Uprooting the weeds: Power, ethnicity and violence in the Matabeleland conflict.
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Citation for published version (APA):

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Chapter Two

Power, Ethnicity, and Violence: A Historical Context

Zimbabwe’s historiography is riddled with variation, not only when examining pre-colonial history, but also with regards to the colonial era and the history of the liberation war. Descriptions are often politically partial and based on the history of victors, omitting significant developments by actors of lesser political clout (Beach 1994:xvii, Bhebe/Ranger 1995:6). In light of the above shortcomings, attempting a synthesis of Zimbabwean historical documentation is a journey through a minefield, in which each choice is open to contestation. The choices nevertheless made in this chapter are linked to one objective: to trace developments in Rhodesian history annals that can facilitate an understanding of the emergence and evolution of the Matabeleland conflict in the 1980s. In order to do so, the description goes back to the pre-colonial period, describing Shona and Ndebele communities. The early colonial period having an impact on Shona – Ndebele relations, as did significantly the first civil war in 1896, have also brought accounts of this period to the fore. However, the emphasis of the chapter is located to the period of nationalist politics (1957–1979), as the Matabeleland conflict is closely linked to the two nationalist parties Zapu and Zanu and their interrelationship. The period of nationalist politics includes the liberation war 1965–1979, which is of great importance for an analysis of post war politics in Zimbabwe. Synthesising descriptions from the war for the benefit of understanding the Matabeleland conflict, is possibly even a more eventful research path to travel than was the earlier period. In Zimbabwean historiography covering the war, descriptive imbalances and omissions are considerable. For research purposes, access to this period has been extremely limited, as Zanla files were unsorted and closed for scholars, whilst ZIPRA files were seized by police and their location remains unknown (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:3, interview Brickhill, 1992). Thus, academic work describing the nationalist war effort remains scarce.12 The accounts that nevertheless are available have furthermore been met with two highly critical responses. Firstly, according to Bhebe and Ranger, the liberation war descriptions have been considerably Zanu biased, posing Zanu’s right of authority to power in a tone of officiality and without differentia-

12 Although there is a gap in the literature regarding guerrilla activity, there are nevertheless many studies covering other aspects of the liberation war, such as the impact of the war on Zimbabwe’s peasantry; in relation to women; concerning ideology and religion; and with regards to healing traumatic war experiences (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:2).
tion. Meanwhile, Zapu’s contributions in the liberation war have been down played or omitted. Secondly, the liberation war descriptions are criticised for being the propagation of an official mythology of war, based on leadership decisions and movements of armies, and thereby ignoring the role of the common soldier (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:6).

In this study’s history description of the liberation war, difference is a reoccurring theme: differences between Shona and Ndebele, Zanu and Zapu, Zanla and Zipra, and between the liberation movements and the settler regime. In general, the established views regarding Zanu and Zapu have been dominated by contrasts between the two (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:8). However, in an effort to correct historical Zanu bias and Zapu omission as well as testing stereotypical propositions, the two nationalist parties have been juxtaposed13, in the search for similarities and commonalities, rather than contrasts and disunities. This exercise brought to the fore a firm argument for similarities, pinpointing that both Zanu and Zapu were nationalist parties, which appealed geographically and politically to the whole nation; both had similar attitudes to rural culture; both set up similar programs for progressive education during the war; both had peasant youths and educated youths in their ranks;14 both armies operated in more than one language zone; and in areas (specifically in Matabeleland) layers of ethnic and national identities overlapped without tension. Based on these commonalities, an argument was posed that there is much content in an argument against the proposition of an inherent Zapu/Ndebele – Zanu/Shona division (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:9,1995b: 32). It was also agreed, as an interim conclusion, that the contrasts remaining between Zanu and Zapu were no deliberate policy, whether concerning patterns and periodization of recruitment, nor ‘to a certain extent’ tactics and strategy – but were rather the results of specific historical and geographical factors (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:11).

Returning to the format of the historical description in this study, identifying differences between the nationalist parties is not for the purpose of adding to already established views of Zanu-Zapu contrasts. Nor is it in order to pose the argument that differences were a deliberate policy in order to demarcate ‘the other’. Instead, the central theme in the chapter concerns perceptions of difference. Through the course of this chapter two collections of perceptions can be followed. Firstly, that

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13 The discussion is based on the introductions to two volumes edited by Bhebe and Ranger (1995;1995b), which include conference papers from the ‘International Conference on Zimbabwe’s Liberation War’, held at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare, in 1991.

14 For a discussion on class and ‘generational’ composition in Zanla and Zipra, see Bhebe/Ranger 1995:8–10.
of a Shona-Ndebele dichotomy, and secondly, perceptions linked to political power competition. The Shona-Ndebele dichotomy traceable to the pre-colonial period coincides later in historical development with the cleavage of political power competition between Zanu and Zapu. Arriving at the historical stage where Zanu and Zapu operate simultaneously, the focus is on differences induced by external forces and differences perceived internally within the structures. In the attempt to unravel perceptions of difference the narrative includes views that the two nationalist parties (with respective armies) had of themselves and of each other, both in terms of ethnicity and as two political forces. Moreover, it includes perceptions on ethnicity and politics held and disseminated by settlers, the minority government, and government security forces.

Looking at historical occurrences from both the viewpoint of actual events and the highly subjective perceptions growing out of, or being cemented by these events, adds an additional angle to the analysis of developments. It is this additional angle, outlining formations, perpetuations, and cementations of ethnic and political perceptions in Zimbabwe's history, which will hopefully add to the understanding of the context, emergence, and evolution of the Matabeleland conflict.

1. The Pre-Colonial and the Early Colonial Periods

1.a. An Outline of Shona Pre-Colonial History

Between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers, the Shona speaking peoples form the largest single cultural and linguistic group of Southern Africa. The term Shona is historically a recent qualification, originating from the Ndebele who called the Changamire Rozvi by this name. It was gradually adopted by Shona-speakers, who had previously identified themselves according to local divisions such as Karanga, Zezuru, and Kalanga, without having a universal name for the linguistic group (Beach 1984:52). This outline covers Shona developments until the end of the 19th century, during which it was pertinent to refer to a distinct 'Shona history'. Thereafter the linguistic group was integrated with other groups, transforming into large units of mixed decent (Beach 1994:XVIII).

For much of their history most of the Shona have lived in relatively small and independent units (Beach 1994:XVI). There are a considerable number of completely distinct lineages, and there is no common tradition from which people came, no territory of 'origin'. People moved due to migration as land shortages occurred, or because of civil wars or invasions (Beach 1994:267–268). There was also no specific Shona succession system. In a myriad of ways, power and dynastic
titles changed, ‘filial, collateral and rotating-house successions occurring in no particular order’ (Beach 1994:269). During Shona history four major political units or state formations have existed. The first such formation was the Zimbabwe State. The ancient stone ruins Great Zimbabwe (near Masvingo) are believed to have been parts of the capital of an early Shona-Karanga empire and the centre of the Zimbabwe State. The Zimbabwe State arose out of the Gumanye culture, the second of the two Shona cultures to have settled on the southern half of the Plateau. Archaeological evidence suggests that it was built about 1100 AD, and the success of Zimbabwe appears to originate from prosperous gold and ivory trading being added to the traditional cattle herding. This involved the initiation of a complex system of trade routes joining gold fields with trade tracks. The trade routes obliging protection from outside exertion, suggests that the state had military strength (Beach 1980:37-38, 42). Between 1300 and about 1450 the Zimbabwe State became highly prosperous. This was reflected in the aversion of labour from agricultural activities and the financing of skilled builders, to erect the grand scale stone structures. Inside the wall that enclosed the main site it is estimated that 5,000 to 11,000 inhabitants lived in an ‘urban’ setting. Outside the main area of the state a multitude of different tribes and clans existed, each with specific territories and chiefs. It has been difficult to determine whether those were under the domination of the Zimbabwe State or for how long. It is nevertheless clear that inhabitants living inside the stone walls at the state’s capital, were only a small minority of the Zimbabwe culture (Beach 1980:48, 81). The Zimbabwe State went through a fast process of decline, and by 1500 the state no longer existed. Reasons for this decline may have been that Zimbabwe grew too big to be supported by its environment, which could have created political tension (Beach 1980:48-50). The successor to Zimbabwe emerged to be the Torwa State at Khami, in the southwest. However, before turning to the Torwa State, the description turns to the Mutapa State, as before the fall of Zimbabwe the Mutapa dynasty had derived as a branch from the Zimbabwe culture.

15 The definition of state is here taken from Beach (1980:113): ‘By a “state” is meant a large but compact area under the control of one dynasty, whether that control was exercised through sub-rulers of the central dynasty or through non-related groups’. The system of power included “oudying tributaries”, in which the state formed alliances with groups and whereby tributes were paid to the ruler. To compel allegiance of tributaries at distance and over time largely took place by the threat of military force.

16 South of the Zambezi River in southern Africa, the land rises to a great plateau, over three thousand feet high in the majority of places. This plateau is the scene of most of the history of the Shona people over the last thousand years (Beach 1980:1).
The Mutapa State was formed in the mid-fifteenth century, most likely by migrations and conquests in which a gradual movement of Karanga dynasties settled and formed the new state (Beach 1980:61, 83). Similar to the Zimbabwe culture, they were cattle herders and took part in trade. Significantly, the Mutapa dynasty ruled Shona as well as non-Shona groups for most of its existence, and at the end of the dynasty’s lifespan the non-Shona predominated. The Portuguese arrival in 1505 was highly influential, although the new inhabitants did not settle in the state until 1629. The impact was nevertheless fundamental, causing great turmoil in the Mutapa State. Although the state survived the Portuguese influx, it had to go through major changes and shifts of locations within the territory. The weakened position of the Mutapa state led to internal instability and long-lasting civil wars. The entire Mutapa State remained nevertheless intact in territory until the eighteenth century, and lasted as a whole for at least four centuries (Beach 1980:117). The cause of the fall of the Mutapa State in the late nineteenth century was linked to the revival of Portuguese power. The Portuguese reacted to the threat of European colonisation and began extensively to take over parts of the Mutapa State. The Mutapa State ceased to exist about 1884 (Beach 1980:150–154).

Little is known about the Torwa State, which was founded at Khami about 1410. As the Zimbabwe State had ceased to be a major centre, the focal point of its culture moved west. In the new state the stone work from Zimbabwe was continued, new styles being added. The Torwa State functioned between the 15th and 17th centuries, and its economy was based on cattle herding and gold mining. The state was however conquered in the 1680s by another Shona group, the Changamire Rozvi, who had migrated from the Mutapa State in the northeast. They took over the capital now located at Danangombe, as well as the Torwa culture. The Changamire conquest of the Torwa State seems to have been a rapid invasion where destruction was limited. After a brief conflict the new dynasty settled among the former inhabitants and intermarriage took place. The Rozvi remained in control until the 1830s (Beach 1980:188-219, 1986:19).

As the Rozvi conquered the Torwa State, the Changamire State began to take form. It was to be the last functional Shona State prior to the occupation of the Ndebele. The state included several different groups, functioning in a system of tributaries. The Changamire’s power rested on a balanced support from these groups, as the prevention of civil war between the main dynasty and the so-called ‘houses’ was imperative. House succession was practised through intricate systems, which nevertheless did not prevent power competition. Stability in the state depended on the relationships between the ruler and subjects not of ruling lineage, as
those were excluded from the ruling title (Beach 1980:240-241). The economic base of the state was gold mining, cattle breeding, manufacturing, and agricultural cultivation. In the late eighteen and early nineteenth centuries there was an overall economic decline influenced by major droughts, civil wars, and the exhaustion of gold mining (Beach 1986:128). In addition, major population movements beyond the control of the Changamire State began to occur. Weakened by these developments, the Changamire State was further destabilised, being subjected to the great migration wave from the south – the *mfecane*. During a decade of migration, on their way north Nguni and Sotho groups invaded or raided the Changamire in many waves. Expelling the intruders and thereby surviving nearly a third of the volatile nineteenth century, a succession crisis finally severely weakened the state. The last Nguni group passing through killed Changamire himself, leaving the state leaderless. When the Ndebele arrived and began occupying territories, the state had still no recognised leader, and each house had to make their own defence strategies. Some put up resistance, others voluntarily submitted to Mzilikazi. When the Changamire State fell to the Ndebeles in the 1830s and 1840s, it did not end the Changamire Rozvi’s influence as a political force. The Rozvis’ influence will be elaborated on below, whilst here it can be noted that the group did finally surrender to the Ndebele in 1866 (Beach 1980:220–277; Beach 1986:20).

1.b. An Outline of Ndebele Pre-Colonial History

The Ndebele are categorised by anthropologists and linguistics as a Southern Bantu people. The Southern Bantu people are on linguistic grounds often divided into four different groups: the Nguni, the Sotho-Tswana, the Venda, and the Tsonga. The Nguni, in turn, is often divided into four sub-groups: the Xhosa, the Swazi, the Transvaal Ndebele and the Zulu. The Nguni from Zululand include three offshoots: the Ngono, the Shangana and the Ndebele (Lindgren 1996:2). This historical outline concerns the Ndebele, the last group who left Zululand and eventually settled in what today is south-west Zimbabwe.

During the 19th century, the migration of Nguni groups south of the Limpopo River (the *mfecane*) created new dimensions in the pre-colonial social formation. These groups moved from the Zulu State in southern Africa, where rebellions against the reign of Shaka (1818–1828) had occurred. Whilst Nguni groups moved northwards they conquered other communities on their way, leading to great disruptions in socio-political settings in southern and central Africa (Beren 1988:7). The invasion of people from the south affected different parts of Shona territory at different times. It is now recognised that the much-cited Nguni migrations were neither as damaging nor as final to the Shona settlements, as was earlier
supposed. The migrations only confirmed a general trend of economic and political turmoil among the Shona, and these circumstantial factors significantly influenced the loss of territory (Beach 1986:20).

The last Nguni group entering the weakened Changamire state, where the Ndebeles under Mzilikazi, chief of the Khumalo. Mzilikazi had been a close ally to king Shaka, but left his homeland about 1821 due to internal conflicts. Between departure and Mzilikazi's settlement in modern Zimbabwe in 1839, he migrated in several waves, conquering kingdoms as he moved with his followers. Entering the Rozvi country his followers were a heterogeneous group, with Nguni and non-Nguni supporters from Zululand, and captives incorporated on the route going north (Ranger 1979:33; Lindgren 1996:2). At the time of the Ndebele invasion, sub-rulers of the Rozvi played a role in the Ndebele conquest of the Rozvi State. As outlined above, 'houses' acted independently due to the state being leaderless (Beach 1986:20).

The Ndebele invasion differed from other Nguni groups in several ways. Firstly, Mzilikazi's people made no attempt to attack the central part of the Changamire State, nor did they extensively kill the Kalanga or the Rozvi. They settled in the western province of Ndumbala among the Kalanga. The new rulers thus took over geographical areas, and they also incorporated economic and political structures from their Shona predecessors. Under Ndebele rule, the new state came to comprise nearly 60 percent of Shona peoples, with the addition of a number of captives from other areas (Beach 1986:21,19). Therefore, in its early years the Ndebele State consisted of a Shona majority ruled by a Nguni minority. The Shona living under Ndebele rule commonly acclimatised to their new cultural environment, and adopted the Ndebele language and customs. The Ndebele identity and state especially attracted Shona youth, and many enthusiastically assumed their new identification (Beach 1984:56). The different peoples incorporated in the Ndebele State came to form different 'classes'. Those Nguni having joined Mzilikazi at the outset were accepted as more or less equal. A second class was formed by the later incorporated Sotho and Tswana, and the last to be incorporated, the Shona, formed a third class. These three classes came to be known as Zanzi (Abezanzi), Enhla (Abenhla) and Lozwi (Balozwi) or Holi (Amaholi). Although men from all classes could be warriors, Zanzi were the aristocrats, and Lozwi the servile cast who performed the manual labour (Lindgren 1996:2).

The second way in which the Ndebele differed from previous Nguni groups, was their consolidation of power by entering into an economic relationship with the Rozvi. Firstly, the Ndebele needed supplies of grain, which would not be forthcoming if the groups functioned under hostile terms. Secondly, the Ndebele need-
ed people to boost their state. The Rozvi, on the other hand, had lost a lot of cattle in the Nguni invasions, which in turn, the Ndebele had plenty of. Initially an exchange took place in which Mzilikazi distributed cattle in return for young people, who then were incorporated into the Ndebele State and society (Beach 1986:22). Later this exchange broke down, due to Ndebeles' seeming to have retained the ownership of cattle without allowing for the return of the young people taken into Ndebele society. In the long run the exchanges of cattle for people were extremely disadvantageous to the Shona, and would later affect Ndebele-Shona relations (Beach 1980:266; 1986:22).

In the Ndebele State, the king was central, and no separation of powers between institutions existed. The king had the combined role of religious, social, economic, military and administrative leader of the state (Nyathi 1996:14). However, senior chiefs, whose approval in national matters was necessary, assisted him. One of its most debated and contested institutions was the military, which was highly developed. The way in which the Ndebele army operated, constituted the most obvious difference between the Ndebele and the Shona (Beach 1984:55). Boys reaching puberty were drafted for military duty, and underwent extensive training. The state did not have a standing army, but those who were militarily trained could be called up for duties at any time. Once back from assignments, soldiers became civilians and returned to their every-day village life in which their military role remained latent (Nyathi 1996:22-23). Geographically, the Ndebele State proper functioned in a relatively small, concentrated area. Outside this area, the Ndebele did not attempt to build communities constructed according to their social organisation (Ranger 1979:26).

In a wide circle outside the Ndebele settlement, Shona speaking people such as the Karanga, Kalanga, Zezuru, Rozwi and Tonga were settled, who recognised the Ndebele State as the ruling power. These groups were in a regulated relationship of tribute with the Ndebele, in which articles (skins, feathers, hoes, spears, tobacco) or services (such as hut building), were given in return for immunity against raids (Beach 1986:30). The tribute-paying client communities, although attached to the Ndebele kingdom, still retained their separate identities (Omer-Cooper 1987:77). To maintain their influence in border tributary lands, the Ndebele entered alliances with local Shona interest groups. Subsequently Shona political interest groups relied on the Ndebele for maintenance, whilst in turn the Ndebele gained support needed to maintain influence on their tributary frontiers. The alliances had an impact on both internal and external threats (Beach 1986:31).
Ndebele Raiding

Ndebele raiding have been subject to both extensive debate and myth making. Ndebele settlement in Shona territory created from the beginning a wide variety of responses and perceptions, particularly in relation to Ndebele military discipline (Beach 1986:16, 23). Descriptions relating to Ndebele regiments’ cruel and violent raiding of Shona settlements was initially spread particularly by missionaries, multiplying later amongst travellers and settlers. Although it was not until the 1890s that a European witnessed a Ndebele raid on the Shona, detailed descriptions in writing were current in pre-1890 books. Even when there was evidence against the written conclusions of the Ndebele, European writers continued to reproduce the imposed perception of Ndebele cruelty on the Shona (Beach 1986:16–17).

Myths regarding Ndebele raiding did however rest on an actual occurrence, although frequency and form were exaggerated. Outside the tribute-paying client communities, the Ndebele made periodic unofficial and official raids. Unofficial raiding was a practice whereby small communities raided women and livestock for their own immediate needs and profit, and was used both by the Shona and the Ndebele. Both the Ndebele leaders Mzilikazi and Lobengula, due to the attraction of reprisals and patterns of cross raiding discouraged unofficial raiding. Official Ndebele raiding was however, made by the direct order of the ruler in the process of establishment and expansion of the Ndebele State (Beach 1986:17–18). The impact of Ndebele raids outside the state was considerable, but has been grossly exaggerated. In early historical interpretations, it was concluded that adjacent to the Ndebele State, raiding caused widespread depopulation. Contrary to earlier beliefs, the majority of Shona communities remained in their areas, whilst a few were forced to move (Beach 1984:57).

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17 One source of myth making was the missionary Robert Moffat who had visited the Ndebele in their previous settlement in southern Africa, during the period of wars and disturbances of the mfecane. From these experiences he concluded the Ndebele were brutal and continued to seek evidence of this when he in 1854 visited them in their new state. He successfully spread his perception to other missionaries, traders and travellers (Beach 1986:16).

18 In addition to Europeans creating a myth around the Ndebele, the Shona peoples added to the dissemination of negative perceptions by accepting the European position and by exaggerating the number and impact of Ndebele raids. However, Ndebeles themselves were also active in the spread of their image. In order to build up their military reputation, many seem to have exaggerated the outcome of their raids and suppressed information regarding their losses (Beach 1986:17).

19 Raiding was not specific to the Ndebele group of people or to their state. On the contrary, raiding was common to many African communities at that time.
During the 1850s, a rapid revival of Rozvi power took place, causing a political threat to the Ndebele. The main issue of discontent leading to the first serious Shona resistance against Ndebele rule was a result of the unequal cattle-people trade. As the Rozvi State still existed in terms of organisation, discontent could be facilitated through these structures. The resistance was manifested by Shona groups penetrating deep into Ndebele ruled territory, mainly stealing cattle and harassing inhabitants. In the effort to re-establish their position, the Ndebele raided Shona communities. Subsequently fighting broke out between the Ndebele State and various Shona dynasties, and continued throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Shona communities were however well organised in the event of raiding, and therefore suffered few heavy losses (Ranger 1979:29; Beach 1986:16-17). As the protracted war only engaged certain Shona communities, extensive areas of central and eastern Mashonaland remained either largely or completely unaffected by Ndebele raids (Ranger 1979:30; Beach 1984:58). Also, simultaneously to the local conflicts, friendly or neutral relations continued with uninvolved Shona communities. These were crucial to uphold, as the Shona trading system was important to the Ndebele. Cattle were still central in the economy, but the exchange of gold and ivory as well as supplies of guns and cloth was imperative to the Ndebele. Trade links to the Zambezi River passed through Shona areas and were available through Shona communities (Beach 1986:24).

From 1860 to 1873 it is believed that the Ndebele made the most concerted effort to dominate the Shona. Raids were conducted on a wide geographical scale. In 1868, the event of Mzilikazi’s death caused internal destabilisation in the Ndebele State. A bitter succession struggle followed, involving white interests.20 Not until 1870 did Mzilikazi’s son Lobengula become king. However, due to internal political opposition, and the threat of white interest involvement in internal politics, Lobengula’s rule was under stress (Omer-Cooper 1987:132). In 1873 the Ndebele were nevertheless at their zenith of power.

Soon thereafter Ndebele defeats began to occur, leading gradually to a power shift between the Ndebele and the Shona. In the conflicts taking place in the 1860s, Shona communities had been short of guns. However, long distance trading and migrant labourers to Kimberley and the Rand, made it now possible for the Shona

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20 Mzilikazi’s senior heir, Nkulumane, had been executed along with those who had prematurely installed the young man in his father’s place. Many Ndebele however, believed that Nkulumane had been sent away to the south. A Natal settler, T. Shepstone, encouraged this rumour, creating insecurity in the Ndebele state whether the senior heir actually was alive or not, and could return to take power (Omer-Cooper 1987:132).
to get arms. With this supply Shona mountain strongholds became near to impossible to penetrate, leading to the turn of power tides in the 1880s.

The Ndebele-Shona power shift was also seriously influenced by Portuguese intervention. For centuries Portuguese power and ideas had been pressing to penetrate eastern and central Shona communities, but had been successfully ousted by the military strength of the Rozvi State (Ranger 1979:25). In 1889, a concerted Portuguese effort to take over the northern, eastern and central part of the Shona country took place. This major political development was distinctively anti-Ndebele and turned out to be beneficial to the Shona. As guns and ammunition were supplied to Shona communities, internal political factors caused Shona groups to abandon their allegiance to Lobengula, accepting Portuguese presence. Following this event, no major Ndebele raiding forces entered the central parts of Shona territory again (Beach 1986:35).

2. Settler Intervention and Colonial Power

2.a. Enter Cecil Rhodes

In the south Cecil Rhodes was engaged in both financial and political affairs. To further secure his financial position, Rhodes looked north. Since gold had been found in modern Zimbabwe, a belief had grown that extensive gold resources existed in the area, far exceeding those of the Rand. To access this, a concession had to be obtained from the Ndebele king. Lobengula, being well aware of white military power, and anxious to get white support against other enemies (such as expansive efforts by Portuguese and Transvaal Boers), entered negotiations with Rhodes' agents. Deliberately deceived by the agents, he put his mark to the fateful Rudd concession granting the right to exploit the minerals of Shona territory. Whilst re-assuring Lobengula that the concession only granted the white men to dig holes for minerals, Rhodes' agents cabled London that Lobengula had conceded the right to occupy the country. To support the occupation, Rhodes portrayed the Ndebele king as sovereign ruler over vast lands, attained by bloody conquests of the Shona. He used the existing myth of Shona subjugation as an excuse for his own occupation agenda, although knowing that Shona communities were independent of the Ndebele ruler (Omer-Cooper 1987:139).

21 The British Cecil Rhodes arrived in South Africa 1870 at the age of seventeen. He soon became engaged in diamond mining, where after he successfully built multiple business ventures as well as engaged in politics in the Cape. For details on Rhodes' business and politics, see for example Omer-Cooper, 1987.
In 1889 Rhodes’ British South Africa (BSA) Company was granted its royal charter to exercise administrative authority in occupied territories. In June 1890, Rhodes set out towards Mashonaland with his ‘pioneer column’, its members believing they were liberating the Shona from cruel servitude. Without meeting resistance the column made its way, building forts along the route, finally hoisting the British flag over Fort Salisbury in September 1890 (Omer-Cooper 1987:131–132, 134).

Having rested the rationale of the Rudd concession on the perception of Shona subjugation to the Ndebele, settler treaties with Shona chiefs could not be attempted. Negotiating with Shona chiefs could question the portrayed dependency, and indicate Shona autonomy. This played a role in why the establishment of indirect rule through Shona chiefs did not occur. Instead, the granted administrative authority of the population in the occupied Shona territories was to a great extent left in the hands of individual whites, backed up by BSA company patrols. The essential purpose of the Chartered Administration was to provide the minimum conditions for the more or less orderly accumulation of capital. To succeed the company asserted its authority over those Shona communities it could access (Phimister 1988:12). In this effort, clashes between the Europeans and the Shona took place. Many Shona believed, in this period, that the European presence was only temporary. However, as the whites staked out land for farms, opened mines, stopped trade with the Portuguese, and demanded labour from the chiefs, Shona communities realised that the whites were not temporary traders but had settled on a permanent basis (Omer-Cooper 1987:140).

Many Shona rulers proceeded to use the European presence for their own advantage in local politics. Clashes between settlers and Shona groups were engineered in order to disadvantage other Shona groups. Nevertheless, resistance against Company rule emerged in the 1890s, and took a number of forms. This included desertion from underpaid labour, aversion of tax payment, theft, and cattle maiming. However, resistance was isolated, unconnected and highly restricted at this point, only including the enforcers such as representatives of the police or the Native Department (Beach 1986: 129–130; Phimister 1988:12).

Rhodes’ business ventures in Mashonaland failed, as the expected gold did not materialise. Faced with a potential economic disaster, the British South Africa Company turned to the Ndebele country. Rumour now had it that the gold reef went through Lobengula’s settlement at Bulawayo. In order for Rhodes to get access to mining in Matabeleland, a minor Ndebele raid near Fort Victoria in 1893 was exploited as a pretext to force war on the Ndebele. A British South Africa Company force was organised, comprising of volunteers who were promised Nde-
bele land and cattle for their effort. In an alliance with Shona raiders, the British prepared to advance toward Ndebele territory. But before British columns set out, Shona raiders were given space to move deep into Ndebele country, taking cattle (Beach 1986:36-37). Subsequently the British advance took place, and in a major battle Lobengula’s regiments lost against the well-equipped settler forces. Lobengula left Bulawayo before the columns reached the city, and died whilst attempting to reach the Nguni kingdom of Mpezeni.22 The BSA Company took over the Ndebele kingdom, and partitioned it into farms for white settlers. In addition, between 1893 and 1896 the BSA company and settlers seized 100 000 to 200 000 cattle from the Ndebele (Phimister 1988:16). Having invaded the territory, the BSA Company relied on its claims to ‘Rhodesia’ on ‘right of conquest’ rather than the Rudd concession. The conquest of Matabeleland resulted in an immediate boom in the chartered company’s shares. The anticipated gold reef was, however, still not found (Omer-Cooper; 1987:136).

2.b. The Ndebele and Shona Uprisings – The First ‘Chimurenga’23

After Lobengula’s fall in 1893, the leaderless Ndebele State was severely weakened. However, institutions were basically intact, as were the pattern of the Ndebele settlement (Cobbing 1977:63), and whilst Lobengula’s successor was sought, most of the Ndebele state was administered by Ndebele chiefs.24 In 1894, the BSA Company received imperial sanction to collect taxes. Thereafter company interventions became more intense, as did forced labour demands (Phimister 1988:16). In addition to settler imposed hardship on the Ndebele, a rinder pest epidemic spread over the territory, killing most of the remaining Ndebele cattle. To contain the spread, company officials shot cattle. For many Ndebele, this cattle-killing measure represented a deliberate ‘final elimination’ of their herds, rather than a preventative intervention (Phimister 1988:18). Discontent was brooding.

In March 1896 the Ndebele rose, lead by both traditional and religious leaders25 who successfully included almost all social strata in the Ndebele state (Sibanda 1989:36). Most Shona members part of the Ndebele State also joined the rebellion (Cobbing 1977:68-71; Beach 1986:133). Within a short period, the rebels had

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22 In Ndebele tradition it is believed that if you capture the king, there is no chance for resurrection of that chieftanship or kingship. Therefore it was reportedly important for Lobengula to flee rather than to be captured.

23 *Chimurenga* is a Shona word for ‘riot’ or ‘fighting in which everyone joins’ (Berens 1988:116).

24 One of Lobengula’s elder sons finally emerged as king in June 1896.

25 Ndebele religion centred on the Nguni high-God, Unkulunkulu; the worship of ancestor-spirits (*amadhlozi*); and the *nxwala* (ceremony performed only by royal Khumalos) (Cobbing 1977:68).
killed nearly 150 settlers, forcing the rest to seek shelter in forts. As the Ndebele position became stronger in April, BSA Company forces poured into the area, and the British government sent troop reinforcements. A civil war was under way. In June 1896, whilst the whites were seriously resisting the rebellion, they were reached by news that the war seemed to have spread. Rebellions in Mashonaland had begun (Phimister 1988:18).

Although the BSA Company accused the Ndebele for instigating Shona risings, co-ordination between the Ndebele and Shona risings are seen to have been highly unlikely (Cobbing 1977:77; Beach 1986: 134, 136). News about the Ndebele rebellion spread through the Shona tribal communities taking part in the uprising, and through communication between Ndebele and Shona leaders who were in contact due to unrelated affairs. News of European defeats in Matabeleland spread to Mashonaland, triggering varied responses among the Shona (Beach 1986:134, 136, 147).

The whites in Shona areas were completely surprised by the rebellion, and in the first days of the conflict over 100 settlers were killed (Phimister 1988:18). As news reached different Shona dynasties, decisions were made whether to join, oppose, or stay neutral. Often rulers did not hear more than a day in advance that the rising was taking place, and guidance in decision making was at times inspired by mediums of the Kaguvii and Mbuya Nehanda mhondoro spirits. The local decision making in the Shona uprising was specific to the way in which the dynasties were organised as polities. In contrast to the Ndebele State hierarchy, the Shona social structure was not centralised but based on dynasties. Each Shona area and dynasty therefore reacted according to local interests, opportunities, and pressures, perceiving their own territory as an independent entity, rather than an element in a larger structure. The BSA company’s political and economic impact was one element influencing the decision-making, whether to join the rebellion or not. Company intervention had been extremely uneven in different Shona areas. Whilst some districts had for several years been subjected to company administration and

26 With this position, Cobbing and Beach are contesting the previously well-established view put forward by T.O. Ranger in the highly influential Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–1897: A Study in African Resistance (London:1967), that the Chimurenga was a ‘sudden and co-ordinated attack’ by the Shona and Ndebele communities. The authors support this position of differentiation (as well as others) by referring to source mis-interpretation as well as to more recent and updated research by a number of academics (see Cobbing 1977; Beach 1986:119–148).

27 At the time, significant Shona leaders contacted the religious leader Mkwati in the Ndebele area in search of locust medicine, due a threatening locust disaster and famine (Beach 1986:134,136,147).
misrule, others were less affected or had successfully resisted escalating tax and labour demands (Phimister 1988:19). Once a decision was made, Shona rulers fought almost exclusively within their territories and very rarely combined attacks (Beach 1986:146). However, in contrast to earlier Shona settler resistance, attacks were extended to nearly all Europeans and foreign travellers, and were basically continuous until defeat (Beach 1986:130, 137, 141). Thus, the Shona uprising was a collection of local responses tied to local circumstances, rooted in complex series of internal and external rivalries rather than being a pre-planned and well co-ordinated Shona-Ndebele settler rebellion, as perceived by the settlers and later others (Beach 1986:68–69).

When the first Chimurenga broke out, there were a considerable number of both Ndebele and Shona who decided to join the settlers or collaborate, in suppressing the rebellion. For example, across parts of the southern Shona territory, five Shona dynasties blocked the spread of the rising. Although the strategic implications of collaboration were considerable, this was difficult to oversee at the time. However, resistance, collaboration, or neutrality were not neat categories consequently chosen by the Africans. As local politics influenced groups’ alignments, shifts took place back and forth. There was therefore no straight relationship between the impact of settler rule and resistance and collaboration. Seeing the conflict as a way to eradicate company misrule and in local political terms, the rebellion could not be identified as nationalism versus colonialism, as the extent and content of colonialism was not yet recognised (Beach 1986:69,133).

The war ended at different times and under different circumstances for the Ndebele and the Shona. For the Ndebele, their regiments failed to storm occupied Bulawayo, and were soon driven on the defensive by the British imperial forces. With the lack of both grain and ammunition, the Ndebele retreated to the Matopos mountains. From there the Ndebele threatened to keep up prolonged resistance, involving the company in massive costs it could not afford. To avoid this situation, negotiations started, resulting in Rhodes personal visit to the Matopos mountains in order to reach a peace settlement with the Ndebele. An agreement was reached in October 1896, whereby the Ndebele laid down their arms in return for resettlement in their original areas. They did however, not realise that the arrangement was temporary, and that the land they occupied remained in white ownership. Rhodes came out of the Ndebele conflict as the victor, public opinion in Britain

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28 For a detailed elaboration on collaboration and resistance with regards to local power politics, see Beach 1986:68–95.

29 Those were the Matibi, Chivi, Chirimuhanzu, Gutu and Zimuto dynasties (Beach 1986:133).
and South Africa being impressed with his negotiations with the Ndebele (Omer-Cooper 1987:140–141).³⁰

With the majority of the Ndebele nation out of the war, imperial forces focused on the Shona rebellion. By concentrating their forces on well-selected targets, company troops were able to outnumber Shona fighters, defeating group after group. Resistance persisted until the end of 1897, when the last centres of rebellion fell due to military might and destroyed crops. However, one of the main reasons the Shona uprisings failed was not lack of strategic planning, but that there were many more people who were neutral or collaborated, than there were rebels (Cobbing 1977:77; Beach 1986:144–145).

Also the aftermath of the war differed between the Ndebele and the Shona communities. The Ndebele had reached peace through a settlement, negotiating a conditional surrender. Some of the leaders who had refused to negotiate with Rhodes, were hunted down, tried and hanged. In general however, the Ndebele returned from the hills and restarted life on land which had belonged to the Ndebele nation before the 1893 war (albeit under conditions of widespread famine and disease as a result of the war). More importantly, Ndebele chiefs were offered salaried positions as officially recognised chiefs in the Native administration. It soon became apparent however, that the Ndebeles had been deceived, and after the two-year grace period on white land, the Ndebeles turned into squatters. They were allowed to stay in return for labour and part of their produce (Ranger 1970:26). This development was nevertheless less violent than in the Shona case, where the settler regime did not make any attempts to negotiate (Martin/Johnson 1981:49). Once the rebellion was suppressed, leaders of the rebellion were hunted down, tried and executed. These executions included the highly regarded spirit mediums Kaguvii and Mbuya Nehanda. Furthermore, those who had collaborated with the settler regime, were treated much the same as those who had resisted or remained neutral (Beach 1986:87).

The differentiated ways in which the settler regime responded in the aftermath of the rebellions, coincided partially with their perceptions of the Ndebele state’s and the Shona dynasties’ ways of functioning and level of ‘political development’. These perceptions rested on well-rooted myths about the Ndebele and the Shona, and had flourished since the first missionaries and settlers entered the territories (Beach 1986:16). The first missionaries coming in contact with the Ndebele found

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³⁰The deal Rhodes struck with the Ndebele was partly possible by appeasing the Matabeleland white land owners, through offering seats to two of their elected representatives, on a legislative council (Omer-Cooper 1987:140).
them irritatingly independent, insolently arrogant and militantly authoritarian, disillusioned as the missionaries were of their lack of success in making Christians out of the ‘savages’. Their perceptions quickly spread as the ‘truth’ of the Ndebele. Despite the perceptions of extreme violence and cruelty, missionaries and settlers grew impressed by the organisation of the Ndebele state, particularly its well trained army and military tactics. This sense of Ndebele central organisation and order stood in a stark contrast to the white perceptions regarding the Shona. Marshall Hole summarised many white views when stating: ‘The Mashona race has always been regarded as composed of disintegrating groups of natives, having no common organisation and owing allegiance to no single authority, cowed by a series of raids from Matabeleland into a condition of abject pusillanimity and incapable of planning any combined or pre-meditated action’ (Ranger 1979:4). A Bulawayo diarist expressed another attitude in 1896: ‘No one likes the Mashonas, dirty, cowardly lot. Matabele bloodthirsty devils but a fine type’ (Ranger 1979:3).

Based on myths of the above kind, whites believed that their coming to the territory (and Company rule) rescued the natives of their own painful situation: the Ndebeles out of an oppressive, authoritarian state – albeit well organised; and, the Shonas from Ndebele subjugation. Logically, in this view, no rebellion could be expected towards those executing such a historical mission. The natives did nevertheless rebel, and after the war the settler regime responded in a highly differentiated manner toward the two groups of people. Whilst the Ndebele peace settlement excluded executions of Ndebele chiefs and instead allowed for salaried leadership, Shona rebels were brutally suppressed and subjugated, after which rebel leaders were tried and killed. The differentiated ending of the first Chimurenga did no doubt influence the three communities’ interrelationship in the country’s future political development.

2.c. Political and Participation in the Pre-Nationalist Period

As a result of the Ndebele and Shona defeat, settlers perceived their occupation to be ‘legal’, and white dominance in combination with BSA company rule was further rooted in Southern Rhodesia. Formalised structures were implemented to control the populace, in order for exploitation and domination to continue without hindrance. Direct rule was established over the rural population by implementing the

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31 Dr. Moffat, a missionary and a ‘friend’ of Mzilikazi, wrote the following about the Ndebele king:

‘Thus he came to earn the reputation of one of the most savage destroyers of human life in the history of South Africa; a tyrant who wallowed in blood and rejoiced in the smoke of burning villages. The massacre of some of the first Boer trekkers to enter the Transvaal by Ndebele regiments has helped to strengthen his reputation as a monster of cruelty’ (Nyathi 1996:11–12).
'Southern Rhodesia Order in Council' and the 'Southern Rhodesia Native Regulations' of 1898. The former enforced a labour policy based on pass laws, provided for the appropriation of land by European farmers and mining corporations, and established African reserves. The latter allowed for an administrative structure which stipulated a Native Affairs Department and gave extensive discretionary jurisdiction to Native Commissioners (NCs), as the African required a form of 'personal government' being 'accustomed to look to the chief' (Hlatshwayo 1995:3). These white government officials had the combination of administrative, judicial and legislative powers. After 1910 their powers were extended to also include jurisdiction to decide on civil and criminal cases concerning Africans. Thus, in this new order, the powers of the Native Affairs Department encompassed all spheres of African life, whilst traditional leaders had no effective power. Chiefs and headmen became subordinated state officials assigned as 'constables' with powers of arrest. Previously cohesive polities were replaced with political units convenient for settler needs and domination. A military structure consisting of cavalry regiments was set up to facilitate efficient control and exploitation (Bratton 1978:13).

After the suppression of the Ndebele and Shona uprisings, no significant armed resistance against white rule took place until the 1960s. Other forms of political activity began however cautiously to develop.

When it stood clear that the expected abundance of gold was not to be found in Matabeleland (as it was not in Mashonaland), white interests recognised the need to exploit the land. A competitive situation between black and white use of land occurred, which led to a squeeze of black farmers. As we shall see, a difference in responses to the new situation among the Ndebele and the Shona occurred. Whilst the question of access to land was to be a cause for organised political activity among the Ndebele, responses in Mashonaland were less articulated.

After the two-year grace period on white owned land, Ndebeles were pushed to move to 'reserves' that were not traditional Ndebele areas, were remote, and drought prone. Although the Ndebele chiefs were recognised by the white administration and could therefore officially voice discontent, the land issue remained unresolved. As a result, a protest movement on a wide scale developed in Matabeleland, lead by Lobengula’s son Nyamanda. He formed the Matabele National Home movement, which became the first significant ‘modern’ political movement in Southern Rhodesia (Ranger 1970:63). The organisation was however unsuccessful in pressurising the Company administration, but it did give expression for Ndebele identity and demand for land. As the land pressure grew acute and affected the majority of the Ndebele population, many migrated to South Africa for
employment in the mines or found work in Bulawayo. The shift to urbanisation and a modern economy slowly resulted in Ndebele town dwellers, living in city communities where Ndebele identity and grievances were important. This urban group were successful in asserting prestige, attracting South African Zulu migrants and others to their midst. Urban associations and welfare organisations were formed, in which Ndebele interests such as a restored monarchy, and African land rights were major issues. In this process of identity and interest formation, education and Christianity played important roles. After the first world war shifts to ‘modern’ political organising in the form of pressure groups and petitioning took place. These developments did however not work as radical rallying calls against white domination, but where low profile politics of protest within the framework of white rule (Ranger 1970:26-44).

In Mashonaland the emerging picture looked different. The defeat of the rebellion had left Shona areas in famine, people were demoralised after the suppression of the uprising, and fearful of the hunt for evaded leaders and participants, who were to stand trial. The Native Administration imposed new chiefs in office for those displaced, choosing among those who had been ‘loyal’ in the conflict. Not being the communities’ own choice created a sense of non-representation, resulting in new chiefs being less respected or even harassed by their subjects. This in turn caused disunity and disintegration. Meanwhile white administration, taxes, and labour recruitment were pressing. The subsequent reactions amongst Shona dynasties generally seemed to take three paths: adhering to the idea of armed resistance against colonialism, whilst in practice exerting passive resistance; focusing on local politics, influencing life on village level; and, adopting Christian virtues of discipline and responsibility linked to self-improvement (most often measured by European standards and values) (Ranger 1970:1-25). Thus, whilst in Matabeleland native discontent to an extent found avenues of expression in organised forms, in Mashonaland responses were less articulated, resistance falling into the background and ‘traditional’ life coming into the foreground.

In 1923 Company rule ended and Southern Rhodesia was annexed as a British colony with internal self-government (so called ‘Responsible Government’). Settler society grew, as did the economy. The mode of rule was entirely authoritarian, stipulated by the Native Affairs Act of 1927, which required that all Africans were bound to ‘obey and comply promptly’ to orders by state officials. Rural administration’s central feature was direct rule backed by military might. Urban councils for settlers were set up already in 1891 covering all settlements in the so-called ‘European Areas’, excluding Africans in theses areas both from land utilisation and
council electoral rights.  

Centrally settlers had exclusive power and regulated a discriminatory franchise system. Thus, a racial system was set up both centrally and locally in which an elaborate superstructure supported the colonial economic system. In a short time span a state based on highly authoritarian laws and a military force surprising majority democratic rights was established (Bratton 1978:13, Sibanda 1989:32).

By the time of the First World War, in pace with the growing economy, a semi urban black proletariat developed. A small educated black sector was also emerging, primarily through mission schools. Black interests and grievances became expressed in a new form, that of reform politics. The main groups were the Rhodesian Bantu Voters’ Association (RBVA) and the Rhodesian Native Association (RNA). The RBVA intended to represent territorially all Africans, but was based in Matabeleland, where the association linked with previous Ndebele political organisations. The Rhodesia Native Association was similarly turned toward the whole territory, but was effectively active only in Mashonaland. The RNA did not have the previous experience of combining mass and elite grievances as did the Ndebele, and were much more inclined to seek the favour and protection of the Native Department in order to find opportunities for improvement. The fact that neither organisation became national movements was however not due to irreconcilable Ndebele-Shona hostility (Ranger 1970:106, 108). Perceptions regarding each province’s organisations and abilities did nevertheless circulate. Besides differences, central in the organisations of this time period were their politics of compromise and accommodation, rather than any challenge of the colonial political and economic structures. Common issues were increased educational facilities and allocation of land for purchase by Africans. The organisations were led by the educated elite and sought to improve the material conditions of the elitist class,

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32 Rural councils, the local government catering for rural white settlers, were not established until 1966. These covered large scale commercial farming areas, and had similar powers as Urban Councils, such as property and land taxes, land development control, and administration of rural services and business centres (Mutizwa-Mangiza 1990:426). Contrary to African councils implemented in 1957, Urban and Rural councils were autonomous and viable, had resources and personnel (Makumbe 1998:23-24).

33 Abraham Twala (a Zulu teacher), the founder of RBVA, lived and worked in Mashonaland, but ‘was either unable or unwilling’ to recruit progressive Shona to his movement. He stated that there was a clear distinction between modernising Ndebele and conservative Shona with regards to land purchase and progressive farming. In 1925 he stated ‘One thing I am sure of is that the Matabeles would buy the farms, but the indigenous natives would not understand. The indigenous natives are simply looking forward to being given a Reserve and staying under communal tenure. They just want to stay together’ (Ranger 1970:93).
through participation and representation in the settler system. The Southern Rhodesia Branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) was such an organisation, formed in 1928. In response to increasingly discriminatory labour legislation and exploitative labour policies, this first formal union was a significant political development. The organisation was nevertheless similarly reformist, in that it sought to improve conditions through gradual change and by appeals to the moral conscience of settlers. Despite its peaceful stance, the ICU posed a threat to the regime and white labour, and repressive measures by the colonial administration weakened the organisation. One of its most important additions to Rhodesian political development was a membership from all economic sectors and ethnic groups, thus over-bridging previous divisions (Sibanda 1989:40–42).

A significant stage in political development took place between 1930 to 1956, and was partly influenced by external developments. The world economy was severely affected by the Great Depression, which in Southern Rhodesia particularly influenced prices of beef and tobacco. To cover their losses of lowered world market prices, the colonial rulers regulated the economy to settler benefit, at the expense of African farming. In addition, repressive measures were taken, such as strict internal migration rules for the black population. Native Commissioners were empowered to regulate African ownership of cattle, supervise tax collection, and register male adults for urban influx control purposes. Furthermore, NCs had the power to allocate African land and resettle those evicted under the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, a legislation that effectively divided the country into one part for the Africans and one for the Europeans. By 1948 the African reserves were overpopulated, overstocked and suffered from heavy soil erosion. Furthermore, with the influx of settlers, more land was needed for Europeans. Rather than reorganising the European areas, a solution was found in reducing the size of arable plot per African family and destocking. Consequently, subsistence requirements could no longer be met in many districts, and the number of people without access to land began to increase fast. Despite this development, every African (whether rural or urban) was by the colonial regime regarded to have his permanent home in the reserves (Bratton 1978:14, Bhebe 1989b: 54–56). Another legislation which created increasing discontent was the Land Husbandry Act of 1951, giving NCs powers of land and livestock management in order to create ‘optimum’ farming units. The new regulation led to a reduction of arable plot per family, causing food deprivation due to lack of land for cultivation (Bratton 1978:14, Bhebe 1989b: 56).

The outbreak of the Second World War was another international development influencing internal affairs. In the war black and white Rhodesians fought on
equal footing on the side of the British. However, upon return racist policies differentiated the groups, the white servicemen receiving considerably better benefits than their black counterparts. This development created frustration and anger in those involved, generally increasing the consciousness of the colonised. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the economy grew considerably due to foreign investments but particularly due to an import substitution policy. African wage employment increased extremely rapidly, as did European immigration. Unions were formed, and particularly in Bulawayo the organisation of labour extended to nearly all economic sectors. In contrast to earlier political organising, Africans now began to challenge the repressive colonial order in a more militant way. Also, attempts to organise amongst different social classes strategically differed from the previous elitist approach. The first disciplined strike including several cities, was organised under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo in 1945, by the Bulawayo based Rhodesia Railways African Employees Association. This action led to settler concessions and the establishment of Native Labour Boards (Sibanda 1989:43-44). The psychological affect of the successful strike was immediate, increasing union activity, rejuvenating African organisations, and leading to the formation of new organisations (Bhebe 1989:38). The appalling living and working conditions and economic hardship faced by the black population were strong foundations for unrest, particularly in the urban areas. People gathered in huge mass meetings in which leaders such as Benjamin Burombo\(^3\) agitated for collective action – a new feature in African politics in Bulawayo. The mass agitation paved the way for another massive general strike in 1948, originating in Bulawayo. It quickly spread to five cities and halted work for days. The strike was successfully executed, resulting in the institution of acceptable minimum wages and improved housing and social welfare (Sibanda 1989:45; Bhebe 1989:71). In the rural areas African discontent was similarly intense. The colonial state continued to expropriate land and livestock from Africans whilst practising forced removals. Buromobo’s organisation, which had after the 1948 strike turned to rural struggles, was critical in raising political awareness amongst peasants, particularly in Matabeleland and Midlands (Bhebe 1989:6). Many organisations were active in the country at the time, attempting to channel the discontent. However, in 1957 the first national political organisation was formed, the African National Congress (ANC).

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\(^3\) Benjamin Burombo formed in 1947 the British African Workers Voice Association in Southern Rhodesia, which worked for the unification of Africans to struggle for better economic opportunities and social advancement within the framework of the colonial state. His chief contribution to the development of nationalism was the arousal of mass political consciousness (Bhebe 1989:6-7).
2.d. The Emergence of Mass Nationalism in Rhodesia

Within a five year period (1957–1962) national resistance against the colonial regime took an extremely rapid turn. During this period several organisations, in successive order, brought the wave of activity forward. Each association adapted to the specific political circumstances, as much as each organisation created the framework in which activity took place. Colonial rulers alerted by the heightened resistance, changed policy direction in order to quell the growth of African nationalism.

The growing colonial resistance fuelled particularly by racist land legislation resulted in a shift from direct to indirect rule, as the colonial state responded through modifying its administrative approach to local government. In 1957 the African Councils Act was implemented, stipulating the establishment of elected councils based on a British model. It was a settler policy with the aim to reinsert lost authority to traditional chiefs, and seen as a counter weight to African nationalism. The councils were based on boundaries of chiefdoms, where appropriated demarcations were lacking, chiefdoms were ‘constructed’. The Native Commissioner acted as the ex-officio president of every council in his district, whilst chiefs were vice-presidents and headmen were ex-officio members of council. The local institution had the power to tax, impose rates and make by-laws. The councils came to embody tensions, as the colonial rural administration simultaneously attempted to uphold powers of a hereditary office and supply a channel of political expression through the elected councils. Tensions focused on the chiefs who had to both implement colonial policy and put forward rural resentment for the same measures. The local government system was in general not accepted by Africans due to its detested colonial features: racism and native control. Native Councils were tools for local administration and rather than local government, as administrative control took precedence over rural political participation. In this shift chiefs who initially were recruited as constables and tax collectors, were given more authority and rewarded in a number of ways for carrying out state functions, such as through increased salaries. However, the policy to reinforce traditional authority had undesired effects: the chiefs became widely discredited amongst the rural population (Bratton 1978:16, 17–18, Makumbe 1998:20–23).

Whilst colonial rulers attempted to build support for white rule among traditional leaders, chiefs and headmen, leaders of various African organisations concluded that the existence of too many associations fostered divisions and was ineffective. In Salisbury the African National Youth League was the most active in organisation, whilst in Bulawayo three major organisations opened their doors for African political engagement (the African Voice Association, the Matabele Home Society, and the
Bulawayo branch of the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress). In 1957 the issue of diversified organisation was solved by the formation of a new national organisation, the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress.\(^{35}\) Joshua Nkomo was elected president, and the headquarters was, as earlier, in Salisbury. The organisation intended to establish itself as a mass political party, and its program included the abolition of all forms of racism, the establishment of local and central democratic institutions through universal suffrage, and the expansion of education based on a non-racial system. The organisation rapidly established branches both in the rural and urban areas. It successfully tapped widespread discontent, such as the great rural resistance to racist land legislation. By the end of 1959, the party was an influential mass organisation, having 39 rural and urban branches nation wide. Influenced and encouraged by the SRANC, in many areas rural dwellers manifested their resistance against government policies through the refusal of destocking regulations. The white government felt the momentum growing, and declared a state of emergency on February 26, 1959, detaining 510 leading SRANC members. This was later followed by a SRANC ban, resulting in an extended immobilisation of nationalist organising in the country (Bhebe 1989b: 51–69).

After nearly a year, a SRANC replacement was formed in January 1960. The National Democratic Party (NDP), whose political goals were basically identical to its predecessor, grew quickly. It attracted leading Africans and had soon established a well-educated core in its organisation.\(^{36}\) A political shift took place from an emphasis for a plea for fair treatment and humanity, to an articulated demand for self-rule. Leopold Takawira stated 'We are no longer asking Europeans to rule us well. We now want to rule ourselves' (Shamuyarira 1965:59). In white politics, the demand for independence from Britain under minority rule, was at this time the main political issue, – besides keeping the nationalists in check. In order to realise the latter, the government increased political suppression, which turned the NDP more militant. As meetings were banned in Salisbury and Bulawayo and police violence increased, the mood amongst Africans grew volatile. Any provocation could result in crowds equipped with stones and sticks, venting anger and frustra-

\(^{35}\) Originally Aaron Jacha founded the SRANC in 1934, but in this form the organisation was in 1957 only functioning in Bulawayo. Its Salisbury branch was defunct. To create space for the new SRANC, the previous SRANC organisation was dissolved. The new SRANC was formed 12/9 1957 (Bhebe 1989b:52).

\(^{36}\) In the interim executive Michael Mawema was elected president, and Enos Nkala Secretary General. Joshua Nkomo was appointed Director of External Affairs, based in London with the task of opening external party offices. Among the many newcomers who developed into well-known nationalists, was Robert Mugabe (Bhebe 1989b:71).
tion through enemy assaults. Riots, strikes and student unrest became part of the general political unrest. The NDP organised mass rallies, in which militant speeches particularly by Enos Nkala and Leopold Takawira, whipped up strong sentiments. To constrict the development, the (Edgar Whitehead) government passed in 1960 the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act, a draconian legislation excessively increasing power for repressive measures.

External turmoil was compounded by internal discord in the nationalist movement. At their party congress NDP had several candidates for the presidential post. In his absence, Joshua Nkomo was elected as a compromise. This move led to some leading members’ refusal to give unqualified support to the new president, resulting in internal division which was openly expressed by Enos Nkala. More internal turmoil was ahead. In 1961, the NDP and other African groups participated in a Constitutional Conference with the settler regime, where the most crucial issue was the question of franchise. The results of the constitutional talks led to great controversy, due to a perceived NDP settler ‘sell-out’ by agreeing to their proposals. The negotiations having taken place under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo, negatively affected executive working relations and created further tension around Mr Nkomo’s leadership.\(^37\) The constitutional question remained in terms of strategy a thorny issue for the NDP. Finally, as a result of NDP political moves, the government decided to ignore the party completely and turned to rural chiefs instead. By the formation of a council of chiefs, the settlers had a perceived direct link to the rural masses, and an agreement on constitutional proposals was met through this body, without the NDP (Bhebe 1989b: 90–93). For NDP, unconstitutional means to gain political participation Rhodesia was the only remaining path. At mass rallies people were incited to act, and by October 1961 NDP inspired outbreaks of violence, strikes, and civil disobedience had become widespread. As a result, the government banned the NDP on December 8, 1961 (Bhebe 1989:70–103).

Subsequent to the NDP banning, a successor organisation was quickly formed. On December 17, 1961, the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (Zapu), was formally announced, under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo. As in the NDP, every region of the country was represented in the new interim executive to ensure unity (Bhebe

\(^37\) In the NDP, it was understood prior to the talks, that only black and white parity of seats in the Legislative Assembly was an acceptable outcome of the negotiations. However, after the talks settler representative Duncan Sandys announced that NDP had accepted the constitutional proposals, which only guaranteed the Africans 15 seats in a House of 65, should it be adopted. Joshua Nkomo denied a settlement, and claimed that Sandys had told a ‘flat untruth’. What actually took place and how, remains unclear. For further elaboration, see Bhebe 1989b: 84–87.
Some controversial names were however missing, such as George Silundika and Enos Nkala, and newcomers, such as George Nyandoro and James Chikere-lma, were added. The Zapu political platform was more explicit than its' predecessors, the political, economic, cultural and international objectives being more elaborate. The immediate task for Zapu was to frustrate the Whitehead government's plans to implement a racially biased constitution, by boycotting the forthcoming elections. Zapu announced its intent to exert extra-parliamentary pressure and organise extensively against African voters' registration – a plan it successfully carried out. As Zapu rallied against government policies, political repression rapidly increased. To further empower its repressive machinery, the Whitehead regime amended its security legislation (the Unlawful Organisations Act and the Law and Order (Maintenance Act), eroding individual rights and liberties. The government's restrictive measures incited widespread violence by rank and file Zapu members. Between January and September 1962, petrol bomb attacks against government collaborators, sabotage against railways, roads, electric power and telephone lines, and attacks against public facilities and European owned property, were increasingly reported. These actions gave the government a rationale to ban Zapu, which took place on September 20th, 1962. Under the newly amended legislation Zapu was aware that a successor party would not be permitted to exist. Therefore the Zapu executive had in July 1962, taken the decision that if it were banned, it would not attempt any new organisation but operate underground. The fact that political freedom could not be won through a legal party, strengthened the leaders position to adopt armed struggle as a means towards liberation. In September 1962, Joshua Nkomo was authorised to start securing arms for Zapu military operations. However, the government's mass arrests of 800 people and the geographical three-month restriction of 273 political leaders restricted the execution of these plans. The latter action included all Zapu leaders, excluding Nkomo, who was in Lusaka at the time of the intervention. Nevertheless, under the command of 'General Chedu' (a triumvirate of three Zapu members), 60 cadres were trained in the use of 'crude local weapons' used in attacks on government infrastructure. Looking back, Zapu had only existed for nine months before its ban, yet its impact had been decisive – its most important decision being the use of armed struggle against the oppressive government (Shamuyarira 1965:173, Bhebe 1989: 103–109).


The period directly after the Zapu ban until the formation of Zanu (Zimbabwe African National Union), in August 1963, is in the nationalist history descriptions filled with contradictions. Amounting tension within Zapu led to a splinter group
forming the new party Zanu, however, exact reasons for the split, according to 
Zimbabwe’s first president, C. Banana, is an issue over which there will never be consensus (Banana 1989:7). Whilst much turmoil was taking place within the nationalist movement, policy shifts were undertaken by the Rhodesian government. In the face of mounting resistance against colonial policies, the government opted for a scheme to decentralise decision-making, giving African councils more tasks. However, a policy of community development did neither transfer power nor respond to the issues raised by African leaders.

3.a. Policy of Community Development

In 1962 the Rhodesian government adopted ‘Community Development’ as an official policy. It disbanded the Division of Native Affairs and instead set up the Ministry of Internal Affairs which was delimited to district administration. District Commissioners (DCs) were to be spearheads of socio-economic development in the African areas. Local self-reliance was to be encouraged and African councils were to take over social services. However, despite decentralisation, the new settler policy was not intended to transfer power or to give space for local initiative. Instead the policy became associated with Ian Smith’s Rhodesian Front government and as the foundation for the government’s entire rural policy. In the efforts to counteract nationalism and in the politics of legitimising claims for independence from Britain without majority rule, chiefs were reinvested with the two imperative powers lost under conquest. The Tribal Trust Land Act of 1967 gave the power 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. Chiefs also received increased salaries, bodyguards and weapons (for protection). The Secretary for Internal Affairs noted that local government in Rhodesia was ‘very much part of

38 The role of the previously established District Commissioner’s courts, as forums for the first instance in civil disputes and legal matters involving Africans, declined in the rural areas after the implantation of the African Law and Tribal Courts Act. They were however important in the urban areas. In the rural areas the tribal courts held both civil and criminal jurisdiction governed by customary law, defined in the Act as ‘the legal practices and judicial principles of an African tribe’. However, DCs were empowered to annul any legal decision made by a tribal court ‘which exceeded jurisdictional limitations or failed to conform with accepted principles of customary law, as they were understood by the District Commissioner’ (Cutshall 1991:14). Thus, whilst the settlers fell under civil law and had broad access to legal forums, Africans had limited categories of judicial forums, and had limited (if any) options regarding the type of law that would apply to their legal affairs. Furthermore, customary law and its application were subject to restrictions based on settler policy (Cutshall 1991:12-17).

39 To further enhance Chiefs’ settler alliance, a number of traditional leaders were incorporated as legislators in the Senate under the Republican ‘constitution’ of 1969 (Bratton 1978:26).
the tribal authority’ and aimed to identify African councils with ‘traditional tribal government’ (Bratton 1978:26). However, rather than deciding locally about local needs the councils became instruments of state power, in which despised racist policies were ‘decentralised’ for implementation. Power was in practice tightly held by the DCs, who controlled council finances, had the right to invalidate chief decisions, and above all had the assignment to ‘inculcate a proper understanding of the disciplinary and penalising influences of Government in regard to national matters’ (Bratton 1978:29). Thus, to ensure the implementation of state policies, control was exercised by the principal field agent of the state, the District Commissioner. However, ‘tribal authority’ was upheld by the chief, who through his position wielded great power in economic, political, social, and judicial areas concerning African life (Bratton 1978: 18–29, Makumbé 1998:20–22).

3.b. The 1963 Zapu Split

The government’s illusory power decentralisation and the strategy to divide and rule by manipulating traditional leaders’ position in the local communities, were moves deeply resented by the African nationalists. The policy of community development was found by nationalist leaders to be ‘unworkable except under a system of majority rule’ (Bratton 1978: 21). The struggle for majority democratic rights had to, in the view of the nationalists, come through organising the population through mass organisations. However, internal disagreements would affect the work to reach such a goal.

Criticism against Nkomo’s leadership had arisen already during the NDP period, subsequently causing perceptions of Nkomo having betrayed the party. Central persons disaffected in 1961 (Takawira, Sithole, Nkala, Malianga and Mugabe), where again an opposition in 1963 (Bhebe 1990:2). According to Shamuyarira, main factors of difference between the leadership and the opposition, was in policy approach following the Zapu ban. Joshua Nkomo argued for emphasising an external focus, whereby drummed up international support would bring effective pressure on the Rhodesian government. Sithole and Mugabe instead argued for an internal focus, whereby rallying and organising inside Rhodesia would ‘crystallise the situation’ (Shamuyarira 1965:177). As months of slow political action followed, frustration grew within the banned organisation.

Meanwhile white politics went through radicalisation. White attitudes were turning more extreme, and the racially supremacist Rhodesia Front platform was rapidly gaining support. The changed climate caused tension in the nationalist movement, where the new situation required action (Sithole 1979:41). Views on what
the two sides stood for or what the basis for Nkomo opposition was, differs among actors and observers. Shamuyarira’s position is that those disaffected centred their opposition to Nkomo around four points: they wished to act on a ‘policy of confrontation’; they wanted a new political party to be formed in replacement for banned Zapu operating as an underground movement; they were dissatisfied with Nkomo’s indecisiveness in his leadership capacity; and they were concerned about the lack of confidence they perceived some Pan-African leaders had of Nkomo (Shamuyarira 1965:180). Nkomo, on the other hand, has given various interpretations of what he perceived to be the cause for disaffection. In 1963, Nkomo denied any policy differences, stating that future plans had been ‘thoroughly discussed in three meetings’, and ‘all completely agreed’ (Nyangoni 1979:59). In 1984, in his autobiography, Nkomo states two reasons for the split: opposition to his leadership which was linked to ‘incitement of tribal feelings’; and secondly in Nkomo’s view ‘the far more genuine issue dividing the central committee’ was ‘that of the armed struggle to which I was myself firmly committed’ (Nkomo 1984:112–115).

In July 1963, Nkomo found proof that four members of the banned Zapu executive (Sithole, Mugabe, Takawira and Malianga) were no longer supporting him as a president, and were prepared to form a new party. Nkomo responded by immediately suspending the four members until ‘a conference of people’s representatives’ had met. This was a nation-wide event Nkomo decided to call in order to discuss the crisis (Nyangoni 1979:62). Following the suspension, seven members of the executive met in Dar-Es-Salaam where the four suspended voted to replace Nkomo with Rev. Sithole. The three others (Moyo, Muchache and Msika) disagreed and walked out. The split had thereby formally materialised. Nkomo was in Rhodesia when the split occurred, and immediately started preparing for the Cold Comfort Farm conference on August 10, 1963. Although Zapu had earlier decided not to form a new party, Sithole’s group found out that Nkomo was about to launch a semi-surface organisation at the conference. Two days before the Zapu gathering, Sithole’s group announced the formation of Zanu (8/8 1963). A mediation team tried to get the two groups together again, but was unsuccessful, as both groups had decided to work separately. The Cold Comfort Farm conference took place with 5,000 delegates attending from all parts of the country. At this event it was concluded that ‘the African people of Zimbabwe recognises Mr. Joshua Nkomo as the only National Leader and declares him Life President of the movement and struggle for the liberty of the peo-

ple of Zimbabwe' ('Resolutions' 1963:1). A 'People's Caretaker Council' (PCC) was formed, with 'Caretaker Committees' to be set up all over the country. The conference also proclaimed a policy of 'active resistance in every walk of life' to colonialism (Shamuyarira 1965:183–184). Furthermore, the conference confirmed Nkomo’s suspension of Sithole, Mugabe, Malianga and Takawira, 'as having been fully justified by the extraordinary circumstances created by them, of proven conspiring and plotting to side-step the People by forming a Party as individuals and dividing the People of Zimbabwe' ('Resolutions' 1963:3).

As mentioned above, many debates regarding the background reasons for the Zapu split have taken place over the years, without any consensus in the different camps. Undoubtedly this highly influential event took place in a chain of events and in combination with personalities (with various aspirations), causing the decision to be coloured by multiple tensions and divisions. In an attempt to explain historical developments after the split, observers have brought up ethnic differentiation as a possible cause (Bhebe 1990:1). At the time however, the ethnic element was not (publicly) identified as a primary tension, as was the crisis of leadership confidence and power competition (Shamuyarira 1965:185, Sithole 1980:26–27). Instead, the additional cleavage mentioned at the time was that of workers/intellectuals. Nkomo had, as outlined above, a long history in the trade union movement which originated in Bulawayo. Sithole’s splinter group was seen to represent the educated African intellectuals, and arguments were put forward that ‘intellectual status’ was a necessary element of leadership in the nationalist movement, which was by the opposing camp seen as highly elitist ('Zimbabwe' 1974:20, interview Brickhill, 1992).

Battles for Support

Shortly after Zanu’s formation the party issued a policy statement. Politically the difference between Zapu and Zanu was minimal, the overarching goal of independence remained the same. Having launched its platform, Zanu began rallying for support. Meanwhile Zapu/PCC had consolidated its position in the Salisbury and Bulawayo areas. Both Zapu/PCC and Zanu were able to organise rural meetings, although a ban on political meetings was in force. With inventiveness meet-

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41 An observer notes that, Nkomo’s election as ‘life president’, suggesting the unattainability of an alternative leader, seemed to have wedged a permanent lodge between Zanu and Zapu. For as the breakaway group saw Nkomo’s leadership qualities as central to the split, an opposition against his presidency would consequently remain, continuously causing division (Bhebe 1990:5).

42 The PCC central committee had representation from the whole country, where ethnic representation was evenly divided between five Ndebele and five Shona (Sithole 1980:26).

43 For Zanu’s 1963 policy statement, see Nyangoni 1979:64–71.
ings were held under the guise of funeral gatherings and on board buses. However, much of both parties’ energies were spilled on rivalry, as the two parties made efforts to eliminate each other. Physical thuggery and party clashes became increasingly common, and violence including severe beatings and murders were frequent particularly in Salisbury (Shamuyarira 1965:184, Nyangoni 1979:73). The white government saw this development as advantageous and refrained from sending police patrols to the townships, allowing the party warfare to take its course. The nationalists were well aware that the split locally worked in favour of the minority government, and internationally gave reactionaries support in their perceptions of Africans inability to rule. Nationalists were nevertheless unable to break the vicious circle of violence. A Zanu executive member explained:

It had to be complete victory or defeat for one party or the other: work in this direction produced more conflict. As each leader got less or more supporters, he acquired a stake in leading them to complete victory. So it went on.... The present day tendency when differences occur is to hate each other more than we hate the real enemy of the cause we are fighting (Shamuyrira 1965:190, 191).

The local canvassing for support was also mirrored by the parties’ international work. Both Zapu/PCC and Zanu spent much central resources on lobbying among the independent African states for moral and financial support, one at the expense of the other. Divisions occurred amongst some countries, whilst others remained neutral (Shamuyrira 1965:192).

The party rivalry having manifested itself in brute violence fizzled out in April 1964, when the new Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith, banned both Zanu and PCC. Political leaders were detained and put under restriction in rural areas. Many remained detained for a decade, released only in 1974. Due to this development, the two organisations were subsequently operated from abroad.

3.c. Zapu and Zanu: The Construction of War Machines

After the PCC ban, the organisation continued to exist abroad under the name of Zapu. From 1964 to 1974, whilst Zapu leaders were under restriction, party affairs were run externally by James Chikerema (1964–1970), and Jason Z. Moyo (1970–1977). Zapu established diplomatic support including the general support of the OAU (Organisation of African Unity). In 1963, Zapu had set up a Department of Special Affairs, mainly concerned with building a military force to initiate the armed struggle. Countrywide recruitment began, and at the end of 1963 groups left for military training in countries in the (then) socialist block. Upon return in
1964–1965, the groups assembled in Zambia, and the ‘Armed Wing’ of Zapu was created. A command structure was set up, and in 1965 the deployment of small units of two to three persons infiltrating inside Rhodesia consequently took place. These carried out further recruitment, and sabotage of small economic targets such as communication networks, electricity supplies and government facilities. In 1966 larger numbers of trained personnel infiltrated Rhodesia, when units of seven or eight men joined those already inside (Dabengwa 1995:26–27).

Zanu set up its external office first in Dar-Es-Salaam, later moving it to Lusaka. In the absence of the detained leaders, Zanu officials outside Rhodesia were authorised in 1964 to form a Revolutionary Council (later called Dare-Re-Chimurenga or the High Command), lead by Herbert Chitepo. Recruitment to the armed struggle was slow and limited between 1964 and 1969, with few recruits actually leaving Rhodesia for training. Recruitment took place in neighbouring independent countries, but in the initial stages these sources produced very few cadres (Pandya 1988:77, Tungamirai 1995:36). In 1965 a training camp in Zambia opened (Itumbi), training was also conducted in Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana and China. As the Smith regime declared a Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, the nationalist movements realised that hardened attitudes and interventions lay ahead. This spurned off further guerrilla activity. In April 1966, Zanu forces conducted a highly publicised guerrilla attack, the ‘battle of Chinoyi’. The attack was in military terms a serious defeat, but for Zanu it came to represent the launch of armed struggle in Rhodesia. The military lesson drawn from the experience was that hastily thrown in guerrillas in areas lacking local support, was unsustainable in the face of superior Rhodesian ground and air force (Martin/Johnson 1981:12, Cole 1985:27, Ellert 1993:11–12). From their position of superiority, the Rhodesian Security Forces considered at this point the warfare to be ‘happy hunting days’. They ‘reckoned that it was a jolly good war’ and patrols regularly ‘netted a good bag of ‘terrs’ [terrorists] (Ellert 1993:26).44

In 1967 the South African ANC approached Zapu with a proposal for joint operations (‘Zimbabwe’ 1974:7, Dabengwa 1995:27), a co-operation that would turn controversial. ANC had trained cadres abroad who needed safe passages through Rhodesia into South Africa. At the time South African forces were already active inside Rhodesia, supporting the Rhodesian troops but also intercepting ANC cad-

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44 According to Ellert, it was common during the late 1960s, to see groups of soldiers and policemen gathered at the popular Makuti Motel overlooking the Zambezi valley, drinking cold beers and boasting of their exploits as their vehicles with the dead bodies of guerrillas stood waiting outside (Ellert 1993:26).
res at the Zambezi river. The South African forces were keen to keep contacts with ANC inside Rhodesia in order to avoid clashes on South African soil, and simultaneously their aim was to uphold the settler regime. For Zapu, South African security presence was obviously to their detriment, as was the apartheid regime a hinder to their liberation cause. The common nature of the struggles in the two countries was a basis for an understanding of mutual support between Zapu and the ANC. Therefore Zapu agreed to give logistical support to ANC by accompanying their cadres across Rhodesia. The ANC cadres would avoid contact with Rhodesian security forces, and fight only if attacked. The escorting Zapu forces would also explain to locals the presence of foreign guerrillas in Rhodesia. Although the transit route was used only for a short period (mainly in 1968), it caused upheaval. The Zapu/ANC operations were criticised by Zanu and African leaders, and questions arose around an internationalisation of the Rhodesian situation. It was also questioned why Zapu joined forces with ANC but remained at variance with Zanu. Based on these issues, the OAU Liberation Committee called Zanu and Zapu to a meeting to discuss unification of the parties’ military wings (Ellert 1993: 25–27, Dabengwa 1995:27–29).

3.d. The Mbeya Accord

Throughout the liberation war, the OAU and the Frontline States periodically attempted to unite Zapu and Zanu, or their military wings Zipra and Zanla. The liberation movements’ being dependent on OAU and the Frontline states for material and diplomatic support, were unable to ignore the external pressure exerted on their political and military decision-making. At times politically disagreeing with the external advice and impositions, but in dire need of money and guerrilla training ground, nationalist parties were forced to make decisions of unification which lacked mass support in the organisations (Dabengwa 1995:29). The first external unity attempt was the 1967 Mbeya Accord.

The Mbeya Accord was reached at a time when Zapu was most militarily active. Zanu, on the other hand, had little guerrilla activity, a small number of trained men, and little support inside Rhodesia. The unity arrangement was to be executed under a Joint Military Command (JMC), where Zapu and Zanu guerrillas would fight under a joint military leadership. However, little was achieved with this arrangement, as Zapu deliberately chose not to implement it, not wanting to have the bulk of its trained fighting force under a joint command (Dabengwa 1995:29).

Instead, senior commanders were instructed to concentrate on the armed struggle as the armed wing of Zapu. Furthermore, Zapu had started joint operations with Frelimo opening up a new front, and had large numbers of recruits awaiting training. Therefore Zapu was most reluctant to give the northeastern part of Rhodesia to Zanu, who ‘was not pulling its weight’. Dabengwa explains:

We saw the JMC as a means of forcing us to carry Zanu on our backs.... Our view at that stage was that Zanu must disband and rejoin Zapu. That was the thinking. It was not that we did not want to work with Zanu, but we thought Zanu needed to confess its failure as a splinter party (Dabengwa 1995:30).

3.e. Zapu Crisis 1969

Zapu’s military success was however soon to turn due to internal strife, a development that would work out to Zanu’s competitive advantage. In 1970, in an effort to evaluate military activity, severe criticism was raised against the acting president J. Chikerema’s handling of certain external operations. Chikerema did not accept the criticism, claimed that military matters were under his rule, (as entrusted to him by Zapu president Nkomo), and proceeded to take far-reaching actions based on his perception of personal authority. Chikerema’s actions and authority affirmations were by one Zapu strand interpreted as an unconstitutional coup, which created much turmoil and tension. The turmoil spread to combatants in Zapu camps in Tanzania and Zambia, where in the latter country, government authorities intervened. The conflict led to a deep crisis where a central issue was the interpretation given by the Cold Comfort Farm Congress regarding executive powers, but did also include other issues such as ethnic division. The Chikerema crisis caused the external wing of Zapu to split into three groups: the Chikerema faction (who later founded a separate political party – Frolizi); an independent group of guerrillas under W. Mthimkhulu (also known as the ‘March 11 Movement’); and the remainder of Zapu now led by J.Z. Moyo. According to some observers, the three way split had an ethnic impact in that the Shona representation left the Zapu branch in exile, leaving this section with the Kalanga Ndebele loyal to J.Z. Moyo (Sithole 1980:30, Bhebe 1990:9).46

After the split an extensive Zapu consultative meeting was held, reviewing the entire party structure and its military activities. As a result, a Revolutionary Council was created, which was to be Zapu’s main body outside Rhodesia. The War Coun-

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46 For primary sources by Moyo and Chikerema, see Nyangoni 1979:142–170. For interpretation of crisis, see Bhebe 1990 and Dabengwa 1995:30–32.
cil had the responsibility to develop and implement the military strategy of the party, and was empowered to take all strategic decisions (Brickhill 1995:54). Under this structure, Zapu's military wing officially became Zipra (Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army).

3.f. The Zapu Crisis: Its Impact on Zanu

The turmoil in Zapu directly affected Zanu’s political organisation and its military activity. At the time of the crisis in Zapu Chikerema turned to Zanu for unity talks, which caused a split also in Zanu. Chikerema found support for unity amongst some Zapu leaders, whilst others believed it was premature to unite with Zapu due to its internal conflicts ‘which were essentially tribal’ (Sithole 1980:29). Ironically, it has been argued that Chikerema’s unity initiative surfaced Zanu regionalism, as those leaving the Zanu leadership to join Chikerema, were mainly Zezuru (Shona). Subsequently, the Zanu War Council essentially became a monopoly of the Shona Manyika and Karanga, who engaged in fierce competition. Allegedly, the competition led to violent fighting, having by March 1975 resulted in the death of over 250 Zanu cadres (Sithole 1979:67, 1980:31, Samukange 1985:8).47

Due to Zapu’s internal strife, its guerilla activity slowed down considerably, which in turn would fundamentally affect Zanu’s military performance (Dabengwa 1995:32). The stagnation of the Zapu war effort caused much frustration amongst trained combatants and commanders who wanted to proceed with the prosecution of the liberation war. Some defected to join Zanla, others joined the armed wing of Frolizi48, leaving Zapu with an estimated 80 trained personnel (Bhebe 1990:9). However, the most serious consequence for Zapu in the development of these events, was losing the initiative taken with Frelimo to open the northeastern front through the Mozambique Tete Province.49 With the lack of internal coherence, Zapu was not in a position to launch a new front. Instead the front was opened by Zanu, leading to a crucial political and military breakthrough for the party. The Frelimo co-operation allowed Zanu to circumvent the Zambezi valley, which had been a major problem when directing activities from Zambia. Entry through the Mozambican border was

47 Little has been written regarding ethnic tensions within Zanu, and therefore Sithole’s positions remain unchallenged. For elaboration on the ethnic divisions in Zanu in this time period, as interpreted by Sithole, see Sithole 1979:67-78.

48 Chikerema’s new group formed an organisation called Frolizi, which also had an armed wing. See below.

49 Among those who defected to Zanu, was Zapu’s Chief of Staff (Robson Manyika), who had first-hand knowledge of Zapu’s contacts and plans, and who allegedly used his former Zapu position to the benefit of Zanu, in discussions with Frelimo (Dabengwa 1995:31).
further greatly facilitated by the subsequent independence of Mozambique, allowing the whole eastern border free for Zanu military infiltration. In effect, at this moment of the liberation war, the country became partitioned between Zapu and Zanu. Zapu would remain active in the Ndebele dominated part of Rhodesia, whilst Zanu slowly would cover the Shona dominated part of the country. Thus, a regionalisation occurred where Zapu operated mainly in Matabeleland, and Zanu in Mashonaland (Bhebe 1990:9). The danger of this regionalisation and its reinforcement of ethnic division, was noted by Nkomo:

The extra danger was that the Rhodesian side of the Zambia and Botswana borders is inhabited by people most of whom are Sindebele [Ndebele] speaking. Zipra operated in and drew its recruits from these people. But the people living along the Mozambique border are mostly Shona speaking. So Zanla increasingly became a Shona speaking army and Zipra a Sindebele speaking army (Bhebe 1990:18).


4.a. The Formation of Frolizi

In October 1971 the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (Frolizi) was formed by a core group of ex-Zapu and Zanu members, notably the former acting Zapu president J. Chikerema. The main idea was to create a united front of the two nationalist parties and fight the liberation war under one army, focusing the strength on the outside enemy rather than inside divisions. In a public document the new organisation gave three reasons for its formation: firstly, as all sectors in the nationalist movement were for armed struggle against the minority regime, there was ‘no need to perpetuate the split’, instead ‘a clear duty’ of national leaders was to forge unity by all means; secondly, due to ‘revolutionary inadequacies’ in Zanu and Zapu the organisations were unable to tap the favourable conditions present in Rhodesia to create a ‘revolutionary situation’. The major stumbling block was the continuing division that hampered the struggle. Zanu and Zapu had ‘incorrectly identified each other as the enemies of the revolution, largely because they were competing for the same positions’; lastly, Zanu and Zapu were not motivated by a clearly defined socialist ideology. If a strong ideological base had existed, ‘regionalism and tribalism would have been averted’. Instead, the severity of the tribal tension has resulted in four groups – a Shona and a Ndebele faction in Zapu, and pro and anti unity factions in Zanu. Apart from this platform, Frolizi presented a socialist programme and noted it having representation from all ethnic groups (albeit with a Shona/Zezuru domination). Its main focus was to be active inside Rhodesia, in order to create a ‘revolutionary situation’ as fast as possible (Nyangoni 1979:171–184). Paradoxically Zapu and
Zanu denounced Frolizi as ‘tribalistic’, Zanu adding that it was a ‘nepotistic grouping’ determined to sabotage the liberation struggle (Sithole 1980:20). Zapu’s George Silundika stated that Chikerema and Nyandore were ‘reactionary’ and that Zapu has ‘absolutely no relations with Frolizi’, Zapu standing ‘firm on the principle of not recognising or tolerating any organisation formed outside the country’ (‘Zimbabwe’ 1974:21). Frolizi was thus left in the cold by the two nationalist movements. Its main disadvantage was however a lack of members, and the organisation’s inability to form an army based on the numbers of guerrillas it had. Initially the Zambian government supported recruitment and OAU support was granted. The latter was however discontinued in 1973 (Samukange 1985:13,16). In 1973 Frolizi suffered a great blow, when in a joint action N. Shamuyarira (founding member) and 21 colleagues publicly resigned in order to re-enter Zanu (Sithole 1979:53). Frolizi’s last organisational effort was in 1974, when it joined other nationalist parties in forming an umbrella organisation, the African National Council. In the end Frolizi’s historical contributions were paradoxical. Whilst it had openly indicated ethnic division within the liberation movements and induced a heightened attention regarding the need for unity, its existence and guerrilla activities created confusion and turmoil among civilians and combatants, leading to further division and tension.

4.b. Zanu and Zapu Military Operations in the early 1970s

Following the military initiative shifting to Zanu’s advantage, and the subsequent opening of the Tete corridor, Zanu made great advances in northeastern Zimbabwe. Recruitment was increased substantially by the flux of refugees to Mozambique. The rural population seeking safety from the regime’s militarily sophisticated counter-measures, were scooped up by Zanu on the Mozambican side – allowing the party a ‘guaranteed and continuos stream of recruits for its army’ (Bhebe 1990:11). Also inside Rhodesia the number of conscripts grew, as guerrillas often with the support of local religious authorities, drummed up Zanu support (Bhebe 1990:10, Kriger 1992:89–90).

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30 It is to be noted that, as Frolizi publicly brings up ethnic divisions in Zanu and Zapu, the response is to denounce Frolizi as ‘tribalistic’. To counter-accuse those who publicly point out ethnic tension, as being tribalistic, re-occurs as clear pattern during the Matabeleland conflict (1980–1987). As the accusation of being tribalist is highly negative, the immediate counter accusations work as deterrents for verbalisation of ethnic tension, suppressing an open discussion on ethnic division. See further elaboration in chapter four, pp. 306–309.

51 In certain areas Zanla guerrillas sought the co-operation of spirit mediums in order to facilitate civilian support. Lan’s research in the Dande area shows how mhondoro mediums gave guerrillas the authority as ‘chiefs’, which included the prerogative to use violence. Evidence presented by Sister Janice McLaughlin suggests that spirit mediums were used most extensively in mobilisation and recruitment from 1972 to 1974 (Alexander 1995:176,178).
In conjunction to Zanu’s expansion, the party began to actively implement strategies of Maoist guerrilla warfare. In 1969 eight Chinese instructors arrived at the Zanu Itumbi camp, highly influencing military thinking, as did the co-operation with Frelimo. The earlier strategy of engaging in conventional battles with the Rhodesian Forces was re-evaluated. Instead, smaller groups were infiltrating with the primary task of establishing links with the population inside Rhodesia, after which military offensives would be launched. Mass mobilisation and politicisation of the peasants became central in the military strategy, which was calculated to gradually lead to Zanu political control of the rural areas and eventually the cities. Pivotal for the implementation of this strategy was firstly for guerrillas to establish a local link, a person who would act as the liaison between the soldiers and the civilians. Secondly, to establish Zanu support in the rural areas through massive politicisation campaigns launched by the guerrillas.

The local liaisons established by Zanla were so called mujibas and chimbwidos.52 These were usually teenagers (or sometimes even younger children) who supplied logistical assistance in the form of food and other supplies, provided information and intelligence, and acted as liaison between combat units. The advantage of using young adults or children was their ability to perform tasks without alerting enemy attention. The mujibas/chimbwidos did not get regular military training, but were instead subject to extensive political education by Zanla commanders. They did however participate in some basic military activities, such as destruction of government property. Another influential role given to mujibas/chimbwidos was to be the eyes and the ears of the local community, locating informers. This task gave children a power over adults that contradicted the traditionally subservient and respectful way expected by children towards elders (Brickhill 1990:17). As Kriger has demonstrated, the childrens’ position in the war played into existing social conflicts and gave rise to new conflicts, patterns of behaviour, and alignments (Kriger 1992). Ranger noted in his study in Makoni District that ‘there was a good deal of remembered resentment among elders and parents directed against the power exercised by the mujibas during the war’ (Ranger 1985:292). In Zanu annals the role played by mujibas/chimbwidos in the liberation war has nevertheless been recognised as significant, their numbers being estimated to be over 50,000 at the end of the war (Pandy 1988:93–97).

The implementation of the political education, the second strategy to establish Zanu support and the successful execution of the liberation war, was seen as one of the guerrillas’ primary tasks. After the war Eddison Zvobgo (Zanu Deputy Secretary of Publicity and Information) concluded that ‘Political education played a

52 The two words mujibas and chimbwidos, reflect gender – the former being male and latter female.
very important part in our winning the war’ (Frederikse 1982:62). As Zanu had existed only for a number of months before its ban, party cells and structures were few if any. Instead, the process of politicisation of the peasantry for armed struggle, was simultaneously a construction of the Zanu party. The establishment of Zanu support taking place under the conditions of a war caused the politicisation to be shaped by violence.

Zanu political education took place mainly through mass rallies—so-called *pungwes* (Shona term meaning from dusk to dawn). In these all night meetings, villagers were expected to attend, as anybody not attending would be regarded as a ‘collaborator’ and would be punished (Pandya 1988:145). Tembo Chimedza, a student from Chibi, recalls:

Some people were refusing to go to *pungwe*, because they were afraid of meeting the soldiers, for of course they would be shot. But you could not miss a *pungwe*. The comrades would send someone to fetch you. I was helping the comrades and sometimes I had to force people to go (Frederikse 1982:61).

To facilitate the politicisation efforts, guerrillas used centrally produced Zanu lectures. Zvobgo recalls that printed lecture series would be spread ‘so that at every meeting in a particular war zone they would be doing Lecture One. We structured the lectures well: they were short, in the vernacular, and to the point. This intensive ideological campaign helped the people understand what the war was about’ (Frederikse 1982:60). Important features of the ideological training were slogans and songs. The political issues discussed often focused on discrimination with regards to land and education, which the guerrillas often stated would be brought to the people by a liberation war victory. Another element in the *pungwes* was a guerrilla held ‘people’s court’, where those accused of being government collaborators or spies were tried. The guerrillas would then discipline the civilian tried guilty, through beatings or amputation of body parts (hands, fingers, legs, toes, lips, tongues or ears). These measures were considered less severe compared to execution, the latter being a common penalty (Pandya 1988:147–149, 173; Frederikse 1982:215–219). The use of the ‘courts’ was a strategy of preventing civilians from government association and from being bought as informers, but notably also to

53 This point has been emphasised by Brickhill, stating regarding Zanu that “There was no nationalist party other than the one that was built by the war itself” (interview, Brickhill 1992).

54 The Rhodesian security forces put much effort into locating informers. One CIO member noted after the war that ‘We used to buy the people. We had paid informers, and the pay was quite good. A good incentive. A lot of money was forked out to informers in this country during the war’ (Frederikse 1982:215).
install Zanu as the alternative authority. Eddison Zvobgo outlined how Zanu perceived the ‘courts’ achieving three objectives: politicisation through mass participation, deterrence of disloyalty, and mobilisation of support:

In every guerrilla war there is a need to demonstrate power. When you do so depends on careful calculation, because too much repulses and you lose support, while too little demonstrates weakness, and you also lose support. So it is the [political] commissar’s duty to go in front before the comrades come in, to politicise people. Then when actual operations begin, you may find that some person is informing the regime of the guerrillas’ movements.... Such a person is to be watched for awhile, whilst [guerrillas] winning the support of the rest of the people. Once political support has been won and the comrades move in, they are presented with lists of enemy agents by the population. It is not advisable to then arrest the person and simply kill him, because that act has no mass participation. What you need to do is to arrest the person, bring him to the people, lead evidence against him and then let the people say what would happen to him.... He will be tried by the people, sentenced to death, if indeed his crime has cost lives, and the sentence will be carried out on the spot. Now this is where you must be careful. If the purpose is to demonstrate muscle, you may order him not to be buried. String him up – no one can touch the traitor’s body. Everybody begins to think of the price of being a traitor. Until the army comes to bury him, which further demonstrates to the people that he really was their agent.... So it is a very careful balance. Root out all agents and, in the process, you achieve something more important (Frederikse 1982:216).

Pungwes were often held three to four times a week, and the cycles would reoccur when a new guerrilla unit arrived. The frequency was considered important for continuity in the mobilisation and politicisation processes (Pandya 1988:146). Brickhill argues regarding the Zanu setting that, firstly, due to the lack of tradition in democratic institution building, and secondly due to the lack of accountable structures outside the military, ‘Zanu became militarised from the beginning, lacking local civilian membership that could influence the leadership’ (interview, Brickhill 1992). He explains further:

The process of building Zanu was taking place in remote areas, very far from the intellectual leadership based in Zambia or Mozambique. They were sending young people who had been trained into areas where there were no political parties to receive them. [In establishing legitimacy] the peasant population were becoming much more caught up than might be
necessar y in violence, and a whole range of frameworks for the building of political power were growing out of this kind of environment (interview Brickhill, 1992).

In the early 1970s, whilst Zanu was increasing in strength and intensifying the war in the northeast of Rhodesia, Zapu began to rebuild its forces and re-launch its guerrilla war. Similar to Zanu, Zapu concluded that the large self-contained detachments that characterised many of its 1960s operations were less successful and were to be avoided. Instead, operations between 1972 and 1973 concentrated on sabotage and land mine warfare on roads and along the Zambezi river. The strategy was to operate without full engagement of the enemy, in cycles of retreating, planting land mines and hiding. These operations allowed Zipra to retain and reorganise its forces which had been idle due to the 1969–1971 crisis, whilst the Revolutionary Council planned for more intensive operations (Brickhill 1995:49, Dabengwa 1995:32).

4.c. OAU Unity Attempts 1972–1973

As both parties and armies began to consolidate in their areas of operation, OAU again pressurised the organisations for a united war effort. The earlier Mbeya agreement was resuscitated, however this time Zapu and Zanu had switched roles. As Zapu previously had sabotaged the agreement, unwilling to take on the halting Zanu guerrillas whilst being successful themselves, the current conditions were just the opposite, whereby Zanu was highly reluctant to unified army efforts due to its military achievements (Bhebe 1990:11). An agreement was nevertheless reached on 23 March 1972, where the Joint Military Command (JMC) was set up with the task of building a unified army. This effort was further developed in Lusaka 1973, when the Zimbabwe Liberation Council (LBC) was formed to plan the overall political and military strategy (‘Zimbabwe’ 1974: 20, Dabengwa 1995:32). Zapu described the development in highly positive terms, as stated in an interview in 1973 by Zapu’s publicity and information secretary G. Silundika:

At the present we are engaged in the process of building a unified army, but we hope this will only be the first step in a successful process of unification. The formation of the JMC is based on our common belief that the future of Zimbabwe is organically linked with the development of the armed revolutionary struggle; and because of this, we now have to take all possible steps to eliminate obstacles and threats to the unity of the Zimbabwean people. The question of the political identities of the two movements is not necessarily an obstruction, because once we arrive at a common conception of what the future holds, further consultations regarding the political aspect of our work should experience no serious difficulties (‘Zimbabwe’ 1974:20).
Allegedly Zanu was not convinced by the authenticity of Zapu’s political stand, and instead saw Zapu’s unity efforts as an opportune step in order to maintain credibility as a liberation movement. Due to the internal strife 1969–1971, the Swedish government had suspended its aid to Zapu, and now the organisation was attempting to reopen this channel, the JMC action being an effort in this direction. Irrespective of Zapu’s position being authentic or not, Zanu’s signature of the unity agreement was apparently entirely fictional, as the organisation ‘had the least intentions to see the Command working’ (Bhebe 1990:11). Zanu’s agreement to the JMC was based on totally unrelated developments, as the party only agreed to form the JMC in order to forestall Frolizi being recognised by OAU (Bhebe 1990:11). This apparently worked, as OAU did support the JMC at the expense of Frolizi. And, as ironically stated by an observer, ‘the JMC lasted only long enough for the excitement over Frolizi to die down’ (Sithole 1980:30).

Zanu’s sabotage of the JMC, resulted in unrealised plans. Zapu recognised Zanu’s reluctance as G. Silundika in 1973 stated that ‘...these [unity] arrangements have not yet come operational due to delays caused by a few elements within Zanu who are just maturing to the glory of a few successful military operations in Zimbabwe – a stage we in Zapu passed long ago’ (‘Zimbabwe’ 1974:21). The delays stretched, and yet again an OAU induced unity effort remained a paper tiger. This was beyond doubt in 1974, after Zanu’s acting national chairman Herbert Chitepo explicitly told Swedish government officials that rather than forming a united front with Zapu, ‘Zanu in the first place wanted to develop its own forces’ (Bhebe 1990:12). The chairman stated that Zanu ‘was the only movement shouldering the burden of the war’ and that its army had 2,000 trained guerrillas and 3,000 under training. These comments were observed as being contemptuous of Zapu’s fighting capacity, and related to Zanu’s confidence in rising to the position of a majority party. The success of Zanu, like that of Zapu before 1969, had a fundamentally divisive effect, as the power competition between the nationalist parties drove them further from unified efforts (Bhebe 1990:12).


Zanu’s perception of strength and superiority did however become tarnished, as the party was to face great internal upheavals between 1973–1975. As mentioned above, the Shona Manyika and Karanga were in fierce competition for the party leadership posts. Amidst the internal party fighting, the so-called Nhari Rebellion took place within the military. A group of dissatisfied Zanu cadres unconstitutionally set up a High Command, replacing the military leadership. The rebellion was put down, but led to much turmoil and bloodletting, followed by a military witch
hunt for suspected rebels (Sithole 1979:60–62; Martin/Johnson 1981:162–168). As the reprisals against the Nhari group were taking place, Herbert Chitepo (Zanu national chairman) was assassinated on March 18, 1975. Due to suspicions that the Zanu chief of Defence J. Tongogara masterminded the murder, the Zambian government detained nearly all the external Zanu political and military leaders. Zanu leaders meanwhile vehemently blamed the act on the Zambian government and/or the Rhodesian secret service. After the Chitepo assassination, Zanu was outlawed in Zambia, its offices were closed and Zambian authorities confiscated all facilities and funds. Tanzania closed their training camps and Mozambique handed over Zanla commanders to Zambia. These actions effectively halted Zanu’s guerrilla warfare (Sithole 1979:62–66, Kriger 1992:91).

4.e. The Detente Initiative 1974

As the internal turmoil was taking place in Zanu, an international effort to end the Rhodesian civil war was staged by the South African Prime Minister John Vorster and the Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, in co-operation with the Frontline states. The so-called detente initiatives were set up to promote a peaceful solution to the conflict through negotiations with the Rhodesian government. The first demand from the Frontline states was the immediate release of Zimbabwean nationalist leaders who had been imprisoned for ten years. Particularly being pressured by South Africa, Smith released the leaders in December 1974. In return he demanded a cease-fire and a constitutional conference without pre-conditions. Meanwhile the Frontline states put pressure on Zapu, Zanu, Frolizi and ANC to sign a unity agreement, for negotiations with the Rhodesia Front government. The neighbouring countries also wanted the detente period free from military operations, and subsequently all material resources in Tanzania and Zambia awaiting distribution to the liberation armies were held.

Both within Zanu and Zapu there was opposition against negotiations, since this would disrupt guerrilla activity. The Frontline states had however leverage on the nationalist movements, since they provided the parties with sanctuaries, holding camps, and refugee facilities. The subsequent unity talks led to the formation of a new umbrella group consisting of Zanu, Zapu, Frolizi, and ANC in Rhodesia – with ANC’s Abel Muzorewa as the head. Forcing unwilling co-operation partners into a joint political and military achievement was however bound to fail. Some

55 ANC – African National Council - was a Zimbabwe based ‘care taker’ organisation set up in 1971 when Zapu and Zanu leaders were in detention. It was led by Abel Muzorewa, and originally had as aim to mobilise the population in order to oppose the 1971 Anglo-Rhodesian Settlement Proposals. In 1972 ANC became a political party (Beren 1988:68).
attempts at a joint negotiated settlement between the umbrella organisation and the Rhodesia Front took place unsuccessfully. Neither Zapu's nor Zanu's military organisations were however interested in constitutional negotiations, but in the intensification of the war. In 1975 the ANC umbrella organisation finally collapsed ('Zanu' 1984:4; Bhebe 1990:12; Dabengwa 1995:33).

The externally forced exercise to unite all nationalist forces had brought the guerrilla warfare to a virtual standstill, whilst the fruitless negotiations resulted in a constitutional settlement being as remote as ever. Zanu was severely affected by its ongoing internal turmoil and the incarceration of the Dare (High Command). Zanla, in particular, had difficulties operating, having their military commander in a Zambian jail. Zapu on the other hand, had recovered from its internal crisis, and the reorganised Zipra was geared for serious operations. However, as the OAU Liberation Committee continued to refuse a release of Zipra weapons held in Zambia until Zanla and Zipra were united, Zipra's war effort was severely constrained. In order for the political and military vacuum to end and the liberation war to continue, yet another Zanu-Zapu joint military effort was ahead – Zipa.


Zipa (Zimbabwe People's Army) was an initiation of the Frontline States and agreed to by Zanu and Zapu in order to re-ignite the liberation war. In November 1975 a commanding group was set up, including nine representatives from Zipra and Zanla respectively, under the leadership of Zanla's Rex Nhongo (Commander) and Zipra's Nikita Mangena (Deputy Commander). Military equipment was shipped to Mozambique where the headquarters of Zipa was established. A plan of action was drawn up, whereby Zanla forces would operate from Tete and Gaza provinces while Zipra forces would operate from Manica province ('Zanu' 1984:5). The Frontline States heralded Zipa as the progenitor of true unity within the Zimbabwean liberation movement, and the organisation assumed its transformation into a political, ideological, as well as military structure, and commenced diplomatic contacts (Moore 1995:74).

Zipa's leaders were made up of 'second wave' guerrilla soldiers, who were largely young, relatively well-educated and urbanised Zimbabweans. Ideologically Zipa took an 'orthodox' vision of Marxism-Leninism, whilst attempting to overcome past in-fighting and ethnic differences. The Zipa High Command were well-versed in military strategy, their members having attended military training programmes of both China and the Eastern block. The new organisation intended to implement a 'mobile warfare' based on Vietnamese theories and practice. In comparison to the
incarcerated Zanu High Command, the Zipa leaders were more advanced. The high level of competence was reflected in the executed warfare, which at Zipa’s rein-stigation was raised to a qualitatively new level. From early 1976 the Rhodesian forces were under heavier pressure than ever before, and within a few months the guerrilla war scene had been dramatically transformed. Having gained the initiative the guerrillas began to pursue a more comprehensive and determined strategy. A major target was to disrupt Rhodesia’s vital road and rail links to the south, as well as the internal road communication system. Zipa’s plans were to establish fully liberated zones in Zimbabwe within the last six months of 1976. The military campaigns led to heavy Rhodesian counter-insurgency efforts, transport convoys, extensive curfews, massive call ups, prolonged national military service, and finally to an altered military strategy. The changes in Rhodesian tactics and policy were interpreted by Zipa as evidence for their success (Moore 1995:73–80).

In spite of important military advances, Zipa did not turn out to be a success story. Yet again differences in the organisations brought the unified military effort to an end. Disagreements in strategy, partly emanating from the different Chinese and Soviet military approaches, caused confusion and division. Guerrilla practice also differed. Zipra cadres objected to that Zanla deployed guerrillas with little or no training, putting combatants at high risk when in contacts with the well-equipped and highly trained enemy. When Zipra opposed this mode of operation, Zanla saw the Zipra positioning as a way to force Zipra strategies on Zanla. Furthermore, serious tension and conflict occurred when Zipra and Zanla cadres were to undertake joint military training, an undertaking that had not been tried before. Under pressure from the Frontline presidents, 800 Zipra recruits were taken to Zanla’s Mgagao camp, and 500 Zanla recruits were sent to Zipra’s Morogoro camp – both located in Tanzania. At the camps faction fighting broke out. Before Tanzanian authorities decided to separate the forces again, faction fighting had caused many Zipra and Zanla deaths. In the aftermath Tanzanian authorities placed various restrictions on Zapu’s training programme, and the movement of its forces. Zipra then decided to pull out of Zipa, and its forces departed from Tanzania. Later it was decided that all Zapu military activities would be based in Zambia, and those of Zanu in Mozambique (Bhebe 1990:17; Dabengwa 1995:34; More 1995:81).56

Zipa continued to function after Zipra’s departure. Although from this historical point often seen simply as Zanla forces, recent research puts forward another view.

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56 For Zipra accounts regarding factional fighting in the camps, see Alexander et al, 2000:147.
Zipa leaders, being more radical and militarily trained than the ‘old guard’ of nationalist leaders, were convinced that their strategies and tactics had more to offer. They maintained their stance for unity and democracy. The failure of the joint training, was in Zipa leaders’ view, a result of old nationalist contradictions which would reoccur unless serious ideological training of cadres took place.\textsuperscript{57} The old Zanla guard did however not share Zipa’s views and found the young and radical leaders a threat. With the advent of the Geneva Conference in October-December 1976, Zanla’s original High Command was released and Mugabe came to rise to international recognition as Zanu leader. As Zipa realised that they could not oppose the old guard’s return, they tried to reshape ‘the direction and the theoretical understanding of the party’. Zipa attempted to be seen autonomous of Zanu, thus not Zipa turned Zanla due to Zipra’s departure. To the old guard they suggested a new Zanu/Zapu/ANC unity construction, in which the Zipa leadership would have majority representation. This was however not accepted by Mugabe and Tongogara (Chief of Defence). Also Nkomo refused the suggestion, seeing Zipa as a Zanu creation. In Zanu’s account of how the Zipa story ended, Zipa members allegedly resorted to caching arms in order to clash with their Zanu opposition. Zanu therefore decided to ‘firmly act against them in defending the party and the Revolution’, and subsequently ‘we had all the Zipa trouble makers detained with the permission of the Mozambican government’. Ducas Mwanaka, a Zanla political commissar in charge of a Zipa unit, was among those arrested. He subsequently spent three years in jail, the reason given for his jail term being that ‘we were almost selling Zanla to Zipra’. He saw the Zipa-Zanu variance in terms of ideology:

Mainly it was an ideological difference. Because when the old guard was in jail, we had consolidated the political base. Before they were arrested there was not much to offer in ideology. But whilst the commanders were in jail, the problems were being outlined, and a very clear, ideological foundation was constructed. I do not know what Zimbabwe would have been like if the likes of us had made our way. It was perhaps due to immaturity that we were deceived into being arrested. We had not really mastered these political intrigues.... We had popular support in the bases.... If the [Zipa] forces had prevailed then, if they had won, we would have been like Nicaragua (interview K.D. Mwanaka, 1992).

Having imprisoned Zipa ‘trouble-makers’, the old guard then made sure no similar ideas were brooding in the party, by conducting a ‘ politicisation programme’ in

\textsuperscript{57} As a consequence of this stand, Wampa College was set up, an institution which was to produce leaders with Marxist principles and ability to lead a national democratic revolution. The College gave long and short term courses (Moore 1995:82–83).
the camps. According to Mugabe, 'we warned any person with a tendency to revolt that the Zanu axe would fall on their necks' (‘Zanu’ 1984:6). During this politicalisation programme in January 1977, reportedly 300 Zanu members were killed in the Tete Province in Mozambique (Sithole 1979:126). Following these events, Zipa had reached the end of its path (Dabengwa 1995:35; Moore 1995:82–86).

4.g. Zapu and Zipra Activity 1976–1977
After having pulled out of Zipa in 1976, Zapu once again reorganised itself. By now Zapu had been at war with Rhodesia for well over a decade, and a debate on military strategy and the objective of the movement was called for. At the Zapu Consultation Conference in 1976, the framework that was to determine Zapu strategy to the end of the war was defined. The primary conclusion was that ‘the only way to ensure the independence of our country is to conquer state power’, and the two strategic tasks to achieve this were: a commitment to build unity with all forces which shared ‘a common desire to defeat colonialism’; and the intensification of the armed struggle with the specific objective to seize state power (Brickhill 1995:49). The latter decision led Zapu to divert some recruits into conventional army training courses. At this point however, there was no clear conception of how conventional military forces might actually be used in the war, and plans to upgrade parts of the guerrilla army to conventional army standards still lacked strategic coherence. The debate on army strategies nevertheless continued. These focused on the Vietnamese theories in which guerrilla warfare was only a preparatory stage in a revolutionary war, to be succeeded by higher forms of warfare (Brickhill 1995:48–52).

Meanwhile Zipra operations had forced Rhodesian forces to retreat from their Zambezi river posts, enabling uncontested Zipra entry into Rhodesia from the Zambian side. In 1977 Zapu continued to use earlier tactics of mine warfare, raids and ambushes, in order to consolidate military gains in the north and northeastern parts of the country. Due to successful mine campaigns, the Rhodesian army could no longer move by truck or transport supplies. In a description of the Rhodesian war effort, the land mines were concluded to be ‘the single most devastating and effective [weapon], seriously impeding Rhodesian security-force mobility’ (Ellert 1993:53). As a result, Rhodesian camps were retreated into safer regions, operations were reduced as soldiers could only move on foot in certain areas. This penetration of the rural hinterland marked a breakthrough for Zapu forces (Brickhill

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50 High ranking Zanu members resigned as a result of the measures taken against Zipa, opposing the intolerance against different-minded party members (Sithole 1979:126–127).
By the end of 1977 Zipra operations covered the Matabeleland province, whilst units were also sent to Midlands and Victoria provinces in the centre of the country. Zipra also opened a new front in Mashonaland, when moving into Sipolilo and Magondi districts. The base in Zambia facilitating the new incursions became a target for the Rhodesian air force and light infantry, as it was considered a substantial threat (Ellert 1993:74). At the end of 1977, Zipra conducted military operations in three fronts (Bhebe 1990:17).

In this period Zipra recruitment increased. The numbers of guerrillas had fluctuated since armed forces were established in 1965, but it was not until the 1970s that their numbers could be established in thousands. In the final part of the war, Zapu would have over 20,000 soldiers in its ranks, of which the majority were trained between 1976 and 1978. Recruitment was mainly located to Matabeleland and Midlands. Military training usually took six to eight months, and was conducted by Zipra instructors. Zapu had guerrilla training and refugee camps in Zambia and Mozambique. However, guerrillas selected for further training were primarily sent to the Soviet Union, Libya, Egypt, Cuba and the German Democratic Republic. In the mobilisation of guerrillas, Zapu underground branches played a major role in the recruitment. These had been set up as early as 1959 under the SRANC, and remained during the succession of parties and party bans. When Zapu was banned in 1963, a routine to the underground structures existed, facilitating continued party organising. Over time this would include not only Zapu party branches, but in some cases also women's branches and the Zapu Youth League (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:7).

Regarding underground activity, Zapu's George Silundika noted that:

> It was only due to our underground structure that Zapu could continue to function.... Since then we have succeeded in developing a *modus operandi* by which communication has been maintained between the various levels, from the top leadership down to the cells.... Fortunately, we have never suffered a total obliteration of our structure, though at times there have been temporary setbacks lasting several months. The people of Zimbabwe are conscious of the need to express themselves as a party, in one way or

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50 The numbers given in the literature of both Zipra and Zanla recruits vary greatly, as the nationalist parties partly used the size of their guerrilla armies as a form of legitimacy – not the least to drum up material support. It is to be noted that the Zipra account given here is higher than accounts given elsewhere in the literature, but refer to the number of guerrillas Zipra had both inside and outside Rhodesia. Brickhill's account of 20,000 Zipra soldiers in 1979 is based on research conducted on the Zipra war files, and is supported by Rhodesian observations, in which the same estimate for the same period is noted – see Cilliers 1985:192. It is however difficult to verify exact numbers, as the size of Zipra and Zanla armies is sensitive to political observations – rather than facts and figures.
another, and know that this requires their being organised on a national level. Thus, although underground, Zapu functions in many ways similar to the way it did before the ban (‘Zimbabwe’ 1974:5–6, see also ‘Interviews’ 1973:10).

Thus, as Zapu branches organised clandestinely, they also recruited guerrillas. This is apparent from the fact that 60 per cent of Zipra’s recruits reported having been members in the Zapu Youth League before joining the army. Furthermore, 66 per cent of recruits came from families in which one or both parents were Zapu members. The fact that recruits had experience of political organisation before entering military training and were introduced to Zapu through family members, had a significant impact on the level of political experience. It also created a sense of organisational belonging, which recruits brought to the Zipra army (Brickhill 1995:66–67).

Zapu underground branches were however not only limited to Zipra recruitment, but also played other key roles during the war. Food, medical supplies, transports and intelligence was supplied to the army by local party contacts. Where Zapu underground branches were established, Zipra commissars first contacted the party, before guerrillas were deployed. In cases where Zapu structures were weak or non-existent, Zipra presence facilitated the growth of such. What was crucially important in the relationship between Zapu party branches and deployed Zipra units was that many of the organising, mobilising and logistical tasks were carried out by the civilian Zapu structures, whilst Zipra soldiers carried out the military operations. Nicholas Nkomo, Zipra deputy commander of the Northern Front Two\(^6^0\) notes that local Zapu leaders supplied the guerrillas with detailed intelligence on Rhodesian troop movements and facilitated the planning of ambushes through the provision of geographic and topological information (Alexander et al., 2000:143). Similar to Zanla, Zipra also had systems of locals gathering intelligence (in Zanla the so-called mujibas), but in Zipra their space to act was co-ordinated and restricted by the organised intelligence presence in the army and in the party branch. According to Dabengwa, ‘all Zipra intelligence was operationally, not politically or ideologically directed’. The organisation depended on direct field observations and on agents infiltrated into the Rhodesian army and police (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:14). Thus, as intelligence information was channelled through army and party, restraint on excess arbitrariness or violence could be exercised under organised forms. Similarly, according to Brickhill, excess guerrilla violence could be dealt with or through the party branches, which functioned as a

\(^6^0\)Northern Front Two (NF2) encompassed Nkayi, Lupane, Binga, Gokwe, Inyati, Kwekwe and Gweru Districts (Alexander et al., 2000:141).
layer between the local population and Zipra guerrillas (Brickhill 1990:18). The underground party structures also allowed Zipra to effectively cover an area with a smaller number of soldiers, than Zanla needed – as the latter broke both new military and political ground. In addition, Zipra guerrillas had an established legitimacy through the party structures, facilitating their presence and the understanding of their actions. This differs from Zanla, where the role of the so-called ‘pungwes’ was essential. In Zapu ‘pungwes’ were viewed with contempt, and as a method of politicisation considered superficial, pointless, and even dangerous to the population (Brickhill 1995:70, Alexander et al, 2000:147). A Zipra member noted that ‘... The men with whom I served were highly trained in both modern warfare and guerrilla warfare, they were soldiers not armed politicians! Therefore, sloganeering and singing were not their appetite’ (Alexander et al, 2000:148). Nkomo commented regarding Zanla’s methods that:

They adopted a policy of forced political indoctrination of the local population. In Shona they called it ‘pungwe’, meaning compulsory all-night mass meetings. Zanla, in fact, operated as a political force, while Zipra had to behave in a strictly military way (Bhebe 1990:18).

The Rhodesian security forces also noted differences between Zipra’s and Zanla’s way of functioning, as they documented that:

...Zipra’s military strategy was not as closely aligned to the politicisation of the rural masses as was Zanla. Zipra commanders believed that the better military force would eventually triumph, if only by force of arms (Cilliers 1985:193).

Thus, Zipra guerrillas did not include a systematic politicisation of the local population, forming a network of committees, as Zanla did. Their local support was to be mobilised through their effective military activities against enemy installations, otherwise through local Zapu branches (Callinicos 1981:39, Bhebe 1999:7,115). The way in which Zipra operated, made many locals believe that they possessed mystic powers, being able to successfully attack the enemy. Due to this perception, Joshua Nkomo as the leader of the guerrillas, became associated with a legend in which he was seen as ‘possessing extraordinary power to conquer and liberate Zimbabwe’ (Callinicos 1981:39).

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61 By the end of the war Zipra operated over as much territory as Zanla with less than half the number of guerrillas (Brickhill 1995:70).
4.h. The Disintegration of Rural Administration

As local support was effectively mobilised by nationalist forces and military resistance mounted against the Rhodesian government, administrative control over the extensive rural areas became increasingly difficult. The rural areas became the centre stage for both sides: settlers and guerrillas alike fought for the political allegiance of the rural population. To counteract the persisting insurgency government policy needed yet a shift. However, the shift did not bring innovation as the old tracks of force and differentiation were followed.

In 1972 the community development policy was effectively dropped in favour of concentrated state control. The executive powers of Provincial and District Commissioners were increased and paramilitary tasks were given the civil administrators. Collective punishment of the rural population was another administrative response to the insurgency. Provincial Commissioners were in 1973 empowered to impose collective fines, confiscate cattle, and with force resettle communities in which contact with guerrillas were suspected. In many regions the population was moved to Protected Villages (PVs), safeguarding the keepers rather than the inhabitants, as will be elaborated on below. Military action was also taken in the form of collective punishment, as reprisals were meted out against villages seen as ‘pro-terrorist’. Death penalty or life imprisonment was accorded those engaging or assisting in ‘terrorist activities’, or those who ‘failed to report the presence of terrorists’. Civilian administration and military activity thus became complimentary and merged (Bratton 1978: 35–38).

As the liberation war raged, with the rural areas as locus, local governance broke down. After 1976 government development work was paralysed in for example Nkayi and Lupane. There, police and intelligence operations increasingly depended on the armed police reserve. With the number of guerrillas increasing, new levels of force were required. Recruitment of civilian informers was stepped up, and the detention and torture of suspects reached unprecedented numbers. After 1977 chiefs and councils could not be relied upon for a minimum of administration. Chiefs and headmen had often to be brought by plane to meetings as roads were unsafe (Alexander et al, 2000:148–149).63 Rural administration disintegrated both

62 A policy of ‘Provincialisation’ was introduced in 1973, designed as an upper tier to the organisation of African local government. It provided for the further institutionalisation of chiefs in national affairs, as well as segregation between black and white politics. For details, see Bratton 1978: 27–29.

63 For a detailed account on the role played by local government representatives in the Shangani during the late 1970s, see Alexander et al, 2000:148–158.
as a result of military actions, but also due to a political decision by government to withdraw rural services. In extensive regions a 'blanket administrative abandonment' took place, the only state representative being the military conducting their operations (Bratton 1978: 44-45).

4.i. Zanu and Zapu form Patriotic Front (PF)

Only a few months after Zipra had pulled out of Zipa, a new effort to unite Zanu and Zapu was attempted. The Patriotic Front (PF) was formed in Maputo in October 1976, just before the Geneva Talks, in an initiative where yet again the Frontline states played a decisive role. The PF was immediately put in use, as Zanu and Zapu participated in Geneva united under the PF construction. Subsequent to the Geneva conference, all settlement negotiations were attended by Zanu and Zapu as the Patriotic Front, reducing the possibility of Smith, the British and the Americans trying to divide and weaken the nationalists. As all previous unity attempts however, the PF was riddled with contradictions. The main factor hindering success seemed, as before, to be the two parties’ diverse perceptions of what a commitment to the PF included.

Crucial amongst the objectives that the PF formulated was to ‘study and recommend steps how to best ultimately fuse’ the two parties, to create ‘harmonious relations’ between the two, and to ‘educate and orient Zimbabweans towards a national democratic revolution and national unity’ (Bhebe 1990:14). Despite well-formulated objectives, what was nevertheless the starting point for any unity attempt, was a political will. The question of fusing Zanu and Zapu included two major stumbling blocks: the merger of two full fledged armies with disparate military approaches, and the merger of two political organisations including their power hierarchies. However, the problem extended further. As Zanu had adopted a Maoist warfare approach which included the conscious politicisation of the peasantry into Zanu members, the party’s political and armed wings were symbiotically entwined with the end goal being not only independence in Zimbabwe, but independence under a Zanu regime. Obviously Zapu fought for the same reasons ('to conquer state power'), but its military wing was less politicised and more connected to military objectives – leaving the political issues for the party structures. Thus, even if only speaking of merger in military terms – to oust the settler regime – Zanu’s military approach excluded joint tactics, as its armed wing was a political army. Therefore the political will for merger would have to include an acceptance of give and take in terms of power. It would have to include a step away from the perception Shamuruyirira warned about regarding Zanu-Zapu battles in 1963, that of ‘complete victory or defeat'. At this point in time, a divorce from this perception

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was clearly not on Zanu’s agenda, although this was not publicly expressed. Meanwhile, Zapu decided to opt for the collective path, despite the Zipa experience, leaning on the ideological reasons to ‘build a broad front against colonialism and imperialism’.

Thus, the Patriotic Front was formed and work for its implementation began, irrespective of the above irreconcilable contradictions. Zanu and Zapu leaders talked to military leaders and visited camps, PF military and political structures were outlined, and a constitution was debated. For Zapu the Patriotic Front had much greater significance than a tactical negotiation alliance against the settler regime and the British. The 1976 Conference program document outlined at length Zapu’s position on unity. It stated:

> We succeeded in forming a Patriotic Front with elements in Zanu for the purpose of presenting a common front on all national issues.... the formation of the Patriotic Front [was] not only in order to be able to adopt a common position at such fora as the Geneva conference, but also in order to consolidate the unity of the people of Zimbabwe.... The Patriotic Front has therefore embarked on a programme beyond Geneva of consolidating unity at the military, social and political levels (‘Our’ 1976:6).

On a more ideological note, the document states:

> At the present stage, it is essential to unite all that can be united against colonialism and imperialism.... No one stratum can succeed in the colonies without the co-operation of other strata. It is in this context that Zapu sees the unity of all social strata that can be united as crucial in the struggle for independence. Unity is necessary whether it is a unity of progressive and revolutionary forces, or of coalitions of progressive organisations, into a broad political movement made up of different classes, strata or groups. We know from our experience, some of it quite recent, that there are always contradictions, including antagonistic ones, in such a movement (‘Our’ 1976:8).

Thus, Zapu supported the Patriotic Front, and wished to use it as an effective instrument of unity between the major liberation movements (Bhebe 1990:17). However, the PF objectives and intentions never reached implementation, as commitment from the parties was uneven. Five months after the PF formation, Zanu Central Committee member Edgar Tekere, told Swedish government officials that the ‘Patriotic Front had no more value beyond its tactical importance during the Geneva conference’, it being ‘largely a paper tiger’. Tekere expressed utter disappointment with the Swedes for emphasising the PF construction, as ‘Zanu was the real core of the
liberation struggle in Zimbabwe'. In his view, Zanu and Zapu could hardly be equated when Zanu catered for 70,000 refugees in Mozambique and Zapu had only 7,000 in Zambia. Furthermore, Tekere argued, the parties had major ideological differences as Zanu was supported by China, and Zapu by Russia and America. Therefore Tekere strongly advised the Swedish government to either support Zanu exclusively, or both parties separately. According to the Zanu leadership, there 'was neither basis nor any need to see the Patriotic Front as representing any form of unity between the organisations' (Bhebe 1990:15). This unmistakable message was however not the Zanu stand disseminated in open fora. Instead, Central Committee member Eddision Zvobgo, stated in an interview in 1978 that the Central Committee had explained to party cadres the 'political and ideological necessity of unity', as it is 'ideologically correct to unite all patriotic forces during the national democratic stage of the revolution' ('Zimbabwe' 1978:36).

Zanu's double positions, one for external use and ideologically correct, and one for internal (and opportune) use based on competitive advantage, caused much policy confusion. Meanwhile, as the unity agreement was signed, Zapu pressed for implementation of a political and military merger. Nkomo stated in 1978:

We also realised it was necessary to move toward the creation of one army. But several of us also believe that before you can form a single army it is first necessary to have one political organisation. The question of any army hinges on the unity of political leadership. You cannot have one army under two parties, with two leaders. Consequently, you cannot talk of uniting the two armies without first uniting the two parties.... You can have a number of political parties within a free Zimbabwe but you certainly cannot have two armies. Zapu and Zanu must consolidate the political leadership and activities of the Front if unity within the armies is to take root ('Zimbabwe' 1978:18).

But as Zanu had little intention of having the PF filling a function other than a joint negotiation tool, the party stalled moves to fuse both party and army with Zapu. Zvobgo leaned Zanu's delay on the Zanu constitution, stating in 1978 that 'we don't have the authority between congresses to decide on a political merger'. However, he admitted Zanu disinterest in a fuse by stating 'We want to harmonise military operations, but preserve separate political organisations at this phase of the revolution'. To keep some future content to the PF construction Zvobgo added that 'Once we have defeated the regime we will be at a different phase, and it will be possible to consider transforming the Party into something else'. Having claimed that harmonising military operations was Zanu's policy position, Zvobgo then (in the same interview) stated why the policy was not implemented:
There are several problems facing us. Our forces are physically separated, with Zanu in Mozambique and Zapu in Zambia. The logistics for joint operations pose enormous difficulties. And we have little experience with co-ordinated military programmes. It is going to be slow achieving our goal of military collaboration. So far there has been no pressing need for joint operations because Zanu and Zapu forces operate in different areas ('Zimbabwe’ 1978:34–35).

As political merger was constitutionally impossible and military merger was no priority, questions regarding a joint political future at independence, remained the only element giving the Patriotic Front any political content. Nkomo visualised a free Zimbabwe under Patriotic Front rule:

It was made clear that if Zapu and Zanu entered into elections in Zimbabwe, they would do so as a single unit. If the results were for the formation of a government by us, then it would be a government of the Patriotic Front. We have no doubt that we will indeed be the first government of Zimbabwe ('Zimbabwe’ 1978:19).

Zvobgo however, built in ambiguities:

I can see various possibilities [for political collaboration once the PF is in power]. We are convinced the Patriotic Front would win by a landslide. We will participate in such elections as the Front, selecting single candidates for each constituency. In areas of Zapu strength, Zanu won’t field a candidate and vice versa. We will still be fighting a common enemy and cannot afford to be fragmented. Following the complete seizure of state power, new opportunities will arise. We can discuss the question of merger. But if we decide not to merge, then perhaps a general election would let the population decide on the question of primacy. Although we would be rivals in such a situation, we are comrades and it wouldn’t be an antagonistic contradiction ('Zimbabwe’ 1978:36).

Despite the incomplete implementation and the obvious discrepancies between Zanu’s and Zapu’s perceptions of what the PF would entail in the future, the PF remained a standing structure until the end of the war. After the 1978 Commonwealth Heads of Governments’ meeting in Lusaka, the PF agreed to attend negotiations at the Lancaster House Conference (LHC). In preparation for the LHC, Zanu and Zapu completed a plan of reconstructing military and political hierarchies as a joint organisation, and adopted a constitution for the Patriotic Front in Addis Ababa 12/5 1979 ('Constitution’ 1979). Having seemingly reached further than any previous attempt in uniting Zanu and Zapu, the joint effort at the LHC was nevertheless the Patriotic Front’s last mission.
During the PF developments, politics took eventful turns in Rhodesia. Abel Muzorewa’s UANC\(^6^4\) signed an ‘internal settlement’ with Ian Smith and elections were held in 1979, resulting in Muzorewa becoming Prime Minister. Neither Zanu nor Zapu participated in the settlement as it did not include a power transfer to the Rhodesian majority. The new constitution continued to guarantee white control of the army, police, courts and civil service. Therefore slightly opening the door and slipping in moderate African politicians into the white power system, was widely perceived as too little too late. In the black community reformist efforts were beyond interest, in the face of massive state repression (Weitzer 1990:91). The internal settlement had been Smith’s last chance to obtain international recognition and thereby relief from sanctions, but as only South Africa recognised the new government, the objectives failed. Instead of a positive response to Smith’s calls for cease-fire, the internal settlement marked a massive guerrilla intensification of the war. Before turning to an outline of Zanla and Zipra war efforts in 1978–1980, it is crucial to highlight the context in which the guerrillas fought and in which the civilians attempted to survive. For as the war was mounting, white politics resorted to desperate measures, resulting in draconian military actions.


As the war intensified, the Smith regime invested increasingly more in security, raising input of both war materials and personnel. In the early seventies the government had military resources far superior to the guerrillas, with a capacity of forty-five thousand security forces. The expenditure however steadily rose: in 1976 defence consumed 25% of the total budget, by 1979 it was 47% (Weitzer 1990:87). Legal powers were also increased to facilitate the execution of the civil war. Copying South Africa’s example, the regime implemented in 1975 the Indemnity and Compensation Act, exonerating the security forces for acts done ‘in good faith for the suppression of terrorism’. In practice the legislation permitted unsanctioned violence. Protected by the Act, soldiers resorted to wanton killings and beatings, collective punishment, destruction of livestock, huts and fields, and interrogation methods including electric shock and immersion in water (Weitzer 1990:95). Despite the great resource advantage, the Rhodesian Security Forces were not able to stem guerrilla activity, and the security situation in the country increasingly deteriorated. In response to an outcry for more drastic measures against the ‘terrorists’, martial law was announced in 1978. In real terms the law was more a political move than a military, as the country was already under an all-powerful emergency

\(^6^4\) The UANC (United African National Council) was formed from the remnants of ANC and included participation from James Chikerama (Frolizi) and N. Sithole (splinter group from Zanu).
legislation. It nevertheless relieved the security forces of all semblance of accountability. Similarly, the checks and balances in the state structure steadily eroded, as the threshold for tolerance against repressive measures was continuously lowered. Security debate within the parliament, for example, was strictly limited. Questioning military operations led to ridicule and accusations of support to the insurgent cause (Weitzer 1990: 96–97, 99).

In order to aid the Rhodesian war effort, the South African apartheid regime heavily supported military expenditure, which in the first year of operations was budgeted to nearly US$ 1 million (Ellert 1993:111). South African personnel was also a permanent feature of the Rhodesian war, dating back to at least 1967, stretching to their final withdrawal in 1980.65 For the South African forces, counter-insurgency operations in Rhodesia added valuable experience to their list of merits. Their tasks varied, but in the initial stage the South African Police (SAP)’s primary task was to prevent infiltration from Zambia. Attempting to disguise their origin, the soldiers wore Rhodesian uniforms and re-sprayed vehicles and planes. A significant field of intelligence work conducted by the South African Defence Forces was the intercepting and deciphering of the Zambian army and intelligence service (Ellert 1993:113). As this work was highly successful, the Rhodesian CIO later established its own special division to complement the South Africans’. In the 1970s, when the war intensified, the Rhodesians turned to South Africa for increased manpower and military hardware. In the last year of the war, South African forces were extremely active inside Rhodesia, operating alongside regular Rhodesian units. These operations were part of an agreement named Operation Favour, in which the apartheid regime had for the 1978–1980 period channelled the substantial figure of R10 million to the Rhodesian civil war. This was an ‘investment’ where the objective was to ensure the emergence of a regime favourable to the Pretoria government. The presence of the forces involved were however denied by both governments (Ellert 1993: 110–123).

Whilst the Rhodesians increased military pressure, the guerrillas were able to stand their ground and spread. The Rhodesians realised that guerrilla success was dependently tied to civilian co-operation and support, causing a change in their military strategy. Originally, the official government line stated that success hinged on winning the Africans’ hearts and minds, however, on the operational level this

65 Dabengwa has argued, as previously put forward, that South African personnel were part of the Rhodesian war effort before 1967. Ellert however argues that South African security entered the war in 1967, as Zipra and the South African ANC began joint programmes in Rhodesia (Ellert 1993:110).
was continuously overstepped. Eventually the idea was dropped, since – as the Ministry of Internal Affairs insisted – the blacks were ‘too primitive’ to appreciate such schemes and only ‘respected force’. Consequently, in Rhodesian counter-insurgency operations, violence against civilians became a matter of routine. The logic was that civilians who support terrorists, are themselves considered terrorists, and as one cannot differentiate between ‘supporting’ and ‘neutral’ civilians, the guilt and punishment must be collectively born. This line of argument was clearly put forward in parliament in 1977 by Mr. Van der Byl (Minister of Defence):

If villagers harbour terrorists and terrorists are found about in villages, naturally they will be bombed and destroyed in any manner which the commander on the spot considers to be desirable, in the suitable prosecution of a successful campaign.... Where the civilian population involves itself with terrorism, somebody is bound to get hurt, and one can have little sympathy for those who are mixed up with terrorists when finally they receive the wrath of the security forces (CCJP 1977:35).

Part of the new military strategy against civilians resulted in a scheme deeply affecting rural communities and their social fabric. In 1973 the Rhodesians copied the programme of ‘Protected Villages’ (PVs), successfully carried out in Malaya in the 1950s. The idea was by forced removals to relocate civilians into enclosed camps, in order to isolate the guerrillas from their supply lines and information sources. By mid 1973 thousands of villagers had been driven to PVs, were they were held without adequate food or medical attention. The average village measured four square kilometres and contained approximately 5,000 people. The task of effectively guarding the PVs was unattainable. The PVs did not keep out the guerrillas who at night got both food and information. This being known to the guards, resulted in brutal repression of the inhabitants, whilst the guards in their ‘protected’ environment boosted their moral with home brewed beer and marijuana. As a result of the environment and the treatment civilian resistance against the regime was further increased, as was an intensification of political awareness. Thus, the Protected Villages turned out to be not only strategic failures, but in addition proved to be counter-productive. In late 1977 there were nevertheless a total of 203 villages where an estimated 580,832 people were detained. Having been a mishap in Rhodesian military schemes, the PVs caused a tremendous traumatic impact on its inhabitants, who subsequently experienced long term detention, violence and forced urbanisation (Ellert 1993:49–52).

66 The same logic was in the 1980s applied by the Mugabe government regarding civilian support to dissident. See chapter three, pp. 218–219.
One of the most feared elements within the Rhodesian Security Forces were the so-called Selous Scouts. The unit was formed in 1973 to conduct classic pseudo-terrorist tracking and secret reconnaissance. It later grew into a battalion, and became the executive wing of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). Although the battalion officially fell under the command of the Rhodesian Army Commander, it was not perceived as accountable and acted autonomously. The hallmark for the Selous Scouts was that ends justify means. Perceived morally protected by this notion, the Scouts conducted sinister operations, of which to date a majority remain shrouded in secrecy (Ellert 1993:124).

One of the documented campaigns conducted by the Scouts, was the so-called pseudo-operations. Scouts disguised as guerrilla soldiers conducted this scheme, which was later partly adopted by the Mugabe regime. For the Rhodesian Security Forces not to confuse pseudo units with real guerrillas, active sectors were declared ‘frozen areas’, banning all other security patrols. The pseudos were deployed at night equipped with captured AK-rifles, standard guerrilla uniforms and kitbags, sent out on ten day missions or until compromised. The pseudos located village contact men, and guerrilla information sources, which then was communicated back to the army. The civilians soon caught on to the pseudo operation however, and developed sophisticated recognition codes with the authentic guerrillas. To circumvent this the Scouts resorted to inducting captured guerrillas into their ranks, which were quickly made part of the pseudo teams.67 With an authentic guerrilla, the Scouts returned to the civilians, who subsequently were mislead and compromised guerrilla information and camps. The pseudo operations became highly successful, justifying an increase in manpower and logistic support to the Scouts- and a promised supply of captured guerrillas including kits and equipment (Ellert 1993:126–135).68

The Scouts perceiving themselves to be above the law and independent of outside controls, caused friction in the army. Yet their top-secret operations were sanc-

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67 The time-span between a capture and the deployment was critical. Any delay caused high risk of failure as the captured guerrilla’s companions would have time to warn villagers. The Scouts had approximately 24 hours to ‘turn’ the guerrilla, whose alternative was death. After ‘political reorientation’ and promised the standard kill-bonus of $1,000, this was many times achieved. (Ellert 1993:126).

68 The Selous Scouts went to great lengths to implement pseudo operations. Captured guerrillas became precious and their identity was at all costs kept concealed from the locals. Not to compromise the scheme, it was often necessary to remove by aircraft an entire village, who might have witnessed the capture of a guerrilla. Other ways to authenticate Scouts as guerrillas, were to subject themselves to mock ambushes for the benefit of convincing the villagers. Needless to say, a great amount of logistics were necessary, as the police and army fired on the Scouts (Ellert 1993:134–135).
tioned to increase, with the aimed objective to improve the all important guerrilla 'killrate'. To obtain this objective in the uphill battle against the guerrillas, the Scouts introduced chemical warfare. After some laboratory work, the Scouts began impregnating toxins into the fabric of clothing often worn by guerrillas. The toxins were to be absorbed through soft body tissue, poisoning the victim and causing death. In 1977 the Scouts managed to spread the clothing to rural country stores, and as deaths were recorded, more consignments were ordered. In early 1978 the operation came to an end when the Special Branch got alarming reports countrywide. The operation was denied by the Selous Scouts, but the schemes' success rate was proved and recorded by Zanla and civilian deaths linked to toxic poisoning. In addition to the impregnated clothes, the Scouts used other methods of chemical warfare. They introduced bacteriological cultures into ground water, and the injection of thallium (heavy metal toxin similar to rat poison with symptoms of rapid ageing) into popular food supplies delivered to guerrillas by civilians (Ellert 1993:142–146).

The Rhodesian war effort rested on a political platform defended by the Smith regime. Smith’s position amongst settlers was strong, as the Rhodesia Front won the 1977 election with 86.4 percent of the white electorate (Weitzer 1990:97). The war did however rock the foundations of settler rule. To address any arising insecurities, a massive propaganda machine was continuously at work directed both at whites and blacks. The messages asserted that the war was against ‘communist terrorists’, focusing on rebel atrocities against black civilians. Information regarding the underlying causes of the conflict was denied to the white population, including data about RSF campaigns. The distorted picture of African nationalists stood in stark contrast to Rhodesian nationalism, where ‘Western values’ and Christianity were main ingredients in the rhetoric. These values were nevertheless mixed with a deep rooted fear in the white population, that the ‘settler manhood’ would be wiped out in some great military catastrophe (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:14). Fears aside, many whites continued throughout the war to live in a distorted reality driven by their supremacist values and a glorified view of their benevolent ‘mission’ in Rhodesia. No real legitimacy was given to black grievances, and black discontent over issues such as racial discrimination and land distribution was not accepted as genuine (Weitzer 1990:90–91). Instead the perception often put forward was how racially harmonious the country was, how ‘lucky’ the blacks were functioning so well with the whites, and if the blacks would just be patient they would eventually ‘evolve’ to white standards. This position is clearly notable in Ian Smith’s comments, when remembering ‘good old’ Rhodesia:
I couldn’t get over how often people said to me “you know what strikes us perhaps above anything else in your country is the happy black faces we see here, the happiest we have seen anywhere in this world”. And that was typical of Rhodesia, there was no friction, we had no political problems. The blacks weren’t interested in politics because the white people were governing the country as they always had and everything was fine – they had a good life. This was the white man’s business, politics. In fact, their system was through the tribal system and their chiefs, and that was how they had always lived. So it struck me how often people said “what happy black faces, what a lovely clean town you have got here”. It was a beautiful place, lovely wide streets and the trees, the cleanliness. That was how we went on, we didn’t want change, we weren’t interested in the South African system....What we were attempting to do was to bring together probably the most sophisticated culture in the world – Western civilisation and the most primitive. But our intentions were always clear, to create one homogeneous country, one nation. We gradually tried to bring these [black] people into the working of a democratic system of government.... There was a wide gap between [white and black] people, and gradually the gap was closed through the normal method that we believed in, the evolutionary system.... Our black people had the highest standard of living of any black people in Africa, perhaps with the exception of South Africa. And they were aware of this. I was often told by the black peoples that they realised this, and that they didn’t want to be stupid. They were opposed to terrorism (interview I. Smith, 1992).

In Smith’s ‘evolutionary’ system, whites would always remain on the arena however, despite being in the minority. Furthermore, evolution would take long time. As late as 1976, after having participated in several settlement talks, Smith in a public outburst revealed his true feelings on black rule, stating: ‘I don’t believe in black majority rule ever in Rhodesia, not in a thousand years....If one day it is white and the next day it is black, I believe we have failed and I think it will be a disaster for Rhodesia’ (Ministry of Information 1976:13).

The cue was carried in the army who continued the civil war, but as the guerrillas established more areas of control, morale began to drop. Already in the mid 1970s a CIO director had insisted that Rhodesia was neither winning the war nor containing the threat, and that the security situation was increasingly desperate. In the Quarterly Threat Assessment of July 1977 it was concluded that ‘No successful result can be attained by purely military means’, and that before reaching ‘a point of no return’ a political settlement should be reached (Weitzer 1990:90). In 1978 CIO held that the point of no return had been reached. But Smith was not willing to
listen, containing the white grip on state power. Meanwhile both Zanla’s and Zipra’s forces grew rapidly, and a massive inflow of Zanla guerrillas took place 1978. Rhodesian forces were under immense pressure, and to stem the tide of guerrillas RSF mounted large scale air assaults on Zanla bases at Chimoio and Tembue in Mozambique, killing hundreds of people in the camps. This did however not prevent the guerrilla warfare, and in terms of numbers the Rhodesians were by now grossly outnumbered. Furthermore, it was known to the Rhodesians that both Zanla and Zipra had large reserves of men and war material outside the borders. There was also evidence that preparations for a final assault were taking place (see Zipra Zero Hour plan pp. 86–94), and would include conventional army attacks on the capital (Ellert 1993:76–80). The desperate situation was summarised in a classified army document in mid 1979, stating: ‘In classical COIN (counter-insurgency) terms, this is a no-win situation or rather, a sure lose equation’ (Cilliers 1985:240). During the months leading to the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement and the cease-fire on December 1, 1979, the RSF forces spent mostly retreated in their base camps. Whilst morale dropped to rock bottom, the realisation sunk in that white Rhodesia had militarily been defeated.


The way in which Zanu and Zapu conducted the last two years of the war, include crucial factors which connect to the ensuing Matabeleland conflict in the 1980s. The periodization made here does not necessarily, in all aspects, coincide with real turning points in the war, as developments overlap and are causal effects of earlier actions. One such important overlap to keep in mind is the Patriotic Front. The periodization nevertheless does serve as a crystallisation of important patterns and occurrences.

Zanu’s last two war years are characterised by the organisation being at its height of guerrilla activity and the patronage of massive refugee camps outside Rhodesia. 1977 had been a highly successful year for Zanu in terms of guerrilla recruitment and activity. As the Zanu leadership realised the immense possibilities of building their organisation on the basis of the thousands of refugees fleeing all parts of Zimbabwe to Mozambique, the party’s ambitions were directed toward using this basis to build an organisation bigger than Zapu (Bhebe 1990:15). As Mugabe reviewed Zanu successes in 1977, he urged the party to stretch further in 1978, and to ‘steel itself for the war through vigorous and total mobilisation and involvement of the

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69 For a discussion on differences in war policy between the Rhodesian army and other government authorities, see Bhebe/Ranger 1995:15.
masses of Zimbabwe’ (‘Zanu’ 1984:6). The last years of Zanla’s warfare had two principal objectives: to defeat the colonial regime by making the peasants ungovernable, and to transform the greater part of Zimbabwe into a vast Zanu party, guaranteeing victory in post-war elections (Bhebe 1990:15). Bhebe concludes that ‘Zanla became a truly politico-military machine intent upon defeating the settlers and out-doing Zapu in terms of followers’ (1990:15). As part of this effort Mugabe declared 1978 to be ‘The Year of the People’, with the motivation that:

1978 must equally be the year in which our party, as the vanguard of the armed struggle, will grow firm and have deep roots everywhere in the country.... The roots of our party are in our people. These roots must spread deep, wide and solid in 1978. The party and the people, and the people and the party, must have one and the same meaning. Organise the party in the name of the people, and the people in the name of the party (Bhebe 1990:15).

In accordance with the directives, Zanla stepped up its activities. Zanla had horizontally sliced Rhodesia into three military zones, Tete (north), Manica (central) and Gaza (south). Operations were launched from three Mozambican provinces, name-wise coinciding with the above military zones. Each military zone was divided into operational sectors, which substantially overlapped with the Tribal Trust Lands. In those operational areas, where mobilisation and politicisation had been, and was, in full swing, Zanla guerrillas attacked their targets with the support of the local inhabitants. Zanla combatants continued throughout the war to use guerrilla warfare as method, launching ambushes, sabotage operations, surprise attacks and assassinations. Zanla’s general target policy was ‘all government institutions and individuals who symbolised and represented the authorities’, other targets (such as farmsteads) were decided upon locally (Pandya 1988:163). In 1978 Zanu declared three areas in the Tete operational province semi-liberated zones (Mutoko, Pfungwe and Marmba), these sectors being under Zanu control (‘Zanu’1984:7).

As Zanla expanded their operational areas, they entered into Zipra’s military zones in the central and eastern part of the country. Little is written regarding the Zanla-

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70 For a description of operational sectors, and which geographical areas were included in each sector, see Pandya 1988:54–55.

71 Zanla guerrillas commonly went through a six-month training in protracted guerrilla warfare, which however became shortened as the war intensified. At no stage did Zanla have trained personnel or the heavy equipment to develop the protracted war into a conventional war (Pandya 1988:88, 182).

72 For elaboration on geographically outlined Zanla infiltration at the end of 1978, see Martin/Johnson 1981:308–309.
Zipra operational overlaps, although it is clear that such existed in several areas (Cal-\-linicos 1981:44; Frederikse 1990:230–231; Kriger 1992:100; Bhebe/Ranger 1995:18; Tungamirai 1995:44). The Rhodesian regime recorded much friction between Zanla and Zipra forces. ‘Inter-faction fighting’ became a regular feature of Rhodesian military communiqués, followed up by Rhodesian Broadcasting, who routinely reported such ‘incidents’ (Frederikse 1990:228). However, as creating disunity between the forces was part of government strategy, one may question the extent of accuracy in these reports. Ellert, in his description of the Rhodesian side of the war, notes that as Zanla spread into Midlands, it came into contact with Zipra forces whereby fighting occurred. He states that one perceived reason behind Zanla-Zipra fighting was each group’s suspicion of the other being Selous Scouts. However, the Rhodesian Special Branch believed the clashes was being motivated by the establishment of territorial supremacy (Ellert 1993:80). Another observer, describing Rhodesian military history, notes that ‘Zanla encroachment into traditional Zipra areas was causing great alarm’ (Cilliers 1985:192). Bhebe claims that in 1978 Zanu ‘spread throughout Mashonaland and converted nearly the entire region, previously dominated by Zapu’, but does not elaborate on what the ‘conversion’ entailed (1990:15).74 Zipra accounts regarding factional fighting recorded by Alexander et al are greatly focused Zipra soldiers’ bitter experience in Tanzanian camps in 1976 where Zipra-Zanla fighting took place, as well as experiences related to Zipa (see pp. 63–65). As a result of these experiences antagonisms were transferred to the war zones of Zimbabwe. There, according to Zipra accounts, when Zipra met Zanla ‘they faced each other as enemies’ (Alexander et al, 2000:147).

A central feature of Zanu’s last two war years, was the experience in the rapidly growing camps located mainly in Mozambique. In Mozambique, Zanu camps consisted of both refugees and Zanla recruits being trained for guerrilla warfare (Pandya 1988:51). Towards the end of the war, the flow of recruits and refugees to the camps was massive. At the end of 1977 Mozambican camps reportedly held 10,000 Zanla recruits, and 29,000 refugees (Martin/Johnson 1981:276). At the end of 1978, it was reported that Zanu had 40,000 recruits in the camps, and 80,000 refugees. Finally at the end of the war, UNHCR reported assisting 150,000 people in Zanu camps (Pandya 1988:68–69;197).

73 For elaboration, see Frederikse 1990: 227–229.

74 What Bhebe does comment on later in his paper is, that as ‘Zanu was converting large parts of the country into its followers, Zapu did almost nothing and therefore lost a lot of ground to its competitor’ (Bhebe 1990:19).

75 The accuracy of the numbers given for Zanla recruits is difficult to verify. Zanla claims must be seen in the war context, including inadequate record keeping and the need to secure international support.
seven so called base camps, where the bulk of the people stayed. The conditions at the camps were generally poor, with constant shortages of medicines and food. Although most of the camps had self-reliance projects producing food, they had to rely on external supplies. Military training, politicisation and education were important elements in the daily activities. The political training entailed the camp population to be politically conscientised about the liberation war. Academic education primarily catered for school children and to some extent adult literacy and skills training.

As Mugabe’s goal of ‘vigorous and total mobilisation’ was carried out in the camps, it was also set in motion inside Rhodesia. However, the war was wearing out both combatants and civilians, and in a combination of factors, Zanla guerrilla legitimacy in the rural areas weakened. The operational areas were deployed with units of newly trained guerrillas, who were both younger and less trained than their predecessors, whilst some veterans in the field began to degenerate into semi-banditry. Furthermore, intensified military pressure from the government affected both guerrillas and civilians, whilst civilians were also increasingly squeezed by the growing numbers of Zanla guerrillas who demanded food and supplies (Ranger 1986:386–390). Ranger notes that ‘Complaints became so frequent and widespread that observers both within and outside the guerrilla movements began to fear a wholesale collapse of rural support’ (Ranger 1986:386). The greatest factor seems to have been unjustified and erratic violence against civilians, which occurred in combination with alcohol abuse and disrespect towards social customs. According to a report filed to the Catholic Commission (CCJP), once certain units had established control in an area, their authority was used for causes other than that of the liberation struggle, whilst cruelty towards civilians increased. The deterioration was elaborated:

In general as they [Zanla guerrillas] establish control in an area they become more cruel and sadistic. They listen to rumours and reports from small children and without making any serious effort to find out the truth, they beat innocent people to death. No respect is paid to elders and long established respected customs are scoffed at.... Local people are asked to attend meetings at great risk to their own lives.... Because of their desire to show their authority... they are defeating their causes in some areas. People are wary of the war and of suffering imposed by so many different groups (Ranger 1986:389).

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76 These were Mavudzi, Doroj, Tronga, Gondola, Xai-Xai, Memo and Matenga. In addition to base camps, Zanu had also transit camps and staging posts. For elaboration, see Pandya 1988:47–52.

77 For elaboration on education in Zanu camps, see Chung 1995:139–146.
The strain of the war affected combatants and civilians alike, however, civilians were in a defenceless position. Faced by the Rhodesian enemy, whilst in places being mistreated and traumatised by their own prospective liberators, caused civilians not only to endure fear but to live with suspicion. The Smith government’s divide and rule policy, both in terms of civilians (RSF buying informers) and a Zanu-Zapu (augmented division through propaganda), caused an ongoing lookout for internal enemies. A civilian recalls:

It was a big problem. There was so much suspicion. It was all very sensitive. The boys suspected many people to be informers. If you did anything against them, you could be taken as an informer. It was quite sad – some people lost their lives being suspected that they were informers.... I think later both Zipra and Zanla started to realise that some people had been murdered for no good reason (Frederikse 1982:217).

The process of enemy location played into local tensions and politics. Kriger notes that in the process of mobilising rural support, coercion played an important role in relation to differentiation in rural society along the lines of gender, wealth, age and lineage lines (Alexander 1995:177). Thus, in the quest to locate the ‘imperialist’ internal enemy, scores were at times settled amongst local enemies. A Zanla political commissar notes:

One problem that I encountered was that of some jealousy among some of the masses, to the point that some would try to incriminate others, by alleging that they were sell-outs.... Then we could eventually discover that some of these masses had become jealous, trying to help their own positions. That was the main problem I encountered in working with the masses (Frederikse 1982:217).

Violence became entrenched in all aspects life, as the war tore in the rural social fabric. The guerrilla authority to judge those presumed guilty, and administer a punishment perceived ‘just’, came to be extended into the local society. The Zanla guerrillas used the villagers as their informers in order to detect an internal enemy, thereby placing powers of life and death with the civilians. This caused detrimental processes of differentiation and shifts in the local power structures. Similarly as it was perceived a just cause to identify an internal enemy, violent means to punish the person or taking its life, also evolved to be an acceptable pattern. A school-teacher in Chibi recalls:

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I must point out this one: when one was thought to be a sell-out, which could be either true or false, one could fall victim. The detection of a sell-out was done by the people. They would say ‘This one we think is not a good person’. The guerrillas were not prophets, to say ‘Amongst you there is one who is bad’. As a whole, the people were good, they tried to educate a person who they thought could be a sell-out. But we, the people, passed the last judgement (Frederikse 1982:218).

Thus, Zanla’s ‘vigorous and total mobilisation’ had several effects. The intensification of the war pressed the Rhodesian security forces to the extreme, causing enemy losses militarily, materially and morally. However, Zanla’s mobilisation also excercbated division and violence in the rural areas. This occurred firstly, through the Zanla guerrillas actively using violence as a method of instilling authority. Secondly, through the location of power to rule over ‘right and wrong’ in the hands of a differentiated rural population. Lastly, through erratic and uncalled for violence due to guerrilla misconduct.

The negative effect of Zanla guerrilla activity and the subsequent deterioration of legitimacy were taken seriously by the Zanu Central Committee. Solutions were debated, however, before a plan of action could be executed party energies were re-channeled to a new development in the liberation struggle – the Lancaster House Conference (Ranger 1986:390). Before turning to settler negotiations however, Zapu’s path to Lancaster House will be traced below.


For Zapu and Zipra, the two last years would bring dramatic change to warfare strategies and their implementation. In 1977 Zipra recruitment had rapidly increased and entry to training camps was at its peak. Dabengwa states that in mid-1978 there was ‘almost sufficient presence of guerrilla forces in most Zipra operational areas’, adding that deployment of more forces would have created confusion and potentially risking a loss of the initiative (Brickhill 1995:52,66). Nevertheless, the RSF’s airborne attacks and the heavily defended garrisons into which most of the RSF in the region had retreated, presented difficulties for the guerrillas. This situation caused Zapu to deploy the first batch of their regular forces, including artillery and anti-aircraft units. The introduction of heavier weapons allowed the guerrillas to increase their offensive capacity, and during 1978 attacks on Kariba and Chirundu towns took place, including RSF garrisons. In the implementation of the new capacities, two problems however crystallised. The guerrillas lacked infantry training enabling them to fully use the capacity of their weapons and forge the advantage they had. Secondly, lack of training also prevented
the consolidation of successful campaigns, as the guerrilla units were not trained to hold defensive positions. Meanwhile, external training of conventional military forces had been under way, although numbers and the precise nature of the training remained a secret. By November 1978, these forces were nevertheless well established. However, the organisation lacked a formulated strategy for the strategic and co-ordinated integration of guerrilla and regular forces, as well as a Zapu decision authorising deployment (Brickhill 1995:53–55).

A framework for such decision-making was a Zapu High Command conference in Lusaka, in November 1978. The new strategy decided upon at the conference was heavily influenced by the Vietnamese experience, and was called the ‘Turning Point’. Central to the strategy was for Zipra forces to get full control of semi-liberated areas, and through regular forces hold the territory and consolidate the gain. This in turn would allow the formation of rear bases where the regroupment of big armed forces could take place, ‘in order to achieve supremacy in attack, and at a given point and at a given time to annihilate the enemy’ (Brickhill 1995:56). The Turning Point strategy was an attempt to develop conditions for ‘mobile warfare’, where the guerrillas were fighting to exhaust enemy forces, economic resources and morale, whilst the regular forces were to inflict military defeats. According to Dabengwa it was the transitional phase to develop ‘our war strategy and gear it to that final goal of military victory’ (Brickhill 1995:59). Directly following the conference decision, commanders set about implementing the new policy. To assist with the preparation and the equipment, Zapu turned to the Soviet Union. The organisation asked for an acceleration of air crew and ground force training, and a speed-up of the delivery of tanks, armoured cars and personnel carriers. Soviet authorities agreed to the request, and assured that aircrew trainees would be ready by the end of 1979 (Nkomo 1984:196). The Turning Point strategy had great implications on the Zipra army inside Rhodesia, bringing changes regarding command and control, logistical arrangements and the influx of heavy military equipment. Simultaneous to the re-organisation of forces, final preparations began for a major military offensive aimed to end the liberation war. This plan was called the ‘Zero Hour Operation’ (Brickhill 1995:55–59).

The primary intention of the Zero Hour plan was to launch a co-ordinated guerrilla and regular force offensive on several geographical fronts simultaneously. Five conventional battalions with artillery support were to seize bridgeheads in the northern front at Kanyemba, Chirundu and Kariba to enable the crossing of Zipra regular forces with armour and artillery. To secure Zipra’s airforce to enter from Angola, attacks were to be mounted at three airfields (Kariba, Victoria Falls, and Wankie). The
ground forces would thereafter have cover from Zipra MIG fighters. The main goal was for the regular forces to seize and hold rear bases along the Zambian border, in support of the offensive taking place inside Rhodesia. There, in three fronts79 and in several lines of advance, guerrilla forces were to attack and capture local strategic sites. Local party branches were intimately involved, as they were to organise civilian support for the attacks. Finally, specialised commandos were simultaneously going to launch attacks in urban areas (Brickhill 1995:61–62).

The implementation of the Zero Hour plan set in motion massive operations in Zambia and Rhodesia. In early 1979 large quantities of arms and ammunition were cached in Rhodesia. Zipra troops active in Rhodesia got a considerable boost of war materials, logistical support as well as medicine (Alexander et al, 2000:142–143). In Zambia Zipra began transport of heavy war materials and great troop movements into the escarpment of the Zambezi river. In May 1979 the Rhodesian Intelligence Digest reported:

It is reliably reported from Zambia that there is a large-scale build-up of Russian military forces and equipment in the country. Up to 50 Russian transport planes daily have been seen on the Lusaka runways.... The military equipment is largely offensive... mostly tanks, artillery and heavy machine guns.... There is much talk of an offensive against Rhodesia, spearheaded by Nkomo's terrorist forces and some elements of the Zambian army (Cilliers 1985:190).

Reportedly the RSF was well aware of the Zipra Zero Hour plan following a successful Selous Scout' operation, where high-ranking Zipra commanders were captured and interrogated (Cilliers 1985:189; Ellert 1993:79).80 In reaction, RSF launched several pre-emptive raids into Zambia during 1979. After some less effective attempts, the Rhodesian Air Force launched in October 1979 massive air attacks in Zambia targeting Zipra camps. The settler air force was met with heavy resistance, and conventional military battles ensued lasting hours and at times days. Described from the Rhodesian perspective, it was noted that:

The effectiveness of Zipra passive counter measures is illustrated by the air strikes against Mulungushi camp northeast of Lusaka during 1979. Subjected to twelve Canberra and eighteen Hunter sorties over a period of two days, Zipra forces remained dug-in throughout the attack,

79 For geographical details, see Brickhill 1995:61.
80 Nkomo writes in his autobiography that he believed the Zero Hour plan was known to the Rhodesians due to British intelligence (Nkomo 1984:197).
sustaining only 7 deaths and 30–40 wounded despite the expenditure of thousands of kilograms of explosives. This was the second bombing attack on Mulungushi (Cilliers 1985:189).

In late October 1979 18 Rhodesian aircraft attacked Zipra’s Chinynyunu camp in Zambia holding 4,500 troops. The camps’ commander describes Zipra resistance:

The attack lasted for one hour and thirty minutes, but they could only do random bombing very fast.... Moreover they were bombing outside the garrison because the firepower was too much.... I even heard the commander of the jet fighters through our means of communication saying ‘I want that target destroyed. Come on, get inside’. The pilot said ‘I cannot get inside. The firepower is too much’ (Brickhill 1995:63).

The Rhodesian military experience fighting Zipra forces was also documented, noting that:

From the outset, it was very apparent that the Rhodesians were up against a vast assortment of military hardware – and an opposition whose discipline and determination were outstanding (Brickhill 1995:62).

The Rhodesians were aware that by mid 1979 Zipra had nearly 20,000 soldiers in Zambia and additional forces in Angola, therefore concluding that ‘the preparation and strength of Zipra forces and camps soon made it evident that attacks on main camps were becoming too costly’ (Cilliers 1985:189, 192). Unable to confront the Zipra forces in battle, a defensive strategy was decided upon. The RSF accordingly destroyed crucial Zambian railway links in order to halt Zipra’s military equipment flow, as the ‘rate and extent of supply had reached alarming proportions’. The strategy also aimed at preventing any Zipra armoured columns from arriving at the launch points, and to prevent a build-up of troops. This objective was reached through destroying nine road bridges into Rhodesia, as well as rail and road links between Zambia and Tanzania (Cilliers 1985: 189, 191, 192). Despite the magnitude of the Rhodesian military interventions, Zipra’s military build-up did not come to a halt, nor did it drastically affect the Zero Hour plan.

The Zero Hour plan was to take effect in the rainy season of 1979 (October-November), but was delayed due to hold-ups in the Soviet pilot training. At this point the Lancaster House conference had assumed, and the launch of the Zipra offensive had to be discussed by the Zapu War Council convened in London. The choice was to set the plan in motion without air cover, or wait. The latter was decided. Once the decision was to be made, it was irreversible. Nkomo noted that ‘Once we said go, we would have to go – but meanwhile there was a chance of fi-
nal victory by negotiation' (Nkomo 1984:197). Reportedly, throughout the latter part of the negotiations the Zapu War Council was on the brink of ordering the Zero Hour attacks. According to Nkomo, when the negotiations seemed to grind to a halt due to the land issue, the British government simultaneously became concerned about an imminent Zipra offensive. Margaret Thatcher privately warned Nkomo not to launch any attacks across the Zambezi. Not having air cover, Zapu counted on crossing the Zambia-Rhodesia border anyway, and the Zipra High Command was ordered into full alert for the offensive (Brickhill 1995:64). Nkomo noted that:

> On the swift conclusion of the Lancaster House talks, in success or in failure, depended the start of a military operation that would certainly have involved an intensification of the war, and could have escalated into an international conflict. Nobody outside my inner circle knew exactly how much was at stake in a speedy conclusion to the conference (Nkomo 1984:198).

As the suspense was held, the Frontline States intensified pressure for Zapu and Zanu to settle in negotiation. The Zapu War Council hesitated in their decision-making, resulting in the moment of possible launch having passed. The land issue was side manoeuvred, and a settlement was reached (Brickhill 1995:65). The Zero Hour plan was rolled back, and the new Zimbabwe was to be born without having been brought to fore by a massive air/ground military offensive causing deaths, injuries and damage — but also without a settlement of power forces.

Zapu’s late liberation war strategy caused much alarm in various camps. It also became the source for a variety of perceptions which later proved hard to alter. As outlined above, both the Rhodesian security forces and CIO were aware of the Zapu build-up in Zambia, and the material support extended by the Soviets. The details of the plan however, were originally a military secret not even known to all Zipra members (Nkomo 1984:196, Brickhill 1995:59). As the war intensified rumours and assumptions regarding Zapu’s plans began to flourish. Zapu nevertheless chose not to communicate any details of its plan even to its partner in the Patriotic Front, – albeit Zapu’s support of a Zipra-Zanla merger. Nkomo explained in his autobiography:

> For security reasons, the plan was not co-ordinated with the Zanla army — but we assumed that when our attack began, Zanla would at once press into renewed guerrilla activity, engaging large numbers of Rhodesian troops on the eastern front (Nkomo 1984:197).
The secrecy and rumours surrounding Zapu’s military build-up in Zambia, laid the ground for multiple views of the party’s intentions. Furthermore, secrecy was fertile ground for enemy disinformation campaigns. Consequently, Zapu’s military strategy was communicated - in a variety of versions - amongst all parties of the war.

The dominant impression circulating at the time, seemed to be a perception that Zapu was intentionally preventing the intervention of Zipra forces in the liberation war, whilst Zanla guerrillas did the bulk of the fighting. Reportedly, Zanu leaders resented Zapu’s decision not to deploy all its forces in the guerrilla warfare, causing tension between the armies and in the Patriotic Front (Callinicos 1981:44; Frederikse 1990:360 #6). The objective of this Zapu policy, the perception held, was to wait until both Rhodesians and Zanla forces had exhausted their capacities, and then strategically move in and take over both Rhodesia and Zanu. This view was also linked to a perception of an international communist threat, whereby Zapu’s intentions were interwoven with expansionism of Soviet style communism. The perception held that the Zapu intended Rhodesia and Zanu take-over was supported by the Soviet Union, and that the Soviet Union would, through the Zapu alliance, maintain its own influence in an independent Zimbabwe.

From Zapu’s perspective, this was obviously not the described path of actions. Contrary to the Rhodesian belief of the USSR being behind the Zero Hour plan (Cilliers 1985:191), the Turning Point strategy was an authentic Zapu plan, which emerged from Zapu’s long-standing debate on military strategy. According to Zipra military leaders, the Soviets had no role in determining the strategy, but were approached for its application. However, when presented with the plan, Soviet military advisors expressed serious reservations about the Zero Hour offensive. Zapu had to put in considerable effort to persuade the Soviet officials that the plan was ‘both necessary and workable’. Furthermore, despite having achieved consent amongst military advisors, the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee remained ‘wary of the plan’ (Brickhill 1995:60).

What was further not disclosed for other parties of the war, was the Zero Hour plan being a component of the Turning Point strategy. Based on Brickhill’s description, the decision to train and combine regular soldiers with guerrilla forces, arose from the guerrilla war situation. As Zapu assessed the Rhodesian war effort being severely weakened, the crystallisation of the Zero Hour plan took place. Military leaders believed that the RSF being on the defensive, created an opening for a massive launch providing a decisive strategic victory (Brickhill 1995:71). Thus, in Zapu perception the sequence of actions were seen in a different light, in which the Zero Hour plan
was part of a larger context (the Turning Point strategy), as well as tied to a historical moment (Rhodesian military exhaustion). In this view, Zipra forces in Zambia were not ‘held back’ for Zapu political or military advantage, but were trained and prepared for a massive co-ordinated ground-air attack.

However, Zapu did not officially communicate its plans, and the top-secret military strategy took on a life of its own. If the perceptions circulating were the work of CIO disinformation campaigns cannot be fully established. Brickhill concludes that the little that has been written about Zapu’s late war strategy, has been ‘grossly misleading, often deliberately so’. He further claims that a cause of the deception was a successful Rhodesian Central Intelligence (CIO) campaign, which included two components (Brickhill 1995:59). The first component was a CIO effort to depict the Zipra military build-up as ‘Soviet expansionism’ in an attempt to negatively influence Western countries not to support the Patriotic Front alliance. In order to succeed, Soviet involvement needed to be emphasised and demonstrated, which was achievable through the noticeable Soviet supported military build-up in Zambia. (Zanu’s Chinese link was less visible). The political appeal by the Rhodesians to Western forces was to prevent the ‘spread of communism’ in Africa, and influence the outcome of the power shift in Rhodesia to bring a moderate leader to the fore.\(^{81}\) Thus, the CIO depicted the PF being under heavy communist influence and where Soviet expansionism became part of the parcel, – a leadership unacceptable to Rhodesians, and hopefully to Western forces as well.

The second component of CIO’s disinformation scheme was to intensify a campaign long under way – to bolster division and conflict between Zanu and Zapu. The preferred short-term effect would be a split in the PF, causing difficulties in the settlement negotiations, whilst the long-term effect stretched into post-independence. Conflict and destabilisation caused by disunity between Zanu and Zapu, would demonstrate the Rhodesian government’s long sought point, that Africans were not ‘ready’ to rule Rhodesia.

Considering CIO’s track record and the circumstantial developments, it is likely that the perceptions circulating were planted by the Rhodesian intelligence. Planted disinformation found fertile ground amongst Rhodesian soldiers, many of them carrying preconceived ideas about Shona/Zanla-Ndebele/Zipra fighting capacity and tactics. In a description of the Rhodesian war effort, the following claim was put forward:

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\(^{81}\) Such a leader was the African prime minister in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, Abel Muzorewa, who was seen to be a puppet of white power.
It can be accepted that the planned Zipra operation was to be a concerted bid by Nkomo and his Soviet backing to forestall Zanu (i.e. Chinese) political or military victory.... In contrast to Zanla, the majority of whose forces were inside Rhodesia at the time of the Lancaster House talks, the larger part of Zipra was still in Zambia.... Nkomo had been planning a conventional onslaught to regain the military initiative he had lost to Zanla in 1969–1976 (Cilliers 1985: 190, 191).

A personal view mirroring the same line of thought was put forward by a CIO member right after the war:

Myths build up very easily.... You found that whites had more respect for the Ndebeles than for the Shona – this whole idea of the Ndebele as the warrior tribe, a prouder race, dating back to colonisation. That also figured in their view of Zipra and Zanla. Zanla had a damned sight more forces in the area, a lot more; their intelligence network was wider, and they infiltrated further. But we saw Zipra as more disciplined, better fighting crowd. Don’t forget, they hadn’t really been utilised. Most of them were sitting up in Zambia. There were the theories that Nkomo was holding on, until such a time as he might form a stronger power base, that he was seeing how the Zanla war went before he fully committed his own troops. They were better trained. Zanla relied on numbers. Zanla, as far as I was concerned, were a bloody shambles. They would never stand and fight – it was all, well, terrorist tactics you dealt with. Many were locally recruited and locally trained. But they had the advantage of numbers and being on the ground with the locals (Frederikse 1982:228).

The ‘theories’ that Nkomo held back deployment for the benefit of his own power position were not only current amongst the Rhodesians. They also circulated in Zanu and Zanla, causing the emergence of a long-lived perception that Zipra ‘pursued a baffling strategy of apparent inactivity’ (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:7). Mugabe twice in 1982 made reference to such a position, stating at one public occasion that ‘Zanu had uncovered a plan in 1977\(^2\) called “Zero Hour”, in which Zapu wanted Zanu to use their arms to liberate Zimbabwe, while Zapu kept its weapons to fight Zanu after liberation (‘Youths to’, 1982; ‘Zapu plotted’, 1982). Later similar perceptions amongst Zanu leaders were noted by an observer who concluded:

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\(^2\)The fact that Mugabe used 1977 as date for the ‘uncover’ may either signal a memory slip of the years, or traces of disinformation, as according to Brickhill’s description, in 1977 the ‘Zero Hour’ plan was not yet conceived.
Many of the Zanu leadership, particularly those who had themselves been personally involved in the guerrilla war, believed that their efforts and the blood of their comrades had been primarily responsible for the downfall of white rule; they felt that Zipra forces had done less than their share of the fighting and, moreover, had been deliberately kept out of the battle for use at a later date. Noting their armaments were suited for a conventional war and how Nkomo had not committed them wholeheartedly to the liberation struggle, certain Zanu politicians were not averse to believing that Nkomo’s long term plan, aided and encouraged by the Soviet Union, was to watch while the white settler bull elephant and the Zanla rhinoceros fought almost to a standstill and then move in his more conventional forces to establish a victorious position over both other armies (Hodder-Williams 1983:6).

In Zanla the Zero Hour plan was not left as a rumour only, but was officially addressed. As a Zanla member during the war, Lt.-Col. E. Munemo, recalls being briefed regarding the Zero Hour plan, stating ‘We were aware of it, to all of us it was an open secret’ (interview E. Munemo, 1996). In Munemo’s assessment, Zanu and Zanla knowledge of Zapu’s military strategy was channelled through the OAU’s International Committee, who allegedly was concerned about an emerging internal division in Zimbabwe comparable to Angola. In Munemo’s view ‘OAU must have assisted both parties to know’. He further elaborated:

We were all aware of the two strategies [Zanla and Zipra], that they were different. The Zero Hour plan looked at a non-negotiated settlement, a military defeat, whereas Zanla was looking at a political-military progression – where the military would know where to end and the politicians would take off. The point is that there was no mention of where Zanla was going to fit in the Zero Hour plan. My assumption is that “if we can defeat the Rhodesian army, we move on to the next” [Zanla]. That suspicion was with Zanla (interview E. Munemo, 1996).

Thus, although Brickhill claims that ‘the “Zero Hour” operation and its details were the most guarded Zapu secret of the war’ (Brickhill 1995:59), it seems as though all parties of the war had some knowledge of the strategy. Even Nkomo gave a public hint in an interview in 1978, stating that ‘As we move into the new rainy season there will be a dramatic change. The whole thing [war] will be over before the end of this first quarter next year’ (‘Zimbabwe’ 1978:22). Nkomo’s as-
essment of the war shortly being over obviously could have tied to a number of occurrences, but seems time wise to fit with the Zero Hour scheme.\(^\text{83}\)

Consequently, it seems as ZAPU’s well guarded secret took at the end of the war a life of its own – with some well guided Rhodesian help – and transformed into a myth in which ZIPRA’s late war effort was seen in a highly negative light. The myth was carried by a diversity of perceptions which would turn out to have a long life, as in 1991 Bhebe/Ranger writes that ‘the usual picture of ZIPRA’ being ‘a do-nothing army finally forced into inappropriate militaristic tactics by its Soviet advisers’ (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:8). During this perceptions’ ‘shelf-life’, some of its proponents had however taken definite positions in the Matabeleland conflict.

4.m. The Lancaster House Agreement

The Lancaster House conference (LHC) was the last settlement negotiation effort in a chain of attempts dating back to the mid-1970s.\(^\text{84}\) Each occasion had included variations not only in content, but also in actors. The LHC was partly a result of previous trials, but were now also coloured by the Rhodesian government’s pressed military situation, and the Frontline state’s acute pressure on the Patriotic Front to end the war through negotiations.

Prior to the LHC there was a political pressure mounted in the United States and Britain for recognition of the Muzorewa government elected in 1979, and in several camps it was commonly assumed that the newly elected Margaret Thatcher would formalise this recognition. However, did this not take place. With pressure having been excerpted at the Commonwealth Heads of State conference held in August 1979, the British instead called the parties together at Lancaster House in September 1979 for a last attempt to settle the ‘Rhodesian question’ through negotiation (Ohlson/Stedman 1994:86).

The parties to the conference were the British, the Patriotic Front delegations led by Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, and Abel Muzorewa’s delegation that included Ndabaningi Sithole and Ian Smith. The objective of the LHC for the British government was to strike a compromise between the white settlers and the African national-

\(^\text{83}\) In general, any ZAPU comments from the liberation war period regarding the allegations of the regular units intended for use in the post war period, are not available in the literature. This may well be linked to the imbalance in research and history description mentioned in the introduction of the chapter. In current material, Dabengwa makes reference to the allegations, stating that at the time ZAPU found them ‘nonsensical’ as the regular forces were to defend liberated areas – and thus not intended for post war ZAPU use (Dabengwa 1995:35).

\(^\text{84}\) For a description of the various settlement attempts, see for example Nzombe 1989:162–196.
ists, which would include ‘constitutional safeguards’ for the settler minority (Mandaza 1987:34). The general framework of the negotiations included three interrelated issues: the constitution, the transitional arrangements, and the cease-fire. After three months of negotiations the Patriotic Front accepted a proposal regarding the constitution which included 20 reserved seats for whites (out of 100) in the House of Assembly; continuity in the judiciary, public services, police force and defence force; dual citizenship; and a bill of rights. However, the most controversial issue regarding the draft constitution dealt with land ownership. The British position was that all private property should be protected from compulsory acquisition, and that any legal acquisition had to be on a willing seller/willing buyer basis in accordance with market prices, and remittable outside the country. This position was unacceptable to the PF who was waging the liberation war on the premise that land was going to be more equitably divided in independent Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the acquisition of land based on market value would ruin the new country’s economy, according to the PF. The negotiations threatened to reach a deadlock over the land issue, but was put back on track through assurances from the British and the Americans that multinational programs to assist in land, agricultural and economic development programs were to be set up (Patel 1988:456–457; Nzombe 1989:185–186).

Negotiations regarding the transitional period, which covered the time period between signing of the agreement and the elections to be held in Zimbabwe, concerned who would have authority to rule during this extremely sensitive period. An agreement was reached that the British would assume total political power in Rhodesia under a governor, who would have both executive and legislative powers. The Rhodesian army and police as well as Zanla and Zipra would be responsible to him. This meant that the Muzorewa government had to step down, until a new government was to be formed after the elections.

Finally, the remaining negotiations concerned the cease-fire. This proved to be difficult as the British and the PF had fundamental differences regarding this final phase. The disagreements were specifically related to the status of the Rhodesian security forces, the integration of the three armies, the Commonwealth monitoring force, and dangers of external military interventions. A serious deadlock developed as the PF took a hard-line stand and refused the British proposals. An agreement was finally reached after consultations with the Front line states, and the British had reworked their proposal. Subsequently all parties signed the Lancaster House agreement on December 21, 1979 (Nzombe 1989:189).

The three months of a seemingly endless number of meetings and discussions, were filled with intense political activity. A plethora of views and observations re-
garding each parties’ objectives and hidden agendas emanated from this complex process, and formed a body of perceptions of the way in which power was agreed to be transferred, and of who the apparent ‘losers’ and ‘victors’ of the agreement were. Disregarding the cleavages between Zanu and Zapu, the outcome of the Lancaster House agreement was generally seen as a setback for the Patriotic Front, if considering the objectives both parities had set for themselves in the course of the armed struggle. As the PF was circumvented from winning a military victory over the settler state, power transfer and social transformation solely based on the PF’s premises was excluded. Instead, the white settler colonial state was to remain intact to a great extent. Furthermore, the land issue remained unresolved, as for ten years the new constitution would safeguard that local land interests would not be fundamentally challenged (Mandaza 1987:38–39).

The Lancaster House agreement brought peace in Rhodesia and independence to Zimbabwe, but at an extremely high cost. The fight against oppression and discrimination transformed in the negotiations into questions of racial oppression and discrimination, and subsequently into efforts of racial reconciliation. Whilst these areas were addressed but remained structurally unresolved, tension and conflict within the liberation movements remained entirely unaddressed in the Lancaster House agreement. What was thus achieved was a resolution-delay, not only concerning white economic power dominance, but the cleavage between Zanu and Zapu.

4.n. The Break-Up of the Patriotic Front

During the LHC the Patriotic Front pushed the agenda of the liberation movements jointly. However, coming to an end of the settlement negotiations, also brought an end of unity between Zanu and Zapu.

As has been outlined earlier, ambiguities in Zanu regarding the Patriotic Front came to the fore at an early stage of the PF construction, as Zanu delayed implementations of both an army and party merger. Zapu, on the other hand, sought actively for a merger. During the LHC, Nkomo repetitiously made clear Zapu’s stand on contesting the first independence elections jointly. He got support for this position from Zanu’s military commander Josiah Tongogara, and the two met in negotiation on several occasions during the LHC (Smith 1981:156; Nkomo 1984:200). However, as the proceedings evolved, Zanu’s Central Committee began to put pressure to dissolve the PF before the upcoming elections. A settlement was close, tactics now turned towards the upcoming power shift, and the scramble for votes. A joint Zanu-Zapu platform was expected to bring a certain victory over Muzorewa’s party. However, it would also bring power sharing with Zapu, and the
leadership question between Mugabe and Nkomo had to be addressed. In the final week of the LHC, Tongogara strongly argued for a joint campaign, but when the matter came to vote in the Zanu Central Committee, he was overwhelmingly outvoted. A fear amongst those opposing the PF was that Nkomo's negotiation efforts with the Smith regime prior to LCH, would turn voters away from the PF, and subsequently be put for Muzorewa's benefit (Smith 1981:156–157). However, in Dabengwa's view, unity came to an end as elements in the Zanu leadership vigorously opposed a joint election effort, fearing that Nkomo would emerge as the leader of the Patriotic Front in post-independence Zimbabwe (Dabengwa 1995:35). Zanu's decision to break-up the PF was not communicated to Zapu, whose leaders were scheduled to meet Zapu counterparts to discuss election preparations (Nkomo 1984:200). Instead Mugabe left for a meeting with the Frontline states in Dar-Es-Salaam. There, Zanu's decision to break up the PF came under severe criticism, and fears were voiced regarding the consequences of the split. Also, dividing the nationalist vote would be a credit to Muzorewa, the Frontline leaders argued (Smith 1981:157). Mugabe brought the issue back to the Zanu Central Committee, where Tongogara with the moral support of Machel and Nyerere argued for the PF. Meanwhile Zapu sent a delegation from Zambia to speak to Mugabe, which however had to return without having made any positive impact for PF's survival. The Zanu Central Committee had met again, and their decision to campaign alone remained (Smith 1981:158). The decision to break up the Patriotic Front was in Nkomo's view, not only a deception towards him and the party, but also towards the Zipra guerrillas (Nkomo 1984:200).

5. Concluding Remarks

The overall objective of this chapter has been to trace developments in Rhodesian history, facilitating the understanding of the emergence and evolution of the Mata-beleland conflict. In doing so, two collections of perceptions have been identified: firstly, perceptions tied to a Shona and Ndebele dichotomy; and secondly, perceptions linked to Zanu-Zapu political power competition. These two collections of perceptions subsequently became closely related when ethnicity became an issue in the nationalist parties. The fact that all nationalist organisations from SRANC to Zapu

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85 An election victory for Muzorewa's UANC would enable Zimbabwe's political and economic affairs to remain firmly in the hands of white interests. Therefore Muzorewa had British and South African support, which with regards to the South Africans translated into an unprecedented cash flow to UANC for a successful execution of their election campaign (Mandaza 1987:40; Ellert 1993:193). As Zanu and Zapu were aware of UANC's external political support, the otherwise less significant UANC posed a possible threat to the nationalists in the election campaign.
(excluding Zanu), made a conscious effort to achieve ethnic and regional balance between the Ndebele and the Shona, exhibits sensitivity to ethnic divisions (Sithole 1980:19). Despite this sensitivity and apparent signals of ethnic tension in the nationalist movements, no concerted internal effort to study the phenomenon was made.\(^{86}\) Due to this gap, any analysis including ethnicity as a factor, travels much on un-researched ground, and must rely on perceptions rather than data of ethnic division. It is nevertheless clear that when political and military developments partitioned Rhodesia into separate Zanu and Zapu areas, coinciding with the ethnically divided geographical regions, a reinforcement of a Zanu/Shona – Zapu/Ndebele dichotomy took place. Despite this ethnic reinforcement, the engine for the dichotomous set-up seems nevertheless to have been intense power competition between the nationalist organisations – and/or between certain personalities within these structures. With a framework in mind including a geographical, ethnic and political dichotomy which are reinforced by historically deep rooted perceptions, in combination with fierce power competition, certain points, events and issues may be lifted to the fore. These demarcations, chosen for their possible explanatory value of the upcoming Matabeleland conflict, are briefly outlined below.

In Zimbabwe’s recent history, two wars have been fought in which a dominant (white) perception as framework has depicted the Ndebele as disciplined, well organised and courageous fighters, whilst the Shona were perceived to be less trained, lacking central order and control. This historical baggage has been continuously fed and fertilised by the white political establishment, constructing myths in which difference has been repeatedly reinforced. Although in real terms marking the formation of a new political party, the Zapu split in 1963, was to become a demarcation of difference neatly fitting settler perceptions. As fighting between Zanu and Zapu supporters raged in 1963–1964, the establishment stayed clear from police intervention, instead encouraged stereotypical perceptions. However, the actors of the event, reinforced the historical baggage of division by being unable to break patterns of violence, fighting each other with a ‘the winner takes it all’ mentality. These violent clashes between Zanu and Zapu, seems to have rooted in historical memory, and set the tone for competition between the organisations which lasted until 1987. Lacking in tradition of institutional problem solving and

\(^{86}\) According to Sithole, the omission of an internal ethnicity analysis in the Zimbabwe nationalist movements, is tied to three factors: the struggle was conceptualised as one between the blacks and the whites; an internal ‘self’ -analysis in terms of ethnicity would have been a ‘hazardous exercise earning enemies’ in the various ethnic factions – particularly the dominant one; and due to the Marxist discourse at the time, in which ethnicity or tribalism was considered as ‘false consciousness’, the phenomenon was dismissed (Sithole 1980:19–20).

98
democratic decision-making due to colonial dictate, members of the nationalist organisations at times identified each other as enemies – as two sides with irreconcilable difference – and in which the winner emerged at the cost of over-powering the other.

Throughout the liberation war external forces, primarily the OAU and the Frontline states, attempted to bridge the gap between Zanu and Zapu. Whilst supporting the nationalist war efforts, they seemed to look to the final goal of liberation rather than primarily focusing on which nationalist party would bring the liberation and seize power. Furthermore, the nationalist split worked in favour of the settler regime and international reactionary forces, an unfortunate result the African neighbours wanted to do away with. Thus, the liberation war history is filled with externally induced unity attempts, however, with low success rates. Reasons for repeated failure were several. Firstly, externally forced unity agreements executed due to pressure and lacking internal support in one or both organisations, no doubt had less chance to be seriously attempted. Secondly, any type of merger would cause a shift in power structures. According to Dabengwa, the focus of unity attempts in the 1960s and early 1970s was set on the armies rather than the parties, but were aborted ‘as politicians were wary of losing military control’ (Dabengwa 1990:4). Thus, a political agenda had less significance or clout without the weight of military might, a situation neither party was willing to adapt to. However, unity attempts were undertaken, as another factor played a role: opportunism. With fluctuating internal developments in each nationalist party, political and war efforts altered in velocity and momentum. When at a low, both parties’ in different time periods, found a unity agreement opportune to their comparatively lesser fortunate situation, whilst simultaneously the other, – carried by its success – was resisting to shoulder additional burdens. Hence, a third reason for failed unity attempts was power competition, whereby the one with comparative advantage was unwilling to share its gains. Despite the circumstantial, political and military factors negatively influencing unity attempts, both parties and their military wings had unity supporters, particularly regarding an army merger (Dabengwa 1990:4). Tensions and divisions within the parties did produce an ‘internally’ induced unity attempt with the formation of Frolizi. However having been born out of a Zapu split and caused division in Zanu, the new organisation was left in the cold by the two nationalist giants, and for various additional reasons failed to make any significant impact. Consequently, a fourth reason for unity failures seemed to be that unless both parties’ power hierarchies were involved in a unity attempt, a lower level initiative did not seem to carry. Contrary to Frolizi, Zipa was an attempt supported by both Zapu and Zanu central organisations. Successfully re-igniting the libera-
tion war after its impasse, Zipa seemed to be the success story actors and observers had waited for. However, as Zipra and Zanla forces trained and fought together, their disparate political and military strategies caused contradiction and conflict. Thus, unity was difficult to uphold in the face of strategic differences between the Soviet and Chinese inspired tactics. Finally, as the one merger furthest implemented, the Patriotic Front was a political conglomerate which was to bring secure election victory to the nationalists and one united army to the new Zimbabwe. However, as in earlier experience, a competitive edge in the power competition caused the break-up. But an ensured political victory for one of the unity partners, without a merged Zipra-Zanla army, would cause a tremendous post-war security problem. This fact the armed forces were clear about, judging from Dabengwa's observations. Dabengwa notes that in 1979, when the PF construction was under stress, 'the military leaders of both Zipra and Zanla made it abundantly clear that their [the politicians] negative attitude [to unity] would complicate the integration effort after independence' (Dabengwa 1990:4). Dabengwa’s comment opens a window into another layer of complexity. The unity attempts not only encompassed two parties (Zapu and Zanu), but four structures (Zapu/Zipra – Zanu/Zanla). The additional (military) layer of both command and will, caused any decision-making to be unlinear, as organisational rationale, and interests did not always coincide between party and respective army. Subsequently, unity efforts, whether externally induced and/or internally supported, failed due to a number of causes. These causes varied with time and situation, but seemed to be closely linked to the organisations’ internal power hierarchies and the intense power competition between the organisations.87

An important difference between Zanla and Zipra, particularly manifested as the war drew to its end, were their disparate military strategies. As Zanu had adopted a Maoist warfare strategy which included the conscious politicisation of the peasantry into Zanu members, the party’s political and armed wings were entwined with the end goal being not only independence in Zimbabwe, but independence under a Zanu regime. Zapu clearly also fought for the same reasons, to conquer state power, but its army was less politicised and more focused on military objectives. Whilst Zanla simultaneously conducted guerrilla warfare and constructed a Zanu political basis, Zipra greatly relied on existing Zapu structures. Zanu was thus breaking new political ground during the war effort against the settler forces.

87 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to comment on the differentiated interests for merger within each structure. One can only note that there most likely was (great) variation in views of power competition between respective leadership, and rank and file members/soldiers.
This necessarily meant the establishment of legitimacy and subsequently authority to command and rule in the new Zanu areas. For Zanu to establish its authority, it ‘demonstrated power’, which included elements of violence. Brickhill contrasts this to Zapu, whose guerrillas were mainly recruited through the existing (albeit banned) party structure, and were deployed into a framework in which a party structure received them. Subsequently, the establishment of legitimacy and authority in Zipra areas took a different course. A course, according to Brickhill, which was less violent than in Zanla regions. Whether the differences are as clear cut as Brickhill argues, are hard to establish, due to the lack of information and research into Zapu/Zipra liberation war activity. However, for the benefit of this discussion, it is clear that patterns of establishing legitimacy and authority differed between Zanu and Zapu.

Another difference between Zanla and Zipra was Zapu’ decision to convert its warfare into a combined guerrilla and conventional warfare, whilst Zanu remained on its path of guerrilla warfare. Zapu’s decision was mainly founded on an assessment of Rhodesian military exhaustion, allowing – through conventional army battalions – the opening of a strategic offensive. Significantly, the Rhodesian military fatigue was due to a combination of Zanla forces being widely spread and well infiltrated, whilst Zipra forces’ military resources proved beyond RSF’s operational capacity. Thus Zipra’s opportunity was a result of both Zanla’s and Zipra’s war efforts. Simultaneous to the Zapu strategic build-up, the party was pushing an army merger in the Patriotic Front. However, despite the offensive being founded on an opening provided by both armies, and Zapu’s political wish to merge the two fighting forces, Zapu did not disclose its plans to Zanu. Why this was the case is difficult to assess without further information or research. It can only be noted that in the PF, Zanu was demonstrating a clear unwillingness for the parties and armies to merge, thus signalling the possibility of yet another aborted unity attempt. Meanwhile, Zapu knew its geographical spread and support, and could calculate a lesser chance of election victory on a single Zapu platform. Thus, a military offensive, excluding settler negotiations and Zanu involvement, could guarantee a Zapu

Brickhill’s findings were discussed at a history conference in Zimbabwe 1991, where participants suggested that the outlined contrasts between Zanu and Zapu were not as sharp as Brickhill suggested. Modification would be due to the fact that in some areas (such as “Hwange and the north-east”) Zapu was less organised therefore receiving structures would be lacking, whilst in other areas state repression and Muzorewa’s ANC activities would have caused the necessity to rebuild support structures. It was also suggested that Zipra guerrilla legitimacy was also sought through traditional religious structures and/or missions (Bhebe/Ranger 1995:8).
seizure of power. Yet, it was a Zapu decision not to launch the Zero Hour offensive during the Lancaster House conference, for, as Nkomo stated, ‘there was a chance of final victory through negotiation’ (Nkomo 1984:197). It is not clear why Zapu at this historical moment chose for a negotiated settlement, if it was due to external pressure, or due to the risk of the emergence of an international conflict. If so, the decision contradicted the earlier reported Zapu position in which seizing power without relying on negotiations remained a key element in the development of Zapu’s military strategy (Brickhill 1995:60, 71). What factors influenced Zapu to cancel the massive and long prepared for Zero Hour offensive, need yet to be brought in the open. What is however more transparent is the external responses to the Zapu build-up taking place. As elements in Zanu and the RSF perceived Zapu to await also a Zanu exhaustion before massive deployment for a combined Rhodesia and Zanu take-over, – irrespective of it being disinformation or not – the *difference* between the two forces grew in views and memory. In this differentiation, Zapu’s (secret) conventional military force was an important ingredient.

Another important aspect of the liberation war, was the impact of division and violence on both civilians and soldiers. No war is free of brutality. However, in guerrilla warfare in which both warring parties subject local community structures to mobilisation and interrogation, violence in terms of division becomes central. Enemies take different shapes, are both external and internal. In the liberation war, the Rhodesian security forces and the oppressive government represented the external enemy. However, the sinister tactics used by Rhodesian forces faded external enemy boundaries, and caused for enemy hunts within the local communities. The chemical warfare secretly deployed by the Selous Scouts, caused trauma not only due to pain and loss, but due to deaths taking place under inexplicable circumstances. Whilst the civilians were caught and participated in what was at times perceived as a ‘just war’, giving explanatory value and space for war trauma – these deaths could not be absorbed in any framework of understanding. Instead, the casual search was turned inward in the local community in the form of witch-hunts, causing much damage in the social fabric (interview Brickhill, 1992). The internal enemy also appeared in another shape, as the so-called sell-outs or bought informers. Irrespective of shape, those determined ‘internal enemies’ were not received with an abundance of understanding, but were usually severely punished. In such circumstances division and difference became linked to violence. The pattern of punishing internal enemies or internal division was clearly seriously treated within Zanu. The suppression of the Nhari rebellion and the re-establishment of the ‘old guard’ after Zipa, exemplifies this pattern. Mugabe looking back at ‘three rebel-
lious developments' between 1974–1978 within Zanu\(^9\), concluded that the revolutionary path is always 'bedevilled' with deep dissension and contradictions. He stated that 'there must be an ability and capability within the Revolution to resolve them, including sometimes harsh methods or solutions' (‘Zanu’ 1984:6). Although not much research is available regarding Zapu operational regions, violence with regards to sell-outs and dissension is recorded, as is deterioration in guerrilla-civilian relations in the last years of the war (Frederikse 1982:217; interview Brickhill, 1992; Alexander 1995:178). Thus, both within the nationalist movements and amongst civilians, existed perceptions of political problem solving linked to 'harsh methods' and brutality, often in a framework of suspicion. One legacy one may therefore trace to the war was division and difference linked to violence.

After fifteen years of violence, in December 1979 the war was nevertheless over. This did however not signal the end of power competition between Zanu and Zapu, which switched into a higher gear in the event of independence elections. The entry to this actual popular measurement of political strength between Zanu and Zapu, was however not undertaken with seemingly equal amount of enthusiasm between Zanu and Zapu. Whilst Zanu was convinced of a victory, political deception entrenched elements within Zapu, and no doubt traces of fundamental anti-climax amongst Zipra forces due to the aborted Zero Hour offensive, had yet to ebb out. Thus, instead of the nationalist parties starting the new post war era in unity, difference was yet again finding its way in between the two.

Thus, as many important similarities existed between the historically and geographically induced Zapu/Ndebele-Zanu/Shona dichotomy, many differences did too. What would however become significant in the Matabeleland conflict in the 1980s, were not the similarities but the differences. In the conflict it would play a role that Zapu and Zanu operated from two different states; dominated and recruited from different geographical regions; mobilised local senses of identity – unable or unconcerned to generalise them; used ethnic appeals in mobilisation and self-identification; and that dehumanisation of 'the other' was inherently part of the war (Bhebe/Ranger 1995b:32). However, what would play an even more important role were *perceptions of difference* carried by the counterparts of the dichotomy. These perceptions, including a mixture of CIO disinformation; political propaganda and ideology; ethnic identification; religious beliefs; and social values and traditions, amalgamated with actually existing differences, creating for each

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individual his or her own ‘truth’. This highly content rich and inherently uncontestable truth would subsequently lie as a foundation for the historical developments to come, for each and everyone’s decisions to make and actions to take – whether as an individual ‘dissident’ or collectively as a government.