



## Indigenous beliefs and Zimbabwe's War of Liberation: Inside the Metaphysics

Joshua Chakawa<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of History, Heritage & International Studies, Zvishavane Campus, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

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### ABSTRACT

This article is a record of mysterious and miraculous events of the liberation war, as expressed by former combatants on either side of the conflict during the Zimbabwe's liberation war in the 1970s. The research, therefore, widens understanding of African spirituality in times of war. Respondents were drawn from Mashonaland Central and West who were the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) operatives in the respective areas. The special collaboration between guerrillas and spirit mediums in the early 1970s makes it imperative to find out if the taboos of the liberation struggle had any bearing to events which the fighters encountered during the war. Data was collected through studies of secondary sources and oral interviews. The major question, which the research answers is whether there was any relationship between metaphysics and battles which were fought during the war. In answering that question, the study examines African cosmology and reviews the development of relationships between liberation movements and spirit mediums. Lastly, it explores ways in which the metaphysical world manifested itself, how it regulated the behaviour of combatants/forces involved in the war and the living legacies of such beliefs to date. It is pivotal to note that the article contributes to issues of national healing, reconciliation and integration which the Zimbabwean government and other civil society organisations have been trying to spearhead, unsuccessfully though, since the attainment of independence in 1980. With a view of avoiding being cornered within controversial schools of thought, this research is not based on any theory, but on African worldviews in relation to religion.

### KEYWORDS

metaphysics; spirit mediums; guerrillas; mass mobilisation; war veterans; ceremonies

### 1. Introduction

Metaphysics is a philosophical outlook which tries to reach a more embracing total view of reality without neglecting the unique place of individual things in the holism of reality (Etim, 2013 p.12). In other words, metaphysics refers to the spiritual dimension of human nature which cannot be authenticated through scientific investigations but still shape the way humans perceive life. Viriri and Mungwini (2009, p.180) forward that metaphysics means 'after' physics or that which transcends the physical. It involves synthesis of all experiences in order to achieve a coherent whole which gives a complete picture of reality. Such a picture provides a system of morality that establishes right



from wrong; good, and appropriate from bad and inappropriate behaviour (Kazembe, 2009 p. 55). The metaphysical view is an anti-science approach, but nonetheless progressive, and workable for those who are committed to it. It makes use of localised deities such as trees, rivers, hills, pools, forests, caves, animals and so on. These can be manipulated by mankind to cause good and bad things to happen.

The way in which civilians and combatants interacted with the metaphysical world during Zimbabwe's war of liberation was logical to circumstances facing them, then, and to indigenous knowledge they had accumulated over the years. Acceptance of indigenous religious beliefs was perceived in terms of the practical results of the whole idea in the face of existential threats. Despite undergoing rigorous military training, some African combatants who fought in this war embraced indigenous beliefs thereby making the war somehow, a religious one. Guerrilla daily activities were generally begun with some traditional rituals and rounded up the same way.

Particular attention was also paid to the behaviour of wild animals and fellow guerrillas, weather and so on, because all that was religiously symbolic in relation to events likely to unfold. There were also taboos that were associated with the natural environment such as rivers, pools, mountains, caves and forests. Guerrillas were expected to be attentive to all these for their own safety. The taboos and directives were given to the fighters by acclaimed spirit mediums, and elders, in each operational area.

It is because of the above that the armed struggle began with a traditional ceremony in the re-launching of the war by ZANLA in 1972. In a short while, this was followed by the crossing over of the medium of Mbuya Nehanda to Chifombo, and the role of various other mediums in Zimbabwe's war of liberation. From there, focus goes to how guerrillas made daily use of these systems alongside the utility of the rituals to the practitioners. Lastly, the research discusses the present dispensation of reburials and various related ceremonies, currently taking place in Zimbabwe, as an attempt to reincarnate a religion formerly abandoned, but nonetheless crucial to many people in Zimbabwe. The operations of the metaphysical world can be best understood by the long quotation below pointing out that:

Ancient Greeks in 100BC consulted oracles, the Romans used soothsayers and Europe's queens and kings consulted stargazers. In the late 1800, spirit mediumship became recognised as a psychic ability. In 1818, the Fox Sisters of New York, in America, are said to have communicated with a murdered toddler buried in the cellar of their house. In 1900, spirit mediums such as Edythe Meander, Jack Kelly, Florence Becker and Mae Graves Ward began to be recognized. In Britain, one of the first mediums was a Mrs Hyden who operated in London. In 1882, a group of Cambridge scholars founded the Society of Psychical Research, and it was then that the subject of mediumship was recognized. In 2010, the world got to know about an octopus named Paul who predicted correctly the results of all German's matches. In Zimbabwe, a good number of war veterans attribute their participation in the war to the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda, who before being hanged, made a prophecy that her bones would rise again (*Financial Gazette*, 13 August 2010).

The quotation above clearly demonstrates one of the greatest forces in life has ever been the power of religion and Africans themselves are not lost when they are incurably religious. The cooption of traditional beliefs in war falls within the context of African worldviews.

## **2. Methodology**

A total of 12 key respondents took part in the research. They were selected on the basis of their memory of metaphysics in as far as it related to the war of liberation. The study was conducted between 2013 and 2021. At first, it involved long trips to Mt Darwin and Bindura with financial support from Midlands State University's Re- search Board. Later, long trips to Hurungwe, Mashonaland West Province, were also undertaken. Between 2017 and 2021, war veterans were interviewed in various parts of the provinces under discussion. Specific battles, and for Hurungwe, the downing of Air Rhodesia Viscounts in September 1978 and February 1979, were the main focus. Indigenous beliefs, however, ended-up being discussed in the deliberations. This, there- fore, influenced the desire to dedicate a paper, exclusively, on indigenous spirituality. There were more trips to be conducted with a view of collecting more data, but this was blocked by restrictions emanating from the covid-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions.

There is no doubt that data here should have been complemented with visits to the National Archives of Zimbabwe. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the archive which is a major source of primary evidence has remained closed. The worst part of it is that Zimbabwean archives are not yet digitised, hence, files, at the time of writing, could not be accessed online. Primary sources were augmented by both published and unpublished secondary sources. In that direction, the Midlands State University online library remained open throughout the period of study, and did not close even during the pandemic. It was, thus, a key source of secondary information.

## **3. Spirit mediums and mass nationalism**

The role of spirit mediums dates back to the 1896-7 uprisings in Matabeleland and Mashonaland respectively. Thus, the legacy of the spirit mediums, who had participated effectively in the First Chimurenga, was still alive in the 1970s, which explained why the new generation of mediums was equally opposed to the whites and their colonial oppressive system (Bhebe & Ranger, 1995 p. 9). According to Beach (1986, pp. 100-1), the technical term for the spirit of a person of political significance is 'spirit medium' or *mhondoro* or *svikiro* in the Shona language.

The participation of spirit mediums in the liberation struggle comes from a long history of resistance. The spirit of Nehanda continued to play a significant role in mass mobilisation in the Dande area of Mt Darwin. Mhanda (2011 p.102), who was himself a guerrilla during the war, alludes that some spirit mediums accompanied the *svikiro* of Nehanda to Mboroma and Chifombo in Zambia with a number of guerrilla recruits. In view of Nehanda's reputation in the 1896-7 war, it is not surprising that when guerrillas in Dande found her actively supporting the war in their operational zone; they took her away to prevent Rhodesians from treating her as one of theirs. According to Tungamirai (1985 p. 148), 'once the children, the boys and the girls in the area knew that Nehanda had joined the war, they came in large numbers.' With Nehanda safely under ZANLA, and the party Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), she was ballooned into a spirit of the whole nation, thus turning the country into a single spirit province under her. This is the position she continues to, controversially, occupy to the present day. Support was further increased when the spirit medium of Chiwawa and Chiwodzamamera joined the war. All these were representatives of traditional religion with metaphysical powers,

believed to rally people behind the war effort against minority rule. By supporting the war of liberation, these mediums had endorsed the cause as morally upright. The coming of the war made mediums important arbiters of power.

During Zimbabwe's war of liberation, the main duties of spirit mediums evolved around the recruitment exercise, mobilisation of support for the freedom fighters as well as giving spiritual guidance (Mhanda, 2011; Lan, 1985). In political terms, this would entail protection against the enemy, prescription of war strategies and preservation of traditional norms. Fay Chung (2006) is of the same view, that, simple adherence to ethical rules such as respect for life, sexual purity, and care of the environment were of paramount importance in the smooth execution of the war of liberation in Zimbabwe.

It was believed that those who bent the rules in their favour would be punished by the spirits. Therefore, spirit mediums were involved in the recruitment exercise and safe movement of guerrillas from one point to another. In light of the above, guerrillas and African traditional religions were inseparable despite the absence of guidance by spirit mediums in the military training of guerrillas. The spirits, and by extension the god they believed in, would protect guerrillas against enemy firepower. When the war was eventually won, the spirit of Nehanda was assumed to have triumphed over the enemy (*Interview*, Mauye, Mahondo, Village, Mt Darwin, 19 March 2014).

Chung (2006) posits that one of the key tenets of traditional religion in Zimbabwe was the belief that ancestral spirits protected their offspring and would guarantee their welfare, provided that the living respected the rules of their ancestors as mentioned earlier. It should also be noted that some of the freedom fighters were both guerrillas, and sometimes peasants, hence were in a better position to guide the struggle; and this was usually complimented by the support of local indigenous leaders such as *mhondoro*. Kriger (1992) views peasants as having been central to the success of the liberation struggle.

The role of the spirit mediums continued into Mozambique; giving guidance to the war effort as they had done in rural Rhodesia. They had suddenly become unofficial military commanders in charge of indoctrination. Chung (2006) forwards that the role of the traditional religious leaders, during the armed struggle, was to provide spiritual and ideological leadership. In both refugee and military camps, the spirit mediums had their own separate encampment where they practised their religion. This idea is confirmed by Mhanda (2011) who cites an incident at Chifombo camp, in Zambia, where the guerrillas were food-poisoned, and the leadership consulted the spirit of *Sekuru Chidyamayu*, who, in a trance, assured of no loss to life. Mhanda further remarked that the food-poisoning was an attempt by the Rhodesian agent to wipe out the ZANLA guerrillas.

Furthermore, it accords reason that spirit mediums were independent of political leadership, and hence, were free to support or to criticise the political incumbents (Chung, 2006 p.195). As a result, they had a profound effect on the day-to-day business of the liberation struggle. In some cases, however, this made them unpopular with leaders who were found on the wrong end of ethical rules, particularly on sexual purity.

#### **4. Metaphysical aspects of the Zimbabwean war of liberation**

Key respondents to metaphysics and the war were Paradzai Mabhunu, who fought in Mutoko; Chikomba, who was in Mt Darwin; George Rutanhire, one of the

most senior guerrillas; Mauye, who was a medium in Nyazura, and Masango, who was a guerrilla. Their experiences are complimented by those of Magarasadza, a ZIPRA guerrilla, who fought in Mashonaland West, and Bhinya (a former ZIPRA *mujibha*), as well one ex-Security Force Auxiliary operative. While ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrillas could seek guidance from the mediums linked to those who had led the first Chimurenga, African soldiers fighting on the side of Rhodesians, resorted to their family spirits for intervention. Whether one was fighting for Zimbabwe or against it, the metaphysical world with its capacity to hide combatants from opponents, was deemed helpful by respondents who were involved either as insurgents or counter-insurgents.

There is need to highlight that guerrilla training, especially outside Zimbabwe, did not emphasise spiritual issues. According to Chitukutuku (2019), guerrillas who were on the war front had to decide on what worked for them, and one of the safest ways was to cooperate with spirit mediums. One former ZANLA combatant, Paradzai Mabhunu (Chikonohono Township, 20, Chinhoyi, September 2013), revealed that when young men made the decision to go out and fight, none of them sought spiritual guidance. Paradzai Mabhunu indicated 'we were just driven by the admiration of guerrillas. We, however, knew that when parents learnt of our sudden departure, they would surely do something about our protection.'

From Paradzai Mabhunu, another former ZANLA guerrilla, Chikomba, noted that there was no indication of any type of teaching in indigenous/traditional religion during the training of guerrillas. After all, in Tanzania as well as many other parts of Africa, notably eastern Africa countries, helping the struggle, there was no place for traditional religion in the training manuals. Instead, guerrilla warfare and mass mobilisation were emphasised. This has led to the conclusion that ZIPRA sought to conquer the landscape using only military might. However, all conducted interviews, revealed that guerrillas heavily relied on spirit mediums too.

After military training, ZANLA guerrillas often went for further training in ideological indoctrination, mainly in Mozambique. This was intended to make them loyal to ZANU and ZANLA as opposed to ZAPU and ZIPRA as well as other militants in the war. Trainees were exposed to knowledge about the party structures, the beauty of the war they were getting involved in and the good behaviour expected of them as they wedged the war. Still, there were no teachings concerning African traditional religion, and how they were expected to communicate with the African god when confronted with difficult military situations. The main goal was to win the war. Military commanders, like Tungamirai, were to learn more of the traditional religion and tactics for winning hearts and minds from guerrillas who were coming from the front.

Seeking guidance from spirit mediums and traditional leaders was not just a matter of political expediency; it was because of the strong belief in the utility for doing so. According to Lan (1985), those who operated in the Dande area, committed themselves to mediums of Nehanda, Kupara, Chiodzamamera, Chiwawa and Chidyamauyu. They avoided Madzomba because it was believed he was controlled by the whites suggesting that the spirit had long departed him.

Specific events with a metaphysical mark have made an enduring imprint to the lives of former combatants. Disastrous incidences were allegedly avoided through daily traditional rituals. According to Paradzai Mabhunu, day time (which to guerrillas was night as they were preparing to patrol) was begun by traditional prayers. Often, a chosen member of the group led such traditional prayers. Each morning, when guerrillas had returned from villages to their mountain hideouts, the chosen guerrilla would then prune leaves from a *munhondo* tree and utter prayers to heroes/heroines of the liberation starting from Nehanda and Kaguvi, followed by

Chaminuka and other heroes of the first Chimurenga. Throughout the prayers, the said guerrilla would be sprinkling some snuff obtained from spirit mediums of the area, such as Nehoreka, deemed to be the leading spirit of the Korekore people. The leader would then distribute the snuff among his colleagues who in turn sniffed it and threw some of it on the ground, for total security during the night (which in practice was daylight), where they slept. Each individual guerrilla was supposed to say prayers to his own ancestor in order to buttress those said by the group. The same procedure was repeated in the evening when guerrillas were preparing to go into the surrounding villages. Each one of them also carried with him some snuff to use when need arose, for example, in battle.

According to Paradzai Mabhunu, prayers resulted in metaphysical protection by the spirits of the land. Mabhunu gave 3 incidences to clearly illustrate the aforesaid. The first one, he reported, happened at Makochera Village in Mutoko. It was reported that close to the village was a mountain range where the medium of the land had instructed guerrillas not to initiate shooting at the enemy in the event of an accidental confrontation as the enemy was supposed to fire first. Further, no shooting was allowed because the range was called *gwararenzou* (elephants' path).

On one fateful day in 1978, Mabunu indicated that his group was coming from its hideout along the river when they spotted a group of Rhodesian soldiers numbering about 20, descending the mountain in a battle formation, and were within 50 meters range, but suddenly, they changed into an extended line and walked along the mountain to the road where they were ferried by waiting vehicles. For Mabhunu, this incident, therefore, was metaphysics at play which blinded Rhodesians from seeing them as such prevented guerrillas from initiating the battle.

The other metaphysical occurrence took place at Chindenga Base, in the same area. It was reported that around midday 2 fish eagles (*zvapungu*) hovered above guerrillas' encampment. As these two birds did so, they were fighting and stretching their legs as if imitating Rhodesian choppers dropping bombs. Around the same time, Mabunu further reported that a troop of baboons came directly into the camp, dangerously, fighting, and making a lot of noise as they passed. To Mabhunu, who was the commander, this was an indication that a fierce battle was imminent. Mabunu indicated that he immediately told his colleagues to leave in the direction the baboons had taken. And when they were about 3km away from their base; the whole area was bombed from above while small arms were directed to the base. Further, where defeat was clear, the spiritual world was said to have intervened in one way or the other, proving the utility of indigenous religion during the war.

The demands of the war also taught guerrillas to manipulate their situation to please the spirits of the land. Where one of them transgressed by lapsing for sexual relations with local women, he was first thoroughly flogged by his colleagues in the presence of villagers. The guerrilla commander had to take him to the local spirit medium to formerly apologise and pay a fine. To cleanse the whole group of misfortune or untold suffering, a battle had to be quickly organised. In one such incident, the offender was instructed to initiate the battle by throwing a stone at a passing military vehicle along Nyamapanda road. He was to do so while standing so that if the spirits had completely disowned him, he would be shot dead by the enemy. He was not and his group followed by a rocket launcher and other small arms. That way, the group had cleansed itself. The failure by Rhodesians to kill a spiritual offender illustrated the strength of his own ancestors in saving him.

ZANLA guerrillas from the north-east, often visited the mediums in the Chokoto area of Dande once they entered Zimbabwe. According to George Rutanhire (Mt Darwin, 20 March 2014), who was in charge of the ZANLA commissariat

department in the war, guerrillas were informed by Nehanda that one medium called Gusvamupara or Parangeti had actually sold out the country to whites as such the war might not be won. It was revealed that he had been paid by whites to ensure that the war spills to the advantage of Rhodesia. Symbolically, a black bull is said to have been tied to a tree at Nhenhenhe (in Mozambique) so that through its death by starvation, Rhodesia would remain under perpetual rule of whites. However, reports indicated that the guerrillas walked to Nhenhenhe, found the bull, and as instructed, cut the rope and the bull ran towards Zimbabwe –an indication that the war was to spill over.

Claims by Rutanhire seem to overlook the fact that Zambia was yet another front, so if the war could not be allowed to spread beyond Mozambique, it would still have come into the country through Zambia. To him, the Zambian component came as an appendage. The authenticity of the statement remains in question because it was not corroborated elsewhere.

The research undertaken by McLaughlin (1996) observes a ceremony to launch the war but does not stress that the attack of Altena farm was directed by mediums. Rutanhire claimed that once guerrillas had returned from Nhenhenhe, they were told by Nehanda to start the war by attacking Altena farm. The absence of official accounts exposes traditional region as at times it is practised privately, and clandestinely. As such, decorated commanders would often find it hard to openly admit that they consulted mediums, but for guerrillas who faced the threat of death, consulting mediums and *sangomas* was synonymous to fetishism.

Mauye (Mahondo Village, Mt Darwin, 19 March 2014) was one of the key informants in providing detailed information on the works of the metaphysical world during the war. He was already a qualified teacher by 1972. When I met him, he had come from Makoni to attend Jimmy Motsi's funeral –a chief exhumer in the Fallen Heroes Trust. Mauye claimed that he assisted guerrillas, severally, to the extent of having his life threatened. In doing so, he miraculously survived because the spirit in him was guiding his operations.

From his submissions, at one time, there was a heavy attack on guerrillas at a place called Ruombwe in Nyazura. Out of the seven guerrillas, all perished except, one who got badly injured, survived. Mauye further reiterated that the spirit told him to go and pick the injured guerrilla at Ruombwe. He reported to have driven there in broad daylight, looked for the surviving guerrilla among the dead and took him to a cave near his home. None of the helicopters hovering above sported him. The surviving guerrilla, Joseph Manjeese, was reported to have been surviving at the time of the interview. In yet another encounter, Mauye said he drove to Chivhu. The sceptical and equally spiritual black Rhodesian forces followed him because his movement was interpreted to mean that the road was safe from landmines. The vehicle ferrying Rhodesian soldiers following behind him, however, detonated a landmine in the same area he had uneventfully passed through.

Eventually, Mauye, like another medium, Enos Pondai in Dande, was arrested on 22 July 1978 and spent the last part of the war in prison. His arrest demonstrates that Rhodesians were taking traditional religion as a real threat to their war effort. Mauye's arrest was triggered by Rhodesians who had intercepted a letter from one guerrilla group informing the other to get spiritual assistance from him. White soldiers who arrested him from his class of 45 pupils, accused him of protecting guerrillas operating in Nyazura, assisting an injured guerrilla from Ruombwe using his metaphysical powers, and taking care of sick guerrillas. Mauye was tried, with the intercepted letter, being used as evidence that he was assisting guerrillas. Such experiences point in the direction that the liberation war, was also a spiritual war. Mauye remains today as Chief Makoni's medium in charge of

traditional ceremonies in the area, especially, those involving war veterans.

At the Burmasyde in Bindura North, I encountered another ex-guerrilla whose name is Masango (*Interview*, 21 March 2014). I summarise his two narratives suggesting that indigenous religion was operating in their midst. In 1978, Masango indicated that guerrillas in Mt Darwin were increasingly being decimated by a lone white soldier called Kruger, who regularly travelled together with his Malawian *n'anga*. When Kruger was moved to Masango's sector, it was said that there was apprehension among fellow guerrillas that their lives were in real danger from Kruger. Each time ZANLA guerrillas laid a landmine targeting him; Kruger's car would pass the landmine safely.

Eventually, the guerrillas visited a spirit medium who instructed them to place their landmines on the side of the road where they would be reached by the shadow of his car. The guerrillas took the medium with them to direct 'planting' of the landmines. The result was that Kruger's car hit the landmines, and he died on the spot, together with his African assistant.

In a case of this nature, Masango does not attribute the elimination of Kruger to guerrilla fighting capabilities because, in such a case, they had exhausted their means. Consulting the medium was the last resort, and it produced positive results. The other dimension of the story is that, whites also believed in metaphysical powers given to them by other Africans to fight the war as evidenced by Kruger working with own black assistant.

Belief in spirituality was such that when guerrillas defeated the enemy in a purely military encounter, they attributed such successes to spiritual interventions in the manner devout Christians link every success to the hand of God. In one such encounter, Masango and his men were on the border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Masango, who could not quite recall on which side of the boarder they were; but he remembered that they had gone for four days without food when they stumbled upon a home and asked for food; reported that a woman refused to assist them with food, but pointed to the nine-armed whites who had just left. The hungry guerrillas followed the white soldiers, for about 2km, to a small dam. Eight soldiers took off their clothes, and began swimming, while one of them, with a radio, played sentry. Masango, and his men, killed all the nine white soldiers.

Such success was attributed to powers of their god which they believed in. Masango pointed out that, militarily, guerrillas were at an advantage because they saw the enemy first, and by the time they fired the first shot, which killed the one playing sentry, the rest simply could not defend themselves.

The relationship between guerrillas and traditional religious leaders was at times sour. According to a former ZIPRA cadre, better known as Cuba, in Nyamhunga area of Hurungwe, it was the chief's duty to take guerrillas coming into the area for some rituals to protect them from the enemy. These culminated in the issuance of snuff which would protect guerrillas wherever they were.

One version leading to the death of Chief Nyamhunga is that Security Force Auxiliaries (SFAs) of Bishop Muzorewa persuaded him to show them the secret behind ZIPRA success. The chief then misrepresented SFAs to the local medium and they were given the same snuff set aside for guerrillas. Upon investigations, the chief was pinpointed as the culprit, and he was killed in broad daylight at his shop. Thus, despite the good training of ZIPRA guerrillas, they continued to take a strong belief in traditionalism because, for them, the war itself was a spiritual war which could only be justified through the support of local mediums. Similarly, Bhinya (*Interview*, 8 September 2018), indicated that one spirit medium from Nyamupfukudza, gave ZIPRA guerrillas protective snuff, and a day later, many of them were killed by Rhodesian soldiers. Survivors came back and killed the

medium in retaliation.

Just like guerrillas, Muzorewa's auxiliaries also claim that they were protected by the spirits of the land which explains why they survived the war. Some of them followed a strict code of conduct which prevented them from being involved in sexual relations with local girls. According to one informant, Zinhata, it was a taboo for auxiliaries to be involved in illicit affairs with local girls. There are, however, contradictions because many auxiliaries were allowed to marry during the war and take their wives to their camp where they would sleep with them.

Generally, abstinence was the official guerrilla standard practice which in several ways was flouted. The practice of abstinence was deep seated in Zinhata's group because it was regularly clashing with highly trained ZIPRA guerrillas making the threat to life a daily reality, and also because the majority of members in the group were almost illiterate. Zinhata was often sent to the local spirit medium for snuff which was believed to have metaphysical protective powers in case of clashes with guerrillas.

Zinhata had to leave behind his gun, but his colleagues provided escort to the medium. Before entering the hut, he removed his shoes, entered the hut while clapping, sat on the reed mat, and asked the old woman to replenish the snuff. This was a sign of total submission. The woman would then 'roar' for some time, sprinkle Zinhata with snuff over the head, and on his clothes. The medium would then hand him a container (*kasha*) full of snuff (*bute* or *mbanda*), to have it shared among his fellows. Zinhata reported that, the medium would then instruct: '*Sienda muchinda ndeekutarisa paunenga usifamba*', meaning, 'go young man, and I will look after you throughout your journey.'

Each morning before parade, SFAs in his group, for purposes of protection, washed themselves in snuff-laden waters put in a big clay pot. Thereafter, Zinhata indicated that he would distribute the snuff to his colleagues, which they then sniffed. That ceremony is what they called *culture*. It was believed that it gave them the much-needed psychological security or armour. Even when any one of them got confused, Zinhata said he would take out the small *kasha* and sniff the *mbanda* to get back in the right frame of mind.

The interview revealed that the spirit medium took SFAs as '*sons of the soil*' and protected them from harm, and also did the same procedures for other guerrillas. In Zinhata's analysis, however, the medium could be a sell-out or a charlatan, but not the spirit which possessed him. As such, the spirit medium could flirt with both sides of the quarrel.

The only differences noted in the prayers were that SFAs did not pray to the spirits of Nehanda, Kaguvi and Chaminuka because of the nature of the war they were fighting. However, from Mt Darwin, Guruve right into Hurungwe, they did appeal to Nehoreka, the medium of all the Korekore people. In any case, he was not involved in the Chimurenga War. They told him, and the family ancestors, that they were fighting because the whites were compelling them to do so. All they wanted was protection because this was war. Their enemies were similarly protected by Nehoreka.

Investigations in Chundu (Mashonaland West) was the only one in which the spirit of Chimombe refused to give protective snuff to Rhodesian soldiers throughout the war. As such, ZIPRA triumphed over its enemies because it was insulated by traditional snuff.

Weather could also be manipulated by spirit mediums as a force to the help of guerrillas. A former ZIPRA commander, Soft Magarasadza (*Interview, 26 May 2021*), visited a spirit medium in the Sanyati area (Mashonaland West) to announce the presence of guerrillas. He was leading a group of six guerrillas. The medium

instructed them to heap their guns in the round hut while they put up for the night. When Magarasadza and his men woke up in morning, the medium's home was surrounded by Rhodesian soldiers ready to pounce on the badly outnumbered guerrillas. The *svikirois* said to have told them to take up their arms and leave without a fight. It was indicated that there was a sudden heavy mist which only disappeared when guerrillas were many kilometres away.

Magarasadza claimed to have consulted the bulk of chiefs and medium spirits in Mashonaland West to seek guidance on how the war was to be executed. He further reported that one medium informed him, at the beginning of 1979, which was his party (ZAPU) would not win the impending election. It is not clear whether this was simple calculation or it was from spirits.

## 5. Fate of indigenous religion in independent Zimbabwe

After the liberation war, former combatants were concerned with cleansing themselves of the very act of having participated in the war. Information from interviewees reflects that the new government was unconcerned with traditional rituals in the same way that elite commanders had ignored such relationships during the war. Mambowa, from Karoi, said that as soon as he returned from the war, traditional beer was brewed and family friends and relatives were invited. In the morning, before friends and distant relatives had arrived, a traditional healer (*n'anga*) had been invited to establish if ancestors had been offended or if the returnee had brought any *ngozi* (avenging spirits) into the family. Traditional medicine was administered on to the returnee for the mere reason that he had seen the spilling of blood, which is something disapproved by the spirits. Putting on only a pair of shorts, Mambowa was made to sit on the floor in a hut, as medicine was being administered, and traditional beer poured on him. Thereafter, feasting became a celebration of Mambowa's re-integration to the family. Surprisingly, most of the oral informants did not openly admit to having killed someone during the war.

Reynolds (1990) claims that after the war, *n'angas* he interviewed said that there were more cases of psychiatric problems facing former guerrillas after the war. The major causes were that there had been so many *unsettled* spirits of people who had not been given decent burials. On returning from the war, African men and women who had fought on either side of the quarrel consulted traditional healers with a view of being cleansed. This was important to both individuals and communities. *N'angas* acted like priests who listened to people's confessions without divulging any of that sensitive information to the public. Thus, people were free to tell a *n'anga* if they had killed anyone in the war or wronged the spirits in any way.

Cleansing could only become effective if the truth had been revealed to the *n'anga* by the client. The traditional healer would then advise the client on what compensation was to be paid, how and to whom. Unless compensation was paid, trouble would persist. Like any other illness, recovery would follow once compensation was paid.

During the war of liberation, some among both the Rhodesian army, and the guerrillas, did shed the blood of innocent people, maimed, sexually abused women and committed other heinous crimes against humanity. The spiritual world was ostensibly against such practices right from the onset of the struggle. Thus, there was need for the returning war veterans to be traditionally cleansed as a way of reintegrating them back into the society.

It seems as if the nationalists' minds were pre-occupied with the reconciliation of only the living combatants probably this was of immediate importance. Taken in this

context, it can be argued that differences in political consciousness continue up to this day (Barry, 2004). In fact, the government was supposed to initiate reconciliation and integration at grassroots level through the involvement of the veterans, spiritual leaders and the entire peasant population in a national cleansing ceremony, spearheaded by religious leaders. It is only now that the government is concerned about resolving outstanding issues of *Gukurahundi* (disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands between 1980 and 1987). According to a report in *The Sunday Mail* (22 August 2021), traditional leaders in the concerned areas have been tasked to find lasting solutions, and that the government will provide the necessary support. This still leaves challenges of Zimbabwe's liberation war in limbo.

Paradzai Mabhunu argued that he managed to return alive due to the protection he received from the spiritual world. Along with his two brothers who were also ZANLA guerrillas, none of them perished in the war because of respecting the *dos* and *don'ts* as instructed by traditional leaders. On their return, beer was brewed on the basis that '*children*' who had '*touched*' blood could not automatically be admitted into the family without undergoing a cleansing ceremony. Therefore, family members had an obligation to cleanse their children.

According to Mabhunu family initiatives were a result of the failure or unwillingness of guerrilla commanders, and their political leaders to lead the process as they had become overjoyed with independence euphoria. For him, a congress of spirit mediums should have been called to cleanse the children sent to fight the war. Failure to do so partly explains various psychological problems which former fighters are experiencing.

The idea of calling for a congress of ancestral spirits is supported by the fact that in re-launching the war in July 1972, such a congress was called for in Chaminuka sector by a certain Mrs Duwa (McLaughlin, 1996). Mediums, from as far as Bindura, attended, and so were senior commanders who included, Joseph Chimurenga and Thomas Nhari. Mrs Duwa was appointed by the spirit medium of Karuwa to deal directly with ZANLA forces. This noble idea did not yield the desired results owing to lack of support from nationalist leaders in Mozambique, and Tanzania.

Since the war had been re-launched with support of spirit mediums, veterans of the struggle thought it was also supposed to be rounded off by them with the concurrence or full support from the top political leadership. Paradzai Mabhunu explained that his war time colleagues are going through traumatic experiences because of this failure by their leadership. Family-based ceremonies, thus, took a centre-stage because of government failure to take up the initiative. Many war veterans think that a welcome home traditional ceremony at national level should be organised with the prime objective of reconciling former guerrillas with themselves, their families, and the nation at large.

Without decent burial of those who had died in war, the integration process is believed to be still incomplete. As such, Sadomba (2011) claims that from 2000, spirit possessions affected many children in Manicaland who were demanding re-burial. To that effect, war veterans in Rushinga established an organisation to undertake re-burials. Otherwise, both the ruling ZANU-PF party, and government are yet taken up the issue seriously. This means that true healing on the part of family members comes about when the dead are given a decent burial in a recognisable area.

In the same context, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2011, a group of 700 people converged at Great Zimbabwe National Monuments (Mawere, 2011). The majority of these were war veterans from Harare Province who demanded permission to carry out ritual

cleansing of the psychological problems they were facing as a result of their war experiences. Furthermore, they indicated that they wanted guidance from the ancestors on how they could go to Mozambique to get the remains of the fallen heroes for proper burial. Entrance to the site was mainly through use of force since nobody from the local managers was willing to grant them permission. The group was led by Nehoreka, a popular Korekore spirit medium, who was known for performing rituals during the liberation struggle (Mawere, 2011).

Upon being asked why they had chosen this national site; participants gave a number of reasons. Some asserted that the site was adopted as the residence of the country's ancestors thereby confirming the same opinion given by Fontein (2006) who argues that Great Zimbabwe is highly regarded as a religious site particularly by the local clans of Mugabe and Nemamawa.

During the liberation struggle, Great Zimbabwe site was used as a source of motivation and inspiration. With the attainment of independence, the country was to be re-named after the site. Furthermore, the new state drew a lot from the site in terms of its national symbols, for example, the Zimbabwe dollar coin, the ruling party's (ZANU-PF) logo and the national flag (Fontein, 2006).

Most of the war veterans expressed the same view as many politicians and historians on the significance of Great Zimbabwe monuments as a core of African traditional religion. In this context, the idea of going to the site was understood to be a national event. To the majority of the war veterans, this was actually obnoxious, and rather a sign of irresponsibility, particularly, when they perceived that the government was casting a blind eye on their call for rituals.

In relation to the above, *The Sunday News* of 26 August 2012, reported that a group of 560 people, mainly war veterans, 25 chiefs and 5 spirit mediums, all from Mashonaland region visited the Matopos National Park, and performed a cleansing ritual at the shrine. The group had collected soil and human remains from Old Mkushi in Zambia to, 'bring back', and the spirits of the deceased freedom fighters to Zimbabwe. Both the living and the spirits of the dead had to be cleansed. It was, however, noted that the ceremony attracted widespread condemnation from other traditional leaders, and politicians from Matabeleland region, who argued that bringing human bones and soils onto the shrine was tantamount to disrespect for the area's rites, and beliefs. It was alleged that they exhibited high levels of arrogance and ancestors were, therefore, not happy, hence, the need to carry out another ritual ceremony to appease the ancestors.

Although this move was characterised by sour relations, the incident sheds light on the unfinished business of reconciliation. The demand for proper individual human burial as opposed to mass grave approach is central to the whole controversy. Magwizi, and other members of the ZPRA Veterans Trust, have been making frantic efforts to initiate decent burials for their colleagues who died in war, particularly, in Mashonaland West. Their challenge is the elusiveness of government support.

## **6. Conclusion**

The article has demonstrated that to the foot combatant, indigenous beliefs, and the metaphysical world, were pivotal to the execution of the war. To help appreciate how the liberation struggle was wedged, the chapter has provided a glimpse of the role of metaphysics showing that guns alone did not win the war of liberation in Zimbabwe. Insurgent (and also counter-insurgent) forces, therefore, invoked the metaphysical world to enable them to survive the challenges of the violent war. ZANLA, ZIPRA and Africans in general fighting on the side of the Rhodesians,

relied on metaphysics or belief, and practices in spirit mediums, to fight the war, suggesting that indigenous beliefs and religion were not partisan.

All fighters wanted to survive the war, and indigenous beliefs had to be invoked in this regard. Zimbabwe's war of liberation was; therefore, spiritual in as much as it was military. As such, problems that former combatants of the liberation war face today, accordingly, emanate from the failure by political leaders to undertake a traditional nationwide ceremony to appease the forces which made the war winnable. The way combatants look back in time comes from real experiences from the battlefield which, to others, sound like unsubstantiated claims which are far from being realistic. Thus, the spiritual dimension is one important way of appreciating the liberation war, and ought to be valued from how former fighters were spiritually assisted. Apparently, Christianity was not a major source of inspiration, especially among guerrilla fighters.

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