

# MAKHOKHOBHA AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS AS THE REMARKABLE CENTRES OF LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE OF *ZHII* PROTESTS

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## ABSTRACT

Makhokhoba and Mzilikazi are two of the oldest suburbs in Zimbabwe and Bulawayo respectively. The people in these areas played a pivotal role in dismantling the yoke of colonialism in Zimbabwe. They also suffered a lot during this period as they were treated as second-class citizens; as evidenced by their type of dwellings—mainly hostels and one-room houses. These were meant for accommodating a man only, as women were not allowed in these areas because they were supposed to stay in rural areas while only the men worked in the city of Bulawayo. This mistreatment, poor working conditions and other ills they suffered in the hands of colonialists led to *Zhii* protests (*Zhii* is an Ndebele word for Ndebele war cry). The *Zhii* protests were mainly volatile skirmishes against the colonial power in the 1950s concerning poor working conditions. These skirmishes are vividly captured in records of oral history interviews found at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. It is therefore, the aim of this article to delve more into these protests by studying the life stories of selected individuals in order to understand the socio-political and economic factors behind them. The life story approach will be interrogated as the best way of collecting oral testimonies. Oral history sources and published literature have been used as sources of information.

**Keywords:** colonialisation; ethnicity; liberalism; life story; Makhokhoba and Mzilikazi townships; Methodism; oral history; Theatre of the oppressed; *Zhii* protests

## INTRODUCTION

Makhokhoba and Mzilikazi are one of the oldest townships in Zimbabwe. There were the centres of social, political and economic activities for the Black population in the dawn



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of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. They have a remarkable iconographies related to the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. The names of these townships; including historic buildings found in this area are pregnant with symbols, memories and symbolically narrate the story of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle since its earliest days to the present era.

## LIFE STORY APPROACH AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THIS STUDY

Oral history is but an approach within the wider methodological practice of life history and life story. Life history is defined by A Dictionary of Sociology (1998) as "an ideographic approach which provides an intensive account of life, usually gathered through unstructured interviewing, but also involving the analysis of personal documents such as letters, photographs, and diaries." The life history approach has the strength of vividly showing experiences of social change, understanding more about individuals' lives from their perspective, and describe contexts in a rich manner (O'Carroll 2009).

The life history method is employed primarily in cultural anthropology to provide a rich, full description of an individual's life. Thus, with this method the aim is to provide an in-depth description of an individual, family or group and allows the research subject to describe a complete picture of their own life, in their own words. Most importantly, the method allows for the life to be situated in a socio-historical context. Life story approach is defined by Atkinson as

the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what the person remembers of it and what he or she wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another. The resulting life story is the narrative essence of what has happened to the person. It can cover the time from birth to the present or before and beyond. It includes the important events, experiences, and feelings of a lifetime. There is very little difference between a life story and a life history. The two terms are often used interchangeably. The difference between a life story and an oral history is usually emphasis and scope. An oral history most often focuses on a specific aspect of a person's life, such as work life or a special role in some part of the life of a community. An oral history most often focuses on the community or on what someone remembers about a specific historical event, issue, time, or place ... When an oral interview focuses on a person's entire life, it is usually referred to as a life story or life history. (Atkinson 2002, 125)

There is a vast archival and published material on Makhokhoba and the surrounding areas, and the liberation struggle. However, this study was based mainly on the life stories captured in the oral nature of six individuals, who lived in these areas during the period 1900 to 1960. In other words, the objective of this study was to show the power of life stories approach as contrasted to the "oral history" approach, which looks at specific events, while neglecting the whole life story of an individual from birth to the "end" of one's life. Some of these individuals were prominent figures by then such

as Masotsha Ndlovu, who was a trade unionist and his remains are now interred at the National Heroes Acre in Zimbabwe. The other person is Reverend Enoch Musa, who was a headmaster in one of the schools in Makhokhoba and a minister of religion as well. The study also documented the life of Dupute Moyo, who worked for the Bulawayo Municipality by then, and Dr HE Ashton, who was a “liberal” white individual, who worked as the Director of the Native Department by then. Lastly, the study documented the life stories of Jacob Mnindwa Moyo and Nduna Ncube, who was working for some private companies by then. This study took a specific interest in the *Zhii* protests of the 1960s, but was not limited to these protests alone, as the focus was also generally on the politically and socio economic atmosphere from 1900 to 1965.

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The *Zhii* riots of 1960 are regarded as the first achievement of confrontational African nationalism in Southern Rhodesia, in which shops and beer halls in the townships were burned (Ranger 2006). The word *Zhii* itself is an Ndebele proclamation of war—a war cry. These protests were triggered by the banning of the political party by the then National Democratic Party (NDP) that was formed in 1959. The *protests* were also triggered by the inhuman living conditions of Africans during this period as Mpofu (2010, 59) summarises the whole episode in the following words:

Rioting broke out in the city on Sunday, the 23rd of July and continued sporadically for two days. Offices, shops, beer gardens and houses lining the rioters’ routes in African Townships were attacked and destroyed. Rioters threatened and sometimes attacked leading African figures. Shops owned by African businessmen in the townships were also destroyed. The economic recession, rising unemployment and dreadful living conditions were blamed for causing the *Zhii* riots.

Ranger (2010, 224) quotes one of the oral interviewees Ritah Ndlovu, who describes *Zhii* in the following words:

Every old person who was there during that period will no doubt never forget it, as I will not. I remember people running everywhere, crying *Zhii! Zhii! Bulala! Bulala!*, meaning kill! Kill! It was as if people were possessed by demons. Food was being looted from stores and beer in the beer gardens. Everyone was being forced to join the violent crowds. I was very afraid during those days, I tell you, because I thought a war had started.

Ranger (2010, 227) again quoting another oral interviewee Major Ndlovu who recalled:

Then came the Federal army. That was no joke. They came. Guns were fired! They went Po! Po! Bho! Bho! It then became tough and worse. The aeroplane shouted from above that the government would take serious action against anyone seen carrying a stone or throwing a stone. People went to their houses. We went to our houses, with tails cut down, very ashamed. It became quiet as if nothing had occurred. People got into their house and closed their doors, switching off their radios.

These *Zhii* protests also revealed a number of sociological and political themes such as ethnicity, nationalism, gender, poverty and classes, as this study has shown, through the selected oral history interviews, which are mainly life stories (Scarnecchia 2008).

These *Zhii* protests took place in Makhokhoba, one of the oldest townships in Zimbabwe. Makhokhoba, Mzilikazi and Barbourfields townships—known as BAT (Bulawayo African Townships), were the first to be founded in Bulawayo. The name itself, Makhokhoba depicts the earliest relationships between blacks and whites at the time when black people were always checked on in their rooms to see if they were following oppressive regulations of the Bulawayo City Council. Burrett and Mukwende (2015, 14) observe that the name Makhokhoba is onomatopoeic. It reminds one of the sound associated with the “Location’s” first European supervisor, F. Fallon. He moved with a walking stick that made a knocking noise as he undertook his inspection rounds. He would also bang on the doors with it when seeking entry. The noise forewarned people, and the isiNdebele word for this knocking sound, *ukukhokhoba*, gave rise to his nickname. People would warn each other that uMakhokhoba is coming—that is how the name evolved.

Kaarsholm (1995, 228), also citing Ashton, describes how the name came into being in the following words:

Bulawayo’s first African township was the Native Location, later known as Old Location, which was situated close to the centre of town where Makokoba is today and came into existence from 1894, first as a spontaneous settlement of Africans seeking employment in town. There was little planning or control invested in the early development of the location: ‘The only public concern was to prevent various nuisances attributed to the “kaffirs” such as noise, dirt, prostitution, tom toms, idleness, thieving, and it was left to the churches and missionaries to look after African welfare and recreation. In 1899, 300 people were estimated to be living in the location, compared to the 2000 Africans who in 1896 were thought to be living in the town of Bulawayo itself.

There was extremely massive overcrowding in these houses as they were mainly one room houses. The conditions were squalid. This neglect of dwelling places for Africans was mainly influenced by racial segregation at the time, which regarded Bulawayo as the area for white people only, with black people only housed there temporarily for purposes of employment (Mpofu 2010).

## SITES OF HISTORICAL INTEREST IN MAKHOKHOBA AND MZILIKAZI

Stanley Hall and Stanley Square, McDonald Hall, Mzilikazi Primary School, United School and churches such as Methodist are some of the interesting historical sites associated with the birth of African trade unionism and African nationalism. They also reveal a lot about the social life of African people at the time. It is very interesting to note that the naming of these places has great significance. It may surprisingly or

paradoxically appear that the White government, especially the Bulawayo City Council, “wanted” to preserve the Ndebele history as they used names that embodied that history.

Stanley Square is an iconic and much revered site in Zimbabwe as it was used for rallies by unionists and nationalists such as Masotsha Ndlovu and Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, to mention but just a few. Stanley Hall was built in 1936 by the Native Welfare Society (NWS), and was named after Sir HJ Stanley, the then Governor of Southern Rhodesia (the third Governor between 1935 and 1942). It was the centre of the *Zhii* protests of 1960 and the general strike of 1948. Burrett and Mukwende (2015, 14) state that

Stanley square witnessed discussions leading to the formation of the NDP in 1961 and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) in 1963. Throughout the liberation struggle it was a place of discussion and resistance. Stanley square is probably the most important political building in modern Zimbabwe. Even today it is at the heart of politics in Bulawayo and indeed the nation.

Stanley Square is located close to the famous long distance bus terminus, known as *eRenkini* (a corrupted version of the English word for a bus rank). This bus terminus had significance because at the time only men were allowed to work in town, while the rest of the family remained in the rural areas. Thus, it was common for the men to use the bus terminus when visiting their families back in the rural areas.

Stanley Square also served as the reception centre for the NWS, whose primary function was to assist new arrivals; mainly from rural areas and existing residents with compliance with the regulations of the colonial system. This involved health inspections, passes and legal rights to residence, as well as assisting them to find a place to live and generally adjust to life in the city (Burrett and Mukwende 2015, 15). Weddings and other social activities such as dances, music festivals, beauty parades, theatre, public lectures and debates took place at Stanley Square. There was also a library, and it was at Stanley Square where African soccer matches and boxing tournaments were first organised (Burrett and Mukwende 2015). Stanley Hall “became the heart of sport, recreation and politics in African Bulawayo. Many would insist that it was here that ‘Township Jazz’ has its origins rather than in South Africa” (Burrett and Mukwende 2015, 15).

The other interesting historical site is McDonald Hall at Mzilikazi. It played the same role as Stanley Hall, except that it was built later in 1955 and was opened in 1957 and named after JM MacDonald, who sought to promote African welfare in Bulawayo.

Another oldest hall in Bulawayo is the Makhumalo Beer Hall. The hall was built in 1913 as the original municipal brewery for opaque beer factory. As demand grew in 1951 it was moved to a new plant along Khami road. The old buildings were transformed into an enlarged beer hall. It should be noted that in the early years King Lobengula’s Queens, royals and other Ndebele as well as Shona matriarchs controlled the “Native Location”, which was later named Makhokhoba. They also controlled the brewing of opaque beer before this was taken over by the Bulawayo City Council (Burrett and Mukwende 2015; Burrett 2015). Opaque beer drinking was more of a pastime at the

time. One of the oral history interviewees mentions that this was a ploy by the colonial government to keep black people occupied by drinking beer instead of engaging in political issues (Dupute 1990).

## THE LIFE STORY OF MASOTSHA NDLOVU AS TOLD BY HIM

He was born in Tegwani, Plumtree during the days when the Pioneer Column came to Zimbabwe. He justifies this by the name given to him Masotsha (“soldiers”). He described the Anglo-Ndebele War of 1893 as it was told to him. He stated that when he came to Nyathini, he was employed by Meikle, who owned a zinc-roofed store in Bulawayo around 1912, where he worked as a Post Boy, delivering letters—because as he says, he was educated and intelligent. He was paid 3 pounds, which was a lot of money then since most black people were paid 30 shillings—whereas police officers were earning 1 pound. He described Thomas Meikle as a likeable man who spoke Zulu fluently. He travelled only on horse-back even when motorcars had been introduced in this country. He would travel from his Hillside home to town on horse-back.

He touched on the influenza epidemic which killed a lot of people. He said that later the people discovered a certain herb, *ukhalimela*, which cured this disease. He said people identified the herb and told Mziki (his English name was Campbell), the Native Commissioner of Fort Rixon, who spread the word that the herb was very preventive. Mziki is described as a likeable person who spoke isiZulu, which he learned in Zululand. All those who were appointed to the Native Department—that is, Native commissioners, were conversant in isiNdebele.

Masotsha said he left the country in 1919 to study at Cape Town and went back to his country in 1928. He mentioned that he went to study in Cape Town so that he could be able speak to English so that he would confront the colonial government. He mentioned Robert Sambo, who was a Malawian sent by Kadale from Cape Town to come and organise the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in 1927. Sambo was however, later deported to Malawi for his political activities. When he came back from South Africa Masotsha started mobilising the working population against the ruling government. He asked Parliament to explain why the prisoners wore canvass dresses instead of pair of trousers.

In his campaigns Masotsha Ndlovu enjoyed support from some of the white liberals. He mentioned Mr Bowden of the Church of England, Reverend White, who was his personal friend, as well as Father Cripps, both of the Methodist Church. He said Father Cripps, who owned a farm at Maronda Mashanu, which had a school, was very kind. He brought the farm for the black people to settle.

In 1934 Masotsha came to know about an oppressive statutory law, which prohibited Africans from walking on the pavements in town. He then decided to conduct an experiment by asking a man named Sikhupha Tshuma from Gwatemba, who was employed at Rosesky, and instructed him to walk on the pavement, buy sweets and

oranges with the 1 pound that he gave to him; and eat until he was arrested. Sikhupha was arrested and fined 1 shilling, but Masotsha and his supporters appealed to the Higher Court, where they were represented by Sir Robert Tredgold, and won the case. After this the statutory law was struck off. Asked about the living conditions in Makhokhoba, Masotsha said they were just very difficult as the police would sometimes come and search people while there were asleep, looking for loafers—and would even uncover them. This was an invasion of their privacy.

Concerning the decline of ICU, Masotsha Ndlovu said they mobilised until 1934 when Europeans started to collect money in Parliament after Mr Fletcher (Sir Patrick, Minister of Native Affairs during the Federation) and other Ministers in Parliament said,

the ICU is civilised, do not say it is not civilised because it knows what it is doing. Very soon all the people will join it and we will be forced to pay Africans more money. The best thing to do is to weaken it. Let us collect money.

The people in Parliament contributed money—50 pounds and so on, until there was enough money. They then asked the Reverend Ibboston of the Methodist Church to resign from his duties as Minister and start a new organisation, the Native Welfare of Matabeleland. The new organisation promoted sporting and recreational activities with various prizes to be won. If one played football and won, he was given a pair of football boots and a uniform; if they competed in a bicycle race and won they were given a new bicycle. People then began not to attend these meetings. They were now more fascinated by the new entertainment provided by the welfare. This weakened the ICU as the interviewee mentioned that he would wait alone under the tree (indaba tree), and the people wouldn't come. This is how ICU disbanded.

In 1939 Masotsha Ndlovu joined the Native Department and found himself working in Shona areas at Selukwe, as he was considered a bad influence among the Ndebele people. He worked for 13 years before joining Burombo (trade unionist). Burombo organised the 1948 strike and fought for the scrapping of the Land Husbandry Act of 1951. Masotsha mentioned that they went to see the then Prime Minister Huggins with Burombo to complain why the ownership of the houses in Makhokhoba was always with the Council and not the people. Masotsha said he also complained about the education system of Africans, which was inferior to that of Indians, coloureds and whites. He felt that the government must invest into the African education infrastructure than leave this to the missionaries, because it has invested in the education of whites, Indians and coloureds.

## THE LIFE STORY OF REVEREND E. MUSA AS TOLD BY HIM

The Reverend Musa starts his life story from birth, saying he was born in 1912 at the Fig tree Centenary. He said this place was a farm owned by the London Missionary



Society (LMS), where Africans were educated and christianised. When asked about his views on what he thought attracted people to the Christian religion he said that there are various reasons—that people always want those things that are good and straight that would make them free. He continued to say that when the missionaries came they treated people in a good way like their own children, and then the people began to gather around them as they were taught the word of God—but they discovered that teaching them the word of God without giving them some training or education would not benefit them in any way—as they would not be able to read the Bible for themselves. Thus, they began teaching them in schools. First, they taught them in vernacular, to enable them to study the whole Gospel of Matthew so that they would understand the contents of the Bible. Later on it became clear that being conversant in vernacular only was not enough; as some of the missionaries themselves did not understand vernacular—hence they had to teach them English for ease of communication.

Reverend Musa says black people preferred schools in missionary farms rather than commercial ones, where they were overworked. He himself was educated at the Centenary LMS. He mentioned that there was a conflict between Christian teachings and African culture, as the missionaries preached against polygamy, drinking beer and discouraged Africans from paying lobola. However, at the Centenary school one could only attend school up to Standard 3, and the school was closed down without anyone informing them. They discovered when they went to church one day that the church was no more a church but a stable. A farmer had bought the mission and was keeping his horses in the church building. The Centenary area had good soils. The new farmer went about buying people's livestock at very low prices. This is how people were chased out of their ancestral lands—some went to Shangani, Filabusi and Essexvale. That is how the Reverend said, he found himself at Waddlove School, where he completed Standard 7. He said this school had the best teachers and he learnt arithmetic, geography, reading and history. The Reverend was regarded as one of the most educated blacks.

From Waddlove he came to Bulawayo, where he was offered a job as court interpreter, but instead opted to be a teacher after he was encouraged to do so by Reverend Carter, who was a family friend. In 1934 he began teaching at Makhokhoba. He taught at a Wesleyan Methodist Church school, where he was responsible for teaching four classes—Standard 1, 2, 3, and 4. He was also a headmaster. However, a misunderstanding ensued between him and a very strict white school inspector, Mr Merther King who came to inspect the school and concluded that Reverend Musa was teaching many classes. Musa said they exchanged bitter words and he was fired on the spot, later to be reinstated after Reverend Carter intervened. In 1935 some churches came together with schools to form one school called United Church School, and Reverend Musa was elected as Headmaster. He said this was the best school in Bulawayo since it was the only school which had standard 4. The other schools where pupils could attend up to standard 4 were outside Bulawayo, such as missionary schools like Hope Fountain and Inyathi.



From 1937 to 1939 Reverend Musa trained as a minister of religion at Waddlove. He stated that the Methodist Church has always been one of the strongest churches since its inception by John Wesley. He continued to say that Methodism gives one an opportunity to advance himself educationally up to a degree level, and encourages one to be a good Christian in all aspects of life.

Reverend Musa described one of the popular white liberals—Reverend Percy Ibboston, whom he worked with at Tegwane Mission, as one of his friends, with whom he used to cycle in rural areas, spreading the word of God. He mentioned that he was a very good man who trained as a lawyer and later became a Methodist Church minister. He also stated that Percy Ibboston assisted many Africans, including nationalists on legal issues. Ibboston is the one who was behind the formation of welfare societies.

Interesting enough, Reverend Musa had no kind words to describe Masotsha Ndlovu, the founding trade unionist in Zimbabwe. When asked about him he said he knew him very well, and that he was an ICU man and had a lot in his head but did not know how to express it because he was not educated. All he ever said was *ngizakutshaya* (“I will beat you”). According to Musa, Masotsha always wanted to use the stick, but said that this is not the way to solve problems. The Reverend said if he was able to convince people properly he would have gone to become one of the strongest unionist and nationalists in the mould of Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo. The Reverend continued to say that this is what happens when one is not educated—they will have ideas but will not be able to translate them into action. Musa states that there was an open space between Mzilikazi police camp and St Patricks; where Masotsha used to have gatherings. Most people would go and listen to him, and were initially very happy—but because what he said to the people was influenced by the people in South Africa, the missionaries told the people not only to listen to things from outside. He said that Masotsha was mainly talking about South African politics rather than the political state of affairs in Zimbabwe. But at the end the Reverend admitted that Masotsha was a force to be reckoned with.

The Reverend also remembered what he referred to as the August 1940 teacher’s strike, where the latter complained about working conditions, especially meagre wages. He said many, including himself were dismissed, but that he was later recalled. As years went by he developed knee problems and was given lighter duties to perform. He became Chaplain of the soldiers at Epworth for a year—although he was attached to the Harare Methodist Church. He said the following year he again became headmaster of Epworth School, because the school was getting out of control, children were hitting teachers—there was simply no discipline at all.

## THE LIFE STORY OF DR HE ASHTON AS TOLD BY HIM

He was born in Lesotho in 1911. His father was working in Northern Transvaal and joined the South African constabularies and was then transferred to Basutholand united police around 1905. He grew up among African and European children. They were

like family in small villages and camps, and was told that growing up, he spoke better Sotho than English. Later in life he went back to Basutholand and studied the customs of the people. He went to technical schools to do carpentry with African people and went to a boarding school in Cape Town. He then went to further his studies at Oxford University, where he initially enrolled for Maths and Chemistry, then switched to politics, philosophy and economics. From there he went to London University, where he studied social anthropology. After this he pursued a career in medical affairs and African customs.

From 1935 to 37 he did a general ethnographic study in Lesotho. After completing his fieldwork he became the District Administrator in Mafikeng. He was then transferred to become a private secretary to the High Commissioner of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. He was based in Cape Town and acted as the British representative. He said the good thing about Oxford at the time was that if one had a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree they could get a Masters (MA) degree if they just paid 5 pounds. He was transferred back to Botswana where he worked as an Assistant District Commissioner of court cases as he was able to speak Setswana. He worked closely with a local chief called Khanye—so close that his second born child was given a Tswana name, Kagiso.

From Botswana he went back to South Africa, where he worked as a Senior Welfare Officer in townships. His work also involved ensuring that there were recreation facilities and founded women's clubs. He also established an industrious school where people were given training in carpentry, building, and electrical services. He was an administrator of the industrious school he established. He claimed that Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo was one of his students.

He said he came to Southern Africa when Smut was defeated and Milner elected Prime Minister, but did not like the nationalist government policy at all. He was appointed by the Bulawayo Council in 1949 to start the Department of Native Administration—although the Council was hesitant to appoint him because of his liberal ideals. He describes Makhokhoba in the following words:

What happened is that Makhokhoba became more like a show place in the 1930s, it had water, electricity and then the war came and enormous developments took place and a tremendous influx of African workers and at the same time houses were being built. There were two great strikes when the railways workers striked in 1948 and then there was a general strike and in both cases one of the causes of the strikes was dissatisfaction of poor housing conditions. Then the Natives housing register was introduced which made the referral authorities more responsible for African housing. The council then appointed Mc Malin who had done a lot of housing at that time and he recommended that the council immediately appoint a Director to start housing Department and then they sent two councillors to South Africa to go round and interview those people who had knowledge of the housing scheme and eventually they saw me and I was invited to the interview and I came up and the council had to take me.

He said that when he moved around Makhokhoba next to Burombo the living conditions were so appalling and disgusting that he felt sick.

## THE LIFE STORY OF NDUNA NCUBE AS TOLD BY HIM

He was employed at Meikles in 1930 as a cart driver; driving the mules and delivering groceries. His story is that of a person working in a private sector and on the other side of the black residences where white people lived. He used to deliver groceries to Northend, Bellevue, Riverside and Khumalo low density-areas, where most of the white people lived. He earned 3 pounds a month and stayed behind the shop in servant quarters—that is, small rooms behind the shops. He claimed that Masotsha Ndlovu once worked at Meikles but left to join trade unionism. The interviewee stated that he used to attend the meetings at Stanley Square, where Masotsha would be addressing workers over difficult working conditions. He praised Masotsha Ndlovu for fighting the colonial government to reverse the statute which prohibited black people from walking on the pavements, where those caught on the “wrong” side of the law were fined a pound.

The interviewee, Nduna Ncube also mentioned the ethnic tensions that existed during that period, but stated that they did not last long. He stated that the Shona and Ndebele fought, and that the Zambians sided with the Ndebele. He said the causes of these fights were that these ethnic groups did not respect each other. The Ndebele accused the Shona of taking their jobs and women.

Regarding social activities Mr Nduna Ncube mentioned that he was a member of a choir that entertained the public, and that they used to sing at Stanley Square and McDonald Hall. They sung church songs in English and Ndebele. He remembered one particular song, which contains the political lyrics:

*OSibanda bazama ukuzenza bona abeCongress*

(“The Sibanda’s are trying to behave as members of the ZAPU party”)

*Bazama ukuzenza umafukuzela*

(“They are trying to behave like Joshua Nkomo”)

*Owawela ulwandle wayaphetsheya*

(“Who went to overseas”)

*Eqondeni ngokuwela kwakhe*

(“Why”)

*Eqonde ukukhulula thina*

(“In order to free us”)

*Eyosiza isizwe*

(“To help the country”)

*Eyosa indaba zesizwe esimnyama*

(“He went carrying issues of black people”)

*Sitheliswa imali yamakhandha*

(“We forced to pay head tax”)

*Sitheliswa imali yamadibha*

(“We were forced to pay dipping tax”)

*Sitheliswa imali yezinja*

(“We were forced to pay dog tax”)

*Sithelele lamasondo ezingola*

(“Also paid the cart tax”)

*Ngoba asilamkhulumeli ephalamende*

(“Because we do not have representatives in Parliament”)

*Sifisa onsundu wakithi azosikhulumela*

(“We long to have a black representative in Parliament”)

*Asihlanganise njalo*

(“To unite us”)

*Sicela wena mafukuzela*

(“We want you Mafukuzela [Mafukuzela was Joshua Nkomo’s nickname and it means the person with a big body”])

*Uze usibuzele ngemthetho enzima*

(“Enquire for us about these difficult laws”)

The above song laments the struggles of black people during the colonial period when people were forced to pay different kinds of taxes and their lack of representation in Parliament. The song then narrates what Joshua Mqabuko Nyongolo Nkomo (one of the founders of NDP and ZAPU) has done for the black people in terms of fighting for their freedom. The song further talks about places overseas, which Joshua Nkomo had visited, in his quest to seek for black emancipation from colonial bondage.

## ANALYSIS OF THE LIFE STORIES

### Wages and Housing Conditions

When black people in Zimbabwe tell their stories about their lives during the colonial period the issue of low wages always comes in. Nduna Ncube and Masotsha Ndlovu, who both worked for Meikles in Bulawayo spoke about earning 3 pounds. The majority of black people in Southern Rhodesia were even earning less than 3 pounds, since this wage was for the educated—others were earning 30 shillings to 1 pound (Ndlovu 1981). The wages were even lower compared to those of black people who were working in South Africa. It was worse when compared with the wages of their white colleagues. Harris (1974, 11) observes that white people in employment earned almost 11 times higher than the average black worker. Harris attributes this wide wage gap to discriminatory practices at every level in society and the economy. Harris (1974, 11) argues further that

whites earn more than the blacks not simply because they produce more, but because historically determined wage structures have established inflexible 'traditional' levels for whites and blacks that do not exclusively take account of productivity; because there is an unequal per capita input into the education of blacks and whites; because blacks are restricted in their access to apprenticeship and other vocational training schemes by informal discriminatory practices; because the promotion of blacks within organisations is often hampered by the prejudices of employers and by their reluctance to face the possible hostility of white staff who would be subject to the authority of blacks or of customers who might object being served by blacks and because the government has, through its immigration policy, maintained a supply of white workers into the more highly paid technical clerical and administrative jobs that would otherwise have been filled by suitably trained local persons.

Most of these observations by Harris apply to black workers during the colonial period. For example, the white government filled some of the paying jobs with whites from neighbouring countries, as is the case with Dr Ashton, who was scouted from South Africa.

One interviewee, Jacob Mnindwa Moyo (1988), who once worked in South Africa, stated that he was earning 21 pounds in 1948 as a policeman, while his colleagues in Zimbabwe were paid 3 pounds. Masotsha Ndlovu (1981), in his life story interview also said he was earning 9 pounds per week at Jagers in South Africa. This shows how low the wages were in Southern Rhodesia by then. Bhebe (1989, 11) argues that

indeed, the most vivid and constant reminder to the African workers of their severe exploitation by employees in the urban areas were the deplorably low wages, blatant cheating by employers and lack of legal protection in the negotiations for remuneration.

The inhuman accommodation in Makhokhoba during the years that led to the *Zhii* protests in Bulawayo can be seen through the eyes of Bhebe (1989, 9) who observes that

the appalling urban African conditions in Southern Rhodesia were first investigated throughout the towns and published in 1943 by the Rev. Percy Ibboston, the Organising Secretary of the Federation of Native Welfare Societies. The Report, though written with moderation, showed that the toiling blacks in the seven major towns (Bulawayo, Salisbury, Gwelo, Selukwe, QueQue, Gatooma, and Umtali) were ruthlessly exploited. Many were not only underfed but suffered from malnutrition. There was nearly everywhere acute housing shortage with its concomitant overcrowding. Medical facilities were far too grossly inadequate to cope with the diseases as well as ailments produced by malnutrition, by food that was not only ill-prepared but also consumed in unhygienic surroundings, by generally filthy living conditions and by promiscuity, the consequence of degenerating morals.

Bhebe (1989, 9) argues that the major cause of these unbearable living conditions was the enactment of the Land Apportionment Act of 1931 with its 1941 modifications, wherein male African labourers thronged to the urban areas after being dislocated in their rural lands. When narrating their life stories, all interviewees mentioned how they were dislocated in their ancestral lands.

## ETHNICITY AND THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

Msindo (2006, 433) describes the ethnic tensions, which were so common in those days in the following way:

As I came to realise, the 1929 violence was part of the effort to regain lost Ndebele moral authority over Bulawayo. Apart from the economic situation and urban stresses, the fights were part of a spirited response to a moral and ethnic panic by the ‘real’ claimants of the town. In this project, Ndebele people, being less co-ordinated and less rigidly unified a category, did not mind help from any other ethnic group that had a bone to pick with insolent Shona.

Msindo’s assertion is backed by Nduna Ncube (1989), who maintains that when the Shona and the Ndebele fought, Zambians supported the Ndebele because, again, as Msindo (2006, 447) argues

Originating from different countries, with different languages and cultures, ‘aliens’ were not an organised ethnic group. For that reason, they could have temporarily supported any group of people with whom they shared at least similar discontents. For instance, ‘aliens’ were annoyed by Shona arrogance at boxing matches and their beating of people at bioscopes, just as Ndebele people were. However, the Ndebele obviously had more and other grievances, over and above those of their ‘alien’ companions. In this light, we are right to see ‘aliens’ as loosely organised aggrieved partners in the violence, who, in a fight for their own cause, found companionship and associates, at least temporarily, among the Ndebele, who had a more persuasive ethnic agenda...

Cross ethnic love relationships were also a problem, as Nduna Ncube (1989) points out that Ndebele men were not happy with their sisters having relationships with Shona men. Msindo (2006, 435–436) makes a detailed analysis about this issue:

Although sexual life prompted, in some cases, a breakout of the limits of ethnicity, it also created an ethnic problem. The sexual relations between Shona men and Ndebele women for instance, attracted the ire of some old ‘respectable’ Ndebele inhabitants of the town, who began, in 1914, to voice their displeasure through two associations, the Loyal Amandebele Patriotic Society and another rival one, Ilihlo Lomuzi, which later became the Matabele Home Society (and was linked to the 1929 fights). The Loyal Amandebele Patriotic Society consisted of men who, by reason of their education, however little, and their attachment to Ndebele culture were both modern (desiring modernity and decency in town) and traditional (hence their quest for the observance of strict Ndebele laws in a modern town). These, few as they were, expressed disquiet about how ‘prostitution risked wiping out the land’, and consequently, ‘breaking the ancestors’ heart’, the ‘Christian law’, and ‘the law of Mzilikazi’. Their activism had little impact, perhaps because of the low number of Ndebele followers at that time. It seems that the local urban Ndebele men were annoyed by these ‘new’ and seemingly casual cross-ethnic sexual relations between their Ndebele ‘cousins’ and Shona and other foreigners in Matabeleland who had more money to attract such women. This sounds similar to the 1929 grievances where Ndebele people bitterly complained of the “association of Mashona males with Matabele females.” The association of Shona men with Ndebele women cited in some of the sources raises a number of questions. First, one wonders whether the Shona, by trying to monopolise the company and sexual services of unmarried urban Ndebele women (to the annoyance of Ndebele men), were being retributive to Ndebele men by attacking them where it pained them most, their masculinity. By that token, one



also wonders whether Ndebele reaction was a response to that felt assault on their masculinity – that Shona came all the way from Mashonaland and took Ndebele women to themselves in the presence of Ndebele men. Alternatively, were Shona men trying to portray an imagined public moral authority over the ‘children of their nieces, aunts’, or what they imagined as their female relatives violently trafficked into Matabeleland during the pre-colonial era? It seems both views are plausible, but future research work is still needed.

## METHODISM AND THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

There are positive aspects that can be glimpsed from the life stories of the interviewees that show the role that was played by the Methodist Church in providing education for Africans—not only in Makhokhoba, but throughout the whole country during the colonial period. Others may argue about the kind of education offered—however, positive contribution still remains.

Coming to the collusion of Methodist missionaries with the state in pushing the colonial agenda the following analysis from the life stories is explained:

Madhiba (2010, 55) argues that during the first phase of Wesleyan Methodists’ political praxis in Zimbabwe the major concern was similar to what Ajayi (2008, 243) observes; that

the challenge of politics was the extent to which it was proper for Christians to be involved in managing the structures of government ... the immediate problem was how to keep the Christian converts away from participating in the politics of their communities that might involve traditional rituals or other practices unacceptable to the mission.

This assertion is supported by Reverend Musa during his interview, when he mentioned that there were conflicts between the missionaries and Africans, when the latter was not allowed to drink beer and practise polygamy.

On the claims that missionaries tried to keep Africans from participating in politics, Masotsha’s explanation of how the ICU disbanded provided a satisfactory answer. He narrated in detail how Reverend Ibboston succeeded in making Africans spend most of their time in sports rather than attending political rallies.

Another interesting observations is made when Reverend Musa, an African minister of religion in the Methodist Church, was asked about his views on Masotsha Ndlovu, the trade unionist. Here are his negative views, which shows the animosity which existed between the church and African politics:

**Interviewer:** So that time when the ICU was active you were already also an enlightened man, did you see most of their activities? The ICU and Masotsha Ndlovu, do you know him?

**Reverend Musa:** I know him very well, he was an ICU man and he had a lot in his head but he did not know how to express it because he was not educated. All he wanted was “ngizakutshaya” (beating people). There was an open space between Mzilikazi police camp and St Patricks thus were Masotsha used to have gatherings. Many people used to come and listen to him but the missionaries told the people not to listen to him.

## CENSORSHIP AND THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

Stanley Square and McDonald Hall became centres of entertainment for Africans early between 1930 and 1950 respectively. The venues were strategically chosen, as they were in the eye of the State, which was interested in the kind of entertainment that was being shown—whether or not it was moral and politically correct. Burrett and Mukwende (2016, 17) concur with the above assertion and note that

McDonald Hall was also use for social activities such as weddings, concerts, dances as well as a film hall. Several times shows were shut down when the Rhodesian Censorship authorities found that “scheduled films” were being shown.

Patel (1997, 56–57) describes the history of censorship laws in the colonial era as follows:

The control of publications made its first entry into the statute books of Southern Rhodesia in January 1912 through the Obscene Publications Ordinance, 1911.9...The particular activities that the Ordinance proscribed covered the importation, production, sale, distribution, possession and posting of indecent or obscene publications or printed matter. The regulation of the visual media was also introduced later the same year, in terms of the Cinematograph Ordinance, 1912.”...Subsequent legislation, promulgated as the Entertainments Control and Censorship Act, 1932, 12 expanded the scope of control to cover theatrical performances and other public entertainments. This Act also established the Board of Censors whose functions at that time were confined to the scrutiny of films and film advertisements...

Africans in colonial Zambia and Zimbabwe have been watching movies since the First World War, when owners of mines organised screenings to lure workers to their compounds. By the end of the 1930s many Africans in the region were attending performances regularly—especially American Westerns (referred to locally as cowboy movies). These movies were used as recruitment tools. Africans by then were regarded as small children who were easily carried away by such movies (Burns 2002). Brennan (2005, 103) cites Bell, who argues that the native must be treated as we treat a 10-year old white child—that is, he must be shown films of action of the Western type of action. These films were viewed by some blacks, especially the educated ones as

contemptuous and ‘low brow’ form of entertainment, appropriate for children and the uneducated, but not for sophisticated audiences. Thus their advocacy of stricter censorship was in part motivated by a desire to establish equal access to the highbrow culture of the colonisers (Brennan 2005, 104).

Brennan (2005, 481) also states that

recent scholars of cinema in colonial Africa have framed their studies around the topic of anxieties held by European officials and settlers towards the corrupting influence of Western cinema on “impressionable” African filmgoers. Such a corruption, Europeans feared, might undermine the racial boundaries that supported colonial hierarchies.

Odile (2007–2008, 36–38) concurs with Brennan that censorship was mainly legislated by the whites in order to safeguard their prestige, maintain public order and silence the narratives, which were contesting colonisation—especially films that instigate rebellion as well as films from the Soviet Union, which were regarded as tools or communist propaganda.

Rwafa (2009) argues that Augusto Baol’s epistemological understanding of the poetics of the oppressed is rooted in the quest to understand the nature of ideological domination and strategies of resisting it. According to Baol

theatre is a cultural weapon that should be placed at the service of the oppressed by the oppressed, so that they can express themselves through language in order to work out alternative ways of articulating their values...The spectator assumes the protagonic role, changes dramatic action, tries out solutions and discusses plans for change. (Baol 1979, 22)

The dialectics of questioning social and political phenomena through theatrical performance allow the oppressed to discover “gaps”, “silences” and “points of undecidability” (Derrida 1973, 42), often concealed by those with the power to write history.

It is therefore, interesting to listen to the song by Nduna Ncube (1989), one of the interviewees. This interview conducted according to the life story approach, shows how music, theatre and drama were used to instil revolutionary political ideology in black people during the colonial period. So effective was this *modus operandi* such that it forced the colonial government to come up with censorship laws, which were enforced by the censorship board. Also of interest was the formation of literature bureau, which promoted African writing and publication of books, which focused on morality, such as promoting such virtues as respecting the authorities and denouncing such vices as sexual immorality, but remaining silent on political issues.

Nduna Ncube’s (1989) song sounds as a form of protest. It contains protest lyrics against all kinds of colonial taxes and those pseudo politicians who were causing chaos in the struggle. It does not clearly mention the name of the African nationalist that is being applauded, except using the nickname “mafukuzela”, which referred to Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, one of the founding members of the liberation struggle. Perhaps by using such nicknames the choir was trying to evade censorship regulations. This genre, containing the lyrics of poetic resistance shows the theatrical growth of Africans at the time, because they were beginning to produce their own relevant struggle theatre than being one way imbibers of western forms of art, which tended to be the “opium of the masses.” This idea is clearly expressed by Odile (2007–2008, 40), who argues that at the

other extreme, cinema is presented as the ‘opium of the masses’ the very tool used by the colonial authorities to lead youth astray into perversion, to deter them from political activity, to restrict their critical capacity and manipulate them instead of educating them.

Therefore, one can argue that Augusto Baol's theatre of the oppressed was now taking place to challenge the ideological domination of the whites by coming up with protest songs, with some sounding honest, while full with hidden political messages that can be understood by blacks.

Also, during the *Zhii* protests the protesters sang the song *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrica* ("God bless Africa"), which became the national anthem soon after independence in 1980. SouthAfrica.info (2016) states that *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* was composed in 1897 by Enoch Sontonga, a teacher at a Methodist Mission School in Johannesburg. The words of the first stanza were originally written in isiXhosa as a hymn. In 1927 seven additional Xhosa stanzas were later added by Samuel Mqhayi, a poet. Most of Sontonga's songs carried sad undertones, as he witnessed the suffering of African people in Johannesburg, but were popular. After his death in 1905 choirs used to borrow them from his wife. Solomon Plaatje, one of South Africa's greatest writers and a founding member of the ANC was the first to have the song recorded, as well as the likes of African teachers and poets such as JL Dube (who later became the African National Congress (ANC) President-General), RT Caluza, and SEK Mqhayi popularised the song (Bangura 2011). This happened in London in 1923. For decades this song has been sung in Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa as a song of protest and defiance—hence it was sung during the *Zhii* protests to motivate people to revolt against the establishment.

## LIBERAL WHITES DURING THE COLONIAL ERA

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (1991, 717) defines a liberal person as tolerant, open-minded and free from prejudice. In political literature Hughes (2014, 49) analysis cites Michael Desch (2007, 10), who defines liberalism as "a political system or set of political values based on some combination of individual freedom, equality of opportunity, free markets, and political representativeness", as well as David Luban (2005, 1426) who asserts that liberalism "includes conservatives as well as progressives, so long as they believe in limited government and the importance of human dignity and individual rights" can be used in understanding this concept.

When one follows the story of Asthon, the interviewee above, one observes that he has an element of liberalism. Ndlovu (1981) also mentioned whites who supported him—Mr Bowden of the Church of England, Reverend White, who was his personal friend, as well as Father Cripps, both of the Methodist Church. Asthon also describes himself as a liberal. Also, some of the historians concurred with the characterisation—as if by justifying it he is telling a very interesting story of his upbringing. Ashton mentioned that he grew up playing with African children, and that he was conversant in local languages. Through the power of his story one is tempted to conclude that his upbringing made him to be a liberalist, as opposed to his other white contemporaries, who were racist. One of the interviewees Moyo (1990) described him as a learned man respected by both Africans and the government. However, he said that his policy

of supporting the building of beer halls was not a good one, as it reduced Blacks to drunkards, who did not hunger in earnest for their independence from the colonial yoke.

These diversion tactics seem to be attributed to liberals. Another liberal who features most in the oral history interviewees found at the National Archives of Zimbabwe is Percy Ibboston. He is described as a Methodist missionary who also represented Blacks in legal issues. However, Ndlovu (1981) seems to have a different view as he accused Percy Ibboston of diverting Africans from politics to sports as noted above. Also Brennan (2005, 104–105) describes Percy Ibboston as the man behind the implementation of censorship regulations, when in 1948 the Federation of African Welfare societies, an organisation run by him, was tasked to censor films that natives could watch, and aggressively implemented its objectives.

Therefore, the characterisation of liberals during the colonial period is complex as they did not clearly fit the category of racists, while at the same time bigotry and moralism fitted in their characters, but not fully. This dilemma is worsened by scholars who now epistemologically put white liberalism and politically-correct racism into some white Messianic complex, voluntourists or white Saviour industrial complex (Gay 2014). Gay (2014, 19) further argues that

Perhaps today's humanitarian warriors and voluntourists could benefit from a study of their religious ancestors. Mainline Protestantism, like most Christian denominations, has a history of foreign adventurism: missionary work. Yesterday's missionaries weren't so different from today's white saviours. A rural African Rip Van Winkle who dozed off in the late 19th century and awoke today would find many new and alien things. But there would be one continuity: a kind hearted and earnest foreigner pushing the locals to change their culture—for their own good, of course. His tracts used to talk about religion; later it was sanitation and literacy; now it's safe sex, democracy, female genital mutilation, and gay rights. The missionary efforts of the past offer a frame for examining the present. Though missionaries then and now may feel they're doing the locals unalloyed good, reality can be more complicated...

Standing (2010) echoes the same sentiments:

White liberals espouse an artificial and pretentious form of 'egalitarianism', a patronising and hypocritical approach to ethnic minorities and non-Western cultures, and – in a re-hash of the notion of the 'white man's burden' – devote themselves to a delusional Messianism in which they seek to 'save the world' through protesting against war (in real terms, protesting against non-white people having a chance at freedom and democracy),... globalisation (thereby opposing the one great vehicle by which poorer nations can develop), and so on, while making themselves feel and look 'good' by flaunting their pious support for campaigns to end poverty in the Third World...

This is how complex the issue of liberalism was at times during the colonial period—even though some of the quotations refer to current international issues, some broad arguments can be taken from these quotes; even though some may appear racist. Therefore, liberalism is not a clear-cut issue and still needs further research.

## CONCLUSION

Atkinson (2002, 125) argues that “telling a life story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear.” These words ring true as historical information is unravelled through the life stories of Masotsha Ndlovu, Dr Ashton, Reverend Musa, Nduna Ncube, Dupute Moyo and Jacob Mnindwa Moyo. Through their stories we do not only learn about the *Zhii* protests, but about aspects of their whole lives as well. These aspects reveal a lot about Methodism, African education, urban and rural living conditions, liberalism, theatre of the oppressed and ethnicity during the colonial rule. As I have shown in this article, there is power in a story.

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