialization: RF Design for Deepening Apartheid', 123; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'The Last Days of Rhodesia and Transitional Politics in Zimbabwe, 1977-1980', in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Godfrey T. Ncube, *Aspects Of Zimbabwe's Past: Slavery, Famine, The Transition To Colonial Developments* (Forthcoming, 2019)

traditional culture without active political participation.<sup>417</sup> There is a consensus among scholars that the rural local government reform measures adopted by the new Government of Zimbabwe at independence in 1980 sought to undermine the authority of traditional institutions in judicial and land matters in the communal areas; firstly because of their perceived pre-independence role as functionaries of colonial oppression; secondly, because some elements within the new Government viewed traditional institutions as antithetical to their modernization project to transform rural society; and thirdly because other elements in the new Government perceived traditional institutions as centres of alternative authority to that of the formal state.<sup>418</sup> Consequently, in the new postcolonial dispensation, traditional leaders lost some of their organisational power, such as land allocation, and adjudicative powers, to the elected local authorities and the government-appointed judicial system.<sup>419</sup>

As early as March 1980, the District Commissioner of Umtali [Mutare] had questioned the role of chiefs and the tribal structure in the new dispensation of rural administration after independence and was told by the Minister of Local Government that the immediate task was the creation of elected local government bodies such as District Councils and elected local courts. As if to underline this point, no immediate steps were taken by the government to replace dead chiefs and headmen in Manicaland Province in 1980.<sup>420</sup> From very early on after independence, the new government of Zimbabwe had decided that elected District Councils should assume administrative responsibility for the Communal Areas. The creation of these District

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<sup>417</sup>M.F.C. Bourdillon, *Where are the Ancestors? Changing Culture in Zimbabwe* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1993) 63

<sup>418</sup> Godfrey Ncube, 'Crisis of Communal Leadership', 89-95

<sup>419</sup> Norbert Musekiwa, 'The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition', 242

<sup>420</sup> Terence Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1995) 295-296

Councils was central to the government's early policy and was considered essential in order to replace the discredited legacy of colonial administration which had hinged on chiefs and headmen.<sup>421</sup> Gradually, in the first two years of independence new council structures were built up and the authority of chiefs and headmen was replaced.<sup>422</sup>

### **Framing the Conflict: The Juridical Framework for Postcolonial Local Government Reform in Zimbabwe**

Soon after independence, the administration of rural areas was taken over by 55 elected District Councils. The new District Councils had to work together with the Village Committees which had been established during the war. The functions of the wartime Village Committees included the administration of Communal Areas, which essentially involved hearing cases and allocating land. These Village Committees were, however, soon abolished because they were considered to be too autonomous and therefore unreliable as agents of the state and the ruling party, ZANU-PF, and replaced by the elected District Councils representing the business and rural classes. The new structures set up were however removed from the people. Under the provisions of the Chiefs and Headmen Act [Chapter 29:01] of 1982, traditional authorities were stripped of most of the powers they had prior to independence in 1980, and Village Heads were excluded from rural governance. Chieftainship was only retained as a ceremonial symbol of traditional values, but the chiefs and headmen were stripped of all their administrative and judicial functions, and even their tax collecting functions, leaving them with only three functions of a

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<sup>421</sup> Terence Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1995) 296

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.* 297

customary nature. The Act also did not recognise in law the traditional leadership of the village head (*sabhuku*).<sup>423</sup>

Ironically, despite being stripped of most of the powers their powers by the Chiefs and Headmen Act of 1982, traditional leaders continued to draw recognition and respect from the peasantry in the early years of independence.<sup>424</sup> It is confounding that at grassroots level, i.e. among the followers of the traditional leaders, the history of the chiefs' collaboration with the colonial regime did not deal permanent damage to the legitimacy of traditional authority among its subjects after independence. Norbert Musekiwa also observed this elasticity of the traditional institutions when he pointed out that

Such alliances between traditional authorities and forces resisting democratic transition seem not to have caused any permanent damage to the legitimacy of the institution of traditional leadership among its subjects".<sup>425</sup>

Following changes in local land administration that were introduced by the Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralization in 1984, which created a new participatory structure in rural local governance comprising of new, democratically elected authorities, VIDCOS and WADCOs, all the traditional functions of the village head (*sabhuku*) ceased to be recognised and village leadership was transferred to the VIDCO chairman. The Prime Minister's Directive outlined the structure through which peasant communities at sub-district level fitted into the district local governance framework. Commenting on the objectives of the VIDCOs and WADCOs in 1984, the then Minister of

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<sup>423</sup>Parliament of Zimbabwe, Chiefs and Headmen Act [Chapter 29:01] of 1982

<sup>424</sup>Norbert Musekiwa "The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition", 242

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

Community Development and Women's Affairs, Teurai Ropa Nhongo, observed that,

The objective is to empower rural people to have a say in development planning. This new initiative is an example of how policies and structures support a people-oriented Government.<sup>426</sup>

These postcolonial changes in local land administration brought about increased competition over the control of land between the old traditional land authorities (chiefs and headmen) and the new democratically elected authorities, Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), and Ward Development Committees (WADCOs). The dual leadership of the VIDCO chairman and the *sabhuku* at the village level created tensions and role conflict due to administrative overlap as they found themselves having to share power. The existence of two leaders at the village level fuelled conflictual claims to legitimacy and highlighted the crisis of communal leadership that pervaded rural local administration in the first decade of independence in Zimbabwe.<sup>427</sup>

From the inception of rural local government reform in 1980, communal leadership in Zimbabwe was characterized by a profusion of overlapping and incongruent local organizational structures, each with its own boundaries, and drawing on different sources of legitimacy, which created weak and disparate local institutions. It has been noted in other studies that, in principle, Zimbabwe's local government system now had three formal hierarchies, existing side by side, spanning from the state to the grassroots, i.e. a decentralized local government system encompassing Provincial Development

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<sup>426</sup> William A. Munro, *The Moral Economy of the State: Conservation, Community Development and State-Making in Zimbabwe* (Athens, Ohio University, Centre for International Studies, 1998) 219

<sup>427</sup> E. Masunungure & N. Musekiwa, *Local Government Policy Review*, 13

Committees, Rural District Development Committees, Ward Development Committees (WADCOs), and Village Development Committees (VIDCOs); a customary chiefly system encompassing chiefs, headmen and village heads; and a multi-sectoral hierarchy of government ministries; all fanning out at the local level into several administrative, developmental, social, political, and other bodies.<sup>428</sup> Consequently, at the local level, institutions administering land tenure and natural resources were characterized by conflicts, particularly between the traditional authorities and elected leadership of the VIDCOs and WADCOs.

Much of the administrative conflict can be traced back to the combined effect of the Communal Lands Act of 1982, which had divested the chiefs of the land allocation powers vested in them by the RF regime in the 1960s; and the earlier Customary Law and Primary Courts Act of 1981, which had transferred the determination of customary law from the Chiefs' courts to new local bodies appointed by the Minister of Justice under the Act. The Communal Lands Act vested control over land in the President and devolved land administration to Rural District Councils (RDCs) and District Administrators under the then Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development. Rural District Councils, therefore, became the rightful land authorities. By removing the application of customary law regarding access to and use of land from customary institutions (chieftaincy) to newly elected local government institutions (the Rural District Councils), the new Government of Zimbabwe was effectively vesting the application of customary law in non-customary institutions.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> B. Sithole, *The institutional framework for the management and use of natural resources in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: village cases of access to and use of dambos from Mutoko and Chiduku* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, 1997); A. Mandondo, 'Situating Zimbabwe's Natural Resource Governance Systems in History', Centre for International Forestry Research, *Occasional Paper No. 32*, 2000.

<sup>429</sup> P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe', 20-41

Rather than incorporate and co-opt traditional institutions into state institutions, the Government sought to marginalize them by denying them, among other things, the power to allocate land. In the long term, the combined effect of the Customary Law and Primary Courts Act, and the Communal Lands Act, introduced profound changes in the land tenure situation in the Communal Lands and left the traditional, conservative leaders with little more than a spiritual function.<sup>430</sup> In practice, however, chiefs and headmen always inserted themselves into the process by clandestinely allocating land on the basis of customary, territorial and other claims to the land.<sup>431</sup>

This lack of clarity on the roles and functions of various institutions at the local administrative levels, particularly over issues of land, precipitated a crisis of Communal leadership in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe, whereby, on one hand, elected rural institutions (VIDCOs, WADCOs etc.) had little real legitimacy according to traditional grassroots perspectives, while traditional leaders were not always acknowledged or respected by the formal state's modernization initiatives.<sup>432</sup> Although the Chiefs and Headmen Act (1988) excluded traditional leaders in land administration, the inhabitants of Communal Areas still referred most land matters and requests to traditional leaders. Furthermore, the Chiefs and Headmen Act (1988) did not recognize the institution of village head, but the village heads remained particularly defiant to their non-recognition and to the imposition of the new structures, and they continued to be involved in the allocation of land, encouraged by both chiefs and headmen who considered the position of village head to be

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<sup>430</sup> Government of Zimbabwe, *Communal Lands Development Plan*, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, Harare, 1986

<sup>431</sup>A. Mandondo, 'Situating Zimbabwe's Natural Resource Governance Systems in History', Centre for International Forestry Research, *Occasional Paper No. 32*, 2000

<sup>432</sup>A. Mandondo, 'Situating Zimbabwe's Natural Resource Governance Systems in History', Centre for International Forestry Research, *Occasional Paper No. 32*, 2000; B. Sithole, *The institutional framework for the management and use of natural resources in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: village cases of access to and use of dambos from Mutoko and Chiduku*, (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, CASS, 1997)



very necessary in traditional local administration.<sup>433</sup> The VIDCOs, on the other hand, faced serious problems from their inception in carrying out some of their functions and in most cases they gave up because they were widely viewed as illegitimate structures with no credibility or respect, and no real effective power and resources to implement their roles.<sup>434</sup>

This crisis of communal leadership manifested itself in many land dispute cases that occurred at district level throughout the country, where there was clear evidence of hostility between the new and the old land administration structures. David Maxwell's study of Manicaland has documented the clash between traditional leaders and VIDCOs over land allocation powers, in which the chiefs complained about the authoritarian manner in which the VIDCOs distributed land and accused local government officials of favouritism. In September 1986 the Provincial Council of Chiefs demanded the re-investment of chiefs' powers to allocate land. In 1987 chiefs and headmen in Nyanga District criticised the confusion over the roles of chiefs, headmen, VIDCOs, and councillors in land allocation and suggested that land administration should be returned to traditional leaders.<sup>435</sup>

It was because of this rising conflict between the elected leadership of the ward and village development committees, and traditional authorities, on the control of local administration that the Rukuni Land Tenure Commission (1994) recommended the need to harmonise the traditional and elective offices and structures at the grassroots level.<sup>436</sup> The enactment of the Traditional

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<sup>433</sup> Dale Dore "Critical Analysis of Land Report and Recommendations", *Future Land Tenure Systems in Zimbabwe's Smallholder Farming Areas: Implications on Investment, Resource Conservation and Productivity*, Harare, 1995; Tendai Murisa, 'An Analysis of Emerging Forms of Social Organisation and Agency in the Aftermath of Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe', PhD Thesis, Rhodes University, 2009

<sup>434</sup> P. Nyambara, 'Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District', 20-41

<sup>435</sup> David Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 179

<sup>436</sup> Stephen Chakaipa, 'Local Government Institutions and Elections' in Jaap de Visser, Nico Steytler & Naison Machingauta, *Local Government Reform in Zimbabwe: A Policy Dialogue* (Cape Town, University of the Western Cape, Community Law Centre, 2010) 48

Leaders Act [Chapter 29:17] of 1998 began the endeavour to harmonise these rural administrative structures in an effort to resolve their inherent conflict in rural administration. Evidence gathered by the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems in 1994 showed that the most serious land conflicts in the Communal Areas had been worsened by the acute breakdown in local administrative structures, and the resultant erosion of authority and responsibility. The Commission "found no legal basis for the VIDCOs in land matters" and observed that there was widespread resistance to VIDCO/WADCO structures as credible authorities over land.<sup>437</sup>

### **Impact of Chiefs' Disempowerment on Traditional Management of Natural Resources in Rural Communities in the 1980s**

The disempowerment of chiefs and headmen in the first decade of independence placed them in a subordinate position to the new bureaucratic structures (VIDCOs and WADCOs) in District Administration, which were created following the Prime Minister's Directive of 1984 that prescribed the establishment of new local institutions to facilitate planning and development at the local level. As Prosper Matondi has observed, the Prime Minister's Directive of 1984 that created the VIDCOs and WADCOs was not only a direct affront to the indigenous traditional institutions, but also revealed the new Government's modernisation thrust that leant towards a wholesale adoption of western values and systems, as opposed to traditional values.<sup>438</sup>

As we saw above, the relationship between the chiefs and the new bureaucratic structures became a polarised collision between technocratic

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<sup>437</sup> Government of Zimbabwe, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems*, Harare, October 1994, 28-29.

<sup>438</sup> Prosper B. Matondi, 'Local Level Development Institutions: Their Effectiveness in Spearheading Rural Development in Zimbabwe', in M.T. Moyo, C.T. Khombe & L. R. Ndlovu, *Innovations in Rural Development: Experiences from Bulilima and Mangwe District of Zimbabwe*, Institute for Rural Technologies, National University of Science and Technology, 2008, 39

modernisation and traditional practices and value systems. Consequently, the VIDCOs and WADCOs never really functioned in the manner that the post-colonial state had envisioned largely due to conflict with traditional leaders and their faithful adherents.<sup>439</sup>

A number of scholars that have researched around issues of natural resource management in rural communities have noted that the introduction of the policy of Decentralization in the early years of independence, and the introduction of various bureaucratic institutions into natural resource management undermined traditional collective management regimes over natural resources through traditional norms and values. Mawere, Mabeza and Shava maintain that the Prime Minister's Directive resulted in the breakdown of the traditional authority of chiefs, headmen, traditional healers and spirit mediums over rural natural resources and community regulation of the exploitation and management of these resources.<sup>440</sup>

In many parts of Southern Africa, traditional authorities were the guardians of the land in the precolonial period, responsible for the management and conservation of natural resources. According to Daneel, people in precolonial Africa observed certain traditional customs handed down by their ancestors which regulated their use of natural resources. They also believed that failure to observe these ancestral dictates could lead to misfortunes such as the withdrawal of the bounty of the land and its resources because of ancestors' displeasure. The role of the traditional authorities was to enforce strict observance of traditional natural resource management regulations such as the

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<sup>439</sup>Prosper B. Matondi, 'Local Level Development Institutions: Their Effectiveness in Spearheading Rural Development in Zimbabwe', 39

<sup>440</sup>M. Mawere, C. Mabeza and T. Shava, "Traditional Authority in Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM): A Critical Investigation of the Role of Traditional Authority in Fisheries Management in GacheGache Communal Lands of Kariba, Zimbabwe", *Fisheries and Aquaculture Journal*, Volume 5: Issue 2, 2014, 2, 5

weekly ancestral rest-day (*chisi* in chiShona, or *ilanga lokuzila* in siNdebele), preparing rain-supplication rituals, and protecting water resources and sacred groves in the forests from exploitation, and wildlife conservation so as to protect species diversity.<sup>441</sup>

By virtue of being of royal descent, each chief inherited secular and religious responsibilities to safeguard the ancestral land and the sole right to alienate territory within his polity, and, as was the case in many societies in Southern Africa, was generally considered ‘the owner of the land and guardian of its inhabitants.’<sup>442</sup> The chief was, at the same time, the repository of supreme power and authority and served as the principal link between the people and the royal ancestors and so would periodically propitiate the *midzimu* (ancestral spirits) to ensure both abundant rainfall and the continued fertility of the land. Communication with the spiritual world was another ultimate source of his power. In her research among the Karanga, Sr. Mary Aquina established that the power of an ancestor-spirit depended on the social status he occupied in life. As such, the *mudzimu* of a chief was considered to have more power than that of a commoner, because it controlled not only the chiefly family, but also all the people living in the chiefdom.<sup>443</sup> The *svikiro* (spirit medium) also had a very significant role to play in natural resource management and would also be consulted in the event of both calamities and thanksgiving in the *nyika* (chiefdom).<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>441</sup>M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona*, 33, 66, 81, 131, 245, 251; Phathisa Nyathi, *Zimbabwe’s Cultural Heritage*, (Bulawayo, AmaBooks, 2005) 122; M.L. Daneel, ‘Environmental Reform: A New Venture of Zimbabwe’s Traditional Custodians of the Land’, *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law: Special Issue on the New Relevance of Traditional Authorities to Africa’s Future*, Vol. 37-38, 1996, 374-376.

<sup>442</sup>B. Isaacman and A. Isaacman, ‘Slavery and Social Stratification among the Sena of Mozambique. A Study of the Kaporo System’ in S. Miers and I. Kopytoff (eds) *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1977) 14.

<sup>443</sup>Sr. Mary Aquina, ‘Spirit Beliefs among the Karanga’, *NADA* Vol. X No.5 1973, 53.

<sup>444</sup>C.J.K. Latham, ‘The Social Organisation of the MaShona, Part III’, *NADA*, vol. xii, no.1, 1979, 6

However, colonial and postcolonial governments in Zimbabwe generally failed to recognise this customary environmental authority of chiefs over the land. Consequently, chiefs were unable to stop land abuse and deforestation, particularly in the first decades after independence. The advent of ‘modern’ bureaucratic institutions of land and natural resource management in the colonial and postcolonial periods, which were based on Western scientism, tended to side-line the traditional authorities in issues of management and conservation of natural resource in rural communities, thereby engendering situations of conflict and weakening natural resource management systems in rural communities. The introduction of decentralization in Zimbabwe in 1984 created new institutions to coordinate rural development in the Communal Areas, which ran parallel to the traditional institutions that were already in existence, thereby creating competing jurisdictions in the rural areas.

Mawere, Mabeza and Shava argue that the disempowerment of chiefs in the postcolonial period in Zimbabwe left a power vacuum in the sustainable natural resources management in rural areas where, despite being community leaders, traditional authorities and their institutions were not legitimized in natural resource management.<sup>445</sup> Madzudzo and Dzingirai provide a case study of Binga District where the Tonga resisted efforts by the government to abolish traditional leadership soon after the independence of Zimbabwe because, for the local people, traditional leadership was linked to the fertility of the land, and any replacement of them was thought of as likely to cause a disaster of some kind.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> M. Mawere, et. al., ‘Traditional Authority in Community Based Natural Resource Management’, 1-7

<sup>446</sup> V. Dzingirai & E. Madzudzo, ‘Big Men and Campfire: A Comparative Study of the Role of External Actors in Conflicts Over Local Resources’, *Zambezia*, vol. XXVI, (1), 1999, 80; V. Dzingirai & M.F.C. Bourdillon, ‘Religious Ritual and Political Control in Binga District, Zimbabwe’, *African Anthropology*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 526-567

Chiefs were also able to exploit their traditional role as environmental guardians and custodians to demand the return of their powers to administer land in the communal areas by drawing attention to the growing litany of environmental problems that they ascribed to their disempowerment. They argued that before their disempowerment, in 1980, problems such as deforestation and River bank cultivation had been controlled by chiefs and headmen and kept at a minimal level. They also added that, because the government after independence had stripped chiefs' rights and limited their role to only arbitrating in domestic disputes and sitting on village development committees, they did not recognise their 'mystically derived environmental authority'.<sup>447</sup> Consequently, chiefs were no longer able to reassert some control over traditional lands, and the protection of water resources, forests and wildlife conservation, or to stop the land abuse and deforestation that characterised the post-independence years.<sup>448</sup> In many areas of Zimbabwe, in the first decades after independence many environmental pressures were brought to bear upon the land and its resources because of land hunger, and this manifested itself in the form of woodlot deforestation, soil erosion, watershed siltation, land exhaustion, and excessive use of firewood by households reeling under economic stress.<sup>449</sup>

Chiefs even attributed the devastating drought of 1992 to their loss of power to allocate land because they could no longer perform the traditional rituals necessary to avert such disasters. This concern was expressed by 50 headmen and chiefs from Manicaland in February 1992, who had gathered to discuss

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<sup>447</sup> M.L. Daneel, 'Environmental Reform: A New Venture of Zimbabwe's Traditional Custodians of the Land', *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law: Special Issue on the New Relevance of Traditional Authorities to Africa's Future*, Vol. 37-38, 1996, pp. 347-376; V. Dzingirai & M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'Religious ritual and political control in Binga District, Zimbabwe', *African Anthropology*, IV, 1997, 2, 4-26

<sup>448</sup> M.L. Daneel, 'Environmental Reform: A New Venture of Zimbabwe's Traditional Custodians of the Land', 347-376

<sup>449</sup> P. Bond and M. Manyanya, *Zimbabwe's Plunge. Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the search for Social Justice* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002) 78

the problems that the province was experiencing. The concerns of the traditional authorities were supported by the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (1994), which reported that problems such as land degradation, river bank cultivation, deforestation and siltation had escalated to such an extent that Government was spending thousands of dollars to remedy the situation.

The report of the Land Commission even hinted at the re-empowerment of chiefs and headmen as the traditional custodians of the land, noting that,

traditional leaders used to carry more meaningful authority over the use of natural resources, but this has now been eroded... laws on natural resources are now basically disregarded in Communal Areas where the political pressure after independence was to turn a blind eye to violators and concentrate on persuasion as the main conservation tool.<sup>450</sup>

Chiefs were, therefore, able to present themselves as defenders of tradition against the new authority of the VIDCOs, by tapping into peasant memories of the past, where chiefs and headmen had had a connection to the land in the eyes of the public and were often seen as the traditional custodians of the land. In peasant memory, chiefs had protected the land through upholding the reverence of certain days per week on which no farming was permitted, a practice that protected soil fertility, and in the general regulation of society's interaction with the environment through the observance of traditional rituals in rain supplication and the preservation of forests and wild life.<sup>451</sup> There is evidence that in some cases the influence of traditional authorities undermined

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<sup>450</sup> Government of Zimbabwe, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems* (Harare, October 1994) 28-29

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*; M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona*, , 33, 66, 81, 131, 245, 251

the new local government structures. This could account for the evident lack of local support and community participation in the work of VIDCOs and WADCOs in many areas of the country in the early decades of independence which was even reported on by the Ministry of Local Government officials.<sup>452</sup>

In the early decades of independence, chiefs were able to exploit their representation in the legislature as a podium through which they were able to express their demands for the return of their powers to allocate land, and to cast themselves as defenders of ‘tradition’, against unpopular state policies and the new local administration structures.<sup>453</sup> In the early decades of independence, there was a notable ambivalence in the new government’s policy towards traditional authorities because some measures taken by the government bolstered the status of chiefs in the Legislature. Taking a leaf from the colonial period, the new government maintained the presence of chiefs in the Senate by appointing 10 Senator Chiefs in the 150-member body. Even at the local administrative level chiefs sat as ex-officio members of the new councils and, together with their headmen, continued to receive their monthly allowances from the government.

Some key ZANU PF politicians and officials even publicly defended the continued recognition of chiefs in terms of the government’s policy of reconciliation which had been extended to the ousted colonisers, while others argued that chiefs were central figures in the preservation of culture.<sup>454</sup> The ambivalence also stemmed from differing relations between Nationalists and chiefs during the liberation struggle. Despite these ambiguous efforts, chieftaincy continued to operate with large numbers of adherents, especially

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<sup>452</sup> Minister of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development, Speech to Annual General Meeting of CAMPFIRE Association of District Councils, 15 July 1989

<sup>453</sup> P. Nyambara, ‘Land Disputes in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe District’, 20-41

<sup>454</sup> David Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 149-150



in rural areas. In this way, chiefs were able to garner popular rural support for traditional institutions by closely associating themselves with the notion of communal tenure and protecting natural resources.

### **Establishment of Hegemony and the Failure of Decentralization in Rural Local Government**

Understanding the relationship between government and the rural areas after the take-over of rural local governance responsibilities by the VIDCOs is central to understanding the relationship between government and traditional authorities in Zimbabwe after independence. In 1980, the newly elected ZANU PF government was determined that the state should lead, guide, and regulate economic development and to distance the postcolonial state from its colonial predecessor by recasting the form of state authority. However, as Munro observes, the continuities in development strategies between the colonial and the postcolonial state are striking.<sup>455</sup>

The ZANU (PF) government drew heavily on institutional structures which the colonial government had begun to put in place as its capacity to regulate rural society dissipated in the 1970s. Like its late predecessor, the government sought to dispel local understanding of the state as overweening and domineering. But the logic of this objective had shifted significantly; whereas the RF government had aimed increasingly to extract the state from rural society, the postcolonial government set out to embed the state in rural society.<sup>456</sup> Conservation and Community Development policies, which provided the main pillars of rural development strategies, constituted the chief conduits for these efforts.

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<sup>455</sup>W. Munro, *The Moral Economy of the State*, 219

<sup>456</sup>*Ibid.* 221-222

After independence, the new government attempted to establish hegemony over rural spaces, once again calling on conservation and Community Development as the main pillars of rural development strategies, while redefining local concepts of community. There is clear evidence of continuity in the state's hegemonic project, in spite of the fact that post-independence development strategies were directed towards greater rural inclusion. It is also evident that the partisan and authoritarian practices that characterised local governance in the postcolonial period were in many ways a continuation of colonial centralising policies that had been utilised to shape and manage rural life. Although colonial rule had been supplanted by the attainment of independence, the legacy of colonial practices of local government, which had sought to expand bureaucratic control over rural spaces through the District Commissioner (renamed District Administrator after independence), remained and continued to shape the postcolonial state's territorial and political strategies, and the general mode of rule after independence, albeit with some modifications.<sup>457</sup>

The local struggles over power and resources between traditional institutions and VIDCOs that occurred in the Communal Areas after independence were triggered by the postcolonial state's efforts to re-establish a powerful state bureaucracy in the countryside in a manner that was not dissimilar to colonial practices of local government that had sought to achieve surveillance, domination and control of the rural populations in Rhodesia.<sup>458</sup> Munro's work has demonstrated how the postcolonial state in many ways inherited the structural vulnerabilities of economic and production structures of the colonial state, and local government and rural development strategies that had evolved

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<sup>457</sup> Amanda Hammar, 'The Making and Unmasking of Local Government in Zimbabwe', in Amanda Hammar, Brian Raftopoulos & Stig Jensen (eds.) *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2003) 121, 134

<sup>458</sup> W. Munro, *The Moral Economy of the State*, 219-222; Suzanne Dansereau, *Review of W. Munro's The Moral Economy of the State* in *Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 36, No. 1, 2002, 164-166

under the colonial regime, all of which are difficult to transform. He reveals that these precedents are the ones which continued to inform the relationship between government and the rural areas despite important shifts in the political character of Zimbabwe after independence.<sup>459</sup> He argues that post-independence development policies used strategies of rural control and development that "resonated remarkably with the colonial ideas of the 1950s and 60s" as the state sought ways to establish its authority over rural areas through a complex process that balanced the dual imperatives of control and consent.<sup>460</sup>

Whereas the Prime Minister's Directive had intended to promote community participation in the planning of local development through a Decentralization of government and policies aimed at rural inclusion, the fact that most District Councils lacked the expertise to formulate development plans, and the financial and human resources to implement them, meant that they came to depend entirely on the expertise of the sectoral ministries, something that amounted to a form of recentralisation.<sup>461</sup> The original objectives of the Prime Minister's Directive of 1984 aimed at a progressive state-society relationship whereby the state would be embedded in rural society. The state attempted to do this by incorporating rural communities through a participatory structure in rural local government that would promote grassroots development in the Communal Areas. Peasants would be brought into a collective, in the form of Cooperatives and Village Development Committees.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> W. Munro, *The Moral Economy of the State*, 219-222

<sup>460</sup> Suzanne Dansereau, *Review of W. Munro's The Moral Economy of the State in Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 36, No. 1, 2002, 164-166

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Jocelyn Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, the Centre Can Hold', 183

<sup>462</sup> Suzanne Dansereau, *Review of Munro, Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2002, 164-166

However, contrary to the participatory structures that had been envisaged by the policy of Decentralization, the practice of rural local government in Zimbabwe in the first two decades after independence became characterized by centralisation of development planning by bureaucrats in the sectoral ministries and the overbearing influence of the ruling party ZANU PF. Village Development Committees became used as conduits of political patronage, rather than serving the interests of subordinate groups. Attempts to have them act otherwise, and especially as a tool for change by and for rural women, ran up against scarce resources, a migrant economy, an increasingly insecure regime, and eventually party politics and even patriarchy.<sup>463</sup> Judith de Wolf's study of Katerere in Nyanga district clearly reveals the top-down processes by which the practice of local governance in the area was recentralised by the ruling party and district-level bureaucrats.<sup>464</sup> Even the report of the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems cited the lack of democratic governance in the operations of VIDCOs, and the prevalence of "autocracy and manipulation".<sup>465</sup>

Consequently, the initial objectives of Decentralization failed in the long run because of ZANU PF's domination of the VIDCOs and WADCOs. As noted earlier, rural local government institutions became central to the postcolonial state's political strategies of controlling and ordering rural populations and resources. Muzondidya argues that because of the ruling party's influence over the elected bodies, the VIDCOs and WADCOs failed to evolve into politically inclusive structures of governance; instead they became instrumental in the partial insulation of the rural areas from alternative

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<sup>463</sup> Suzanne Dansereau, Review of Munro, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2002, 164-166

<sup>464</sup> Judith de Wolf, 'Practices of Local Governance. A Sociological Study into the Functioning of Local Government in Nyanga District, Zimbabwe', MSc. Thesis, Wageningen Agricultural University, 1996, 66

<sup>465</sup> Government of Zimbabwe, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems*, Harare, October 1994, 24

political influence of opposition parties. Many rural areas became literally cordoned off from opposition party influences because of ZANU PF's dominance and control of rural populations through these administrative structures.<sup>466</sup>

Amanda Hammar sees no significant change in the role played by the VIDCOs and WADCOs from that played by wartime Village Committees and cells of ZANU PF during the liberation struggle, and concludes that ,

they remained local ZANU-PF party committees and cells carried over from the liberation war but whose partisan and authoritarian practices pervaded both popular participation and democratic developmentalism.<sup>467</sup>

Derman and Murombedzi provide evidence of the debilitating effects of ZANU PF's overbearing domination of local government institutions in their studies of districts in the Zambezi valley by noting that it was an unspoken rule that all the people elected to the District Councils after independence had to be members of ZANU PF, and that, all the Provincial Governors and District Administrators were appointed from well-placed members of the ruling party.<sup>468</sup> These village-level institutions came to be seen as tools both to secure the authority of the state and to entrench the power of the party among poor and marginal peasant populations.

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<sup>466</sup> James Muzondidya, 'Zimbabwe's Failed Transition?: An Analysis of the Challenges and Complexities in Zimbabwe's Transition to Democracy in the Post-2000 period', in Tim Murithi & Aquilina Mawadza, *Zimbabwe in Transition: A View From Within* (Johannesburg, Fanele Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2011) 10

<sup>467</sup> A. Hammar, 'Disrupting Democracy? Altering Landscapes of Local Government in post-2000 Zimbabwe', Crisis States Discussion Paper No. 9 (Denmark, Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2005) 19

<sup>468</sup> W. Derman & J. Murombedzi, 'Democracy, Development and Human Rights in Zimbabwe. A Contradictory Terrain?', *African Rural and Urban Studies*, Vol. 1, 1994, 122;

Even the Rural District Councils failed to operate as autonomous units serving the interests of local communities because they largely remained an appendage of central government, severely marginalised, under-resourced and dependent on central government for both their funding and staffing.<sup>469</sup>

Scoones and Matose argue that the Rural District Councils gave all power to the state and limited the power of traditional leadership and the local people to participate in local development planning, and exercise authority and control in the management of natural resources in their communities.<sup>470</sup> The work of the District Councils came to be dominated by the government officials that served on them. The fact that the District Development Committee (DDC), which was responsible for developing the district development plan, was composed entirely of district heads of central government ministries and departments, together with representatives of the state security organisations, chaired by the District Administrator, meant that the DDC was akin to a committee of central government.<sup>471</sup> It also meant that the planning of district development programmes became a top-down process with little community participation. In the development of the district plan emphasis was placed on implementing central government policies rather than training VIDCOs and WADCOs to produce their own development plans.

There is evidence from many districts in Zimbabwe that in the first two decades of independence the VIDCOs and WADCOs did not receive popular support from local communities due to the autocratic manner in which these

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<sup>469</sup> E.M. Chiwome & Z. Gambahaya, *Culture and Development: Perspectives from the South*, (Harare, Mond Books, 1998) 236; W. Munro, *The Moral Economy of the State*, 219-222; E. Masunungure & N. Musekiwa, *Local Government Policy Review* (Cape Town, Policy Zimbabwe Institute, June 2005) 13; J. McGregor, 'The Politics of Disruption: War Veterans and the Local State in Zimbabwe', *African Affairs*, 2002, 17-23

<sup>470</sup> I. Scoones and F. Matose, "Local woodland management: constraints and opportunities for sustainable resource use" in P.N. Bradley et. al. (eds.) *Living with Trees: Policies for Woodland Management in Zimbabwe*, (Washington D.C., World Bank, 1993) 157-198

<sup>471</sup> J.C. Murombedzi, 'Decentralization or Recentralization?: Implementing CAMPFIRE in the Omay Communal Lands of the Nyaminyami District', Working Paper No. 2, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, 1992

bodies operated, and the arbitrary manner in which the VIDCOs had been delineated on a mathematical calculation of the number of households, without regard to pre-existing community boundaries.<sup>472</sup> This process was accompanied by a notable decline in the rural dynamism that had characterised politics at the local level in the early 1980s. Part of the reason for this decline was that party structures such as the VIDCOs had been imposed from above, resulting in local loss of control over development to authorities further up the party hierarchy.<sup>473</sup>

The lack of local participation in the work of VIDCOs can be interpreted as one way in which the peasantry articulated their challenge to the state's search for authority and control over the countryside and underscored their preference for traditional leadership structures. Commenting on the lack of cooperation by peasants with the work of the VIDCOs, the Minister of Local Government Rural and Urban Development observed in 1989 that there was a disturbing development in some areas of the country where there was,

an unacceptable level of participation in the planning process by residents at the village and ward levels. Reports reaching my ministry suggest that people are not sufficiently involved or active in the village and ward development committees.<sup>474</sup>

The rural communities' clear preference for traditional leadership structures pitted traditional leadership in direct competition with the modernising and authoritarian ideology of the civil servants in the Ministry of Lands and the Ministry of Local Government. Decisions concerning development policy and

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<sup>472</sup> W. Derman & J. Murombedzi, *Democracy, Development and Human Rights in Zimbabwe*, 122

<sup>473</sup> D. Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 178

<sup>474</sup> Minister of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development, Speech to Annual General Meeting of CAMPFIRE Association of District Councils, 15 July 1989

land reform were taken at the national level, and state resources were channelled to rural areas with little sensitivity to bottom-up demands.<sup>475</sup> The administrative competition between the modernisers in the powerful state bureaucracy that came to administer the rural areas after independence; and traditional leadership structures, stemmed from the complete exclusion of chiefs and headmen from the institutional framework local government and rural development in Zimbabwe that was outlined by the Prime Minister's Directive in 1984, which declared that the basic unit of planning in the new system would be democratically elected Village Development Committees (VIDCOs).

Despite the disempowerment of chiefs in the first decade of independence, at the local level they continued to enjoy genuine, popular support and exhibited a remarkable endurance, elasticity and adaptability to changing political circumstances. In spite of the loss of their traditional responsibilities to the elected bodies, the legitimacy of the institution of chieftaincy among its subjects remained unshaken. This was because, unlike the elected leadership of the VIDCO and WADCO, chiefs held offices that derived from customary hereditary succession and therefore were endowed with 'traditionally' legitimate status.<sup>476</sup> Consequently, they continued to carry out their customary functions of allocating land and resolving customary law disputes, and the local people continued to recognise them as their community leaders and accorded them the status that they had always had.

Although the postcolonial state introduced several pieces of legislation into the juridical framework of rural local governance at independence that were meant to undermine the courts that were run by traditional leaders, such as the

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<sup>475</sup> J. Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, the Centre Can Hold', 180, 183; M. Drinkwater, *The State and Agrarian Change in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas* (London, MacMillan, 1991) 103

<sup>476</sup> D. Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 122



Customary Law and Local Courts Act [No. 2] of 1990, the elected officers who presided over the new courts encountered stiff opposition from chiefs that continued to claim that running courts was their traditional function. In many cases where the elected presiding officers found that they could not compete against the influence of the chiefs among the peasants, a compromise was reached by empowering some chiefs to run courts. This concession to the chiefs inevitably undermined the influence of the elected officials of the courts.<sup>477</sup> Norma Kriger notes that five of the eight headmen who survived the liberation war in her study area were elected to positions in the newly established courts after independence under conditions similar to those described above.<sup>478</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Rural local government reform measures adopted by the new Government of Zimbabwe at independence in 1980 were largely inspired by the state's modernization initiatives and the need to create a framework for expanded delivery of services to the peasant communities in order to redress the imbalances of colonial neglect. However, the reform measures also sought to undermine the authority of traditional institutions in judicial and land matters in the communal areas; firstly because of their perceived pre-independence role as functionaries of colonial oppression; secondly, because some elements within the new Government viewed traditional institutions as antithetical to their modernization project to transform rural society; and thirdly because other elements in the new Government perceived traditional institutions as centres of alternative authority to that of the formal state. The failure by the new Government to incorporate and co-opt traditional institutions into formal

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<sup>477</sup> J. Alexander, 'Things Fall Apart, the Centre Can Hold', 180, 183

<sup>478</sup> N. Kriger, 'Struggles for Independence: rural conflicts in Zimbabwe's war of liberation', 473

state institutions in the first two decades of independence lies at the heart of the confusion surrounding land administration in the communal areas after independence.

This confusion at the local administrative levels was characterized by a lack of clarity on roles and functions between the traditional institutions of chief, headman and village head, and the elected leadership of village development committees (VIDCOs) and ward development committees (WADCOs) in land matters. It precipitated a crisis of communal leadership in the communal areas of Zimbabwe, whereby, on one hand, elected rural institutions had little real legitimacy according to traditional grassroots perspectives, while traditional leaders were not always acknowledged or respected by the formal state's modernization initiatives. However, in many areas of the country, chiefs, headmen and village-heads illegally re-acquired some of their defunct authority over land and proceeded to clandestinely allocate land. This crisis of communal leadership manifested itself in many land dispute cases that occurred at district level throughout the country for more than two decades, where there was clear evidence of hostility between the new and the old land administration structures.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE RESURGENCE OF CHIEFS AS POLITICAL ACTORS IN ZIMBABWE, 1990s - 2010

#### Introduction

This chapter addresses a significant paradox in African studies that has drawn the attention of many scholars in chieftaincy studies in the last two decades, i.e. the revival and growing influence of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe today despite their association with colonial regimes before independence. It explores the evident resilience of the institution of chieftaincy over time and its paradoxical political trajectory from a discredited institution at the end of the liberation war in the 1970s because of its alliance with colonial forces, to its revival and current importance in Zimbabwe today, where chiefs are publicly courted by government officials and the media. The chapter explores the sources of the evident resilience of the institution of chieftaincy under the onslaught of the forces of colonialism and modernisation and identifies the durability of the appeal of traditional culture and traditional legitimacy as the underlying reason for the resurgence of chiefs in the second decade of independence.

It builds on the preceding chapters by unveiling how the institution of chieftaincy in its current form continues to be shaped through the exercise of power to do the bidding of governments in power. It begins by exploring the various theories and explanations that have been proffered by scholars throughout Southern Africa to explain this region-wide phenomenon, but then goes further to argue that in Zimbabwe there was another political dynamic that propelled chiefs back into prominence, i.e. the legitimisation crisis that

ZANU PF was faced with in the 1990s. It shows that the resurgence of chiefs in the late 1990s was due to their official courtship by the postcolonial state when it became confronted with a legitimation crisis due to its declining popularity and growing political opposition to its rule due to a deepening economic meltdown, severe poverty, hyperinflation and unemployment.

The last part of the chapter critically analyses the relevance of traditional authorities to democratic transition and rural development in Zimbabwe today. It is written against current debates raging all over sub-Saharan Africa over the relevance of inherited traditional structures to democratic governance. The relevance of traditional institutions, especially chieftaincy, to the transformation of African economies and governance systems is highly disputed in the postcolonial literature, with some analysts maintaining that chieftainship is intrinsically undemocratic.<sup>479</sup> Throughout Southern Africa today, traditional institutions feature prominently in the discourse around democratisation of the postcolonial state, and the political nexus between modern bureaucratic institutions and traditional leadership. This chapter, however, argues that precolonial heritage structures of traditional leadership should be accorded space by the state to operate without manipulation because their precolonial mode of governance was inherently democratic, and they are adaptable to modernising influences.

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<sup>479</sup>Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Oxford, James Currey, 1996); Terence Ranger, 'Democracy and Traditional Political Structures in Zimbabwe, 1890-1999', in Ngwabi Bhebe & Terence Ranger (eds.) *The Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe Vol. 1: Precolonial and Colonial Legacies* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 2001) 31-52

## **Neo-traditionalism and the appropriation of ‘traditional culture’ as a source of political legitimacy by modern politicians in Zimbabwe in the 1990s**

Today, traditional leaders, in alliance with spirit mediums, hold great power in contemporary Zimbabwe. The institution of chieftaincy is recognized by the Constitution and chiefs are an integral part of Zimbabwe’s political structure. David Maxwell’s analysis of the historical roots of elevated status of traditional chiefs since the late 1990s emphasizes the neo-traditional throwback in Zimbabwe’s chiefly politics, whereby politicians and government officials seek to draw legitimation for their governance by association with the guardians of ‘traditional culture’, who are portrayed as the ‘spokesmen of important rural constituencies, ignored only at the state’s peril’.<sup>480</sup>

Chieftaincy and the politics of tradition in Zimbabwe have been characterized by a re-imagination of tradition. In response to the growing influence of traditional leaders, there has been a re-imagination of ‘tradition’ in many different and often contradictory ways by the government, the local bureaucracy, and the traditional leaders themselves. All these various interest groups seek political legitimacy by means of making appeals to authenticity. Furthermore, chiefs, with the aid of spirit mediums, have regained power as both effective populist leaders and patriarchs, by filling the vacuum left by the collapse of the ruling party at the local level. In line with a growing trend across Central Africa, the revival of traditional leaders as political leaders has caused them to be courted by both local and national party politicians, and civil servants.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>480</sup>David Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 149-150

<sup>481</sup>Ibid. 149-150; Wim van Binsbergen, ‘Chiefs and the State in Independent Zambia. Exploring the Zambian

For many bureaucratic officials in government, their association with ‘tradition’ and traditional leaders was a strategic alignment and a rhetorical device for gaining legitimacy in the face of failed development strategies and an increasing inability to mobilize the rural constituency without the chiefs. In many cases mutually beneficial alliances between the traditionalists (chiefs) and the modernizers (bureaucratic officials) were forged as party officials and civil servants sought to gain legitimacy associating themselves with ‘tradition’ and traditional leaders, while on the other hand, chiefs also sought to further their own agendas by drawing on other sources of their legitimacy such as a good wartime record of resistance against colonial rule, and party membership.<sup>482</sup>

Bourdillon has shown how in Zimbabwe after 1990, modern politicians and bureaucrats strategically and tactically embraced and appropriated many of the traditional ideas of authority and traditional forms of power that were historically held by chiefs and fused them with the newer forms of power and authority emanating from elections. In this way, modern bureaucratic leadership was given a sacred quality, and cultural factors were invoked to stifle public criticism of modern leaders.<sup>483</sup> In the end we have what Bourdillon has described as ‘customary attitudes to authority in a modern state’, whereby traditional forms of power and authority held by chiefs have been confused with the newer forms of power and authority emanating from elections. As a result, as was the case in the past in most traditional African cultures in Southern and Central Africa, where open and public criticism of the chief by the people was not tolerated; similarly, political leaders today prefer to act like royalty and do not brook criticism.<sup>484</sup>

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National Press’, *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, Nos. 25 & 26, 1987

<sup>482</sup>David Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 175

<sup>483</sup>Bourdillon, M.F.C. *Where Are the Ancestors*, 64-66

<sup>484</sup>*Ibid.* 65-7, 68

Ranger has shown that the contemporary ‘rediscovery’ of chiefs in Zimbabwe is not an isolated case.<sup>485</sup> Throughout Southern Africa today, in countries like South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, and even further afield in Ghana, the role of chiefs is now constitutionally provided for in the emerging hybrid political systems. Annukka Lakanen and Sofia Reenkola, who have studied the rediscovery of chiefs in post-independence Namibia, have labelled the phenomenon of the resurgence of chiefs that has been witnessed throughout Southern Africa since the 1990s as ‘retraditionalisation’.<sup>486</sup>

Various theories and explanations have been advanced on the causes of the recovery of chieftaincy in the 1990s throughout Central and Southern Africa. These include problems experienced by the postcolonial state in extending political control over its rural population; the state’s efforts to capture tradition as a valuable resource in the construction of postcolonial identities; recent global trends in Decentralization and pluralism; and the traditional leaders’ lobbying of the ruling parties.<sup>487</sup>

All the reasons given above for the ‘rediscovery’ of chiefs throughout Southern Africa in the 1990s are perfectly applicable to Zimbabwe, but in Zimbabwe there was evident political opportunism by ZANU PF which was faced with a crisis of legitimacy and waning popularity in the urban areas due to economic recession, rising unemployment, mass retrenchment of workers, and growing opposition from emergent political formations in the 1990s. The

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<sup>485</sup>T. Ranger, ‘Democracy and Traditional Political Structures in Zimbabwe, 1890-1999’, 31

<sup>486</sup>Annukka Lakanen and Sofia Reenkola, *Chiefs and Politics of Tradition in Namibia*, PDF file: chiefs politics of tradition-Namibia.pdf. accessed 26/08/2011

<sup>487</sup>Pierre Englebert, ‘Patterns and Theories of Traditional Resurgence in Tropical Africa’, *Mondes en Développement*, Vol. 30, 2002, 118; Annukka Lakanen and Sofia Reenkola, *Chiefs and Politics of Tradition in Namibia*, PDF file: chiefs politics of tradition-Namibia.pdf. accessed 26/08/2011; John T. Friedman, ‘Making Politics, Making History: Chiefship and the post-Apartheid State in Namibia’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1, March 2005; Thomas Spear, ‘Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 44, 2003, 3-27; Francis B. Nyamnjoh, ‘Chieftaincy and the Negotiation of Might and Right in Botswana Democracy’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21, 2, May 2003; Terence Ranger, ‘Democracy and Traditional Political Structures in Zimbabwe, 31-52.

following section traces the historical roots of the waning political support for the ruling party in Zimbabwe over a much longer period than most accounts do and shows the legitimisation crisis that beleaguered ZANU PF since the end of the 1990s was not sudden but resulted from a concatenation of events that built up over time.

### **ZANU PF's Legitimation Crisis: The Economic and Political Background to the Resurgence of Chiefly Power in Zimbabwe 1989 -1999**

As shown in chapter 4, at independence the new ZANU-PF government had unquestioned legitimacy, having won the 1980 elections convincingly. Due to its overwhelming popularity, the new government had no felt need for allies in the form of traditional leadership and treated them with disdain throughout the first decade of independence. The origins of Zimbabwe's economic and political crisis which resulted in waning support for ZANU PF are as complex as they are multiple, and no single factor can adequately account for the crisis. Analyses that take a longer-term view trace the origins of the economic crisis back to the mid-1980s when shortages of foreign currency began to have a debilitating impact on the performance of the economy.<sup>488</sup>

Before the introduction of a series of fundamental economic reforms sponsored by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the early 1990s, Zimbabwe had had a fairly diversified economy in which manufacturing played a much bigger role than in other African economies. The economic strategy was interventionist, premised upon growth with

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<sup>488</sup> William A. Masters, *Government and Agriculture in Zimbabwe* (Westport, Connecticut, Praeger Publishers, 1994) 4; James Muzondidya, 'From Buoyancy to Crisis, 1980-1997', in B. Raftopoulos & A. Mlambo, *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from the precolonial period to 2008* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009) 167-200



equity.<sup>489</sup> After independence, GDP growth between 1980 and 1989 averaged 3.2 %, but needed to be higher in order to provide for a growing population and huge programs of social expenditure by the government. However, poor export performance and the lack of meaningful foreign investment resulted in serious shortages of foreign currency. The inadequate level of economic growth, which was attributed to structural problems in the economy in the face of mounting demands on the fiscus, spurred the country to embark on economic reforms.<sup>490</sup> Trade liberalization was expected to create high and sustainable levels of export growth and open the country to external competition, earning the country foreign currency and increasing productivity.<sup>491</sup>

However, barring the independence boom of 1980 and 1981, throughout the rest of the 1980s the Zimbabwean economy became more sluggish and was characterized by increasing unemployment and a worsening scarcity of foreign exchange. Foreign borrowing could not be sustained, and rapidly growing domestic demand caused the foreign exchange shortage to worsen. Private investment failed to materialize, and between 1982 and 1987, Zimbabwe experienced a deep recession in 1982-1984, followed by a brief recovery in 1985, only to slip back into another recession in 1986-1987, and recovery again in 1988-1990. This stop-and-go growth pattern was influenced primarily by fluctuating rainfall levels which made it impossible to sustain growth, causing unemployment to grow rapidly by the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Mthuli Ncube, 'Financial Sector Reform and Trade Liberalisation in Zimbabwe', Centre for Research in Economics and Finance in Southern Africa, *Quarterly Review*, July 1995, 11-25

<sup>490</sup> T. Mumvuma, 'Understanding Reform. The Case of Zimbabwe', Online resource available at [http://www.depot.gnet.org/cms/grp/general/Zimbabwe\\_proposal.pdf](http://www.depot.gnet.org/cms/grp/general/Zimbabwe_proposal.pdf) (2002)

<sup>491</sup> R. Hess, *Zimbabwe Case Study on Trade Negotiations* (London, Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper, 2001)

<sup>492</sup> William A. Masters, *Government and Agriculture in Zimbabwe*, 4-7

Beginning in 1989 and 1990, the government began to implement a series of fundamental economic reforms. The initial objective was trade liberalization, but this was not accompanied by sufficient exchange rate devaluation or reduction in inflationary pressures and therefore resulted in a surge of imports and little growth in exports or employment.<sup>493</sup> In 1991, with the support of the World Bank and IMF loans, a standard “economic structural adjustment program” (ESAP) was announced, combining liberalization with devaluation and reduction in government expenditure to combat inflation. A major 40% devaluation and various export promotion schemes were implemented to initiate the program.<sup>494</sup> The Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) introduced major changes in government expenditure, chief among which was the demand to downsize the civil service. The economic downturn that followed the adoption of ESAP led to extensive lay-offs throughout the country. Under the general economic deterioration of the nation that followed everyone was being implored to tighten their belts by the Minister of Finance, Dr. Bernard Chidzero, in consecutive budget statements of the period.<sup>495</sup>

However, the reforms were not successful partly because of a calamitous two-year drought that hit the 1991 and 1992 harvests and led to massive maize imports in 1992 and 1993. ESAP failed to achieve the forecasted GDP growth and actually saw a decline in average real GDP, the growth of which averaged 1.7% between 1991 and 1996, while per capita income actually contracted by -1.9% to Z\$1.992 compared to Z\$2.998 just before ESAP. Similarly, average inflation rose from 15% to 25%, while interest rates doubled.<sup>496</sup> To make matters worse, implementing ESAP reforms required US\$3.5 billion in new

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<sup>493</sup> William A. Masters, *Government and Agriculture in Zimbabwe*, 4, 5, 7

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.5

<sup>495</sup> Zvakanyorwa Wilbert Sadomba, *War Veterans in Zimbabwe's Revolution: Challenging Neo-colonialism & Settler & International Capital* (Harare, Weaver Press, Harare, 2011) 102

<sup>496</sup> J. L. Moore, *Zimbabwe's fight to the Finish: The catalyst of the Free Market*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003) 158, 244-245

foreign loans over 5 years, in addition to an existing debt of US\$2.5 billion. Even worse, during the 1992/93 fiscal year, interest payments on both foreign and domestic debts increased by 15% more than projected due to the interest and exchange rate volatility.<sup>497</sup>

Under ESAP, Zimbabwe also suffered ‘deindustrialization’. This was evident in several key manufacturing sectors, such as textiles, which saw a 61% contraction between 1990 and 1995, with manufacturing output in general falling by more than 20% between 1991 and 2000.<sup>498</sup> Reduction in social spending by the State also affected basic social services and a parallel program of reforming the civil service saw 25% of public workers laid off. Unemployment reached 50% by 1997. In spite of a program to mitigate the social effects of adjustment, the percentage of people living below the poverty datum line rose from 50% to 75%.<sup>499</sup>

The deepening economic meltdown, severe poverty, hyperinflation and unemployment created a public backlash that culminated in what the media termed ‘IMF riots’, the most severe of which were the 1994/1995 bread riots in the capital city Harare. Public workers went on strike in 1996, followed by numerous other trade union-organized strikes in 1997. The public unrest fermented resentment mostly among the urban dwellers hardest hit by the impact of the reforms.<sup>500</sup> The ESAP program’s failure led to popular scepticism about the value of reform. Popular frustration about ESAP was expressed in caricatures of the acronym ESAP such as, “Extended Suffering

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<sup>497</sup> World Bank, *Zimbabwe. Achieving Shared Growth* (Washington D.C., World Bank, 1995) 1-44

<sup>498</sup> P. Carmody, ‘Neo-classical Practice and the Collapse of Industry in Zimbabwe: The Cases of Textiles, Clothing and Footwear’, *Economic Geography*, Vol. 72, No. 4, 319-343; A. Ismi, *Impoverishing a Continent: The World Bank and the IMF in Africa* (Ottawa, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2004) 14-15

<sup>499</sup> Admos Chimhowu, Jeanette Manjengwa & Sara Feresu, *Moving Forward in Zimbabwe: Reducing Poverty and Promoting Growth*, (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, Institute of Environmental Studies, 2010) 7

<sup>500</sup> Admos Chimhowu, et.al. *Moving Forward in Zimbabwe: Reducing Poverty and Promoting Growth*, 7

of the African People” and “Endless Starvation And Poverty”.<sup>501</sup>

There is a consensus in most analyses of the period that the failure of ESAP and the economic hardships it ushered in triggered Zimbabwe’s economic and political crisis, although there are other key events that worsened the crisis in the years that followed, e.g. the payment of huge sums of unbudgeted compensation to War Veterans in 1997, the costly deployment of the army to the DRC in 1998, and the violent land occupations of 2000. Most scholars and analysts concur that the downturn in the country’s economic performance and the regime’s political fortunes were set in motion by the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in 1991. Others like, Eldred Masunungure and Lloyd Sachikonye also emphasize the failure of ZANU PF to build upon the early economic boom of the 1980s due to the subordination of development to political goals of regime security. They highlight ZANU PF’s early commitment to the overarching political goal of creating a one-party state in Zimbabwe, which eventually led to a new wave of economic and political crises that engulfed the country in the 1990s and opened a new page of political activism in the country.<sup>502</sup>

Growing disenchantment with ZANU PF’s one-party state project led to the birth of the first opposition party from Manicaland, the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), in 1994, led by veteran Nationalist Edgar Tekere. According to Alfred Nhema, the key motivation behind the formation of ZUM was discontentment with Mugabe’s one-party state ideology.<sup>503</sup> The 1990s also saw the growth of Zimbabwe’s trade union movement into an alternative

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<sup>501</sup> William A. Masters, *Government and Agriculture in Zimbabwe*, 5

<sup>502</sup> L. Sachikonye, *Democracy, Civil Society and the State* (Harare, SAPES Books, 1995; Michael Bratton & Eldred Masunungure, ‘The Anatomy of Political Predation: Leaders, Elites and Coalitions in Zimbabwe, 1980-2010, Research Paper 09, Developmental Leadership Programme, January 2011

<sup>503</sup> Alfred G. Nhema, *Democracy in Zimbabwe: From Liberation to Liberalization* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 2002) 131

source of political power in urban areas.

Economic strife, exacerbated by retrenchments and hardship caused by ESAP finally drove War Veterans of the liberation struggle of the 1970s to rise and challenge the ZANU PF leadership. They demanded compensation for what they believed the state owed them, i.e. compensation for the injuries they had suffered during the war; the demobilization package they had never received; pensions and gratuities; and above all, land for resettlement similar to the ex-servicemen schemes that had been designed for White soldiers returning from the World War II during the late 1940s in Rhodesia.<sup>504</sup> According to Sadomba, it was the challenge thrown to the party leadership by the war veterans and their street marches that paved the way for the formation of breakaway political movements and parties like the war-veterans-led Movement of Independent Electoral Candidates (MIEC) in 1995, and the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats (ZUD) in 1998 led by Margaret Dongo, a female war veteran who was also a Member of Parliament. The building up of formidable opposition politics in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s finally led to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999.<sup>505</sup>

The Zimbabwe crisis deepened in the crucial year of 1997 when the militant demonstrations by War Veterans demanding compensation for their military service led Mugabe to cave in to their demands and try and buy them off by allocating them an unaffordable compensation of Z\$50,000 each (then around US\$2,500), plus a pension of Z\$2,000, and a monthly salary of Z\$4,000. The whole package amounted to Z\$4 billion in unbudgeted new expenditure. Because the Zimbabwean government did not have the money to pay, it resorted to printing money, which started Zimbabwe's inflationary spiral,

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<sup>504</sup> Zvakanyorwa Wilbert Sadomba, *War Veterans in Zimbabwe's Revolution*, 104

<sup>505</sup> Ibid. 104-5

leading to a crash in the value of the Zimbabwean dollar on what has been dubbed 'Black Friday', 14 November 1997.<sup>506</sup>

This issue of the Compensation Fund for war veterans turned out to be toxic and tainted all aspects of Zimbabwean life, eventually leading to the destruction of the Zimbabwean currency and individuals' savings in the following decade.<sup>507</sup> In the later part of 1997, the government announced a 5% 'war veterans' levy', plus an increase in sales tax and petrol duty, to try to pay for the expenditure on the compensation package. Much of the burden for this unbudgeted spending was passed on to the taxpayers, resulting in an explosion of anti-Government feeling in the general population.<sup>508</sup>

With the food riots, the mass strikes, and the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 1998 was certainly a turning point in ZANU PF's political fortunes. Many former ZANU PF sympathizers then began to criticize the regime openly and questioned its competence. Radical analysts with leftist leanings maintained that the regime had sold its soul to international capital when the government adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in the early 1990s; for others, like Brian Raftopoulos, a selfish ruling class had hijacked the Nationalist project.<sup>509</sup> In September 1999, when the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed under the leadership of trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai, a strong counter-political formation emerged that seriously challenged ZANU PF's claims to be the only representative of the national will. The imagination and definition of the national project as expressed by ZANU PF always reduced it to the liberation

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<sup>506</sup> Zvakanyorwa Wilbert Sadomba, *War Veterans in Zimbabwe's Revolution*, 135

<sup>507</sup> Ibid. 128

<sup>508</sup> Ibid. 135

<sup>509</sup> Daniel Compagnon, *A Predictable Tragedy: Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 3-7; Brian Raftopoulos, 'Beyond the House of Hunger: Democratic Struggles in Zimbabwe', *Review of African Political Economy*, 54, 1992, 59-74

struggle and the land question at election times. However, the MDC party challenged this exhausted strategy which prioritised the survival of Mugabe's regime over democracy, human rights, social peace, human security, good governance and orderly management of the economy.<sup>510</sup>

In February 2000 the ruling party, ZANU PF, suffered its first poll defeat since independence in a nationwide referendum that had been conducted to test mass opinion on a new constitution. The rejection of the ZANU PF government's draft constitution in the 2000 national referendum by an overwhelming 'NO' vote orchestrated by the opposing National Constitutional Assembly (which sought to push through its own preferred reforms) constituted an important political juncture in the political fortunes of ZANU PF. The 'NO' vote represented the first major political defeat for the ruling party since 1980, and more ominously, it threatened to be translated into a General Election victory for the newly formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). ZANU PF's 2000 poll defeat, coupled with serious economic decline, debilitating corruption, a massive brain-drain, constriction of the media, and consequent international condemnation, resulted in declining legitimacy for the ruling party.<sup>511</sup> Consequently, this besiegement and waning popularity forced the ruling party to take measures to revive its political fortunes through aggression and violence.<sup>512</sup>

The 'NO' vote alarmed ZANU PF because it showed that most rural voters, who had been the traditional stronghold of the ruling party, had withdrawn support. The referendum defeat precipitated a political crisis in ZANU PF because the ruling party now faced the real possibility of another poll defeat in

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<sup>510</sup>Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Zimbabwean Nation-State Project. A Historical Diagnosis of Identity and Power-based Conflicts in a Postcolonial State* (Uppsala, The Nordic Africa Institute, 2011) 73

<sup>511</sup>Brian Raftopoulos & L. Sachikonye, *Striking Back*, 2, 17, 36-40

<sup>512</sup>P. Bond & M. Manyanya, *Zimbabwe's Plunge*: 273

the upcoming general election which was set for June 2000. Consequently, ZANU PF moved quickly and introduced a variety of measures to re-gain complete control over the countryside. According to Daniel Compagnon, the political events that unravelled in Zimbabwe after the ‘NO’ vote of February 2000 revealed the true nature of the regime’s autocratic tendencies, which bore a strong resemblance to the security measures that had originally been created by the settler state of the Rhodesian Front.<sup>513</sup>

The political challenge posed to ZANU PF’s hegemony by the MDC party’s popularity and the ‘NO’ vote compelled it to introduce stringent and oppressive legislation to control citizens, in particular, the infamous Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) passed in 2002, which was designed to silence the critical media. The other repressive piece of legislation passed in 2002 was the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) which was meant to reduce public gatherings and participation in political activities by opposition political parties and to reduce the space for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to operate.<sup>514</sup> Rural local government structures were also targeted, many Rural District Council offices were closed, and many local Councillors and District Administrators were removed from their posts.

These measures also included the take-over of white commercial farms and the displacement of their white owners and African employees because ZANU PF believed that the farm labourers had been orchestrated by their white commercial farm employers to vote ‘NO’. The state increasingly became more authoritarian and adopted a radical Nationalist political discourse that exploited the issue of unequal land ownership patterns and radical land reform

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<sup>513</sup>Daniel Compagnon, *A Predictable Tragedy: Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe*, 3

<sup>514</sup>Alexander Chimange, ‘Political Participation in Manicaland, 2000-2008’, in David Kaulem (ed.) *Political Participation in Zimbabwe* (Harare, Arrupe College, African Forum for Catholic Social Teachings) 2010



to regain its fading political legitimacy. ZANU PF's strategy for political survival enlisted veterans of the liberation war of the 1970s and put them at the forefront of the radical and often violent land seizures that occurred between 2000 and 2003, that was presented to the masses as the final, third phase of the liberation struggle that would usher in a genuine final realisation of the economic emancipation of the masses.<sup>515</sup> ZANU PF's radical discourses of nationalism, land reform and economic empowerment were used to legitimate the hegemonic politics of the state. The state's use of the print and electronic media to portray the repossession of the land from white farmers as a 'war' for the land (expressed in Shona as *hondoyeminda* or 'Third Chimurenga') gave the African masses sanction to embark on the chaotic and violent land occupations of the post-2000 period.

### **The Re-empowerment of Chiefs and their Political Mobilization by ZANU PF to Secure Rural Constituencies, 2000-2010**

As we noted above, the 'NO' vote precipitated a political crisis within ZANU PF because it revealed that most rural voters, who had been the traditional stronghold of the ruling party, had withdrawn their support and there was the distinct possibility that they would lend their support to the emergent MDC in the June 2000 elections. Consequently, the ruling party initiated a parallel process to the farm invasions by actively seeking out the support of traditional leaders in order to showcase traditional sanction for their populist move to resolve a long-standing peasant grievance about the loss of their ancestral land that had been alienated to Europeans under the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and the Land Tenure Act of 1969. The co-optation of the traditional leaders, which was secured through a wide range of pecuniary incentives,

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<sup>515</sup> Cornelius Ncube, 'Contesting Hegemony: Civil Society and the Struggle for Social Change in Zimbabwe, 2000-2008', PhD thesis, International Development Department, University of Birmingham, September 2010

enabled the ruling party to secure its control of the rural areas from being captured by the emerging, vibrant opposition movement.

Chiefs were mobilized by war veterans throughout the country and put in the forefront of the ‘Third Chimurenga’, a popular reference by war veterans to the land occupation movement of 2000. The mobilization of the chiefs by war veterans to lead the militant *Jambanja* invasions and occupations of White-owned farms in the year 2000 is widely acknowledged to have been a populist political move that was calculated to regain popularity for ZANU PF after its resounding poll defeat in February 2000. Beginning in the Chikwaka and Svosve areas of Mashonaland East, war veterans tapped into a long-standing peasant grievance about the loss of African ancestral land to the white settlers and went around the country galvanizing chiefs and headmen in all the Provinces to invade and repossess neighbouring white farms. The War Veterans Association approached local ex-combatants in Matabeleland, Masvingo, Midlands and Mashonaland East and held meetings with chief and headmen whom they prompted to initiate popular land occupations of White-owned farms by the peasants.<sup>516</sup>

The decision to re-empower traditional chiefs in the early 2000 was clearly driven by the embattled ZANU PF regime’s efforts to shore up its sagging political fortunes and Robert Mugabe’s survival politics. The ZANU PF government was faced with a serious political challenge from a rising tide of opposition movements during this period, which included University of Zimbabwe students, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, and a host of disenchanting civic organisations; which culminated in the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change party (MDC) in 1999.<sup>517</sup> Faced with the

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<sup>516</sup> Zvakanyorwa Wilbert Sadomba, *War Veterans in Zimbabwe’s Revolution*, 104-5

<sup>517</sup> Daniel Compagnon, *A Predictable Tragedy. Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe*, 83-86

real threat that the growing opposition would garner support from the Communal Lands, the ZANU PF government opportunistically moved quickly to officially re-empower chiefs in 2000 by bringing into effect the Traditional Leaders Act (No. 25 of 1998) (Chapter 29:17) which, although it had been passed by the Parliament of Zimbabwe in 1998, only became effective from 1 January 2000.<sup>518</sup> The implementation of this Act officially re-incorporated traditional leaders as an important, but hitherto alienated, political ally of central government in securing control over the rural areas.

The re-empowerment of chiefs through the Traditional Leaders Act (No. 25 of 1998) was premised on the recommendations of an earlier commission of enquiry, the Land Tenure Commission of 1994, whose recommendations had been largely ignored and shelved by the government due to the disdain that it held for traditional leaders in the early years, before it became faced with a legitimisation crisis at the end of the 1990s. The Land Tenure Commission (1994) had been set up to investigate and make recommendations on the administrative conflict between traditional authorities and elected local government bodies in rural local administration, which had ensued since the official disempowerment of chiefs in 1980. As we saw in Chapter 4, this administrative conflict was marked by ‘entangled sovereignties’ that were exercised by both the new structures of state bureaucrats and the age-old structures of chiefs and headmen.<sup>519</sup> Mandondo argues that the numerical predominance of the chiefs in the composition of the Land Tenure Commission gave them a distinct advantage over other sections of society in shaping the new powers of traditional leaders that were eventually enshrined

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<sup>518</sup> Daniel Compagnon, *A Predictable Tragedy. Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe*, 83-86

<sup>519</sup> Donald S. Moore, *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2005) 157

in the Traditional Leaders Act (No. 25 of 1998).<sup>520</sup>

The Report of the Land Tenure Commission made the following observations and recommendations with regard to powers of traditional leaders since independence. It reported that “traditional leaders used to carry more meaningful authority over the use of natural resources, but this has now been eroded”.<sup>521</sup> The Commission also found overwhelming evidence of serious conflicts within the Communal Areas which had been worsened by the acute breakdown in administrative structures, and the erosion of traditional authority and responsibility. It reported that senior authorities in the Ministry of Local Government down to the lowest units of local government (VIDCOs) believed that they had the ‘de jure’ exclusive authority over Communal Land. While the Rural District Councils were expected to take cognizance of customary law in administering Communal land, in practice, traditional leaders were not expected by the RDCs to play a role in land administration.<sup>522</sup> After presenting its findings, the Commission recommended that traditional villages under village-heads were the legitimate and appropriate units for local natural resource management in the Communal Areas, and that village-heads should be given exclusive legal authority over natural resources in their areas. The recommendations of the Land Tenure Commission (1994) became the template for the crafting of the Traditional Leaders Act which was passed by Parliament in 1998.<sup>523</sup>

Although the co-optation of traditional leaders by ZANU PF became evident from the crisis year of 2000 going forward, official moves by the government

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<sup>520</sup>Parliament of Zimbabwe, Traditional Leaders Act (No. 25 of 1998) (Chapter 29:17); A. Mandondo ‘Situating Zimbabwe’s Natural Resource Governance Systems in History’, Centre for International Forestry, Research, Occasional Paper No. 32, 2000

<sup>521</sup> Government of Zimbabwe, Land Tenure Commission Report, 1994

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

to court the support of the chiefs had begun much earlier in 1997/98, when a definite downturn in the political fortunes of ZANU PF became evident under the onslaught of urban protest movements that threatened the loss of rural support to emerging opposition movements. From the end of 1999, ZANU PF deployed a strategy of winning over the support of the chiefs through a variety of enticing incentives. In October 1999 the Minister of Local Government, John Nkomo, announced plans to create new ward and village assemblies which would be led by chiefs and headmen. Soon after that, on November 19, 1999, President Robert Mugabe told the Matabeleland chiefs that their allowances would be increased from Z\$2 083 a month to Z\$10 000 a month. Headmen's allowances would be raised from Z\$680 to Z\$5 000.<sup>524</sup>

These huge increases were accompanied by a public apology from Mugabe for the 'shabby treatment' chiefs and headmen had been given since independence. Mugabe said traditional leaders were to be given 'more powers in spearheading development and promoting cultural values'.<sup>525</sup> The combination of 'development' and 'cultural values' now seemed to be what rural democracy was about.<sup>526</sup> The political courtship of the chiefs increased in 2000 following the emergence of a very powerful opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change in 1999, which posed a serious political challenge to the ZANU-PF government in the rural constituencies.

This orchestrated political courtship of the chiefs culminated in the formal re-empowerment of chiefs in the year 2000 through the Traditional Leaders Act (No. 25 of 1998). The re-empowerment of traditional leaders had a profound impact on the organisation of rural local administration in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe because it effectively side-lined the popularly elected

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<sup>524</sup> *The Chronicle*, 19 November 1999; *The Sunday News*, 21 November 1999.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>526</sup> Terence Ranger, 'Democracy and Traditional Political Structures in Zimbabwe, 31-52

VIDCOs and WADCOs and reversed what little progress had been made in democratizing rural governance in the early 1980s.<sup>527</sup> Chiefs became very powerful actors in Zimbabwe's development, usurping that role from locally elected councillors who were now considered to be weak.<sup>528</sup> The Act strengthened the role of traditional leaders over local planning and development issues. It gave the chiefs, headmen and village-heads the powers to deal with problems of conservation of land and natural resources and crimes such as livestock theft, to coordinate development and allocate land on behalf the Rural District Councils, to act as agents of the RDC in collecting taxes and levies, and to preside over family disputes in their areas of jurisdiction. This development did not, however, remove the rivalry and tensions between chiefs and bureaucrats in local planning and rural development.<sup>529</sup>

The new power that chiefs now wielded meant that they were no longer accountable to the local bureaucratic structures and came to play an important role in the installment of what Mahmoud Mamdani has described as 'decentralized despotism'.<sup>530</sup> The roles of chiefs, headmen, and village-heads under the Traditional Leaders Act (1998) were an exact re-enactment of the colonial roles of chiefs and allied traditional leaders. Under the Traditional Leaders Act 1998, chiefs became Presidential appointees who were tasked to supervise headmen, promote and uphold cultural values, oversee the collection by village-heads of taxes and levies for the Rural District Council, and ensure land and natural resources were used in accordance with national

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<sup>527</sup> Parliament of Zimbabwe, Traditional Leaders Act (No. 25 of 1998) (Chapter 29:17)

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

<sup>529</sup> A. Masendeke, Andrew Mlalazi, Ashella Ndlovu, & Douglas Gumbo, 'Empowering Communities through CBP in Zimbabwe: Experiences in Gwanda and Chimanimani', *PLA Notes* 49, 2004, 41-42

<sup>530</sup> James Muzondidya, 'From Buoyancy to Crisis, 1980-1997', in B. Raftopoulos & Alois Mlambo (eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe*, 198-199; M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 17, 23, 37-61

legislation, especially legislation prohibiting over-cultivation, overgrazing, and deforestation.<sup>531</sup>

In the decades that followed, the traditional leadership in Zimbabwe became increasingly adjoined with ZANU-PF, largely through the ex-officio positions it occupied in local government and the National Assembly. In the General and Presidential Elections of 2002, and 2008, most of the traditional leadership openly campaigned for ZANU-PF, and chiefs in Parliament always voted for ZANU-PF.<sup>532</sup> The political move to re-empower chiefs taken in 2000, paid huge political dividends for ZANU-PF by guaranteeing the support of chiefs in rallying rural constituencies as vote banks for the ruling party in the elections not only of 2000 but also in 2002 and 2008. These developments underline the serious adulteration that the institution of chieftainship underwent in the postcolonial period, and the extent to which it was patronized by the ruling party since 2000. In the process chiefs lost their historical role as custodians of tradition and culture and became political agents the postcolonial state.

In the highly polarised political atmosphere that characterised the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the year 2000, ZANU PF strategically forged a mutually beneficial alliance with the traditional leaders, whereby, the chiefs greatly benefitted from generous monetary perquisites from the state such as vastly improved allowances and vehicles, while ZANU PF earned itself a powerful support-base in the rural constituencies because of the chiefs' support of the ruling party. Establishing a similar grip over the urban constituencies, however, remained problematic for ZANU PF due to the impact of the economic crisis outlined above, which was felt more by the

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<sup>531</sup> A. Mandondo A, 'Situating Zimbabwe's Natural Resource Governance Systems in History', Centre for International Forestry Research, Occasional Paper No. 32

<sup>532</sup>N. Musekiwa "The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition", 242

urban populations than by rural folk. This bifurcation of Zimbabwe's electorate between the rural masses and the urban voters has been observed in all of Zimbabwe's elections since 2000.

The chiefs were rewarded by the state for their support in this new alliance with an array of privileges that included increased allowances, Mazda B1800 pick-up trucks; and homesteads constructed by the Ministry of Rural Housing; all of which underline the perceived importance of chiefs as sources of political mileage.<sup>533</sup> After the elections of 2002, the Chiefs' allowances were raised, and one chief interviewed stated that they earned far more than teachers with University degrees. They also got other benefits, including vehicles with state-paid drivers while rural homesteads were also built and electrified for them. Due to these pecuniary incentives, the traditional leaders, led by the President of the Zimbabwe Chiefs' Council, Fortune Charumbira openly expressed their support for the ruling party.<sup>534</sup>

The strategic alliance between traditional leaders and ZANU PF was clearly spelt out by the Minister Ignatius Chombo speaking during the installation of Chief Zivengwa Murove at Gwamatenga Primary School in Mwenezi, on 3 October 2004. He emphasized that traditional chiefs were duty-bound to preserve the gains of the country's independence whose attainment came from many sacrifices and at the of cost many lives, therefore they should rally communities in their domains behind ZANU-PF to ensure the ruling party wins the following year's parliamentary polls. He said, in view of the many attempts to reverse the gains from the country's independence, chiefs were obliged to take a leading role in stopping the re-colonisation of the country by making sure the opposition MDC does not get into power. He reaffirmed that

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<sup>533</sup>M. Wines, 'An endgame in Zimbabwe that Mugabe may yet win', *New York Times*, March 30, 2007

<sup>534</sup>M. Padera, 'President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe Hails Traditional Leaders', *The Herald*, August 2007



the government was committed to improving the welfare of chiefs as was evidenced by the vehicles it had given them, the increase of their allowances, the construction of roads leading to their homesteads and the installation of electricity at their homes.<sup>535</sup>

According to Mararira, chiefs were encouraged to exercise the extensive powers over rural communities that had been restored to them by way of the Traditional Leaders Act and were threatened with removal from their positions or discontinuance of state allowances if those under their jurisdiction voted against ZANU PF.<sup>536</sup> Paul Themba Nyathi, the spokesman for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, raised a complaint against what he termed the political manipulation of chiefs by ZANU PF and bemoaned the uneven political playfield in recent elections. He observed that ZANU PF was benefitting from the coerced support of the traditional leaders in Zimbabwe. In a Daily News feature article entitled ‘Chiefs now mere pawns in Zimbabwe’s political mine-field’, the MDC spokesman compared the Mugabe era to the Smith era when chiefs were abused and made to act against the interests of their country and people. Nyathi argued that ‘They [chiefs] are now being abused in the Mugabe era and used as instruments for denying their people free participation in their country’s democratic processes’.<sup>537</sup>

In the run up to the 2008 harmonized elections the ZANU PF government once again held a function in Harare in October 2007 at which 38 chiefs were awarded double-cab vehicles to secure their partisanship. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) also introduced a programme of providing chiefs with

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<sup>535</sup>*The Herald* Online 5 October 2004

<sup>536</sup>Simon Mararira, “Oral Tradition: Its Forms and Role Among Chiefs in Bikita District”, MA thesis, History Department, Midlands State University, 2008, 51

<sup>537</sup>Daily News Feature, ‘Chiefs now mere pawns in Zimbabwe’s political minefield’, 24 August 2004

farm implements such as tractors, scotch carts, disc ploughs, and other implements in 2007 and 2008. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party was quick to describe these moves as a gesture meant to bribe chiefs ahead of the joint local government, parliamentary, and presidential elections of 29 March 2008.<sup>538</sup>

The perception that chiefs in Zimbabwe had become aligned to the ZANU PF government generated criticism of their partisanship from many quarters and raised questions about their relevance to modern democratic governance that is based on elected leadership. Some critics argued that chiefs had become an important ally of the ZANU PF government and were instrumental in securing electoral victories for the party in rural constituencies.<sup>539</sup> Other critics pointed to the financial perquisites that chiefs received from the government as evidence that ZANU PF was bribing chiefs. The move by government to win back the support of chiefs by awarding them a broad range of perquisites, such as double-cab off-road vehicles and the construction and electrification of their rural homesteads was largely interpreted by critics as a move to bribe the chiefs to secure ZANU PF's control of the rural electorate.

It was this perceived alliance of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe with ZANU PF that helped to bring to the fore the discourses among scholars on the relevance of traditional authorities to modern democratic governance in Zimbabwe and Africa in general. Some critics of the institution maintain that chieftaincy is anachronistic to the 21<sup>st</sup> century because it is undemocratic, divisive because of its association with ethnic identities.<sup>540</sup> The following section delves into this contentious question and critically analyses the

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<sup>538</sup> Simon Mararira, "Oral Tradition: Its Forms and Role Among Chiefs in Bikita District", 51

<sup>539</sup> Chengegai Zvanya, Parliamentary Editor, 'Govt. to splash on chiefs' cars', *Daily News*, Sat. 04 October 2014.

<sup>540</sup> Economic Commission for Africa, *Relevance of African Traditional Institutions of Governance*, 10

substance of the divergent views over the relevance of traditional institutions of governance in modern African democracies.

### **The Debate over the Relevance of Traditional Authorities to Modern Democratic Governance in Zimbabwe and Africa in the Postcolonial Era**

Throughout postcolonial Africa today, the relevance of traditional institutions, especially chieftaincy, to the transformation of African economies and governance systems remains highly disputed. This section shall begin by endeavouring to give a summation of the main arguments that have been advanced both for and against a role for traditional institutions in Africa's postcolonial transformation and democratisation. It shows that the sharp divergence of views in the literature is mainly between traditionalists and modernisers. Traditionalists regard Africa's traditional chiefs and elders as the true representatives of their people, accessible, respected, and legitimate, and therefore still essential to politics on the continent. "Modernists," by contrast, view traditional authority as a gerontocratic, chauvinistic, authoritarian and increasingly irrelevant form of rule that is antithetical to democracy.<sup>541</sup>

The role of traditional African chiefs in modern African democracies has been the subject of an intense debate between the so-called 'traditionalists' and 'modernists' in Southern Africa since the 1980s. This debate was spurred on by the efforts of newly-independent Southern African states at democratization and decentralization which triggered competing claims to legitimacy and power in rural local governance between traditional chiefs and elected local government bodies, resulting in local struggles over power and resources in the communal areas. Although the constitutions of many African

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<sup>541</sup> Carolyn Logan, 'Traditional Leaders in Modern Africa: Can Democracy and the Chief Co-exist?', Afrobarometer Working Papers: Working Paper No. 93, 2008, 1-2

countries recognized traditional institutions at independence, and accorded them a role in rural local government, alongside modern state structures, the relevance of traditional authorities to modern politics nevertheless remained questionable.

Modernists generally question the ability of traditional African chiefs to co-exist with democracy. In their view, traditional authority represents a form of governance that is authoritarian and antithetical to democracy. They question the relevance of traditional authorities to modern politics on the African continent. Frequent conflicts over power and legitimacy in the rural landscape between traditional leaders and elected local government bodies in many African countries have strengthened the modernists' perception that traditional authority is antithetical to democracy.<sup>542</sup> In John Makumbe's view, chiefs are irrelevant to modern democracy in Zimbabwe largely because of their history of partisanship to ZANU PF and the inherently undemocratic nature of their leadership. He also argues that chiefs play no meaningful role in local government since they are not involved in making bye-laws or providing services to the people. He concludes that chiefs should be restricted to playing an advisory role on cultural issues only.<sup>543</sup>

As noted above, there are some opposition politicians who hold the view that the alignment of chiefs with ZANU PF poses an obstacle to democratic transformation in the country. The evident manipulation and redefinition of the role of traditional leaders by ZANU PF has generated questions over the years regarding their role in local government, their nexus with modern

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<sup>542</sup> Carolyn Logan, 'Traditional Leaders in Modern Africa: Can Democracy and the Chief Co-exist?', Afrobarometer Working Papers: Working Paper No. 93, 2008, 1-2; Tinashe Chigwata, 'The role of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe: are they still relevant?', Dullah Omar Institute for Constitutional Law, Governance and Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of the Western Cape, 2016

<sup>543</sup> J. Makumbe, 'Local Authorities and Traditional Leadership', in Jaap de Visser, Nico Steytler & Naison Machingauta (eds.) *Local Government Reform in Zimbabwe: A Policy Dialogue*, Community Law Centre, University of the Western Cape, 2010, 92;

constitutionalism and the democratic order, and their ability to adapt to the tenets of democracy. Critics have compared the manipulation of chiefs by ZANU PF to the way colonial governments remodelled the role of traditional leadership institutions to suit their political interests and to exercise firm control over the rural populations. It is clear that both the colonial and postcolonial regimes have found traditional leadership institutions indispensable and central to the governance of rural communities in Zimbabwe.

However, other scholars aver that the juxtaposition of the ‘old and the new’, the traditional and the modern into a hybrid governmental system is essential for stability and good governance. Walter Kamba has argued for the creation of a ‘*modus vivendi*’ between the traditional system and the modern democratic system because that can only be beneficial to African governments. He maintains that the integration of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, is essential for stability and good governance.<sup>544</sup> Similarly, Ben Hlatshwayo has argued for the harmonisation of the traditional systems of governance with the modern structures because they are able to co-exist. In his view, the traditional structures and the elected structures of communal leadership have common roles and objectives that must be reconciled because both structures are essential and compatible.<sup>545</sup>

A key aspect of the survival of chieftaincy in the political transitions from the precolonial to the colonial and postcolonial period appears to lie in its adaptability to modernising influences. An examination of the sources of the enduring power of the institution of chieftaincy under the onslaught of

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<sup>544</sup> Walter J. Kamba, ‘Foreword’, in F.M. Engelbronner-Kolff et.al, (eds.) *Traditional Authority and Democracy in Southern Africa*, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Namibia, 1998, v-viii

<sup>545</sup> B. Hlatshwayo, ‘Harmonizing traditional and elected structures at the local level: experiences of four Southern African Development Community countries’, in F.M. Engelbronner-Kolff et.al, (eds.) *Traditional Authority and Democracy in Southern Africa*, 131-154

powerful political and ideological forces that have sought to transform it since the advent of colonial rule, such as colonialism itself, modernism and nationalism shows its resilience derives from mutability. This thesis argues that traditional authorities are dynamic and capable of modernising. The invention of tradition thesis has unveiled the elasticity of the concept of ‘traditional’ authority in the way precolonial land tenure was seamlessly alloyed with formal colonial powers granted to chiefs in the 1960s to administer land in the Reserves, to create what later came to be widely considered as ‘tribal custom’, despite its relative recency.

Manfred O. Hinz has emphasized the essential fluidity of ‘tradition’ as a socio-political concept that is able to,

marry recent enactments with so-called tradition said to be in existence since time immemorial, as long as the enactments of today find their foundation in that tradition.<sup>546</sup>

It has been observed that much of the ‘customary’ rules and legislative acts which traditional authorities submit as having been ‘in place since time immemorial’ are nevertheless results of recent legislative actions.<sup>547</sup>

Consequently, this ability of an existing set of ‘traditional’ rules to integrate modern legislative acts and rules so that something can appear to be traditional yet it has been recently created, has led scholars to acknowledge that traditions are amenable to evolution and modernisation. It is this elasticity that seems to undergird the widely acknowledged resilience, adaptability and dynamism of the institution of chieftaincy, and its recent resurgence in the postcolonial period.

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<sup>546</sup>Manfred O. Hinz, ‘The Traditional of Traditional Government: Tradition versus Democracy-based Legitimacy’, in F.M. d’Engelbronner (et. al) *Traditional Authority and Democracy in Southern Africa*, 1-13  
<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

Chiefly power has also provided an institutional framework, which supports an indigenous system of natural resource management. Advocates of Community Based Natural Resource Management have stressed the historical role that traditional authorities continue to play in the enforcement of the strict observance of traditional natural resource management regulations in the Communal Areas, such as soil conservation measures like long-term and short-term fallowing to permit recovery of soil fertility, preparing rain-supplication rituals, and protecting water resources and sacred groves in the forests from exploitation.<sup>548</sup> Their advocacy has urged the postcolonial government in Zimbabwe to recognise this customary environmental authority of chiefs over the land in order to stop land abuse and deforestation which has manifested itself in the form of woodlot deforestation, soil erosion, watershed siltation, land exhaustion, and excessive use of firewood by households reeling under economic stress.<sup>549</sup> In the final analysis, it is clear that the traditional form of government has continued to appeal to the peasants because of its closeness to the people.

## **Conclusion**

The crisis of legitimation that the ZANU PF government faced at the end of the 1990s due to the general economic meltdown, mass unemployment and the failure of economic reform measures significantly eroded its support among the urban masses. The government's political predicament was worsened by the emergence of a vibrant opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change in 1999 that challenged ZANU PF's hold on power. This chapter argued that the erosion of ZANU PF's political support in the urban

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<sup>548</sup> M.L. Daneel, 'Environmental Reform: A New Venture of Zimbabwe's Traditional Custodians of the Land', *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law: Special Issue on the New Relevance of Traditional Authorities to Africa's Future*, Vol. 37-38, 1996, 374-376.

<sup>549</sup> P. Bond and M. Manyanya, *Zimbabwe's Plunge*, 78

areas by the government's poor economic performance compelled it to officially court an alliance with the traditional chiefs so as to secure its control of the rural populace. It revealed the move by government to win back the support of chiefs by awarding them a broad range of perquisites, such as double-cab off-road vehicles and the construction and electrification of their rural homesteads was largely interpreted by critics as a move to bribe the chiefs to secure ZANU PF's control of the rural electorate.

The examination of the reasons for the resurgence of the power of chieftaincy also delved into the political appeal of its permanency due to its foundation on the traditional lineage structures, which contrasts with the temporary nature of elected office. The chapter argued that part of the ZANU PF government's courtship of traditional chiefs was a search for a new source of political legitimation for their governance by appropriating traditional culture through association with chiefs and spirit mediums. It unveiled that the strategic alliance that ZANU PF forged with chiefs in 2000 emanated from the traditional power that chiefs wield over rural constituencies, hence the association of modern politicians and government officials with traditional leaders granted authenticity to their rule. In most cases this alliance has proved to be mutually beneficial because chiefs have also used their alliance with government to further their own agendas, such as their constant demand for more perquisites and improved rural infrastructure.

In the final analysis, the chapter reviewed the debate over the relevance of African traditional institutions to modern democratic governance by challenging the dominant view in studies of chieftaincy in the postcolonial era in Africa, which holds that traditional institutions are inherently antithetical to democracy. It argued that the resurgence of traditional chieftaincy in Zimbabwe in the third decade of independence has belied predictions of its



imminent demise and abolition by new democratic politics at independence. Contrary to the predictions of doom, traditional leadership institutions have proved to be indispensable to modern bureaucratic forms of government in Africa because they are more relatable to African rural populations.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This thesis historicized the paradox of the survival of the institution of chieftainship in Zimbabwe from near demise at independence in 1980, when it was largely considered as a discredited institution due to its former alliance with colonial administrations, to its resurgence and re-empowerment in the late 1990s when it was apportioned considerable power in national politics. The thesis investigated the underlying causes of the survival and enduring power of the chieftaincy under the onslaught of powerful political and ideological forces that have impacted on it since the advent of colonial rule, such as colonialism itself, modernism and nationalism, and it located the sources of the institution's resilience in the lasting appeal of its precolonial mode of governance which was consultative and culturally relatable to the rural peasantry. This is evidenced by the history of chieftainship in Zimbabwe after 1980, whereby, in spite of the incoming Nationalist Government's disempowerment of the chiefs due to their history of collaboration with the ousted colonial regime of Ian Douglas Smith, there seems to have been no permanent damage that was dealt to the legitimacy of traditional authority at the local level among rural peasants.<sup>550</sup>

This became even more evident during the local struggles over power and resources that occurred between chiefs and elected rural institutions (VIDCOs) in the communal areas after independence, where, despite being stripped of most of the powers their powers by the Chiefs and Headmen Act of 1982, traditional leaders continued to draw recognition and respect from the

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<sup>550</sup>Norbert Musekiwa, 'The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition', 242

peasantry in the early years of independence.<sup>551</sup> A crisis of communal leadership emerged in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe, whereby, on one hand, elected rural institutions (VIDCOs, WADCOs etc.) had little real legitimacy according to traditional grassroots perspectives, while traditional leaders were not always acknowledged or respected by the formal state's modernization initiatives, but were preferred by the peasantry.<sup>552</sup> This thesis argues that the Prime Minister's Directive which created the VIDCOs and WADCOs was a direct affront to the power of traditional leaders in local governance because it promoted the adoption of Western values and scientism which side-lined traditional authorities in issues of management and conservation of natural resources in rural communities. Consequently, the introduction of these modern institutions in rural development, where traditional institutions had always existed, fomented situations of conflict.<sup>553</sup>

Largely as a result of this conflict with traditional authorities, the VIDCOs and WADCOs never functioned in the manner that the postcolonial state had expected. The rural communities' clear preference for traditional leadership structures pitted the chiefs in direct competition with the modernising and authoritarian ideology of the civil servants in the Ministry of Lands and the Ministry of Local Government. Despite the fact that traditional leadership was treated with disdain throughout the first decade of independence, at the local level it continued to exhibit a remarkable endurance, elasticity and adaptability to changing political circumstances. In spite of the take-over of rural local governance responsibilities by elected bodies, the legitimacy of the institution of traditional leadership among its subjects remained unshaken.

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<sup>551</sup> Norbert Musekiwa "The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition", 242

<sup>552</sup> Godfrey Neube, 'Crisis of Communal Leadership', xx; B. Sithole, *The institutional framework for the management and use of natural resources in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe: village cases of access to and use of dambos from Mutoko and Chiduku* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, CASS, 1997)

<sup>553</sup> M. Mawere, et. al., "Traditional Authority in Community Based Natural Resource Management", 1-7

This was because, unlike the elected leadership of the VIDCO and WADCO, the positions of traditional leaders were the product of customary hereditary succession and therefore they were endowed with ‘traditionally’ legitimate status.<sup>554</sup>

The thesis’s historicization of the evolution of colonial local government and the embedment of African chiefs in the Europeans’ administrative structures began with an examination the politics of African Administration in the era of the BSA Company and proceeded chronologically to successive white regimes between 1923 and 1950, so as to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic political circumstances under which traditional leadership institutions were remodelled to serve colonial interests. It unveiled that Rhodesian rural local administration differed significantly from what obtained in other parts of British Colonial Africa in this era because Rhodesia had no definite policy or theoretical approach to African administration apart from the insistence on the racial difference between Europeans and Africans, and the use of race as the key organising tool in the construction of colonial governance.

It also unveiled that what was fundamentally at stake in the manner in which rural local government evolved in Rhodesia was the maintenance of law and order among the conquered Africans in order to guarantee the security of white power and prevent insurrection; the implementation of parallel development of the races which was characterized by territorial segregation and separate facilities for whites and blacks; and the general political exclusion of Africans in the country’s electoral politics. The thesis argued that this concept of racial separateness adopted by the colonial government facilitated the institutionalisation of injustice against Africans in colonial

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<sup>554</sup> D. Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 122

administration which sowed the seeds for the later growth of African Nationalism and the struggle for liberation in the 1960s and 1970s.

The study unveiled that during the era of Chartered Company rule, considerations of expediency and concerns about the expenses of administering the indigenous populations with Company manpower alone largely compelled the state to build their Native Administration upon the existing institutions of customary authority, because the state did not possess an alternative form of control over the rural African populations. Due to this limitation in the capacity of the state to effectively govern the rural countryside without African chiefs, traditional leadership institutions proved to be indispensable to modern bureaucratic forms of government throughout the colonial era. Thus, although the Rhodesian state was loathe to implementing the Lugardian-Cameronian concept of Indirect Rule through traditional authorities in its African governance, political pragmatism forced it to concede to the retention of African chiefs and headmen as part of its rural local governance. However, as later history showed, the traditional chiefs were not only exploited to buttress colonial control of the rural areas, but they were also manipulated to achieve other strategic goals of the settler administration, such as combating the growth of African Nationalism among the peasantry.

The thesis's analysis of the three decades of Responsible Government that followed the end of BSA Company rule in 1922 made several key conclusions regarding the contribution of colonialism to the transformation of the institution of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe. Firstly, the thesis unveiled how chieftainship underwent secularization during the colonial era that divorced it from its spiritual foundations of the precolonial era and had far-reaching implications on the legitimacy of colonial chiefs. Under the Native Affairs Act

of 1927, the colonial state usurped the right to appoint chiefs from precolonial customs and gave colonial courts of law an unqualified right to appoint whoever the state considered suitable to a chieftainship. In some cases, new chieftainships were created as a convenient and necessary instrument of local administration.<sup>555</sup> The thesis argues that this was a desecration of the precolonial ideology of chieftainship which was founded on a close relationship between religious and temporal power, and regulated succession to chieftainship. One of the consequences of the appointment of salaried chiefs by colonial authorities was that the office of chief came to be coveted as a lucrative post and induced a more individual quest for wealth and power in every clan that fuelled recurrent chieftainship wrangles and succession disputes.<sup>556</sup>

Secondly, the thesis revealed that under colonial rule African chiefs came to wield powers of coercion over their followers that were largely alien to the precolonial ideology of chieftainship. The powers and duties of salaried over their subjects were increased by a proclamation from the High Commissioner in 1910 which ordered them to perform new coercive tasks on behalf of local administration. The engagement of chiefs in the prosecution of unpopular colonial policies such as cattle seizures, forced labour recruitment, and destocking underlined their complete transformation from representatives of their people to servants of the colonial local administration whose powers now derived from the colonial state. The thesis argues that, in many ways, precolonial leaders were more accountable for their actions than colonial chiefs because the source of chiefly legitimacy in colonial period derived from

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<sup>555</sup> NGB2/1/1, Chiefs and Headmen

<sup>556</sup> G. Bishi, 'The Colonial Archive and Contemporary Chieftainship Claims: The Case of Zimbabwe, 1935 To 2014', MA thesis, University of The Free State 2015, 48-53; M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona*, , 33, 66, 81, 131, 245, 251

the state, not the people.<sup>557</sup>

As indicated above, the colonial state never officially acknowledged the administrative system of Indirect Rule as policy in its African local governance, but its dependence on chiefs and headmen in its rural administration nevertheless made the governing process itself an indirect one. The state's concession to Indirect Rule became more evident during the era of Responsible Government in the promulgation of Acts of Parliament that theoretically promoted African local self-government and vested much responsibility in chiefs through its Native Boards and Native Councils policy. Through legislation such as the Native Councils Act 1937 which allowed Native Councils to make rules and regulations within their own areas, and the Native Law and Courts Act 1937 which further empowered chiefs by granting them powers to exercise semi-autonomous jurisdiction in their domains, Godfrey Huggins's government not only entrenched his Two Pyramid policy of racial separation but, by implication, also guaranteed the retention of African traditional authorities as the chief instruments of rural local governance.

However, this concession to African administrative autonomy was half-hearted and rather limited because of the reluctance of the Southern Rhodesian government to adequately fund the Native Councils and empower traditional authorities with financial responsibilities.<sup>558</sup> The reluctance to financially empower the Native Councils and make them truly independent underscores the point that the political motive of the colonial local government was that of central control rather than local development. The

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<sup>557</sup> Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 83; C. Ake, 'Rethinking African Democracy', *Journal of African Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1991; J. Cobbah, 'African Values and Human Rights: An African Perspective', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1987.

<sup>558</sup> William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa*, 21

creation of the Native Boards and Native Councils emphasized the bifurcation of colonial society along racial lines. In later years this dichotomy in local government structures was marked by impoverished African Councils for blacks that were wholly dependent on grants from the central government, in contrast to better funded white Rural Councils that collected their revenue by taxes on the white farmers and from beer levies on beer halls in the commercial farming areas.<sup>559</sup>

Faced with the Nationalist challenge to white minority rule in the 1960s, the UFP and RF regimes sought to perpetuate white hegemony in the country by manipulating the African chiefs to support Rhodesia's bid for independence from Britain under white minority rule, mainly in order to forestall the granting of independence by Britain to the Nationalist parties ZAPU and ZANU as had happened in Zambia and Malawi in 1964. The colonial state also forged a strategic alliance with chiefs and manipulated them to counter the growing influence of the Nationalists among the peasantry in the countryside by promoting them as the only true representatives of the African people. The colonial regime then used this argument to rule out the need to consult the opinion of the Nationalists on the crucial question of the future of the country.<sup>560</sup> Part of the political agenda of the white settlers in the promotion of the customary authority of the chiefs was to confine Africans to governance within their traditional political structures according to their customary laws wherein they could not enjoy equal rights to the white man.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, *State Politics in Zimbabwe*, University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, 188

<sup>560</sup> Tor Sellstrom, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa: Solidarity and Assistance: A Concerned Partnership (1970-1994)*, Nordic Africa Institute, December 1999, 305

<sup>561</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (James Currey, Oxford, 1996); Bridget O'Laughlin, 'Class and the Customary: The Ambiguous Legacy of the *Indigenato* in Mozambique', *African Affairs*, 99, 2000, 5-42



A major political objective of the Rhodesians' alliance with the chiefs was to showcase their support in order to convince the British government that the settlers' bid for independence under white minority rule had the support of the majority of the Africans in the country. From the time the RF assumed power, its government frequently turned to the Council of Chiefs to elicit manifestations of African support for its actions. It quickly became evident that the chiefs were now the mouthpiece of the Smith regime when delegates of the chiefs were sent to London to make a case for independence under white rule. The diplomatic isolation of the RF regime after UDI led it to an even stronger alliance with African chiefs in the 1970s, as it sought internal legitimacy to counter its international illegitimacy. Throughout the 1970s African chiefs continued to rise to unprecedented prominence under the Rhodesian Front regime.<sup>562</sup> Smith even promoted some chiefs to Ministerial posts in his government.<sup>563</sup>

A corollary political scheme to the promotion of chiefs in African affairs involved the strategic repression of all the Nationalist parties in the country, delegitimizing their political messages, and criminalizing membership to these organizations.<sup>564</sup> During the talks with the British government regarding Rhodesia's independence Smith repeatedly stated that he had no intention of consulting the leadership of the African Nationalist parties and firmly held the view that the chiefs were the true spokesmen for all the Africans in the country, and not the Nationalists. This close association of chiefs with the Smith regime after UDI in the 1960s and 1970s precipitated political fallout between the chiefs and Nationalists that reversed the promising start that had

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<sup>562</sup> N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza, *Community Development in Pre-Independence Zimbabwe: A Study of Policy with Special Reference to Rural Land*, University of Zimbabwe Publishing, Harare, 1985; Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, 118

<sup>563</sup> Reporter, 'Four Chiefs Made ministers', *The African Times*, vol. 11, No. 5, May 5, 1976, p.1

<sup>564</sup> Nathan Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 31; Ngwabi Bhebe, *B. Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe*, 74

been set between them in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The souring of relations between them deteriorated even further during war of liberation when some chiefs became targets of attacks by the ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrillas on accusations of being ‘sell-outs’.<sup>565</sup>

The thesis exposed how, in the last two decades of colonial rule the interaction between Rhodesian administrators and chiefs became more intense and appeared to have sealed their fate as powers that were destined for in the face of the looming victory of the Nationalist forces. By the end of 1979 traditional chieftaincy appeared on the verge of being brushed away by a new democratic politics of a new Zimbabwe.<sup>566</sup> True to the wartime predictions, after the attainment of independence the new Government of Zimbabwe introduced reform measures that undermined the authority of traditional institutions in judicial and land matters in the communal areas because of their perceived pre-independence role as functionaries of colonial oppression.

This thesis argues that the failure by the new Government to incorporate and co-opt traditional institutions into formal state institutions in the first two decades of independence precipitated confusion in land administration in the communal areas largely due to the peasants’ continued preference for the institutions of traditional authority. This confusion at the local administrative levels was characterized by a lack of clarity on roles and functions between the traditional institutions of chief, headman and village head, and the elected leadership of village development committees (VIDCOs) and ward development committees (WADCOs) in land matters. It precipitated a crisis

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<sup>565</sup> Joshua Chakawa, ‘The Environment and ZIPRA guerrilla warfare in Hurungwe District, 1972-1979’, M.A. Dissertation, History and Development Studies Department, Midlands State University, 2007, 75; Ngwabi Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe, 1947-1958*, 1-160; Commonwealth Secretariat, *Southern Rhodesia Elections, February 1980: Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group on Elections leading to Independent Zimbabwe*, Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, London, 1980

<sup>566</sup> Kate Baldwin, *Paradox of Traditional Chiefs in Democratic Africa*, 3

of communal leadership in the communal areas of Zimbabwe, whereby, on one hand, elected rural institutions had little real legitimacy according to traditional grassroots perspectives, while traditional leaders were not always acknowledged or respected by the formal state's modernization initiatives.

The decision to re-empower traditional chiefs in the late 1990s was clearly driven by the embattled ZANU PF regime's efforts to shore up its sagging political fortunes and Robert Mugabe's survival politics. The ZANU PF government was faced with a serious political challenge from a rising tide of opposition movements during this period, which included University of Zimbabwe students, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, and a host of disenchanted civic organisations; which culminated in the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change party (MDC) in 1999.<sup>567</sup> Faced with the real threat that the growing opposition would garner support from the Communal Lands, the State opportunistically moved quickly to incorporate traditional leaders as an important but, hitherto, alienated political constituency.

As noted above, the perception that chiefs in Zimbabwe have become aligned to the ZANU PF government has generated criticism of their partisanship from many quarters and raised questions about their relevance to modern democratic governance that is based on elected leadership. Some critics argue that chiefs have become instrumental in securing electoral victories for the party in rural constituencies.<sup>568</sup> Other critics point to the financial perquisites that chiefs have received from the government since 2000 as evidence that ZANU PF is bribing chiefs to secure of the rural electorate.

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<sup>567</sup>Daniel Compagnon, *A Predictable Tragedy. Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe*, 83-86

<sup>568</sup>Chengetai Zvanya, Parliamentary Editor, 'Govt. to splash on chiefs' cars', *Daily News*, Sat. 04 October 2014.

In the final analysis, this thesis underscored the resilience, adaptability and dynamism of the institution of chieftaincy under the great transformative impact of colonial and postcolonial policies and its ability to survive transformation, as was evidenced by its resurgence in the late 1990s. It attributed the lasting appeal of the institution of chieftaincy to its precolonial legacy as a culturally-relatable consultative and inclusive political structure. The thesis argued that traditional leadership institutions have proved to be indispensable to modern bureaucratic forms of government in Zimbabwe and in Africa.

The thesis highlighted the limits of the colonial state's power in the invention of colonial chiefs by also emphasizing the agency of chiefs as historical actors who often subverted their colonial relationship with the state. It drew from revisionist critiques of the invention of tradition thesis which emphasize the power of historically-shaped local traditions to limit colonial inventions, and the resilience of local ideas, to argue that colonial rule did not completely obliterate precolonial African traditions of governance and customary laws, and many of these traditions remained and antagonistic to the colonial project. It proffered this as one of the explanations for the resilience of the institution of chieftainship in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa in general.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>569</sup>Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention*, (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1998)

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