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Contested archaeological approaches to mass grave exhumations in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Within the last 50 years, present day Zimbabwe, (Figure 1), formerly Rhodesia, a Southern African country, has gone through various pogroms resulting in the death of over 50,000 people in total both within and outside the country. The massacres consist of the Liberation War (1966–1979); political violence characterized by every election since 1980; the Matabeleland Democide (1982–1987); and the diamond conflict in Marange, Eastern Zimbabwe (2006–2018). These various episodes of violence have produced a myriad of human body depositional sites which include mine shafts, mass graves at schools and hospitals, burials at detention centres, pit latrines, and caves. This paper will analyse the disagreements and antagonism between professional archaeologists and vernacular exhumers that emerged during various limited exhumation of mass graves within the country. The paper will conclude by offering avenues of approaches to mass graves exhumation as the material evidence might in future, subject to judicial inquiries, contribute towards truth telling and peace and reconciliation.

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Exhumation; politics; forensic archaeology; mass graves; material evidence

Background to the conflicts

Liberation war

Present day Zimbabwe was part of the Federation of Southern Rhodesia, which consisted of Northern Rhodesia [Zambia], the protectorate of Nyasaland [Malawi] and Southern Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] (Bhebe and Ranger (1995); Evans 2007). This federation broke up when both Zambia and Malawi achieved their independence from Great Britain in 1964 and the Ian Smith-led government made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on 11 November 1965. The declaration polarized the country, with the Smith regime alienated from the rest of the population; it triggered the birth of Black Nationalist organizations, which sought dialogue over land, discriminatory laws, and racism. The first such party was the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress (SRANC), formed in 1957, and Joshua Nkomo was its first leader (Nkomo 1984). This party was soon banned in 1959 as the Rhodesian government felt that its leaders were inciting the black majority workers and youth in townships to revolt against white minority rule. Soon after that, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo was formed in December 1961. This

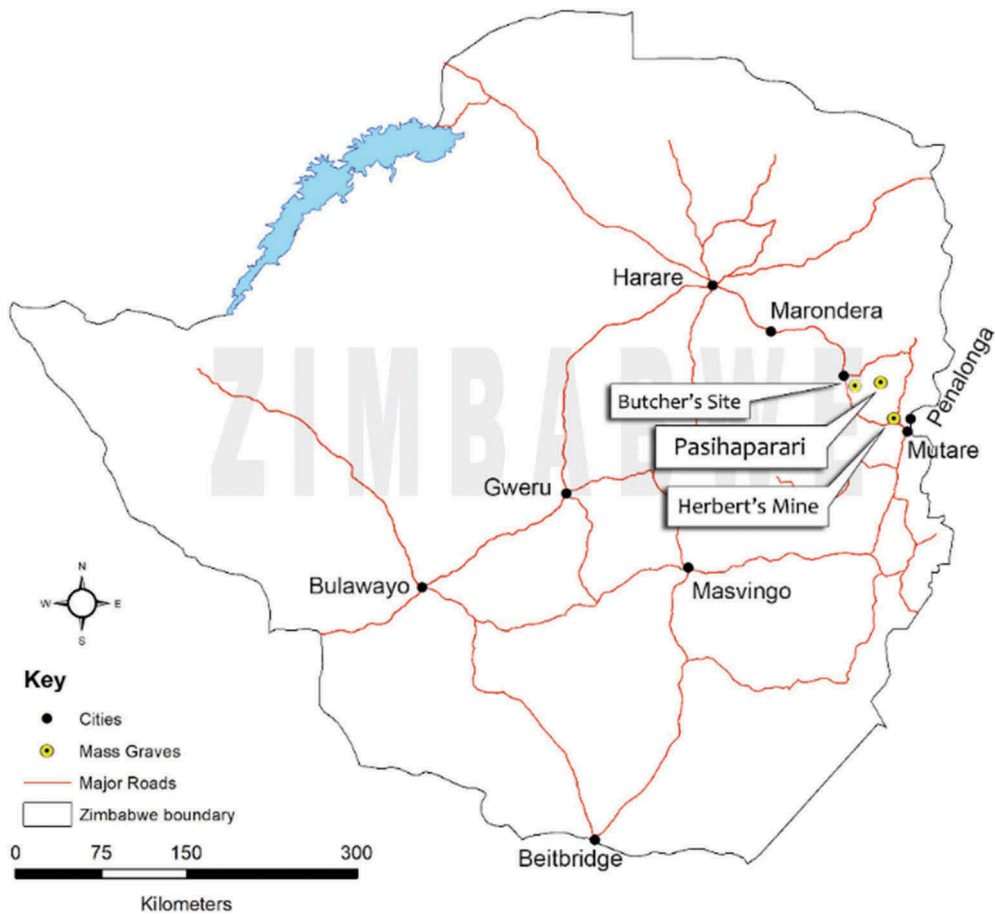


Figure 2. Zimbabwe showing selected mass grave site. Picture prepared by Rusell Kapumha 2020.

2007). These subtle linguistic differences were vital in that they shaped the killings that later occurred in the 1980s. The Liberation War was fought by these two armed militant groups for 15 years. Over 30,000 people lost their lives, not only in Zimbabwe but also in neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Zambia (Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger (2000);). The remains from the Liberation War are scattered around contested sites in the country, which includes mine shafts and mass graves at former detention centres such as Butchers Site and Hebert Mine in Eastern Zimbabwe; these will be discussed further in this paper.

The matabeleland democide

Soon after the end of the war in 1979, the new government under Robert Mugabe was faced with the complex task of integrating three armed groups into a single national army under the supervision of the British. The three groups were the Rhodesian Army, ZIPRA, and ZANLA. This operation was not particularly successful due to nepotism, quest of



Figure 3. Butchers Site Magamba Township Rusape Zimbabwe. Source: Google Maps 2018 (Picture by Njabulo Chipangura).

power by ZANU-PF, and tribalism (Evans 1991; Nkomo 1984). This led to skirmishes between former ZANLA and ZIPRA cadres at assembly points and desertion of men from both groups in Entubane, Connemara, Ntabazinduna and Chitungwiza (2000); CCJP 1997). As a result of these desertions, a 'dissident narrative' soon emerged. This was purposely used to describe ZIPRA cadres who had escaped assembly points and went on to commit crimes in the Matabeleland provinces (Alexander 1998; Kriger 2003). There were also former ZANLA cadres committing similar offences in the Mashonaland provinces, but they were not labelled as such (Alao (1994). Mugabe, who had won elections and been sworn in as Prime minister, also had designs for a one-party state which was resisted both within and outside his own party, much to his frustration (Doran (2017); Shaw 1986). There was also the 'discovery' of arms caches in Matabeleland which the state attributed to evidence of dissidents within ZAPU; this was not exactly truthful as both ZANLA and ZIPRA cadres had cached arms, which was widely known (CCJP and LRF(1997); Doran 2017). The caches were used as an excuse to further tarnish the image of ZAPU as a 'dissident party' and to justify the events that unfolded afterwards. In addition to this scenario, South Africa had a destabilization policy for Zimbabwe under Operation Drama (Doran (2017); O'Brien 2011). This was a counterinsurgency programme to destabilize Zimbabwe by training and arming spies and former 'dissidents' to make incursions into Zimbabwe and commit offences (Scarnecchia (2001); Phimister 2008).

Mugabe at independence assumed the dual role of minister of defence and Prime Minister; hence, he was able to negotiate with the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, in Pyongyang in 1981 for the training of an army unit that would report directly to him (CCJP 1997). Mugabe commissioned this brigade, which he named the 5th Brigade or *Gukurahundi*; *Gukurahundi* means ‘the early rain that washes away the chaff before spring’ (Werbner 1991). The Brigade comprised over 3,500 men, which consisted mostly of Shona-speaking ex-ZANLA cadres. This brigade was headed by the present Minister of Agriculture and former Air Marshal, Perence Shiri, and was trained for over a year at a secret location in Nyanga and deployed in Matabeleland North in January 1983.

The 5th Brigade started its training in September 1982 and Mugabe handed them a flag embroidered with the word *Gukurahundi* and told the passing out brigade to go and plough and reconstruct Matabeleland (Cameroon 2018; Werbner 1991). The 5th Brigade then began a systematic campaign of murder, torture, rape and arbitrary detention of ZAPU and ZIPRA members who were overwhelmingly Ndebele. The standout massacre was the murder of 67 young people on River Cewale, of which six survived by pretending to be dead (1997). Witness testimony at hand and collected at the time also revealed extreme methods of torture and murder which included forcing victims into huts and setting them alight, making victims dig their own shallow graves and shooting them within, being buried alive, and thrown down pit latrines and mineshafts (Silika 2020). When international news broke of the atrocities and the CCJP made a report which they presented to Mugabe, the 5th Brigade was briefly withdrawn, retrained and redeployed in Matabeleland South in 1984 (CCJP 1997). In this province, tactics changed to more subtle methods although kidnapping, torture, starvation, curfews, rape and bayoneting of pregnant women continued (1997). The most notorious detention centre to be opened during that time was the Bhalagwe Camp, near Antelope mine. In the first few months of the operation of Bhalagwe Camp, over 2,000 people were detained, tortured, and their remains thrown into nearby Antelope mine (Berkeley and Schrage 1986). The exact number of killed at this site is unknown; however, the camp was abandoned and has not been used for any other reason while some of the buildings have been destroyed. There has been sporadic recovery of remains at the site, but people are fearful of approaching due to security, spiritual and political contexts. This period of unrest ended with the signing of a Unity Agreement between ZAPU and ZANU in 1987 and left between 20–30,000 people killed, although some estimates put the deaths even higher at 50,000 (CCJP and LRF (1997); Coltart (2017); Cross 2016). The remains of *Gukurahundi* democides are found in mass graves near schools and hospitals, caves, former pit latrines, burnt huts and mine shafts (EAAF 1999, 2001).

Political violence and the disappeared

Since 1980, Zimbabwe has held eight presidential elections, eight parliamentary elections, and two constitutional referenda, all of which have been marred by political violence with opposition members bearing the brunt of the violence (Reeler (2009); Sachikonye 2011). When Zimbabwe achieved its independence in 1980, the Mugabe regime inherited most of the apparatus that had been responsible for human rights abuses during the previous two decades, and particularly the dreaded Central Intelligence Organization [CIO] (Courville

(2012); Flower 1987). The emergence of viable opposition in the form of the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 seemed to have increased the ruling party ZANU-PF's appetite for violence. This also been aided by the availability of former ZANLA and ZIPRA personnel in its ranks. In addition, the government has had at its disposal former war veterans and government-trained militia; these men were trained ostensibly to conduct 'youth service'. However, they have been used by ZANU-PF for campaign purposes (Chidza 2015). Except for 2013, every election year has been marked by groups associated with the government setting up 'bases', particularly in rural areas, where opposition party members are arbitrarily kidnapped, and some instances, killed (Chitukutuku 2017). The elections of 2000, 2002, 2008 have been the most violent, particularly the latter which resulted in the MDC presidential candidate, Morgan Tsvangirayi, withdrawing from the election. In August 2018 and January 2019 for instance, over 20 people were killed by the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) personnel, Police, and CIO in various locations such as Harare, Bulawayo, Kadoma, and Epworth (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum 2019). A commission of inquiry for the August 2018 killings, the Motlanthe Commission, blamed the opposition for the post-election riots but noted the army were responsible for the killings (Motlanthe 2018). Due to the partisan nature of the police service and judiciary, most of the offences are never comprehensively investigated and a presidential amnesty has followed each and every period of violence (Magaisa 2016). Opposition members' estimate that over 5,000 people have been killed since 2000, millions displaced, and a sizable number have gone missing (Aids Free World 2009; Cross (2016); HRW 2009).

Blood diamonds

The discovery of surface diamonds in Chiadzwa, Marange around 2006 triggered a massive invasion of the area by 'illegal panners' also known in local parlance as *makorokoza/magweja*. The alluvial diamond fields are in the municipal ward of Chiadzwa, about 80 miles southwest of the city of Mutare in the Manicaland Province. Between 2006 and 2007, 'illegal diamond mining' in the area continued unabated with the local community also joining the enterprise (Chipangura and Marufu 2019). With the realization of the scale of illegal panning, the government then deployed the ZNA, police and CIO operatives into the area.

When alluvial diamonds were discovered in the area the government through ZANU-PF senior figures encouraged illegal mining syndicates to operate amidst a major economic crisis within the country which had brought about hyperinflation and high unemployment levels (Cross 2015; HRW 2009). The diamond rush was thus the direct result of an open government policy, later overturned after chaos erupted as thousands of miners descended on the mining field. In November 2008, the mining door was shut by the government, which had initially permitted illegal miners to exploit the diamonds soon after their discovery (Chipangura 2017). With a collapsing economy that had triggered massive unemployment (90% unemployment rate), mostly among the youths, the ruling government was presented with an opportunity in Chiadzwa to appease the restless population by allowing free exploitation of the recently discovered diamond fields. Thus, allowing *makorokozas* (illegal miners) to mine freely was a way of trying to garner votes for the upcoming presidential and general elections. However, after its re-election in July 2008 the government decided to drive *makorokozas* violently out of the area under the pretext of restoration of order.

A violent military operation code named Operation *Hakudzokwi* was launched in November 2018, which resulted in an estimated death of 300 illegal miners.

At the peak of the diamond rush, senior securiocrats in the army and police intelligence joined hands with the illegal panners to form syndicates in which they would share proceeds from illegal diamond sales in return for offering the miners protection (Saunders and Nyamuda (2016); Simpson 2018). Certain sections of the fields were known by monikers of connected individuals who owned them. For instance, the Vice President at that time, Dr Joyce Mujuru and her deceased retired army general husband, Solomon Mujuru, had place called *Churu chekwaMujuru* [hill that belongs to the Mujuru's]. Her daughter, Nyasha Del Campo, was caught trying to sell Kimberly Process uncertified diamonds worth US\$15 million with her Portuguese husband to European clients in 2009 (Rukuni 2009). At the height of the diamond rush, over 35,000 people made it to the fields despite an informal cordon surrounding the areas (AIDC 2016). Internationally connected diamonds dealers also started to come into the area, such as the notorious Sam Pa who had links to senior government figures that facilitated the movement of the diamonds and money on an international scale (Burgis 2015).

In order to evade police seizure of diamonds and local criminal gangs, panners soon developed techniques to avoid confiscation of their precious finds. One way was to swallow some pellets and excrete them when they had passed check points; another way was to hide in all possible orifices (Silika 2020). Soldiers soon picked up on this modus operandi which resulted in some panners being detained for days until they had pass the diamonds. Those who tried to escape were shot. Women who were in the fields who were caught would often be tortured, raped and some infected with HIV as a result (AIDC 2016). The precise number of people killed in the Marange fields since the disturbances started is unclear as this is still ongoing; however, a conservative estimate puts the figure just over 300 (HRW 2009). There is a well-known mass grave in Dangamvura which was dug by soldiers in 2008 containing the remains of over 80 people for instance, and some remains have been buried within the fields (Andersson 2011).

Types of mass graves

The Liberation War, Gukurahundi, political violence, and diamond related deaths have produced different types of body deposition sites which vary from primary to secondary. Primary mass graves, often execution sites, are where individuals have been killed and buried within that location; secondary sites are where the individuals have been transported after being killed somewhere else (Adams and Bryd (2014); Jesse and Skinner 2005). Mass graves within both contexts are found at schools and hospitals (St Pauls Secondary School in Lupane), at former detention centres (Butchers site Rusape, Bhalagwe Camp in Matobo), mineshafts (Hebert Mine in Mutasa, William Mine in Chibundo, Antelope Mine in Matabeleland South), caves, and former dip tanks (EAAF (2001); Eppel 2015). There are also individual burials at former commercial farms and within cemeteries (the Dangamvura burial mentioned previously). The mineshafts are particularly problematic as there is a strong case that they have been used multiple times since the Liberation War right up to the present day to deposit human remains (Coltart 2016).

A case in point is the William mine shaft in Mt Darwin. ZANU-PF through the Fallen Heroes Trust of Zimbabwe (FHTZ) claimed the remains belonged to those who were killed in the Liberation War and dumped there. The opposition MDC also claimed their members who have been missing and presumed dead were buried in the same location (Benyera 2014; Fontein (2016)). Finally, the former guerrilla movement ZIPRA also claimed the remains belonged to their former ZIPRA cadres who were massacred at assembly points and brought to this location. This resulted in a court order granted in favour of ZIPRA, which resulted in the halting of the exhumation (ZIPRA V Fallen Heroes Trust Judgement No. HB 61/11 Case No. HC 880/11). Through three case studies, this paper is going to examine the complexities around exhumation of human remains at Butcher Site, Hebert Mine, and Pasihaparari, all in Manicaland Province, Eastern Zimbabwe (Figure 2).

Methodological conflicts in exhumation exercises

This section explores the fraught and intricate working relationship between the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) and FHTZ using three case studies of exhumation work that was undertaken at Butcher site, Hebert Mine and Pasihaparari Village in Manicaland. NMMZ is a government institution that is mandated by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe Act 25:11 to conserve and present national heritage in the country. It has a number of professionally trained archaeologists who mostly undertake research work that is associated with archaeological and Liberation War heritage protection. The FHTZ is a mixture of former mostly ZANLA guerrillas, war veterans and 'spirit mediums' who are involved in the search, exhumation and identification of Liberation War mass graves. They are also politically aligned to the ruling ZANU-PF (Marawanyika 2011). One of the authors of this paper was involved in all three exhumation projects working as an archaeologist with NMMZ. The disputes that will be discussed in this section hinged more on the best approach possible to use in exhuming remains of the Liberation War fighters who were buried in mass graves. We will analyse this fragile working relationship from an autoethnographic perspective that is derived from the participation of one of the authors in the exhumation projects. The data that is going to be presented in this section was obtained using interviews, archaeological exhumations, and material evidence analysis.

Contextual historical background of Butcher site

Butcher Site in Rusape (Figure 3), Zimbabwe is believed to have been used as a Rhodesian Forces (RF) secret interrogation, torture, and execution base during the latter phase of the Second *Chimurenga*, that is between 1976 and 1980. Before independence, the name 'Butcher' seems not to have been used, although local residents knew that some people captured by the RF were being killed at the shooting range (Ibid). The name came into popular use during the exhumations and metaphorically 'Butcher' was used to depict and present graphically the murder of Liberation War fighters that occurred at this site (Choga 2013). It has not yet been established when the shooting range was constructed but a map drawn by the Surveyor General's Office (SGO) in 1972 clearly shows the existence of a 300 m long rifle range. It runs north-north-west, ending near a stream that runs westerly (SGO 1972). An outline of the site and an analysis of remnants of old destroyed buildings seem to suggest that the site had a resident court martial. The shooting range might have

been an execution area for court-martialled guerrillas, war collaborators, and civilians suspected of aiding guerrillas (Rutanhire 2013). War Veterans interviewed stated that those who had been condemned to death were executed by a firing squad and were used as live and mobile targets (Bunjira 2013, Rutanhire 2013). According to the narrative of Takesure Bunjira, the mass killings at the shooting range and the bloodletting epitomizes the suffering experienced by the liberation fighters; hence the place qualifies to be called a Butcher/Slaughter Site (Bunjira 2013). The executed individuals were thereafter dumped in unmarked shallow mass graves scattered around the site. With time, the shallow graves were exposed due to erosion and in 1993 efforts were made to rehabilitate some of the mass graves. Subsequently, in 1996 the site was designated a district heroes' acre at the recommendation of the war veterans in Makoni District.

The exhumation process

Exhumation work at Butcher Site started as a result of a spiritual inspiration by FHTZ. This being the acceptable approach in human remains investigation within the context of local cultural and political contexts. A total of nine skeletal remains of different individuals were exhumed from a mass grave measuring twelve metres by four metres (Chipangura 2013). The skeletal remains recovered from this trench were heavily decomposed with a number of missing body parts from the hip area to the cranium. Material remains recovered included a complete military uniform, a shirt, three pants, and a brownish buckled belt. It is possible that these remains belonged to male adults and the clothing recovered seem to suggest liberation fighters (2013). The other remains exhumed from this trench were found wrapped in a black plastic bag. These skeletal remains were heavily fragmented and fractured, with some isolated grains of hair found on what would have been the skull. Some of the materials recovered together with the remains included a pink scarf with red and white stripes, green gloves, whitish/reddish socks, eight black power bangles, a bead bracelet with greenish, royal blue, yellow, black and orange beads, and red and white glass beads from the neck area. These remains were thought to have belonged to a woman because of a floral dress and a purple jersey recovered alongside the fragmented skeletal remains. Apparent dry blood stains were also noticed on the left tibia and the general assumption here was that she was shot in the leg (2013). From this analysis, it was deduced that this individual was not necessarily a Liberation War fighter but might have been an ordinary person captured at a *pungwe*/night vigil organized by the guerrilla fighters during the Liberation War.

The other major exhumation carried out by NMMZ and FHTZ was on unmarked mass grave 14. This was the biggest mass grave of all at Butcher Sites and it measured a total area of twenty-four m² (2013). Twenty-five bodies comprising of fragmented skeletal and mostly burnt remains were recovered. The human remains were piled up and were laid in a supine position and some were in white and black plastic bags (Figure 4). The first skeletal remains were uncovered underneath the grey plastic bag at an initial depth of 0.89 m (2013). Evidence of intense burning in this grave was also noticed from the consistent appearance of a red soil layer around all the edges of the grave. Furthermore, burnt remains of clothes and shoes recovered augmented the evidence of burning. A live round from a suspected AK 47 rifle, a tube of margarine, woollen socks, green underwear, and two medicine bottles were also discovered on the first body in this grave (2013). It is possible that the individual with these possessions was a medick. Two



Figure 4. Remains exhumed from mass grave 14 at Butchers Site in white and black plastic bags (Picture by Njabulo Chipangura).

Rhodesian coins were also recovered from around what would have been the hip area of the body. All the other remains exhumed from this grave exhibited signs of heavy burning which led to the conclusion that the twenty five bodies and materials from mass grave 14 were buried on the same day and were subjected to attempted cremation.

Unearthing of human remains at Hebert Mine

Herbert Mine, commonly called Matumba Six, is located at Premier Farm, 21 km north west of Mutare on the foot of Chiremba Mountain, west of Old Umtali Mission School. The previous owner of Herbert Mine was Robert Truscott who was a former Rhodesian soldier (Rutanhire 2013). The abandoned mine was later used by the RF during the latter phase of the Liberation War to dump bodies in the disused mine shaft. The bodies that were dumped in the shaft were of victims tortured and killed at the Rhodesian military base that was located just a few kilometres from Herbert mine . Apart from dumping human bodies in the shaft, the RF also threw old vehicle accessories, horses, wooden crates, plastics, and chemical containers, scraps of metals, plastics and rotten oranges. This was probably done to conceal the evidence of human remains. After the liberation struggle the mine was completely abandoned and become disused (Ibid).

In 1993, Mr. Oliver Mhandu, the current owner of the Herbert Mine, was given a prospecting licence by the Ministry of Mines to mine at the site, but mining operations only started in 2013. It was during this period that miners working for Mr. Mhandu discovered human remains. These were found along with a FN rifle, AK 47 magazines, and several rounds of ammunition (Mukangu 2013). The exhumation and unearthing of human remains that was

to follow was again carried out by NMMZ archaeologists working alongside FHTZ vernacular exhumers. The exhumation exercise at Hebert Mine was undertaken between August and September 2014; a total of 71 human remains was recovered. The estimated depth of the mine shaft was around 45 m (Chipangura 2014). Before the exhumations at Hebert Mine by FHTZ and NMMZ, human remains from the mine shaft had been arbitrarily removed by the mine workers. The remains of the suspected freedom fighters were removed unsystematically and bundled in a cage, then lifted out of the shaft. Because of this unsystematic removal there was a co-mingling of human remains. It was therefore virtually impossible to reconstruct the full extent of individual human skeletons except for the bodies that were retrieved from the mine shaft in plastic body bags (2014). The first body removed from the shaft by the miners was found at a depth of 32 metres. Nine bodies were exhumed from the shaft, of which five human remains were in white plastic body bags. The differentiation of the skeleton bones was carried out together by NMMZ and FHTZ. Matching of individual skeletal remains proved to be very difficult because of the mixing of human and animal bones. Archaeologists tried to trace individual bones using the clothes that were found on some of the bodies as a separation mechanism. Officials from the NMMZ using the minimum number approach by; White (1953) concluded that there were about 41 human remains; however, using traditional spiritual methods, the FHTZ insisted it was 71 despite not having any physical evidence for the number.

Massacres at Pasihaparari village

Oral witness narratives by villagers revealed that liberation fighters were attacked by the RF on 8 April 1979 at Pasihaparari Village in Mutasa District. Pasihaparari village is located 25 km north of Hebert Mine. A surprise attack was launched on the liberation fighters whilst they were drinking beer at a homestead identified to be of the Maori family (Nyagwambo 2014). A jet fighter bombed the area and as the guerrillas were scouting for cover, helicopters dropped paratroopers who immediately launched a ground offensive on survivors (Ibid). Nine guerrillas were killed during the attack, along with one civilian, and were buried in two mass graves in the village (2014). Exhumations at Pasihaparari were again undertaken by NMMZ working with FHTZ personnel. At Pasihaparari, two trenches were set up covering both areas that were believed to have the remains. The first trench before exhumation and subsequent expansions measured nine m². This trench was divided into segment A and segment B. Segment A measured about two m². Before the exhumations commenced, engineers from the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA carried out a metal detector survey for safety as previous testimonies from interviews pointed out the likelihood of stumbling across ammunition and bombs stashed within the remains (ZNA 2014). Thereafter, the exhumations started in segment A and the first signs of material remains, a threadbare blanket and some pieces of clothing, were observed at a depth of 0.88 m (Chipangura 2014). The systematic recovery of the bodies in segment A was led by NMMZ archaeologists working together with FHTZ exhumers. The first human remains to be revealed were the left humerus, ulna, and radius, along with some bullets. The human remains appeared to be lying on the right side. It was established the ammunition was from an AK47 (Zimbabwe National Army Officer 2014). A hand grenade was also found with this body. Most of the bones on Body 1 were fairly well preserved. The other material remains recovered from this body included green

underwear, an orange golf t-shirt with black stripes, brown trousers, two Black Power bangles, and a pair of hunters' shoes. According to earlier interviews with local witnesses, the materials recovered from Body 1 belonged to one Comrade Soweto who was the commander of this group at that time.

The second body was also fairly well preserved. Material remains recovered from this body include a pair of brown denim trousers and a brown denim jacket. This attire was popularly known as the 'sting suit' during the liberation struggle. A pair hunter's shoes size 10, a yellow handkerchief with the inscription 'we sacrificed to die for our motherland Zimbabwe', and match boxes were also recovered from this body.

The third individual was found to be fairly well preserved. Some threadbare pieces of a grey blanket were found covering the body. Black denim trousers, a pair of red socks with red and white designs; white underwear with green stripes was also found in the right pocket of the denim trousers. Another prominent recovery from this body was a white pack of crescent snuff that was found in the left pocket of the denim trousers. In contrast, recovered bones from Body 4 were far less well preserved: there was no complete skull and only isolated fragments were collected. The material remains that were recovered included a blue worksuit, grey underwear with purple and white designs, and a brown pair of socks.

Body 5 had numerous Black Power bangles and the individual was identified as 'Cde Sucker' based on this adornment. 'Comrade' was a moniker given to freedom fighters during the Liberation War and is often shortened as Cde. His remains were found to be fairly well preserved although with fragmented bones, constituting roughly 75% of the full body. Material remains recovered from the body included a tube of Colgate fluoride toothpaste, green denim trousers, cream underwear with black dots, a brown shirt, a brown belt, a pair of tennis shoes, and a white handkerchief with blue floral designs. The remains of Body 6 were heavily fragmented. Bone fragments from the right hand were removed first, together with numerous green and white beads which were recovered from the left hand. A unique Black Power necklace with a rectangular design on the lower end was also recovered alongside this body. The other material remains that were found included a black afro-comb, a tooth brush, a blue denim shirt, brown trousers with zig-zag designs, a green pair of socks with white line designs on the ankle, and a pair of hard knock shoes (Chipangura 2014).

The next body recovered was Body 7 which was heavily fragmented with few bone remains. Alongside this body a pair of green socks, a blue pen comprising of a barrel and a refill, cream underwear with black zebra-like designs, a brown denim shirt, and a white vest with black patches were recovered. The remains of Body 8 were partially fragmented and incomplete anatomically; however, a white scuff, a green jacket, green trousers, a black pair of socks, a black belt, white underwear with yellow floral designs, and a military shoe were recovered.

Body 9 was also heavily fragmented and showed evidence that it was subjected to burning. The few bones that were recovered were all heavily burnt. Body 10 was also burnt, with evidence of burning visible on the mandible of the skull and other bone remains. Material remains that were recovered alongside the body included a blue burnt overall, a white t-shirt, and a blanket (2014). A metal key was also recovered in one of the pockets of the overalls. The body was identified to be of Tengerai Clever Nyagwambo – a civilian who was said to have been a chief logistic officer for the liberation fighters. The

identification was done by Sheila Nyagwambo, wife of the deceased based on the clothing items he wore when he went missing (Nyagwambo 2014).

The points of friction between professional archaeologists and vernacular exhumers

Exhumations at the three sites described were undertaken through a series of contested approaches between NMMZ and FHTZ. There were huge disparities in methodological approaches implemented by both sides. Spiritual methodologies preceded all the scientific methods used by the archaeologists and it became increasingly difficult to use contemporary approaches to exhumation. Spirituality as a method of exhumation relied on deceased guerrillas who would indirectly speak with selected members of FHTZ, advising them on where to exhume. The spirit of the dead would manifest on members of FHTZ who during the process would indiscriminately fall on the ground rolling over and speaking in tongues – a language which was difficult to understand but was easily interpreted and translated by the other members. The possessed members, who were mostly women, were used by the dead as conduits to narrate how they were killed during the war and where to find their remains. Sometimes the dead would apparently speak with the living through dreams. The next morning the dreamer would direct the exhumation programme, pointing out where to find remains based on clues given in the dream.

Based on of this spiritually driven context, NMMZ and FHTZ had a fraught working relationship marked by negotiations and sometimes conflicts on how to conduct the exhumations of Liberation War fighters. One typical conflict of interest emerged from archaeological approaches and the setting up of measured trenches at all the sites. Systematic trenching makes it easy to document all the material culture recovered from the exhumation exercise level by level and in their proper descriptive contexts. This is usually accompanied by detailed photography of the material before any unbundling or hasty removals. However, FHTZ would exhume the human remains without following reference to the trenches; this created problems that later led to a huge mix up of the human remains in most cases. FHTZ was particularly concerned with the quick recovery of human remains because they wanted to authenticate their narrative by having a lot of bones to showcase and ‘educate’ the public (according to; Musoni 2013). The bones were displayed in makeshift mortuary tents and visitors were allowed to see the remains with a view to making them appreciate the gravity of massacres at the three sites.

Moreover, the use of the standard archaeological tool kit also compromised the working relationship between NMMZ and FHTZ. Trowels, brushes, handpick, dust pens and sieves were used in order to meticulously recover the human remains and all fragmented skeletal remains before full documentation. However, this method was not accepted by FHTZ exhumers; they argued that the use of brushes and sieves was unethical because brushing and sieving remains was un-cultural and a sign of disrespecting the dead (Muzenda 2013). The differences were further widened by the use of shovels, picks and spades by FHTZ exhumers. The use of such heavy working tools meant that the human remains were seriously disturbed and damaged during the digging process. All this meant that the chances of mixing up the remains were very high.

Another issue of serious concern that made the working relationship between NMMZ and FHTZ fraught was the prohibition of bright colours during the exhumation processes. All participants during the exhumation exercises were not supposed to wear red. The reason was that the colour would upset the working spirits of the exhumers and even infuriate the dead guerrillas who were being exhumed: in their lifetime on the front, they would not have worn red at all (Bunjira 2013). The colour red is considered to be a bad omen in local cultural nuances, although in other cultures it is considered to bring good luck (Bortoli and Maroto 2001). Such a complication would at times result in archaeologists wearing red being barred and expelled from the site. Statistics of the remains exhumed at the sites also considerably varied between the NMMZ and the FHTZ records. Sometimes FHTZ members would improperly count the remains, and at times fragmented bones of one individual would be counted as two or three people. This was a common occurrence that was encountered during the sorting exercise, but nothing would convince FHTZ members to see that they had made errors because they were concerned with getting large numbers which would be more appealing to the public.

At the Butcher Site, the NMMZ official body count number was 111 but FHTZ had a record of 145; at Hebert Mine, the NMMZ official body count was 41 whereas FHTZ had 71. Ironically, the number of coffins secured, of graves dug, and reburials carried out were all based on FHTZ statistics. In addition, FHTZ exhumers guided by spiritual methods of identification would direct archaeologists to exhume certain areas where they believed that human remains could be found based on the spiritual pointers previously explained. This was particularly the case at Butcher Site, and in all cases apart from the known marked mass graves, such exhumations would yield nothing. In the end, the recovery of deep black humus soil was falsely interpreted by FHTZ as evidence of the burning of human remains. The soils were collected and prepared for burial as burnt remains. Such an erroneous analysis would entail that the body count at the end of the exercise would be exaggerated, creating a disparity with the official count. The reason for the overestimation of human remains can be viewed within the political contexts at the time which had the trajectory of using the remains as propaganda against opposition and white farmers (Fontein 2014).

FHTZ also used spiritual methods in identifying all the human remains during the exhumations. Archaeologists emphasized the need for doing some DNA tests before conclusively giving out the bodies to relatives who came looking for their missing relatives. In one instance, a family looking for their father who did not return from the war were made to believe that some remains recovered from Butcher site, found alongside a walking stick, belonged to their missing father. Earlier on, family members had intimated to the exhumers that the disappeared/deceased individual used to have a walking stick (Mukangu 2013). Family members were not able to question or authenticate the FHTZ identification methods as this would have been interpreted as doubting the guiding spirit from the dead. Such identification methods were quite problematic given that remains were just dumped in mass graves and there is a possibility that the some of the accompanying materials were also randomly thrown into the graves. Thus, spatial proximity to the exhumed bodies does not always necessarily mean that they belonged to the remains. The other identification method was based on the spirit of the dead emerging out from a group of FHTZ spirit transmitters who would randomly pick remains in the mass graves and give them *nom-de-guerre names*, village of origin, real names, and the time they joined the liberation struggle.

At Hebert Mine and Pasihaparari for example, remains of nine Liberation War fighters were 'positively' identified using such 'spiritual' techniques.

Finally, during the exhumation exercise, the team of archaeologists would come across a range of material culture which included black power bangles, Rhodesian coins, medicine bottles, cigarette packs, small bags, grenades, rifles, ammunition, military uniforms, and underwear. In a quest to understand the events that transpired at these sites they wanted to collect such materials but there was always resistance from FHTZ members who argued that such a practice would anger the dead.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of archaeological approaches in the exhumation and identification of human remains by NMMZ working with FHTZ was problematic and deeply contested due to the dissonant nature of exhumation methods. FHTZ used spirituality-derived information from communicating and connecting with the dead through trances and in dreams. From their perspective, all subsequent exhumations were sanctioned by the dead through the spiritual realm. As a result, proper archaeological methods such as test trenching and auger surveys were disregarded by FHTZ. In addition, there were other anthropological approaches such as sex assessment, ancestry, and isotype analyses that could have been carried out to ensure that proper identification was conducted. FHTZ wielded too much power in the process; in most cases, the spiritual methods did not yield correct results, and this resulted in a substantial mix up of human remains, incorrect body counts, and false burials. However, FHTZ is politically aligned to the ruling ZANU-PF and were thus immune from criticism. The investigators from FHTZ possess no relevant training for forensic work, while the use of spirit mediums in the identification of human remains has no scientific basis. It is hoped that in future, training can be provided to FHTZ. As it stands, with such spiritually-derived methods predominating, the exhumation and identification methods will further obscure witness testimony, truth telling, or future judicial undertakings.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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