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Dedications

To the memory of my father, father-in-law and mother-in-law who all passed on in 2013, 2016 and 2017 respectively. Father, I always wish God had given you that extra portion of life to read the story of the Hlengwe to the making of which you contributed so much. I also extend this dedication to the memory of the late *Hosi* Amos Gezani and *Hosi* Ben Macheme Chilonga, both of whom made great contributions to the writing of this history of the Hlengwe but never lived to see it. May your dear souls rest in peace - I have completed the task.

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Abstract

Studies of ethnicity have shifted from primordialism to diverse variants of social constructivism, which include instrumentalism, invention of tribalism by the colonial elite and missionaries and demotic constructivism or creation of ethnicity from below. The studies have generally generated two broad schools of thought. One school avers that African ethnicity was invented by the colonial elite and missionaries in the colonial period whilst the other and more recent asserts that ethnicity had a precolonial currency and the generality of Africans also

played a key role in identity formation. Also most notable is that most studies have tended to focus on larger and more visible ethnic groups, ignoring the stories of small communities mostly found in remote border areas of modern 'nation' states. Using archival material, colonial records, autobiographies, oral and secondary sources, this thesis, which is largely guided by the demotic constructivist theoretical perspective examines the evolution of the ethnic identity of an 'obscure' Hlengwe ethnic community of the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe from the pre-colonial period to 2014. History of the Hlengwe history has been blurred by the use of the term "Shangaan" to denote the Hlengwe, yet they were not ethnically so. A chronological approach and demotic constructivism have been used to enable a deeper analysis of the critical historical phases, key players and processes in Hlengwe identity formation as time wore on. While we acknowledge that identity formation involves diverse players, we also focus on the role of the generally neglected commoners in the making of African ethnicity. This study differs from other works on ethnicity which focus on events of short historical phases and the role of selected elitist agents in the making of African ethnicity, by analysing the making of Hlengwe ethnicity from the precolonial to the postcolonial period. We prove that Hlengwe ethnicity was created in the pre-colonial period but did not remain static as it was perpetually reshaped by unpredictable historical events right up to 2014. The Hlengwe community was subjected to processes of social transformation over a long period of time to an extent that the one time docile, 'uncivilised', inward looking community bearing an identity of shame had evolved by the close of the 20th century and early 21st century to an assertive community, proud of its identity and actively seeking political, economic and cultural recognition and rights for its 'underdog' Hlengwe constituency in a country where diverse Shona groups and Ndebele form the dominant ethnic communities.

Acronyms

AIDS	-	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
ANC	-	African National Congress
BSAC	-	British South Africa Company
CCDI	-	Centre for Cultural Development Initiatives
CNC	-	Chief Native Commissioner
DA	-	District Administrator
DC	-	District Commissioner
FMC	-	Free Methodist Church
FTLRP	-	Fast Track Land Reform Programme
HIV	-	Human Immuno-Virus
LDO	-	Land Development Officer
MDC-T	-	Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai.
MP	-	Member of Parliament
NAZ	-	National Archives of Zimbabwe (appears mainly in footnotes)
NC	-	Native Commissioner
NDP	-	National Democratic Party
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHLA	-	Native Land Husbandry Act
PNC	-	Provincial Native Commissioner
TTL	-	Tribal Trust Land
VIDCO	-	Village Development Committee
WADCO	-	Ward Development Committee
ZBC	-	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZANLA	-	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	-	Zimbabwe African national Union
ZAPU	-	Zimbabwe African People’s Union

ZESN	-	Zimbabwe Election Support Network
ZIPRA	-	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZRP	-	Zimbabwe Republic Police

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a historical study of the transformation or evolution of the ethnic identity of the Hlengwe people of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas in Chiredzi District in the south-eastern lowveld of Zimbabwe (See Maps 1 and 4). Although the Hlengwe are considered to be a minority group at national level, they are the dominant population in Chiredzi District. The Hlengwe are generally known by the generic terms “Shangaan” and “Machangana” by Zimbabwean ethnic others, scholars and the Government. However, these appellations are problematic because they are not ethnic specific since they refer to broader regional identities of assemblages of people of different ethnic groups found in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa. The term “Shangaan” is derived from Soshangane (Manukosi), one of Zwile’s army generals who fled from Natal to southern Mozambique in the early 1820s after the fall of Zwile’s Ndwandwe state. It became a political identity of the diverse ethnic groups which fell under the direct and indirect political influence of the Gaza kingdom created and ruled by Soshangane and his successors.¹ The use of the term “Shangaan” when referring to the Hlengwe gained importance in the Zimbabwean public domain because of a combination of the colonial usage of the term and colonial politics of ethno-cartography and also because of the politics of ethnic labelling by the Shona and Ndebele who settled among the Hlengwe after the 1940s.² In this study of Hlengwe ethnicity, I have problematised this broad south-eastern lowveld regional political label, “Shangaan”, and distinguished it from its variant Hlengwe ethnicity in Chapter 2.

¹J.H. Bannerman, “Towards a History of the Hlengwe People of the South of Rhodesia,” *NADA* XI, 5 (1978): 483-96; Isak Niehaus, “Ethnicity and the Boundaries of Belonging: Reconfiguring Shangaan Identity in the South African Lowveld,” *African Affairs* (2002): 101, 562; R. Kent Rasmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979), 293.

²Eric Worby, “Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games: The Epistemology and Iconography of Colonial Power in Northwestern Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 3, (1994): 371-392.

The term “Tsonga”, which is also used to refer to the “Hlengwe”, was first used by Henri-A Junod in 1905 to refer to a large number of linguistically related people found in a region stretching from southern Mozambique to north-eastern parts of South Africa south of the Limpopo River and south-eastern Zimbabwe who included the, Rhonga, Hlengwe, Van’wanati, Chopi and many others.³ Coincidentally, in this area Soshangane established his kingdom, hence the source of the general misconception that Shangaan and Tsonga mean the same thing. Scholars like D.N. Beach, who observed the term Tsonga’s lack of ethnic precision, at times prefixes “Hlengwe” to Tsonga when dealing with the Hlengwe, so that it reads Tsonga-Hlengwe.⁴ Junod’s categorisation of Tsonga language speakers as one ethnic group has been contested by Patrick Harries who argues that it is misleading because it implies an erroneous ethnic unity. Harries maintains that, besides not having the feeling of oneness or unity, the Tsonga people had considerable linguistic and cultural differences which made them diverse groups.⁵ Harries’s assertion is confirmed by Junod’s self-criticism of his grouping of people into Tsonga when he says “...there is no true national unity amongst the Thongas (Tsonga),” and that these numerous Tsonga groups were not conscious of the implied oneness and did not have a name for the group.⁶ In a more recent publication in 2013, Mathebula asserts that there is a very distant link between Tsonga and many other groups which purport to be Tsonga, such as the “...Tonga, Rhonga, Amatonga, Lundis, Botongas, Bitonga, Gazas, Tshwa, Hlengwe, Magwamba...Knobneuzen and Shanganes.”⁷ He says that among these groups are some that

³ Henri-A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe I: Social Life*, (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1927), 14-19; Patrick Harries, “The Anthropologist as Historian and Liberal: H-A. Junod on the Thonga,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8, 1 *Special Issue on Anthropology and History*, (1981): 45.

⁴ D.N. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe 900-1850*, (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1980), 305; D.N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1840-1900*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986), 20,31,33; D.N. Beach, *A Zimbabwean Past*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1994), 134, 142, 180-182.

⁵ Harries, “The Antropologist as Historian,” 46-47.

⁶ Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe I*, 14-15; Patrick Harries, “Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa,” in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroy Vail (London: James Currey, 1989), 85.

⁷ Mandla Mathebula, *800 Years of Tsonga History, (1200-2000)*, (Burgersfort: SASAVONA Publishers and Booksellers, (Pty) Ltd, 2013), 8.

speak languages different from Tsonga such as the Mozambican Tonga, often referred to as Nyembane who speak *Xinyembane*.⁸ Samuel Mzamani Manyise said Tsonga refers to all *Xichangana* dialects but admitted that Tsonga is mostly used in South Africa.⁹ This means that the term “Tsonga”, which was coined by Junod, does not refer to any specific ethnic group but is a regional identity for different ethnic groups.

We therefore can safely say that the terms “Shangaan” and “Tsonga”, which are used interchangeably and contextually to refer to the Hlengwe, are generic terms which do not imply any ethnic categories. They should be used with caution or contextually because there are some Tsonga who are not Shangaans because they never fell under the political sway of the Gaza Kingdom and there are also some Shangaans who are not Tsonga, because they do not speak Tsonga/Shangaan languages. However, to avoid any confusion I will use the term “Hlengwe” to refer to the people that I am researching about throughout this thesis.

The study seeks to understand the processes in the evolution of Hlengwe ethnicity from the pre-colonial times to the 21st century, the latter period being a historical phase in which the Hlengwe began to openly seek greater ethnic recognition and inclusion than before in the Zimbabwean political, economic and social space. The study is concerned with the evolution of Hlengwe ethnicity in response to socio-economic and political developments in Chiredzi District from the pre-colonial period to 2014. The study is premised on the view that once ethnic identities are created they do not remain static but keep evolving in response to broader, and also specific local historical experiences over a long period of time, for some like the Hlengwe starting from precolonial times. This means that the evolution of ethnicity does not

⁸ Mathebula, *800 Years of Tsonga History*, 8.

⁹ Interview with Samuel Manyise Mzamani, (Hlengwe student at Great Zimbabwe University), Mashava Campus, June 14, 2014.

follow a set or rigid trajectory but is subject to many coincidental historical actions or the specific experiences of each ethnic community.

An interest in the area of study was generated by many factors including reported cases of Hlengwe violence against the perceived Karanga or non-Xihlengwe speakers in the late 20th and early 21st centuries in defence of their culture and land and the general readings about bits of Hlengwe history from some scholars who have tried to work on related themes.¹⁰ Also having worked among the Hlengwe at Alpha Mpapa Secondary School in Matibi 2 and at a school in the town of Chiredzi for a period of about six years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, one can observe that in the 21st century there is heightened Hlengwe voicing and murmuring about political, social and economic marginalisation of the Hlengwe by the Karanga or Shona dominated government. The Hlengwe are also more and more overtly clamouring for recognition at national level than in the 1980s and early 1990s. The case of the marginalisation of the Hlengwe and other minority communities like the Venda and Tonga was also mentioned by Muzondidya.¹¹ There is evidence that the generality of the Hlengwe population is coming out of “obscurity” and is seeking greater national visibility; fighting to protect its cultural heritage and reasserting its identity in a multi-ethnic geographical social, cultural, political and economic space of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas in Chiredzi District. These developments make Hlengwe ethnicity a subject worth studying so as to find out how the Hlengwe identity has evolved over the years to a point where as a community the Hlengwe are becoming assertive and making socio-economic and political claims on a state which has to a large extent ignored their existence. This study thus addresses the silence around the history of a Hlengwe community that has been generally excluded from national historical discourses

¹⁰ J.H. Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe of the Lower Save and Lundi Rivers, From the Late-Eighteenth to the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *Zimbabwean History*, (1981): 11-14.

¹¹ James Muzondidya, “From Bouyance to Crisis, 1980-1997,” in *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*, eds. B. Raftopoulos and A.S. Mlambo (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009), 187.

where the master-narrative has remained that of the dominant Shona and Ndebele groups. No study in Zimbabwe ethnicity lends itself to analysing influences to the transformation of Hlengwe ethnicity. In short, this study fills a huge gap that exists in the historical literature of the south-eastern lowveld of Zimbabwe, a region that is largely alienated as far as economic development is concerned.

This is a ground-breaking study in its examination of the complex Hlengwe ethnic identity which was little understood by the colonial officials and is little understood by scholars, Zimbabwean national policy makers and larger sections of the non-Xihlengwe-speaking communities of Zimbabwe. Ethnicity remains a fascinating phenomenon in the study of identities because of its resilience in spite of most attempts at promoting the growth of civil society and pluralism or all efforts at nation-building or even major efforts at socio-political reform to promote social cohesion. Ethnicity is complex in that the same identities that some scholars want to call mere inventions or creations “persist or resurface in various guises to rear their ugly heads.”¹² As it becomes less active or dormant in one ethnic community it becomes active or agitated in another, or even in a formerly “obscure community” as in the case of the Hlengwe, who for a long time have been of little significance in national politics to a point that they were little understood by many sections of the non-Hlengwe speaking communities. In this study we will be guided by Lonsdale’s conception of “moral ethnicity” and “political tribalism” which are explained in Chapter 2. Also important are J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith’s view that though ethnic community and identity are often associated with conflict and political struggles in various parts of the world, there is no necessary connection between ethnicity and conflict.¹³

¹² Elizabeth MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity in Mozambique and Zimbabwe*, (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2007), 112.

¹³ John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, “Introduction” in *Ethnicity*, eds. J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

This study in the transformation of Hlengwe ethnicity also revisits some existing theories on the emergence of ethnicity, especially the Rangerian model, which attributes the invention or creation of African ethnicities to the work of the colonial agents, missionaries and educated African elite during the early colonial period up to the 1930s. The idea of ethnicity as an invented identity was also popularised in the late 1980s through an edited collection by L. Vail entitled *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*.¹⁴ The Rangerian model rejects the notion of the pre-colonial African ethnicity and as such totally discounts primordialism's attempt to seek to explain the origin of African ethnicity in antiquity. Wolmer has loosely applied the Rangerian invention model to explain the creation of the identity of the "Shangaan" (Hlengwe), who are the subjects of study in this thesis and says that it was an invention of colonial administrators and missionaries. We argue that the celebrated Rangerian model of the 1980s and 1990s widely used in explaining the origin of ethnic identities by a number of scholars has no universal applicability as it fails to adequately explain the origin of ethnicity in some little-known ethnic communities most of which were of little political, social and economic significance to the colonial rulers in the early colonial period like the Hlengwe and other communities found mainly in remote peripheral or border areas of Zimbabwe. I further argue that Hlengwe ethnicity had a pre-colonial currency so it was not invented by the colonialists, missionaries and educated African elite and neither did the colonisers have a great influence in its transformation even in the colonial period. The study therefore revisits agency in the formation of ethnic identities and uses E. Msindo's demotic constructivism theoretical perspective. This has been explained in detail under the theoretical framework of this thesis. In short it is a theoretical perspective which asserts that the generality of Africans or commoners were active agents and movers in the creation of identities in Africa although there were also

¹⁴ Leroy Vail, (ed) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, (London: James Currey, 1989).

other players such as the elite.¹⁵ We therefore highlight as much as possible the role played by the commoners or ‘underdog’ communities in identity formation which is different from the Rangerian model’s emphasis on the agency of elites. We expose the fragility of the colonial officials and missionary presence in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas and the lack of essential infrastructure to enable effective administration and penetration of the area to interact with the colonised. These are factors which severely limited the colonisers’ capacity to influence Hlengwe identities right up to the end of the 1930s and even beyond. However, we are not saying that our approach is totally opposed *per se* to the widely celebrated exogenous and elitist agency associated with the early colonial period, propounded by Ranger, Chimhundu, Vail and a host of other scholars.¹⁶ We are simply making an essential addition to knowledge on the complex phenomenon of African ethnicity, which the Rangerian model of the 1980s and 1990s overlooked.

This study also examines processes influencing ethnic identity formation among the Hlengwe beyond the 1930s up to the 21st century and unravels how ethnicity was imagined, congealed, negotiated and renegotiated while Hlengwe ethnic boundaries were entrenched as the Hlengwe interacted with varying groups of new comers to the Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. The new comers included diverse groups of people such as the Karanga and Ndebele, Free Methodist Church Missionaries, ZAPU nationalists, ZANLA guerrillas and Rhodesian Guard Forces. This also brings out hidden histories of Hlengwe reaction to the coming of Karanga

¹⁵ Enocent Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe: Transformations in Kalanga and Ndebele Societies, 1860-1990* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 9-10.

¹⁶ Terence Ranger, “Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika: The Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe”, in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. L. Vail (London: James Currey, 1989), 118-150; Leroy Vail, “Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History,” in L. Vail, (ed) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989), 1-19; Herbert Chimhundu, “Early Missionaries and the Ethnolinguistic Factor During the ‘Invention of Tribalism’ in Zimbabwe,” *The Journal of African History*, 33, 1, (1992): 87-109; Worby, “Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games,” 371-392.

and Ndebele; Hlengwe participation in the earlier phases of the nationalist struggle and the violent armed struggle of the 1970s to the 1980s, which were all important episodes in the growth of Hlengwe ethnic awareness. All these are issues never discussed in detail elsewhere in the history of Zimbabwe.

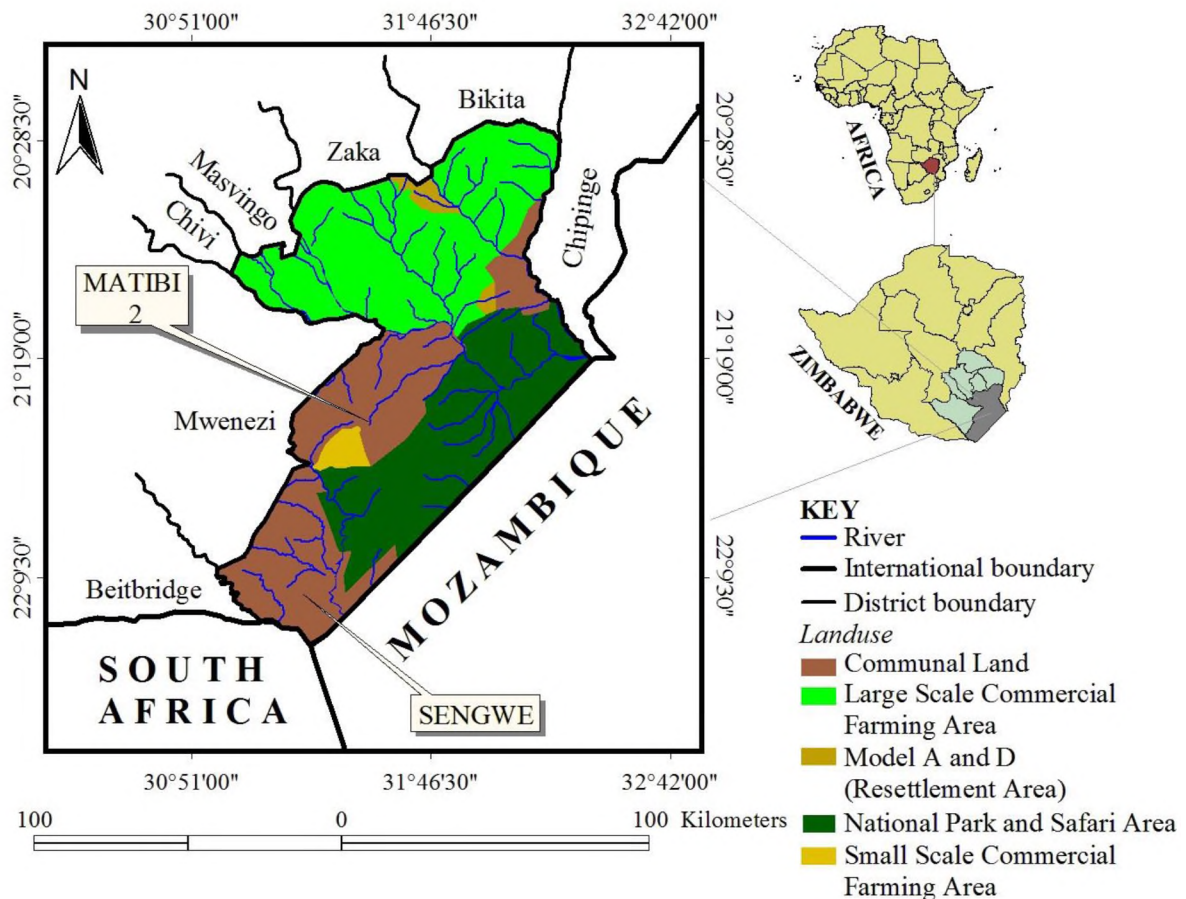
I analyse chronologically the events of the period from the pre-colonial era to 2014 so as to be able to map out the key agents or ideological players; changes and continuities in the process of transformation and the various influences at each historical phase which helped to shape Hlengwe ethnicity. I view the evolution of ethnic identity as an episodic phenomenon influenced by a chain of coincidental and at times planned historical processes which influenced identity transformation. The year 2014 is the cut-off point in that it is a major turning point in the internal debates about what the Hlengwe ethnic community should be called as sections of the Hlengwe population openly try to cast-off the “Shangaan” appellation, which is used in official circles to denote them in preference for “Tsonga,” even ahead of Hlengwe.

The area of study in the Chiredzi District has had numerous changes of name from the period of colonial conquest to date. From 1890 to 1944 it was part of the huge Chibi District, and lay in the huge Matibi Reserve which was split into two Reserves Matibi 1 and Matibi 2 through the creation of the Nuanetsi Ranch in 1919. From 1922, it lay in the Nuanetsi sub-district of Chibi, before the Nuanetsi District was made an autonomous district in 1944 with its own NC. In 1966, the Nuanetsi District (modern day Mwenezi District) was reduced in size and Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas were made part of the newly created Chiredzi District which also took parts of the Ndanga District. Therefore, reference will be made to all these areas depending on the period being covered. But to avoid confusion I will stick to the use of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas.

The Physical Area of Study

The study area comprising of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas, is located in the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe, in the Chiredzi District of Masvingo Province. The District borders with Mozambique in the East and South Africa to the South. See Map 1 below for its location.

MAP 1: LOCATION OF MATIBI 2 AND SENGWE COMMUNAL AREAS



It is a low-lying country below 600m above sea-level. Its terrain is relatively flat with few big rivers and small kopjes. It is dry country with a dry deciduous tree savannah merging in certain areas into a shrub savannah but characterised by large expanses of mopane woodland (*colophospermum mopane*). Generally, the area receives very low rainfall averaging 450 mm per annum, with good rains being recorded once in every three to four years. It lies in Zimbabwe's climatic and agricultural Region 5 which is not suitable for dryland cropping.

Describing the area inhabited by the Hlengwe, Bannerman says, “The area is rather like a vast dry inland sea, with the river valleys and the better rainfall areas around hills resembling islands. Most of the population of the lowveld lived on these islands or along the great rivers that flow through the lowveld.”¹⁷ This land in which the Hlengwe lived had a great bearing on the evolution of their cultural identity and history.

The Origin of the Hlengwe Community in Zimbabwe

By 1890, when Zimbabwe was colonised, the Hlengwe had established themselves as the dominant ethnic group in the south-eastern lowveld of Zimbabwe.¹⁸ Their origin remains difficult to trace with certainty and so far is explained through myths where the Zimbabwean Hlengwe trace their origin to a legendary figure called Matsena. All of the Hlengwe *tihosi* (chiefs) in Chiredzi District strongly believe that they are one family by biological descent. Therefore being Hlengwe is imagined as being part of a people who biologically descended from Matsena. As Msindo states, the appeal to primordialism by ethnic communities in telling their story is essential for legitimising and solidifying their practices.¹⁹ So by appealing to primordialism, the Hlengwe justify their claims to chieftaincy and control over land and other resources in Chiredzi District.

In the 1890s the missionary Henri A. Junod, who worked in Mozambique, recorded this myth. The same story of Matsena, which at the time of my field study from 2013 was being retold in Hlengwe oral memory, was also recorded by B.P. Kaschula in his Nuanetsi District Delineation Reports in 1967 and by the NAZ research team in 1991.²⁰ Kaschula says “...the (Hlengwe)

¹⁷ Bannerman, “Towards a History of the Hlengwe,” 483.

¹⁸ Bannerman, ‘Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,’ 10-11; Gerald C. Mazarire, “Reflections on Pre-Colonial Zimbabwe, c850-1880s,” in *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*, ed., B. Raftopoulos, et al. (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009), 29; H.A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe, 1*, (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1927), 13-35.

¹⁹ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 16.

²⁰ MS22 (NAZ Records Centre, Masvingo), B.P. Kaschula, *Delineation of Communities: Tribal Communities in the Nuanetsi District of Rhodesia*, (August 1967); OH/2/CHR/90 Interview between Chief Tsovani and Patrick

elders repeated with remarkable accuracy the order of birth of their ancestors.”²¹ He was referring here to the order from Matsena, their last known common ancestor.²² Therefore the sense of oneness or a common origin and identity among the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas has been in existence since the pre-colonial period. This is irrespective of the fact that they belong to different *hosi*-ships (chieftainships), clans and kinship groups.

What is also worth noting here is that although the Hlengwe were not literate, they were able to pass these traditions with the order of ancestors intact from generation to generation in all their chiefdoms. Considering that Hlengwe chiefdoms were autonomous states, with no centralised authority as was the case with the Zulu under Tshaka or the Basotho under Moshoeshoe or Ndebele under Mzilikazi, it is fascinating how they managed to keep the traditions intact or with little variations. Basing on this knowledge we can infer that the Hlengwe were a community with close links and well established social networks. Hlengwe oral sources indicate that the Hlengwe left their place of origin as large groups,²³ and they claim that it was Matsena who allocated to his sons territories to conquer and rule in Zimbabwe.²⁴ These myths are explained in detail in Chapter 2.

However, the growth of the Hlengwe community in the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe can best be explained through Igor Kopytoff’s frontier thesis. The frontier perspective taken by Kopytoff is that of a spatial or geographical local frontier lying at the fringes of numerous established societies where African polities are produced by other and usually more complex

Ngulube of the NAZ, Masvingo Records Centre October 05, 1990; OH/2/MWZ/91 Interview between Chief Chitanga Feleni (Born 1921) of Lundi Area Mwenezi and Patrick Ngulube of the NAZ Masvingo Records Centre, February 28, 1991.

²¹ MS22 (NAZ Records Centre, Masvingo), B.P. Kaschula, *Delineation of Communities: Tribal Communities in the Nuanetsi District of Rhodesia*, (August 1967), 68.

²² Bannerman, “Towards a History of the Hlengwe,” 487.

²³ OH/2/CHR/90 Interview between Chief Tsovani and Patrick Ngulube of the National Archives of Zimbabwe, Masvingo Records Centre October 05, 1990; OH/2/MWZ/91 Interview between Chief Chitanga Feleni (Born 1921) of Lundi Area Mwenezi and Patrick Ngulube of the Department NAZ Records Centre on February 28, 1991.

²⁴ Interview with Hlengani Machuvukele Muninginisi, Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, July 03, 2014.

societies.²⁵ The frontier is therefore taken to be an open area nestled between organised societies.²⁶ To these frontiers the metropole, which refers to the original society from which a splinter group hives off to start its own evolution, sends out breakaway settlers who establish independent communities.²⁷ In the frontier, the breakaway settlers or immigrants either join social groups they find there or proceed to construct a new social order, basing on a political culture and a model of a legitimate social order imported or brought from the metropole.²⁸ A.K. Smith, writing about the people of Southern Mozambique (also original home to the Hlengwe), agrees with Kopytoff that pre-colonial societies, whether villages, clans or chieftaincies had fissiparous tendencies or a consistent tendency to fission and segment as “...the disgruntled, the victimised, the exiled, the refugees, the losers in internecine struggles, the adventurous and the ambitious,” broke away.²⁹ In the frontier, the breakaway groups dealt with the problem of forging a new social order in the midst of an effective institutional vacuum.³⁰ It was in this process that taboos, customs and rules to standardise practice within the emerging community were crafted.

The Hlengwe were a society which disengaged from the metropole in south and south-western Mozambique and moved into the south-east lowveld in modern day Zimbabwe. Bannerman has proven that in Mozambique there are still found pockets of Hlengwe groups such as Mavhuve in Massengena, Matsovele in Espungabera, Salani, Ximise and Makulunje.³¹ The Hlengwe movements to Zimbabwe, which culminated in the construction of a new social and

²⁵ Igor Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Political Culture,” in *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, ed. Igor Kopytoff (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press, 1989), 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14, 16-17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁹ Alan, K. Smith, “The Peoples of Southern Mozambique: An Historical Survey,” *Journal of African History*, XIV, 4, (1973): 573; Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier,” 18.

³⁰ Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier,” 7.

³¹ J.H. Bannerman, “A Short Political and Economic History of the Tsovani, Chisa and Mahenye Dynasties of the Ndanga, Chiredzi and Chipinga Districts to CA. 1950,” (Unpublished Paper at National Archives of Zimbabwe, Salisbury, 1980), 3

political order with the Hlengwe as the new *tihosi* (chiefs), started in the 18th century.³² The movements were effects of explosive changes that took place among the Ngoni clans in Zululand.³³ Bannerman says that by 1729 the Hlengwe had reached Sofala and by 1770 they were near the mouth of the Save River.³⁴ Though he admits that there are no written records of Hlengwe expansion into Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), he maintains that the Hlengwe migrated into Zimbabwe from areas of Mozambique which were comparatively close to Zimbabwe where Hlengwe people had lived for many centuries speaking their own dialect well before the Gaza Nguni migrations.³⁵

Bannerman's line of argument is consistent with popular Hlengwe oral traditions which point to southern and western Mozambique as the place of origin of the Hlengwe. However, there are also some Hlengwe sources which say that their place of origin was Zululand, with some even making untenable claims of the Hlengwe originating from the Palestinian Gaza in the Middle-East.³⁶ However, many Hlengwe oral sources spoke of Bilene-Masiya, which is in southern Mozambique to the east of the Limpopo River, as the original home of the Hlengwe.³⁷ In *Hosi* Sengwe's area, oral memory talked of the Hlengwe's place of origin as Mozambique, in a place of small shrubs called *Swikundo*.³⁸ In *Hosi* Samu's area, the name of the area of origin of Hlengwe was given as *Chihondweni*, a term which also describes a place of small trees.³⁹ Oral history of the Hlengwe recorded in 1956, which shows a mixture of Hlengwe with

³² M.D.D. Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi*, (London: Longman Group Limited, 1973), 209.

³³ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁴ Bannerman, "Towards a History," 486.

³⁵ Bannerman, "Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe," 14.

³⁶ Interview with Philemon Makondo, (Elder in the community), Chikombedzi business centre, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014.

³⁷ Interview with Musisinyani Mundau and Philip Chauke, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District August 9, 2013; Interview with Mack Saulo Khosa, (Village Head) *Hosi* Gezani's homestead, Sengwe, July 09, 2014.

³⁸ MS22 (NAZ Records Centre, Masvingo) Report on the Gezani Headmanship, Chief Sengwe: Sengwe Tribal Trust Lands, B.P. Kaschula, *Delineation of Communities: Tribal Communities in the Nuanetsi District of Rhodesia*, (August 1967), 106.

³⁹ MS22 (NAZ Records Centre, Masvingo) Report on the Samu Headmanship: Chief Sengwe: Sengwe Tribal Trust Lands," in B.P. Kaschula, *Delineation of Communities: Tribal Communities in the Nuanetsi District of Rhodesia* (August 1967), 99.

Gaza Nguni traditions, talks of Hlengwe migration from Zululand to *Sukudwini* in Portuguese East Africa before moving to Zimbabwe.⁴⁰ Hosi Feleni Chitanga, in an interview with researchers from the NAZ, said that the Hlengwe came from Zululand fleeing from Tshaka's war, and came to a place called *Zvikundune* before crossing into Zimbabwe.⁴¹

The Zululand origin, which of course is in sync with the notion of Hlengwe chiefdoms as tributary states of Soshangane's Gaza State, is however problematic as it cannot be supported by historical evidence. It is not tenable because it is at variance with established historical facts about the Gaza Nguni, which show that Soshangane and his Ngoni arrived in Mozambique and eastern parts of Zimbabwe well after the settlement of the Hlengwe in Zimbabwe. The Hlengwe expansion is known to have preceded the Ngoni migrations by 80 to 100 years.⁴² Even linguist Blake-Thompson's findings help dismiss the South African origin of the Hlengwe because he says in a letter to Professor Mitchell and G. Fortune of the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland;

Speaking of the Hlengwe living near the Sabi River both in the Nuanetsi area of Southern Rhodesia, also some in the Ndanga-Zaka and Chipinga and their dialects; I have found after over three years amongst them that as far as my knowledge goes they do not speak the Transvaal Shangaan. They appear to have reverted to the tongues of their mothers...⁴³

However, names of places given above - *Chihondweni*, *Zvikundune* and *Sukudwini* - all refer to a place of *swikundo* or small bushes, and *swikundweni* is an adjective describing a place of small bushes. So place names *Chihondweni*, *Zvikundune* and *Sukudwini* are distortions of *swikundweni*. This description corresponds to an area of low rainfall, characterised by

⁴⁰Bannerman, "Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe," 13. [From, Land Husbandry Committee, Fort Victoria, Assessment Report, Matibi II Reserve, Annexure, Minutes of a Meeting held at the Native Commissioner Nuanetsi Office, 16 July, 1956. [Copy of minute held by J.H. Bannerman].

⁴¹ OH/2/MWZ/91 Interview between Chief Chitanga Feleni (Born 1921) of Lundi Area Mwenezi and Patrick Ngulube of the NAZ Masvingo Records Centre on February 28, 1991.

⁴² Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 486.

⁴³ NAZ, TH10/1/1/361-362 Joseph Blake-Thompson in a letter to Professor Mitchell and Father G. Fortune of the University of Rhodesia, 14th June, 1958.

grasslands and bushlands, on the eastern banks of the Limpopo River, near the “Shengane” River, from where the Hlengwe began their northward expansion.⁴⁴ So the Hlengwe should have originated in south and south-western Mozambique, which includes areas close to modern day Zimbabwe.

Narratives by historian D.N. Beach and Tillman Houser, the longest serving missionary among the Hlengwe, talk of the Hlengwe invasions of Zimbabwe, conquering the local *vaNyai* or Shona-speaking groups in the south-east lowveld. Beach says that by the end of the 18th century, the Hlengwe had reached the lower Save Valley, while other Hlengwe had begun to conquer the south-eastern lowveld from the small Shona speaking groups. He says that Tsonga-Hlengwe rulers such as Chitanga, Mpapa, Mahenye, Dumbo and Furumela conquered most of the lowveld and advanced far up the Chiredzi, Lower Runde and Lower Mwenezi Valleys.⁴⁵ Tillman Houser says that Hlengwe and Zulu warriors “made intrusions into Rhodesia” primarily from Mozambique, in two major drives with one following the Save and Runde Rivers and one running parallel to the Limpopo River into Pfumbi country dominated by Chief Matibi.⁴⁶ The Hlengwe communities were therefore created out of breakaway communities that migrated into the south-east lowveld which justifies Wolmer’s claims that the “...human history of the lowveld is one of ongoing large-scale movements of populations and micro-scale movement of individuals and families...” which began in the pre-colonial times.⁴⁷ (See Map 2 below)

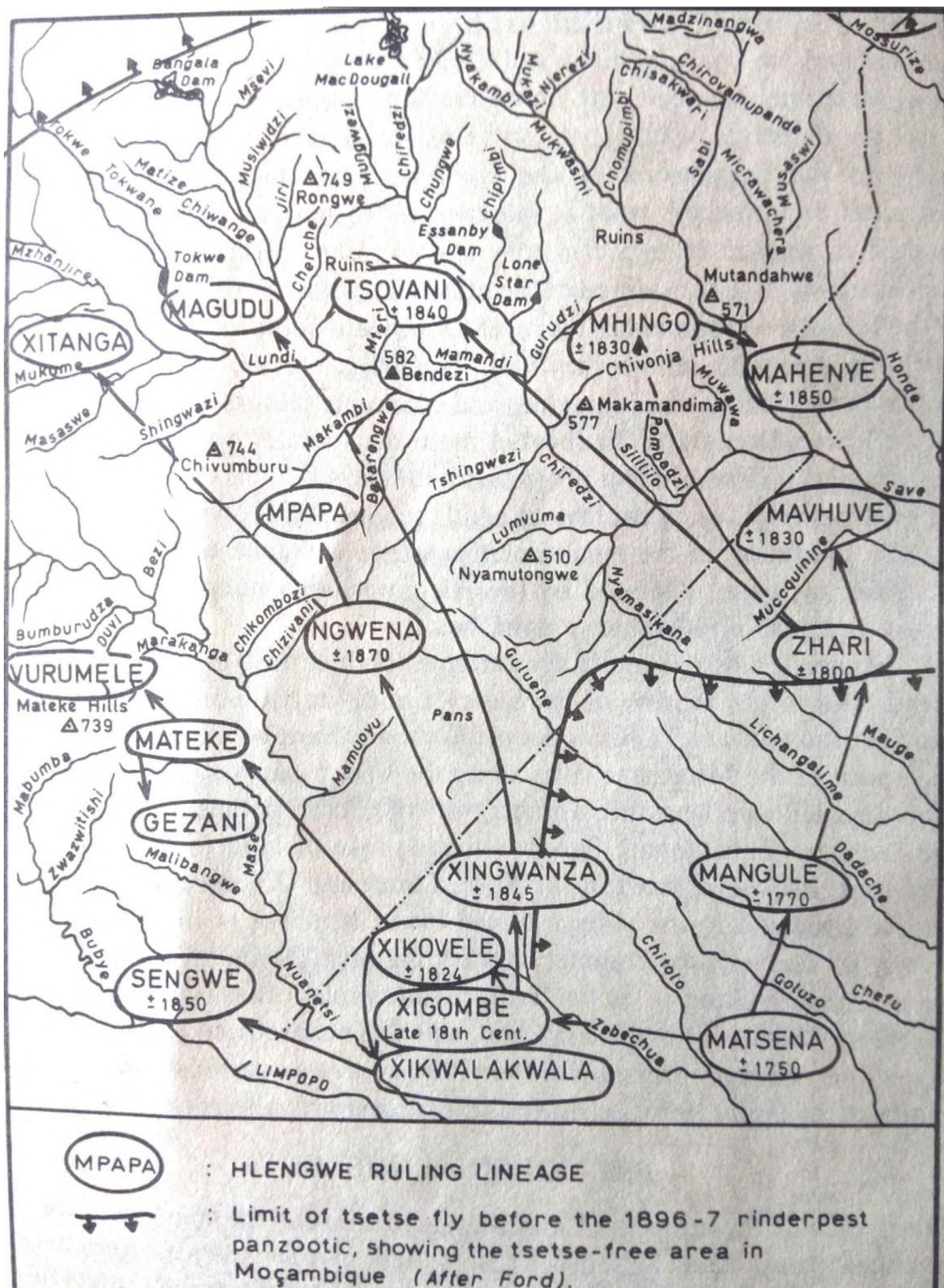
⁴⁴ Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 6.

⁴⁵ Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe*, 305.

⁴⁶ Tillman Houser, “The Extent of Karanga Speaking Spirit Possession Among the Hlengwe in Rhodesia,” History of Central African Religious Systems Conference: Lusaka, August 30 – September 8 (1972), 1.

⁴⁷ William Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision to Farm Invasions: Conservation and Development in Zimbabwe’s Southeast Lowveld*, (Oxford: James Currey), 49.

Map 2: SHOWING POSSIBLE ROUTES OF HLENGWE MOVEMENTS INTO ZIMBAWE



Source: J.H. Bannerman, 'Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe of the Lower Save and Lundi Rivers, from the Late-Eighteenth to the mid-Twentieth Century,' *Zimbabwean History*, 12 (1981). **NB.** Pointed arrows show direction of Hlengwe movement from Mozambique. Attached dates are based on Bannerman's own calculations and have not been verified. **NB.**

Mazarire locates the formation of the Hlengwe identity in these movements and says that Hlengwe identity was to a large extent shaped by their confrontations with the *vaNyai* groups who settled in the south-eastern part of Zimbabwe in the pre-colonial times.⁴⁸ As Kopytoff explains,

...the essence of the frontier as a historical phenomenon lies in this: once outsiders have defined an area as a frontier and have intruded into it in order to settle in it, there begins a process of social construction that, if successful, brings into being a new society.⁴⁹

Hlengwe oral and other scholarly sources confirm that the Hlengwe created a new Hlengwe-controlled society in the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe after the demise of established societies.⁵⁰ The Hlengwe entered one of the easiest frontiers, where they overran the local inhabitants, the Pfumbi or Lomwe/Romwe. Contrary to Beach and Houser's narratives of military conquests, Bannerman says that to a large extent, Hlengwe penetrations of areas along the Save, Chiredzi, Mkwazine, Mutirikwe and Runde Rivers were peaceful.⁵¹ This was so because the area was settled by very scattered peripheral groups of the Pfumbi since colonial reports indicate that the majority of the "Bafumbe" (Pfumbi) and "Bavenda" were in the modern Maranda area which was mainly to the west and in areas around Mateke Hills.⁵² Beach makes it clearer when he says that reference to the Pfumbi dynasty as "mighty" is an obvious exaggeration because though the extent of their territory was indeed great this meant little in that the lowveld "...resembled a dryland 'ocean' with people only living along watercourses or around hills with no-man's land in between."⁵³ The low density of the population owed mainly to the lowveld area's hostile climatic conditions because the first NC of the huge Chibi

⁴⁸ Mazarire, "Reflections on Pre-Colonial," 29.

⁴⁹ Kopytoff, "The Internal Frontier," 25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵¹ Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 490.

⁵² NAZ, N8/1/1 Official Register of Prehistoric Relics Discovered in Southern Rhodesia, (undated), 70; NAZ, S2929/8/4 Nuanetsi District, T.W.F. Jordan, (Provincial Agricultural Officer, Victoria) Report, 15 March, 1973

⁵³ Beach, *A Zimbabwean Past*, 180, 181, 182.

District described this area in 1900 as "... waterless and uninhabitable."⁵⁴ The scarcity of water in the area was confirmed by W.J. Arthurstone the Surveyor General in May 1914.⁵⁵ Also in a communication to the Superintendent of Natives, Victoria, the Native Commissioner of Chibi, stated that in Reserve 37 (Matibi), the general features of the country,

...are large flat plains with here and there a small kopje, and scarcity of water away from the main rivers, and scattered population. The two main rivers the Lundi and Nuanetsi always contain water, ... the following rivers in the area are dry in the no water months, Tshingwesi, Mkambe, Ramasikana and all small streams in between these and running into the Nuanetsi and Tshikombedzi. ... on the Portuguese Border, the river Guburo has pools but dries up inland and the Chefu is dry...The whole length of the Lundi is good grazing, but there is practically no water away from the river in the dry season. This can also be said of the Nuanetsi (River).⁵⁶

The small size of the Hlengwe chiefdoms in Matibi II and Sengwe Communal areas by 1900 also proves that the groups they encountered in the area were even much smaller, to resist domination by the Hlengwe immigrants. In 1900, Tshironga's (Chilonga) population was 100,⁵⁷ with 33 huts,⁵⁸ while Masivamele's population was 65⁵⁹ with 36 huts and Sengwe had 280 Hlengwe and 106 huts. Ngwenyeni had 54.⁶⁰ These were numbers of tax-paying males. A colonial navigator of the Runde (Lundi) and Save (formerly Sabi) Rivers, De Lassoë, also confirms that even by 1906, the Hlengwe area was very scarcely populated.⁶¹ Continued migration of the Hlengwe to better watered areas was mainly thwarted by resistance from bigger *Nyai* groups which confined them to *Hlengweni* (land of the Hlengwe), an area generally between the Save River to the North and Limpopo to the South, while the Bulye River marked the general western limit. A number of *Nyai* groups surrounding *Hlengweni* in the areas that

⁵⁴NAZ, N3/24/2 Peter Forrestall NC, Chibi in a letter to the CNC, 4/8/1900.

⁵⁵ NAZ, N3/24/1/2 Native Reserves – Mashonaland Circle II.

⁵⁶ NAZ, N3/24/1/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to Superintendent of Natives Victoria, 25/5/1913.

⁵⁷ NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC, October 7, 1900

⁵⁸ NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC 4 August, 1900

⁵⁹ NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC October 7, 1900.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ NAZ, BE8/11/2 Lundi and Sabi Rivers 1906.

the Hlengwe failed to penetrate were bigger because statistics provided by the NC for Chibi in 1898 show that the population of Neshuro's chiefdom was 646, Matibi 700, Murove 164 and Negare 318 tax-paying males.⁶² Furumela, who was expanding his territory toward Venda chief Matibi, was stopped by an alliance of Matibi and the Ndebele.⁶³ While the Karanga chiefs Neshuro, Madzivire and Shindi stopped the westward and northward expansion of Ndalega, the founder of the Chitanga dynasty of the Hlengwe.⁶⁴ So by 1890, in Hlengweni were found the following Hlengwe chieftaincies, Mpapa, Gezani, Sengwe, Masivamele, Chitanga, Furumela, Chilonga, Samu, Ngwenyeni, Shilotlela and Tshovani.⁶⁵ It was in their newly conquered area that the Hlengwe, who were the stronger of groups in the south-east lowveld, went on to develop most of the features, traditions and cultural artefacts with which they were identified with being influenced by their socio-economic and natural environment. Beach says Tsonga-Hlengwe from the south-east conquered the Shona-speaking population of the lowveld "...and converted it to their own language and culture."⁶⁶ The emblematic features of Hlengwe identity will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. However, what is clear is that in these early stages of the evolution of Hlengwe identity, no Europeans or missionaries were involved.

The Hlengwe settlement in the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe was followed by the migration of the Ngoni groups into areas in Mozambique and eastern Zimbabwe from which the groups had some indirect influence on the evolution of Hlengwe identity in the 19th century. This followed demographic upheavals associated with wars, famines and population displacements in Nguniland or South Africa's KwaZulu Natal area which J.D. Omer-Cooper terms the

⁶² NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC, 5 March 1898.

⁶³ Beach, *A Zimbabwean Past*, 182.

⁶⁴ Happyson Matsilele Chauke, "Army Document Reference One," The Unpublished Works of Happyson Matsilele Chauke: Compiled by Tillman Houser, (2009), 279; NAZ, N3/33/8 Tshitanga Tribe, Bashlungwe People, Mutupu is M'oto, Report of the NC, Chibi, December, 1903.

⁶⁵ NAZ, N1/2/1-4, List of Paramount Chiefs their Sub-Chiefs and Headmen in the Chibi District, 1st March, 1900.

⁶⁶ Beach, *A Zimbabwean Past*, 180; J.D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (London: Longman, 1966).

Mfecane.⁶⁷ I use the term *mfecane* for the ease of reference to the period and its associated events, but acknowledge Julian Cobbing and Jurg Emil Richner's critique of the *mfecane* as nothing historical but a myth.⁶⁸ However, the association between the Hlengwe and the Ngoni, especially Soshangane's Gaza Nguni, is quite problematic in that the magnitude of the interaction between these two groups has not been accurately documented and still remains murky. Hlengwe oral memory does not help much as it is shrouded more with speculation than fact. Of Hlengwe oral memory with regards to the Hlengwe-Gaza interaction Bannerman says, "...there is now a tendency for many Hlengwe to get their own traditions mixed up with those of the Gaza Nguni."⁶⁹ Bannerman, admits that there might have been some Hlengwe groups such as Sengwe who probably paid tribute to the Gaza kingdom but still he says, "...exactly how is not known."⁷⁰ While it is possible to liken the Hlengwe-Gaza-Nguni relations to Barnes's idea of the Snow Ball State in his analysis of the political organisation of Zwangendaba's state, where the conquered were allowed to retain their own chiefs as subordinate rulers and their own social and cultural practices so long as they paid tribute to the Ngoni overlords,⁷¹ the Hlengwe case is unique in that the majority of Hlengwe *tihosi* with Soshangane remains quite unclear.⁷² Most Hlengwe remained in the peripheral areas of Gaza power. Wilson and Mazarire concur on the over-exaggeration of the Gaza kingdom by some scholars. Wilson says that Soshangane's original army was as small as only about 100 men when he left Nguniland.⁷³ Mazarire believes that the influence of the Gaza has been

⁶⁷ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (London: Longman, 1966).

⁶⁸ Jurg Emil Richner, "The Historical Development of the Concept "mfecane" and the Writing of Early Southern African History, from the 1820s to 1920s," Master of Arts Thesis, Rhodes University, (2005).

⁶⁹ Bannerman, "Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe," 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷¹ A. Barnes, *Politics in a Changing Society*, (Oxford University Press, 1954), 60. Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 36-37.

⁷² Bannerman, "Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe," 14.

⁷³ Monica Wilson, "The Nguni People," in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds), *A History of South Africa to 1870*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 100.

mythologised by scholars.⁷⁴ While he admits that the “Shangaan” appellation denoting the Hlengwe is one of the effects of Gaza interaction with the Hlengwe, he still questions how Soshangane’s Gaza could have had a tremendous cultural effect on the Hlengwe especially “...given that the Gaza capital was never in one place long enough to hold any significant control over its subjects.”⁷⁵ He concludes that, the Hlengwe grip on their conquered territory was confirmed by the nineteenth century “...only to be altered slightly by the coming of the of *mfecane* migrants.”⁷⁶ Liesegang says that by 1838 the Gaza population was so small because it had been decimated by smallpox in eastern Zimbabwe and had to go back to the Limpopo Valley.⁷⁷ Therefore the Gaza influence on Hlengwe identity formation was very slight as Mazarire says. However, it was as a result of Gaza presence in Mozambique and the eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe that the Hlengwe came to be called the “Shangaan,” which we argue was more of a political than ethnic identity. The Shangaan-ness of the Hlengwe is problematised in Chapter 2.

Theoretical Framework

A number of theories have been formulated in a bid to analyse and understand ethnicity, in terms of what it is, how it originates and develops and how it shapes politics and society. The approaches include primordialism and various versions of social constructivism from instrumentalism to demotic or popular constructivism.⁷⁸ It is however important to start this discussion by looking at the major contribution of anthropologist Fredrik Barth to the study of ethnicity. This is because in African history Barth was very influential in putting to rest the notion of “tribe” as a primordial social fact and also his perspective on ethnicity was very

⁷⁴ Mazarire, “Reflections on Pre-Colonial Zimbabwe,” 31.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 31; See also, Beach, *Zimbabwe Before 1900*, 57.

⁷⁶ Mazarire, “Reflections on Pre-Colonial Zimbabwe,” 30-31.

⁷⁷ Gerhard Liesegang, “Nguni Migrations between Delagoa Bay and the Zambezi,” *African Historical Studies* 3, 2 (1970): 321; Also Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, 1, 29.

⁷⁸ Thomas Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History*, 44 (2003): 16; Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 9-10.

important in the framing of this doctoral thesis. His study published in 1969 and entitled *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* emphasises that ethnicity is a relational phenomenon, which makes an important field of study needing rethinking and “a combined theoretical and empirical attack.”⁷⁹ In it he also makes pertinent observations about ethnicity especially that “...[Ethnic] boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them.”⁸⁰ Thus for Barth, this relational phenomenon is characterised by the existence of ethnic boundaries and a continuous maintenance of these boundaries. He further emphasises that “categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories.” Ethnic differences, for Barth, were fused over time when groups adapting to a specific geographical or socio-economic niche developed a common set of practices that were elevated to distinguish them from their neighbours and reinforce a sense of difference. These differences became the basis for the creation of social boundaries and formalised the distinction between “us” and “them.” This idea is very important for this thesis’s analysis of the imagining of Hlengwe differences with the Karanga and Ndebele others. It is also apparent that for Barth, ethnic boundaries are the critical site where identities are continually being constructed, negotiated and reconfigured over time to meet people’s own immediate needs and their access to scarce resources. This helps in setting a solid foundation for the theoretical perspective in this study of the Hlengwe struggles to maintain their own bounded territory in competition with ethnic others in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas. For Barth it was through boundary maintenance that ethnic relationships, both past and present, were preserved.

⁷⁹ Fredrik Barth, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Bergen-Oslo: Universitets Forlaget), 10.

⁸⁰ Barth, “Introduction,” 9.

In the view of primordialists, ethnicity is an inborn, biological attribute which is static or immutable.⁸¹ So for them, ethnicity is not a social construct. Clifford Geertz describes primordial ties as social attachments stemming from “the assumed ‘givens’ of social existence.”⁸² Pursuant to that he argues that “...for virtually every person in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural, some would say spiritual affinity than from social interaction.”⁸³ Primordialists therefore explain ethnicity’s affective aspects in terms of natural ties of blood, race, language, region and custom.⁸⁴ As S. Thomson puts it, primordialism, addresses the “...deeply affective and motivating power of ethnicity by marking its (ethnicity) roots in metaphors of shared kinship,” which primordialists believe are ethnicity’s inborn characteristics.⁸⁵ However, important as primordialism maybe in explaining the affective and emotive power of ethnicity, this school of thought has many weaknesses. Eller and Coughlan say that “primordialism is a bankrupt concept for the analysis and description of ethnicity.”⁸⁶ They accept that ethnicity is “an affect issue,” but deny that it is primordial because “...emotion is not necessarily or ordinarily primordial but has a clear and analysable sociogenesis.”⁸⁷ By so saying Eller and Coughlan reject ethnicity’s ‘naturalness’ and ‘spirituality’ as assumed by primordialists. Msindo also questions primordialism’s emphasis on the ‘naturalness’ of ethnicity, when in reality, ethnicity disappears during one period and intensifies during another.⁸⁸ He also, criticises primordialism’s inability to explain, when and why ethnicity is invoked and becomes so charged and why under different

⁸¹ Clifford Geertz, “Primordial Ties,” in *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 41-42.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 41-42; Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism,” 17; Hutchinson and Smith, “Introduction,” 8.

⁸⁵ Steven Thomson, “Revisiting “Mandingization” in Coastal Gambia and Casamance (Senegal): Four Approaches to Ethnic Change,” *African Studies Review*, Volume 54, Number 2 (September 2011): 97.

⁸⁶ Jack Eller and Reed Coughlan, “The Poverty of Primordialism,” in *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 50.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁸ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 10.

circumstances the intensity of mobilisation of ethnicity varies.⁸⁹ The primordialist school of thought also fails to reconcile the natural aspect of ethnicity and the capacity in individuals to assume various identities in different situations. It is also incapable of explaining various complex identities resulting from diverse circumstances such as intermarriage or migrations.⁹⁰ Therefore, the major flaw of primordialism is that it lacks the explanatory power. However, in this study primordialism will not be totally discarded, because the majority of the Hlengwe's sense of self is interpreted and explained in the primordial sense. The appeal to primordality is significant in legitimising or justifying their actions and claims to authority and control of resources in their interactions with ethnic others in their imagined homeland, Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal area. In a sense, Hlengwe imagine their identity and in attempting to justify themselves, assume that their being Hlengwe is natural and given. In other words, they are imagining a primordial identity out of an ethnogenetic process that is and was not in itself primordial.

One other school of thought that has had a major impact on contemporary ethnic studies is instrumentalism. According to Hutchinson and Smith, one of the central ideas of instrumentalism is that ethnicity is socially constructed and that individuals have the ability to "...cut and mix from a variety of ethnic heritages and cultures to forge their own individual or group identities."⁹¹ The instrumental constructivist school sees ethnic identities as social categories that are created by individuals as instruments for specific purposes under particular circumstances. In the instrumentalist sense, ethnicity is thus a social, political and cultural resource for different interest and status groups.⁹² In this sense, ethnic identity can be manipulated by some people or groups as an instrument to achieve some ends. Spear says,

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Hutchinson and Smith, "Introduction," 8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 8.

ethnicity was invented and mobilised "...by migrant workers to counter urban anomie, poverty, insecurity and competition; by nationalists to build political constituencies and gain access to national resources; and by cultural elites to enhance their status."⁹³ Cases are also given of some migrant, non-Shangaan workers from Zimbabwe and Mozambique adopting a Shangaan identity so as to get jobs and better wages as mine-boys in the South African mines, where the Shangaan identity was easily marketable in mine employment.⁹⁴ However, the instrumentalist school has a major weakness in that it cannot explain the affective or emotional aspects of ethnicity, which makes ethnicity such a powerful and effective tool of political and social mobilisation.⁹⁵ By emphasising the materialist aspect of ethnicity, instrumentalists also ignore some salient features of ethnicity such as the ethnic group's tendency to imagine certain notions of fixed pasts.⁹⁶ It is a fact that, there are many members of an imagined ethnic community, who come from different economic or social backgrounds or status who do not attach materiality to an ethnic group but are just satisfied to know that they belong to it, or to have it as their social identity simply because they were told by their elders that it is their identity. Instrumentalism is also limited in explaining the power of these "utilitarian identities" in forging long lasting 'ethnic unity' among members of the ethnic community.

The 1980s era was a major turning point in the theorisation on ethnicity in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular as ethnic studies received more attention than before. There emerged the 'invention of tradition' or the 'creation of tribalism' thesis which was greatly influenced by the ideas of "invention of traditions" in a book edited by T. Ranger and Hobsbawm, especially Terence Ranger's article the "Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in the same book. In

⁹³ Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism," 17.

⁹⁴ MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity*, 108; D.N. Beach, "The Zimbabwe Plateau and its Peoples," in D. Birmingham and P.M. Martin, (eds), *History of Central Africa Volume, Volume One*, (London & New York: Longman, 1983), 271; Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 485.

⁹⁵ Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism," 17; Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 10.

⁹⁶ Hutchinson and Smith, "Introduction," 9.

this article, Ranger asserts that colonial Africa was characterised by the importation of European neo-traditional inventions of identity such as the regiment, the boarding school, refeudalised country-house, with Africans being included as subordinates. Added to this, he also says, there was the systematic invention of African traditions, customary law, ethnicity and traditional religion. Ranger goes further to assert that before colonialism Africa was characterised by pluralism, flexibility and multiple identities but after colonisation African identities of “tribe,” gender and generation were all bounded by the rigidities of invented tradition.⁹⁷ This version of social constructivism therefore represented ethnicity in Africa as an invention or creation of the colonial period through the agency of colonial authorities, missionaries and African intellectuals in their bid to create a social order of convenience.⁹⁸ The proponents of this school of thought include Ranger, Chimhundu, Vail and contributors to the book, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, edited by Vail.⁹⁹ Wolmer also borrowed the idea to explain the origin of the Hlengwe or “Shangaan” identity, which is an idea that is contested in this thesis.¹⁰⁰

Vail, one of the key proponents of the invention school of thought, sees intellectuals such as European missionaries, anthropologists, historians and African educated elite as the key formulators of ethnic ideologies which defined cultural characteristics of members of various ethnic groups and were also cultural brokers among the African communities.¹⁰¹ Hermann Giliomee also proves that even among Afrikaners in South Africa, ethnic consciousness which was non-existent by 1850, was developed through the agency of white farmers, teachers, the

⁹⁷ Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211-262; Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa,” in *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century-Africa*, eds. T. Ranger and O. Vaughan (London: Macmillan, 1993), 63.

⁹⁸ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 11.

⁹⁹ Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited,” 62-111; Chimhundu, “Early Missionaries and the Ethnolinguistic Factor,” 87-109.

¹⁰⁰ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 4-5.

¹⁰¹ Vail, “Introduction,” 11.

clergy and professionals.¹⁰² The missionaries are also seen as being instrumental in providing the cultural symbols that could be organised into cultural identity such as the written language and written history of a people. The missionaries are credited for specifying customs and traditions which formed the base of a distinct new ascriptive ethnic identity and replaced the older social organisational tools that depended on voluntary clientage and loyalty which as Vail says "...showed great plasticity."¹⁰³ Through missionary education the Africans were socialised into accepting tribal membership, which they accepted (without questioning) as being modern and fashionable. In turn, the educated elite played a critical role in shaping the new ethnic ideologies.¹⁰⁴ Vail is convinced that the role of missionaries was so significant in the creation of ethnicity to the extent that;

In those societies, where missionaries did not work or where they did work but did not introduce education along western lines, or where African intellectuals emerged only at a late period or not at all, the development of ethnic ideologies was either stalled or never occurred.¹⁰⁵

The invention of tribalism thesis, in the way it is generally constituted, has serious limitations, especially in its denial of the existence of ethnic consciousness among many pre-colonial African communities and in granting super or magical creative power to the colonial regimes, missionaries and the African elite of ascribing long-lasting identities to Africans. There are many studies now emerging which prove that ethnicity existed together with other identities before colonialism.¹⁰⁶ Msindo has also rejected the invention of tribalism thesis's oversimplification of the complex process of identity creation, which he claims is premised on

¹⁰² Hermann Giliomee, "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. L. Vail (London: James Currey, 1989), 21-50.

¹⁰³ Vail, "Introduction," 12.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Enocent Msindo, "Social and Political Responses to Colonialism on the Margins: Community, Chieftaincy and Ethnicity in Bulilima-Mangwe, Zimbabwe, 1890-1930," in *Grappling with the Beast: Indigenous Southern African Responses to Colonialism, 1840-1930*, ed. P. Limb, N. Etherington & P. Midgley, (Brill/Leiden/ Boston: 2010), 120-121; Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism," 25.

a lack of clear understanding of a complex interaction between colonisers and the colonised which was "...characterised not simply by African acquiescence but much more seriously by resistance, negotiation and at times indifference..."¹⁰⁷ The top-down or elite-centred approach of the invention of tribalism thesis treats commoners as mere imbibers of what was imposed on them by the elite, yet they were also active agents in identity formation.¹⁰⁸ Ranger's analysis of the invention of Manyika identity (in his article "Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika") is a classic example of this, as he creates an impression that all the communities which became Manyika, were a homogenous community in terms of thinking, behaviour and attitude and all welcomed missionary teachings. Ranger exaggerates the situation when he says Anglicanism in the Makoni district spread easily because of "the grassroots demand for learning" in the newly created Manyika language, and "...there were no obstacles to the spread of Old Umtali Manyika out into Mrewa and Mtoko or to the spread of St Augustine's Manyika into almost the whole territory."¹⁰⁹ This argument is not sustainable as it is premised on African gullibility and acquiescence which was not true. Studies by a number of scholars among different ethnic communities show that indigenous communities had different ways of resisting the imposition of new languages on them.¹¹⁰

The invention of tradition thesis does not take into account the troubled interactions that colonial agents, missionaries and African intellectuals had with the African subjects. As Msindo says, an examination of what the colonial officials called the "native problem" proves that there was African resistance to the imposition of colonial socio-political systems, which were deemed by Africans to be disruptive of existing African systems.¹¹¹ The invention of

¹⁰⁷ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Msindo, "Social and Political Responses," 116-117.

¹⁰⁹ Ranger, "Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika," 133, 136.

¹¹⁰ Enocent Msindo, "Language and Ethnicity in Matebeleland: Ndebele-Kalanga Relations in Southern Zimbabwe, 1930-1960," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 38, no. 1 (2005): 79-103; Tillman Houser, "Let me tell you..." *A Memoir*, (USA: Self-Publication, 2007), 108-109; MacGonagle, *Crafting Identities*, 96-103.

¹¹¹ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 11.

tribalism thesis therefore fails to recognise that there were many areas especially in Zimbabwe where there was great resistance to missionary education and teachings, which is why one colonial administrator in an area in Matebeleland, where there were many missionaries and colonial administrators, wrote despondently in his 1946 annual report that “The average native is not ready for Christian or civilised customs.”¹¹² There were also areas that were inaccessible and had never been effectively penetrated by colonial administrators and missionaries by the 1930s but ethnic communities were already in existence. Also by the 1930s, the number of literate African intellectuals was very small and the majority of them were semi-literate and still rooted in imagined African traditions to have a major impact on African social transformation of the magnitude that the invention thesis envisages. The Native Commissioner (NC) of Victoria remarked in the 1950s, “African boys and girls are taught by African teachers, whose contact with Europeans and the Western way of living is extremely limited.”¹¹³ Wright, a former DC of Nuanetsi, also admits that the common colonial practice of carrying out all administrative work at district headquarters, “...with the exception of an annual patrol for the collection of tax or dipping fees,” was inefficient.¹¹⁴ This was compounded by the great distance between administrative offices and most African areas, which meant that colonial administrators had little knowledge of what was happening among their rural communities.¹¹⁵ Though this study does not totally dismiss aspects of colonial invention and interference with African social systems to the point of modifying them, it will demonstrate that there were many factors that militated against the elitist agencies’ ability to be strong ideological players or cultural brokers in the growth and evolution of Hlengwe ethnicity before and after the 1940s in the area of study.

¹¹² NAZ, S235/432, NC Shangani Reserve letter to Provincial NC Bulawayo, 9 November 1946.

¹¹³ NAZ, S2827/2/2/4/1, Report of the Native Commissioner Victoria District, for the Year Ended, 31 December, 1956.

¹¹⁴ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 204.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

The late 1980s and post 1990 period saw social constructivists adopting Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as "...an imagined political community"¹¹⁶ in their theoretical formulations in the study of ethnicity. Anderson's justification of the "notion of nations as imagined communities" is that a nation is imagined "... because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."¹¹⁷ It is apparent that Anderson's idea is rooted in the notion of creation of identities, so he attributes the rise of imagined communities to the emergence and spread of Western print capitalism. The print languages associated with this development are said to have laid the basis for the growth of national consciousness especially by; (i) creating unified fields of exchange and communication, (ii) giving a new fixity to language and (iii) by creating languages of power.¹¹⁸ Although Anderson focused on the invention of nations and not ethnicity, his ideas began to influence some social constructivists in the 1990s and they began to view ethnic groups as imagined communities as well.¹¹⁹

Anderson's ideas influenced Terence Ranger, one of the most published authors on ethnicity in Zimbabwe, to the point that he began to shift from the notion of "invention of ethnicity" to the notion of an ethnic group as an "imagined community".¹²⁰ But Ranger's shifting is half-hearted as he tends to use the notion of imagination to justify his invention thesis in his new works. Msindo clearly points out that Ranger's major borrowing from Anderson's *Imagined Communities* appears to be the term "imagined" itself, while the rest of what he says represents his (Ranger) playing around with the meaning of the term and how it serves to explain the

¹¹⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso/ New Left Books, 1996), 5-6.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹¹⁹ Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition Revisited," 81.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 82, 96.

reconstitution of symbols and ideas over time.¹²¹ In a 1993 article, Ranger admits the limitations of using the term “Invention” by arguing that the term implies “...too one-sided a happening and a once-for-all an event.”¹²² He says that it is a term which makes, “...little allowance for process, for the constant reworking of identities and the steady transformation of institutions.”¹²³ He admits that, invention implies that ethnic identities could be imposed from outside or from above which is hardly possible, because there plainly had to be more than merely African acceptance. Ranger also accepts that his invention is strong on early colonialism and on the 1930s but much weaker on the period after the Second World War.¹²⁴ Invention as he concludes, therefore fails to give a fully historical treatment of African participation and initiative in innovating custom.¹²⁵

However, having said all this about invention, in the article *The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa* published in a book co-edited by Ranger and Vaughan in 1993, Ranger still finds it hard to relinquish his idea of invention. He argues that he was “crudely on the lines,” but regretted that his analysis was too elementary.¹²⁶ The article seems to be largely a self-justification or defence of his invention thesis and an attempt to merge the thesis’s ideas with those of Anderson and related scholars. Referring to his 1985 pamphlet on the *Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe*, he also says that his ideas were “...not so much incorrect as incomplete.”¹²⁷ He maintains that “European ideas” played a key role especially in the first stages of inventing the Ndebele and many other ethnic identities. He emphasises that these are very much first stage explanations.¹²⁸ This on its own is evidence that he does not accept the existence of pre-colonial ethnic identities but that ethnicity was invented. Also

¹²¹ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 14.

¹²² Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited,” 79-80.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

referring to his chapter entitled *Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika: the Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, in a book edited by L. Vail, he argues that he had started dealing with “the internal imaginative processes” because his ideological players, the teacher-catechists of the Christian Missions, the creators and users of written ‘chimanyika’, were the ethnographers of an imagined Manyika identity.¹²⁹

However, away from the self-justification, Ranger tries to explain the complex Ndebele ethnicity in Zimbabwe by bringing in notions of imagination. He starts by asserting that “The people who call themselves Ndebele cover a wider area, come from more varied origins and environments and have more numerous alternative identities available to them.”¹³⁰ He claims that there was a steady movement of the imagination towards a wider “Ndebele” identity away from the narrow “Zulu” type model created by early administrators and *indunas*.¹³¹ However, his explanation of this development betrays his failure to abandon the invention thesis because his sequence of events leading to the imagination of a wider Ndebele identity starts with the social engineering work of colonial administrators in alliance with *indunas*, helped by the ideological work of the first Ndebele-speaking Christian intellectuals as explained in Ranger’s 1985 pamphlet. He believes that the colonial NCs recruited from Natal invented a narrow Ndebele ethnicity with a membership restricted to the royal clan and the Zansi aristocracy but excluding the great majority of subjects of the precolonial state. When this narrow notion of Ndebele ethnicity spread to the towns and to labour migrants, it did so defensively and as a means of beating off competition of Shona speakers in the Bulawayo labour market. But in the 1940s and 1950s the initiative passed from *indunas* and aristocratic Anglicans and shifted to the most successful mission-educated men drawn from areas outside the core of the Ndebele state, ethnically Kalanga or Nyubi. Such educated men, as Ranger further argues, took

¹²⁹ Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited,” 96.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

leadership positions, even in the Matabele Home Society, which was defining a broader, inclusive Ndebele identity. Ranger believes that the colonial state's unpopular policies such as massive destocking of cattle and evictions of people pushed the 'pure' Ndebele chiefs who had been the state's allies all along into alliance with these urban "imagers" of the wider Ndebele identity, who also stressed the compatibility of Ndebele-ness.¹³²

What is apparent in this thesis which forms the basis of his arguments in his works after the admission of a shift to the notion of imagination is that just like in the invention of ethnicity thesis his key ideological players are the elite. Therefore, the key weakness of Ranger's formulations is that, just like Anderson's work from which he adopted the notion of 'imagined communities', they remain elitist and fail to adequately analyse the role played by commoners. As indicated in Ranger's 1999 publication, *Voices from the Rocks*, the inventive work of colonial administrators and missionaries was the starting point in the construction of the Ndebele ethnic identities.¹³³ This inventive work, he argues, was followed by decades of the evolution of a composite Ndebele identity as a response to;

...the turmoil of the 1890s, which had thrown so many different people together, and the evictions of the twentieth century which continued to mix people up; it was an effect of administrative reform and missionary teaching and it was an ideology of protest against the breaking of the promises of Rhodes.¹³⁴

According to Ranger, the new challenges following the said turmoil led to social disruptions which affected the cultural, gender, political, class and generational identities, and called for much imagination to be invested by Africans in order to articulate new definitions of community.¹³⁵ Also taking a cue from John Lonsdale's argument that for the Kikuyu of Kenya,

¹³² Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition Revisited," 99.

¹³³ Terence Ranger, *Voices, Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopo Hills of Zimbabwe*, (Harare: Baobab, 1999), 99-100.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

imagining ethnicity was not a matter of producing a single homogeneous set of values and assumptions, he also argues that for the Ndebele it also meant that many different imaginations of Ndebele identity were developed.¹³⁶ He says that Ndebele identities were appealed to and imagined in the context of the struggle for the land because whites had made war on the Ndebele state, made peace with the Ndebele *indunas* and made promises of land to the Ndebele.¹³⁷ In his exploration of the dynamics of imagining of a wider Ndebele identity, by the multi-ethnic groups including Banyubi, Sotho, Kalanga and Ndebele of the Matopos, he sees the chiefs, the mission-educated elite, teachers, farmers and traders and intellectuals as the key players. The *indunas* are said to have kept the legitimating memories of the Ndebele state, but it was the modernising intellectuals who based Ndebele ethnicity on these memories.¹³⁸ In resisting evictions after 1945, the chiefs like Ndaniso and Matole appealed to the past especially to Ndebele identity and rights.¹³⁹ This was so because Ndebele identity was essential in that Rhodes had promised the Matopos as a home for the Ndebele.¹⁴⁰ Just like in Wenlock, the disparate groups of the Matopos also defended their right by invoking Rhodes's promises to the 'Ndebele' rather than centuries of Banyubi occupation.¹⁴¹ In the same vein, the elite Matebeleland Home Society was also taking up the land grievances of the Ndebele. It also invented new traditional ceremonies, like pilgrimages to Mzilikazi's grave in the Matopos. The intellectuals were therefore the cultural brokers in Vail's formulation, because they were the ones who debated the language and culture and articulated a specific Ndebele right to autonomous development.¹⁴² Ranger also sees the press, the *Bantu Mirror*, as from 1947 laying the bases for the growth of Ndebele consciousness as the elite used it to express their views,

¹³⁶ Ranger, *Voices*, 102.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 117.

aspirations and desires.¹⁴³ So Ranger sees the press, in the Andersonian sense, playing the significant role of creating unified fields of exchange and communication. In this Rangerian formulation, it was the elite again that linked the rural and urban grievances which were being articulated as Ndebele grievances. So the elite like Daniel Dube, a modern Christian, Sigombe Mathema (a wealthy cattle owner who is credited with welding ‘Ndebele’ factions “into one tribe”) and agricultural entrepreneurs like Mark Dokotela Ncube, Johnson Sigodo Dube, Chief Matole Dlodlo and labour migrants who came from Bulawayo and South Africa became so influential in these developments.¹⁴⁴ Migrant labourers from South Africa are said to have undergone political education there, hence brought radical ideas. In the Matopos Chief Nzula, who “was educated, wealthy and of high social standing” is credited with writing books on Ndebele history and participating in great invented traditionalist rituals and in so doing linked Matopos to the imaginers of Ndebele identity in Bulawayo.¹⁴⁵

Ranger also claims that the political identity of the Matopos up to 1950 was made by the Christian Progressives of the Whitewaters and the Matopos Mission rather than by Ndebele indunas or Mwali priests. Ranger’s failure to relinquish his firm belief in the elite’s social engineering work is confirmed by his weak attempt to bring commoners into the processes unfolding in the Matopos, leading to the imagining of an Ndebele identity. Nqabe Tshuma, the man who helped in influencing the imagining of the Ndebele identity in the Whitewaters area, is described by Ranger as a Sotho commoner. However, he was a “commoner” only in Ranger’s terminology but in reality an educated elite. Nqabe Tshuma, the leader of Sofasonke, was “very strongly London Missionary Society,” a school teacher at Hope Fountain and trained at Inyati. He was also at one time a migrant worker who had been to Johannesburg where he got the

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴⁴ Ranger, *Voices*, 124.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

influence to be a nationalist and was a member of the National Congress and the ICU.¹⁴⁶ Thus Ranger's formulation in *Voices from the Rocks*, reflects a slight shift from his inventionist thesis and elitist approach. In this form, his thesis does not adequately explain how the commoners embraced and were prepared to die for symbols and ideas imagined for them by the elite. Therefore the Rangerian thesis and the Andersonian idea of "imagined communities" still leave out commoners as outsiders in the processes of the evolution of identities.

Ranger's elitist formulations are echoed in the works of his 'disciples', Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor in an article entitled "Modernity and Ethnicity in a Frontier Society: Understanding Difference in North Western Zimbabwe," published in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 23, No.2, June 1997. It is a work in which the authors admit is built on Ranger's pioneering work on Ndebele identity and explores in particular the everyday politics of naming as it occurred in the context of forced evictions into the remote Shangani Reserve after World War 2. Whilst they say that the interactions between evictees and locals were critical in shaping the content of Ndebele identity, they argue that the evictees who defined themselves as "modern" and "Ndebele" were the principal agents in this process.¹⁴⁷ Alexander and McGregor's thesis is also not very clear about the role played by the commoner locals, and singles out the 'elite' evictees as the key ideological players. That commoners are not key ideological players in social transformation in Ranger's works is confirmed in his joint publication with Alexander and McGregor entitled *Violence & Memory: One Hundred Years in the "Dark Forests" of Matabeleland*, published in 2000.¹⁴⁸ Their key agents in the processes of social change in the Shangani after the Second World war are the "Ndebele" evictees who were "Christian progressives whose Christianity was a key source of self-identification and

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁴⁷ Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor, "Modernity and Ethnicity in a Frontier Society: Understanding Difference in North Western Zimbabwe," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.23, No.2, (1997): 187-201.

¹⁴⁸ Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the "Dark Forests," of Matabeleland* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

was intimately tied up with ideas about modernity and nationalism.”¹⁴⁹ They were involved in naming and labelling and they are said to have been the pioneers of nationalism in the Shangani Reserve.¹⁵⁰

However, in spite of its perceived weaknesses, the idea of ‘imagined communities’ makes it easier for us to examine multiple imaginings of Hlengwe identity in different historical phases up to 2014. For example, Xihlengwe language and circumcision or initiation, two institutions that the Hlengwe are dying to defend, are widely imagined as undying symbols of Hlengwe identity. Therefore, to some extent, Anderson’s thesis is important to this study especially in analysing the changing notions of Hlengwe identity during its transformation from the pre-colonial period to 2014 as they responded to their changing socio-political and cultural environment.

Though the Rangerian model has been so influential up to the early twenty-first century, scholarship strongly challenging Ranger’s elitist ideas discussed above about the construction of ethnic identities in Zimbabwe has begun to emerge in the new millennium. MacGonagle in her book *Crafting Identities in Mozambique and Zimbabwe*, published in 2007, has gone in the right direction by examining issues of Ndauro identity from the fifteenth century through the nineteenth century. In this she accepts, like Spear and a host of other scholars, that pre-colonial ethnicity existed and that ethnicity was not a creation of the colonial state. She therefore rejects the Rangerian invention of ethnicity thesis. However, MacGonagle did not deeply analyse historical developments after the 19th century which had an impact on the development of Ndauro ethnicity. Her work was mainly anthropological, and therefore it did not produce a deeply penetrative historical analysis. As also observed by Perman in his review of her book, MacGonagle has taken an extreme stance from the position of invention of ethnicity theorists.

¹⁴⁹ Alexander, *etal*, *Violence and Memory*, 10.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapters 2 and 4.

This is extreme in that she locates the construction of Ndaue ethnicity in the pre-colonial period and asserts in her conclusion that “...neither the pressures of colonialism nor the politics of nationalism created a sense of being Ndaue. Evidence shows that Ndaue...was shaped as an ongoing practice in the precolonial period.”¹⁵¹ This denial of the influences of the colonial period in identity formation implies therefore that after its formation, ethnicity remains static, which thesis is not sustainable because the way Ndaue ethnicity was imagined in the 19th century is different from the way it is imagined in the 21st century. However, she can be forgiven for admitting in a thinly veiled self-criticism that “It is clear that studying history and identity from 1500 to 1900 in this setting prompts questions about more recent processes of identity formation in the twentieth century.”¹⁵²

In the first decade of the 21st century and after, Msindo’s writings on Ndebele and Kalanga ethnicity in Western Zimbabwe have made numerous contributions to theory and content in the study of ethnicity. Msindo believes, like MacGonagle, in the notion of pre-colonial ethnic consciousness among Africans and argues that in Bulilima-Mangwe the Kalanga “...imagined and entertained the idea of an undisputed pre-colonial Kalanga community, Kalanga territory and Kalanga ethnic identity.”¹⁵³ In his 2012 publication, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe: Transformations in Kalanga and Ndebele Societies, 1860-1990*, he argues that, the early phase of the creation of Ndebele and Kalanga ethnicity was in the pre-colonial era, when the two groups’ relations were marked by increasing competition for social, economic and political space, with the Kalanga as the vulnerable ‘Other’ fighting for survival against political domination by the stronger Ndebele.¹⁵⁴ Unlike the Rangerian model, Msindo says that the creation of ethnic identity was not a top-down process, constructed or reinforced by the state,

¹⁵¹ MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity*, 106.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁵³ Msindo, “Social and Political Responses,” 153.

¹⁵⁴ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 3.

but a development indigenous to the African communities. He thus dismisses assumptions inherent in the creation of tribalism thesis that give the colonial state a key role in the formulation of ideologies among Africans, stating that the colonial state was too weak and faced with serious administrative challenges to be able to create and cement social ideologies among Africans.¹⁵⁵ Therefore he revisits social constructivism, ‘and moves beyond the notion of history from above’ to examine the complex interactions of both commoners and elites, in the process of creating identities. This is the notion that he calls demotic or popular constructivism, which is inclusive of the role of the common African people as active agents and movers in the complex process of identity formation.¹⁵⁶ Msindo argues strongly that African people were not simply docile recipients of ideologies formed for them by the elite.¹⁵⁷

This study of the transformation of Hlengwe ethnicity uses Msindo’s strand of social constructivism, known as demotic constructivism, and views ethnic identities as having been created in pre-colonial times, but continue to be shaped by complex processes that involve the interactions of the commoners with the state, missionaries, African educated elites and other agents. We widen the scope and type of ideological players in identity formation to embrace the commoners, because they were very active agents in the evolution of their ethnic identities from the pre-colonial to the colonial period. We argue in this study that Hlengwe ethnicity was not merely a product of colonialism, African elite or missionary manipulations and inventions but that the initial phase of creation was through the agency of indigenous Hlengwe communities. Its transformation from the pre-colonial period to 2014, was a product of the interactions of Hlengwe commoners, colonial elites, missionaries, educated elites and resettled ethnic others, the Karanga and Ndebele, ZAPU nationalists, ZANLA guerrillas and the post-independence government. The commoners as engaged played a very important role, as they

¹⁵⁵ Msindo, “Social and Political Responses,” 118-117.

¹⁵⁶ Msindo *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

repudiated, resisted and interpreted colonial, post-colonial and new social systems they were exposed to, in complex ways that they saw as beneficial to the survival of their identity. The Andersonian notion of “imagined communities” and the primordial sense of identities as natural ‘givens,’ have been applied in their limited senses, not to say that Hlengwe identities were in themselves primordial, but that they appealed to notions that could only be viewed as primordialist in the Hlengwe imagining of their *Hlengweness*. The Andersonian “imagination” has been adopted because the Hlengwe communities showed that even though they do not know most of their fellow Hlengwe throughout Chiredzi District and have never met them, but in their minds lives the image of their existence and communion. The primordial sense was found to be critical in that for most Hlengwe ethnic entrepreneurs and commoners, lives or is imagined a sense of the permanence of their ethnicity from pre-colonial times and basing on this they make claims to chieftaincy and being rightful indigenous owners of land and other resources in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas in Chiredzi District.

Methods, Procedures and Techniques

Qualitative research methods were used mainly because this is a study which sought above all other things not statistical data or generalisation but to record and analyse the Hlengwe’s notions of their ethnicity and the major historical events which had a bearing on the evolution of their identity. Qualitative research methods were useful in such a study because they deal with the opinions of subjects or participants. This ensures that the social, historical and institutional context of the phenomenon being studied is not lost in the analysis.¹⁵⁸ Also since quantitative methods have an interest in statistical data, it was felt that they could not provide information for an understanding of ethnicity which is abstract as it is about internal human

¹⁵⁸ F.C.L. Rakotsoane & M.A. Rakotsoane, *The ABC of Research Project, Dissertation and Thesis Proposal Writing* (Roma, Lesotho: Choice Publishing Company, 2006), 16.

feelings, which evolve over long periods through different historical episodes which can only be captured by the researcher through interviewing the subjects.¹⁵⁹

The primary subjects of this study were the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. We sought to understand the transformation of their ethnicity. The social groups that the Hlengwe interacted with at different historical episodes such as the Romwe/Pfumbe, Karanga and Ndebele, colonial and post-colonial administrators, Free Methodist missionaries, the ZAPU nationalists and ZANLA guerrillas are secondary but essential subjects to the understanding of the transformation of Hlengwe ethnicity. Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas of Chiredzi District have been chosen because this is the area which is generally accepted as Hlengwe area where the “Hlengwe traditions” are deeply rooted and the whole area is under Hlengwe *tihosi* (chiefs and headmen) only. It has to be clarified from the onset that Hlengwe do not have a term for headmen because since pre-colonial times they had no paramount chiefs and headmen but *tihosi* (chiefs) who were all equal in status. It is not surprising that even to date, many years after the creation and institutionalisation of the offices of paramount chief and headmen by the colonial and post-colonial administrators, the Hlengwe still refer to their traditional leaders as *tihosi*. As such it is befitting to refer to the same as *tihosi*, which is commensurate with the thinking of the Hlengwe.

The current state of knowledge on the Hlengwe identity is partly a reflection of the dearth of primary and published material on the Hlengwe. There is very little in the way of traveller, missionary, hunter or settler accounts about the Hlengwe which reflects that it was a community of little interest to literate communities for a long time. So having been fully convinced that the Hlengwe community exists and that fragments of information about them could be found in some colonial reports, documents and publications which instead of studying

¹⁵⁹ Robert E. Stake, *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), 29.

the Hlengwe in detail mainly acknowledged their existence, it was worth taking the risk to try and produce a comprehensive history of the Hlengwe focusing mainly on the evolution of the Hlengwe identity. This is because the Hlengwe are a community with a history and a story to tell which because of negligence was slowly sliding into oblivion. Bannerman, an Agricultural Officer stationed in Masvingo (then Fort Victoria), in his two papers published in NADA and the *Zimbabwean History* (a journal of the Historical Association of Zimbabwe) focused on the history of a small Hlengwe community north of the Runde River with emphasis on the Hlengwe modes of production and colonial land dispossession before the 1930s.¹⁶⁰ The missionary, Tillman Houser, published two books with a bias on the white Free Methodist Missionary activities in Zimbabwe, where among other areas of operation they also interacted with the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe.¹⁶¹ Allan Wright, the former DC of Nuanetsi District, in his published book, *Valley of The Ironwoods*, focused on his experiences as DC of the Nuanetsi District which covered the study area and as such makes useful contributions to the understanding of some Hlengwe economic and political activities in the period 1958 to 1968. My two publications focus specifically on the Hlengwe, however, one published in *Zamani Afrika*, focuses on Hlengwe responses to dispossession of land, while my book chapter published in a book edited by Professor Ngwabi Bhebe is a direct product of this research and focuses on ethnic or “tribal” conflicts between the Hlengwe and the Karanga in Matibi 2. In the use of the terms “tribe”, “tribalism” we acknowledge the pejorative sense of the terms when referring to Africans, but we use them in the Lonsdalean sense when he was discussing “political tribalism” as explained elsewhere above. Besides my latter work there is none that makes an attempt to understand Hlengwe ethnicity in Zimbabwe in detail.

¹⁶⁰ Bannerman, “Towards a History of the Hlengwe,” 483-496; Bannerman, ‘Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 1-45.

¹⁶¹ T. Houser, *Let me tell you...A Memoir*, (USA: Self-Publication, 2007); T. Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions in Zimbabwe*, (Harare: Priority Projects Publishing, 2000).

Information was mainly collected through interviews and consultation of primary and secondary sources in different research institutions. Secondary sources in the form of published literature, books or journals on ethnicity in general and aspects of Hlengwe history and newspaper articles were obtained from Lundi Mission, Rhodes University Library, Midlands State University Library, University of Zimbabwe Library, Gweru Moth Memorial Library and Masvingo Mirror Newspaper Library, the National Archives of Zimbabwe, Masvingo and Gweru Records centres and the Chiredzi District Administrator's office.

Most of the field data was collected in 2013, 2014 and 2015 from rural Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. These communal areas were chosen because together they make up an area where imagined old Hlengwe traditions still prevail. Archival material was consulted between 2013 and 2017. From the National Archives of Zimbabwe, we were able to obtain few relevant writings on the Hlengwe from volumes of the Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA) publications and a copy of Wright's *Valley of the Ironwoods*. The National Archives of Zimbabwe had a lot of relevant colonial government documents, correspondences and Native Commissioners' reports for the Chibi District up to the 1940s, from which bits of information on the specific area of study from the early colonial period to the 1950s could be obtained. However, besides the information they provide, the reports and documents are part of the concrete evidence that the Hlengwe *tihosi* and their subjects were until the 1950s of little significance to the colonial administrators as only a paragraph or two or a few lines would be devoted to the Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas in the annual or monthly reports. It is evident that in the colonial mind these were people with no "colourful" history to write about. But on a positive note, reading through the numerous small paragraphs in the reports, correspondences and documents helped us to piece together information which gave useful insights on Hlengwe communities' socio-economic and political activities. The information was very helpful in filling in gaps, corroborating and correcting the recorded oral memories of

the modern Hlengwe communities about aspects of their history of the pre-1960s era. The 1967 Delineation Reports for Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas produced by the colonial government's delineation committee but not deposited at the National Archives of Zimbabwe were found at the Masvingo Records Centre.

The problem also with studying the history of the Hlengwe is that for the post-1961 period information is not readily available. All efforts by the NAZ officials to locate even the unprocessed post-1961 government documents or reports on happenings in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas were in vain. Faced with this situation, Allan Wright's book, *Valley of the Ironwoods* became a very useful source of information for the period. While it is almost certain that the book is not devoid of weaknesses such as personal and colonial biases, it still has the advantage that it gives very detailed accounts of the political and economic developments in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas during Wright's time as DC of Nuanetsi. The major strength of this source is that Wright was writing about the citizens of his district and his personal activities, experiences and observations, being the man on the spot during the period 1958 to 1968. His ideas were also compared and tested for authenticity with oral memories of the Hlengwe, as some people who witnessed the events of the 1960s to the 1970s that he was writing about are still alive.

Following major changes in the Zimbabwean socio-political landscape since 2000, there has arisen many gatekeepers and this has curtailed the freedom of movement for researchers throughout the country. However, I was equipped with letters of introduction from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, Provincial Administrator of Masvingo Province and the District Administrator of Chiredzi District, to enable me to enter the research area. The letters however, are no guarantee that one will get information from locals, the Provincial or the District office as each of the gatekeepers have the right to exercise their own discretion. In the Chikombedzi area in July of 2014 I was barred from interviewing

people and even taking pictures of *swikombana* (Hlengwe women who had just graduated from the initiation school) by drunken ZANU PF party youths in spite of my being granted permission by the village head and elders. I was actually advised to leave the place for my own safety and that of my research assistant and interpreter. Some would just not give me audience out of “unknown fear.” At one of the district offices it was difficult to access information from the district office till July 2017 following the appointment of a young District Administrator. However, still to prove that the *tihosi* were of little significance to colonial administrators, the records of the various Hlengwe chieftaincies obtained at the District office were so thin and only contained scant information on deaths and installation of chiefs, starting from the mid-1950s. Therefore Wright was correct when he said that, when he took over the Nuanetsi office as DC in 1958 all records were in shambles or non-existent.¹⁶²

Oral interviews were also an important method in information gathering. The interviews enabled the gathering of stories told from the perspective of the people who live in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas who were drawing on their own recollections while some were retelling stories that they were told by generations before them or oral traditions. According to Vansina oral tradition refers to exclusively hearsay accounts, that is testimonies that narrate an event which has not been witnessed and remembered by the informant himself, but which he has learnt about through hearsay.¹⁶³ Although such sources are important for a study which goes back to the precolonial period where societies were not literate the reliability of the stories should be tested rigorously. Referring to challenges around the reliability of oral traditions and other oral sources Tumblety says, historians should guard against using oral testimonies “straight forwardly as a transparent window onto an individual’s lived experience.”¹⁶⁴ This is

¹⁶² Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 2-3.

¹⁶³ John Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers), 20.

¹⁶⁴ Joan Tumblety, “Introduction: Working with Memory as Source and Subject,” in *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, ed. Joan Tumblety, (London and New York: Routledge) 4.

because oral traditions have limitations and a certain tendency towards bias due to many influences. Oral testimonies in general can be distorted and are affected by memory lapses or a deliberate falsification of information. Vansina says that informants may forget some information or deliberately leave out some for personal, social or political reasons.¹⁶⁵ Referring to the challenge of distortion of oral testimonies or traditions associated with informants Tumblety says, “human memory is [deliberately] filtered as much as constructed.”¹⁶⁶ What is clear is that there is a tendency by some informants to manipulate traditions in their favour for instance to justify their claims to chieftaincy, land and other resources and even indigeneity. As a precautionary measure every effort was made to verify the accuracy of information through rigorous questioning of the story content for any contradictions. An effort was also made to find out the social, political, cultural and other possible reasons behind the versions of stories or views presented by the various Hlengwe informants. The informants’ stories were also checked for accuracy and consistency against other historical sources such as written documents and archival sources and oral testimonies from other interviewees on related issues.

The oral interviews were very important as they helped to fill in information gaps that existed in documentary sources. Interviews were essential for this kind of study because they enabled the participants to verbally communicate information about their behaviour, thoughts or feelings in response to the author’s questions.¹⁶⁷ With the permission of the respondents, most of the interviews were audio-taped. Interviews also had the advantage that the told stories could be verified against the narratives of other oral sources and existing documentary sources till solid facts could be established and errors corrected or reduced. The interviews were mainly

¹⁶⁵ Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 20.

¹⁶⁶ Tumblety, “Introduction: Working with Memory,” 4.

¹⁶⁷ W.D. Crano, M.B. Brewer and A. Lac, *Principles and Methods of Social Research* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 280.

conducted in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas although there were many Hlengwe and non-Hlengwe interviewed elsewhere.

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to identify most of the interviewees. Purposive sampling involves sampling participants on the basis that they will be able to provide rich data to analyse or deliberately choosing people who by virtue of their positions or status are thought to be knowledgeable on the subject of interest.¹⁶⁸ Snowball sampling is a technique where “initially sampled participants are asked to contact and recruit others in their social network.”¹⁶⁹ Braun and Clarke also call it “Friendship Pyramiding,” but prove that it is a flexible approach where researchers can ask participants to identify anyone they know may provide information.¹⁷⁰ The main reasons for using these techniques was that, the population of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas is multi-ethnic and the Hlengwe population size and distribution is unknown since there have been many movements into and from the area by both Hlengwe and non-Hlengwe groups, especially since the 1950s. Purposive sampling together with snowball sampling made it easier to locate the participants, thought to be knowledgeable on issues of interest in the mixed population scattered throughout the study area, thus saving time and resources as well.¹⁷¹ I undertook oral interviews with ordinary Hlengwe, Karanga and Ndebele people from Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas and other informants such as chiefs (*tihosi*), church pastors, civil servants, and some Hlengwe liberation war-veterans in the research area. Most of the interviewees were very helpful in identifying and locating the people that they thought had knowledge on the topic of interest. Some *tihosi* showed great enthusiasm in having their history written and helped in identifying knowledgeable people and even invited

¹⁶⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*, (London: Sage Publication Ltd, 2014), 56. See also, K.F. Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 193-194.

¹⁶⁹ Crano, *etal*, *Principles and Methods*, 235.

¹⁷⁰ Braun and Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research*, 57.

¹⁷¹ Crano, *etal*, *Principles and Methods*, 235.

the informants to their courts to be interviewed by me, which reduced my research budget and helped save time.

Together with oral sources I also used contemporary literature that includes the print and electronic media. I also closely followed a Hlengwe interactive website to gain an understanding of how Hlengwe identity is being discoursed on line. Through internet sources, falsified or exaggerated information can be posted but the greatest advantage of internet sources is that individuals express their feelings freely so for a study of ethnicity this is not much of a disadvantage because it makes it easier to judge the language used especially whether it is friendly or hostile. The ethnic group's grievances are discussed and the 'enemies' identified.

Interviewing Hlengwe women was not easy mainly because the rural Hlengwe community is largely still under dominant patriarchal norms which have transcended all the historical phases from the pre-colonial era to the 21st century. The women do not sit in the council of men and do not join in male conversations as it is taken as a sign of gross disrespect for the husbands or males. The majority does not dispute what males have said. They would say "*Leswo vangamubyela hiswona, or ahitivi. Swatibya nivabava.*" Translated, "What they (husbands or males) have told you is the truth, or we do not know. The information you want can only be provided by the males." Even in the absence of their male counterparts most of the women were not ready to be interviewed. However, a few young Hlengwe women, mainly university students from Great Zimbabwe and Midlands State University were willing to share their stories with me and through them a bit of some light was shed about the historical and lived experiences of the generality of the Hlengwe women. But the frustrating thing about interviewing the majority of the women was that they still remained as secretive as ever before.

The collected data was broken up into broad themes which formed the chapter titles. In the analysis the collected information was checked against other sources, oral and written for accuracy and reliability.

Chapter Outlines.

This thesis is divided into 9 chapters. The first chapter, besides introducing the study, defines the methods and sources of information used to answer the research questions. It also gives a brief history of the origin of the Hlengwe. The theory that guides this study is also laid out.

In Chapter 2 our focus is on clarifying issues on Hlengwe ethnicity. We address the problem of naming the Hlengwe where the “Shangaan-ness” of the Hlengwe is problematised. The relationship between the Gaza Kingdom and the Zimbabwean Hlengwe is explored in detail. We argue that the Hlengwe communities were already established in the south-east lowveld by the time that the Gaza established themselves in Mozambique and eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. We insist that, the power of the Gaza Kingdom and its influence over the Hlengwe was over-exaggerated. The majority of the Hlengwe groups were in remote peripheral areas that they were not assimilated by the Gaza, maintained their culture and language and only adopted the “Shangaan” appellation as a security measure to avoid any possible Shangaan raids. The chapter also revisits the invention of tribalism/ethnicity thesis where we prove that even before the colonisation of Zimbabwe, a nascent form of Hlengwe ethnicity or ethnic consciousness did exist in the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe and that the pre-colonial Hlengwe communities had identity markers or cultural symbols which distinguished them clearly from their *Nyai*/Shona or Pfumbi/Lomwe neighbours and were aware of their ‘otherness’ from the non-Hlengwe. This ethnicity was articulated socially in the day to day interaction in the Hlengwe moral economy and in very rare instances as political tribalism, proving that ethnicity had a pre-colonial currency in some African communities.

In Chapter 3 we revisit agency in the creation of African ethnicity and also prove that elitist agency had very little impact on Hlengwe ethnic identity during the early colonial encounter in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. We prove that the Rangerian invention of tribalism

thesis, which locates the invention of ethnicity in the early colonial encounter and grants magical social-engineering power to elitist agency, has gross limitations in explaining the origin of ethnicity in some ‘under-dog’ or “obscure” minority societies such as the Hlengwe. We expose the limited ability of the colonial administrators, migrant workers, missionaries and African educated elite to influence Hlengwe identity formation during the early colonial encounter. We examine the factors that limited the effectiveness of the elitist agents in influencing social transformation among the Hlengwe, which were possibly overlooked by the proponents of the invention of tribalism/ethnicity school of thought in their studies elsewhere. In this section, we also argue that the Hlengwe were not mere consumers of invented traditions, colonial policies and missionary teachings, but instead responded in different ways to defend their imagined ‘traditions’ even when colonial agents and missionaries tried to modify their customs and culture. For example, the Hlengwe were able to maintain their early marriage practices in spite of colonial efforts to stop early marriages and the payment of lobola.

Chapter 4 explores the processes of the reconstruction and re-imagining of Hlengwe ethnicity beyond the 1930s, especially in the 1950s after the resettlement of evicted Karanga and Ndebele in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. We examine how the interaction between the Hlengwe and groups of resettled evictees created new avenues for the reworking of Hlengwe identity within the new broader social, political and economic contexts created by the colonial regime. The chapter begins with an analysis of the interaction between the Hlengwe and the Karanga/Ndebele evictees resettled in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. We examine the hardening of Hlengwe ethnicity as a response to loss of land and competition for water resources with the new comers. Hlengwe ethnicity or political tribalism was mobilised to defend Hlengwe resources and the key players were the commoners and *tihosi*. We also discuss the aspect of naming/labelling and stereotyping which affected the imagining of Hlengwe identity. All aspects of life ranging from diet, attire, deportment, gender relations,

how homes were built and kept, how fields were tended,¹⁷² Hlengwe attitudes towards education, and many other economic and social issues were viewed in ethnic terms. To be Hlengwe became associated with being “uncivilised,” “uneducated,” “backward,” and “dirty.” It was also associated with poor agricultural practices. It became an identity of shame, which saw the Hlengwe reacting differently. Some abandoned it and changed surnames while radical elements defended their practices, leading to the hardening of Hlengwe feelings against Karanga others. Also important in this chapter is our view that it was the new-comers who played a key role in popularising the Hlengwe’s “Shangaan” appellation. We also examine how some Hlengwe traditions which served as identity markers were transformed. Whilst we do not deny that the role of colonial agency and missionaries was significant in social transformation in this historical episode we still argue that their role was secondary to that of the commoners.

In chapter 5 we continue to pursue the transformation of ethnicity beyond the early colonial encounter. In the invention of tribalism thesis, the Missionaries played their role mainly before the 1930s and they were critical in codifying customs and standardising languages. We argue here that in Matibi 2 and Sengwe, the missionaries were not inventors of the Hlengwe ethnicity but also became critical players in the modification of Hlengwe traditions and the re-working of Hlengwe identity alongside the commoners and *tihosi*. Free Methodist Church (FMC) missionaries became more visible in the 1950s having expanded their operations, from the Lundi Mission in Nuanetsi (Mwenezi District).

We begin this chapter by examining how the missionary activities promoted ethnic consciousness among the Hlengwe through their pro-Hlengwe attitude which created divisions between Hlengwe and Karanga. The missionaries spoke and taught in *Xitswa*, a Tsonga/Shangaan dialect similar to Xihlengwe, and barred the use of any other languages

¹⁷² Alexander, *etal*, *Violence and Memory*, 55.

especially Karanga. They preferred Hlengwe ahead of ethnic others in offering jobs in their mission stations and assisted the Hlengwe to acquire academic and professional qualifications. The educated Hlengwe elite, not missionaries, tried to bar the production of Free Methodist Church Christian literature in Shona. The Hlengwe, *Hlengwenised* church organs such as the Youth and Women's League by naming them in Xihlengwe and the majority of Hlengwe converts showed a preference for Hlengwe candidates to fill the highest leadership positions in the church. For this reason, the FMC became ethnically associated with the Hlengwe, even after a large number of evictees of the 1950s joined the church. We also analyse how the church modified some aspects of the Hlengwe culture and traditions, making the church a significant player in social transformation after the 1930s. However, we argue that the majority of commoners and *tihosi* were not passive participants as they resisted missionary attempts to change some Hlengwe traditions. The FMC even failed to standardise the Hlengwe language and had few converts, as the Hlengwe majority merely feigned Christianity for the materialist benefits associated with being members of the Church. Therefore, the church only played an influential role after the 1950s but commoners were not passive participants. It is also clear that the evolution of Hlengwe ethnicity was a complex process and each historical phase had an impact on social transformation.

The detention of Joshua Nkomo and his ZAPU nationalists at Gonakudzingwa in the south-east lowveld from 1964 to 1974 and how it activated Hlengwe nationalist feeling and helped rebuild the waning Hlengwe confidence in their ethnicity is the subject of Chapter 6. Though we are looking at African nationalism, the idea is not to engage in debates about what nationalism is or not. We argue that the Hlengwe joined the nationalist phase much later, in the mid-1960s and that this coincidental historical episode had a significant influence in the understanding of Hlengwe identity, as the Hlengwe inter-mingled with ZAPU nationalists.

We argue that the nationalist phase saw a complex re-working of Hlengwe identity through the agency of the ZAPU nationalist elite and the Hlengwe commoners, *tihosi* and elite in the rural setting of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. Whilst Mtisi *et al* note that during the nationalist phase “...the idea of the ‘nation’ had to compete for loyalty with more parochial interests related to class, gender, religion and ethnicity,”¹⁷³ we argue that in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas the period 1964 to the early years of the liberation war in 1975 the ZAPU version of African nationalism co-existed than compete with Hlengwe moral ethnicity. The co-existence of the two was aided by the ZAPU nationalists’ approach which was not a threat to Hlengwe socio-cultural systems. The nationalists treated the Hlengwe as equals and emphasised tolerance of cultural diversity and the need to accept and learn each other’s cultures. This approach made the Hlengwe feel that they were equal partners with the nationalists in the struggle whose goals they also believed in. Furthermore, it allowed the Hlengwe to negotiate their entry into nationalist politics without it being an imposition from the outsiders. Therefore instead of contesting, nationalism and ethnicity co-existed as was also observed by Msindo in Bulawayo urban between 1953 and 1963.¹⁷⁴ We also argue that it was not a top-down process as the majority of the Hlengwe who also had grievances against the colonialist regime played a key part in spreading the ideas of the nationalist struggle and winning adherents to the struggle. This would have been difficult for the ZAPU nationalists in detention to accomplish. We also argue that the imaging of Hlengwe identity changed from that of inward looking, docile, ignorant and peaceful people to active nationalists ready to engage the colonial regime peacefully or violently, to regain their land and freedom from colonial oppression.

¹⁷³ Joseph Mtisi, Munyaradzi Nyakudya and Teresa Barnes, “Social and Economic Developments during the UDI Period”, in *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*, eds. B. Raftopoulos and A.S. Mlambo, (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009), 125.

¹⁷⁴ Enocent Msindo, “Ethnicity and Nationalism in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe: Bulawayo, 1950-1963,” *Journal of African History*, 48, (2007): 267-290; Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 178-210.

The seventh chapter focuses on Hlengwe and the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe from 1975 to 1979. There is very little literature on their role in the liberation war and in this chapter I try to bridge the gap by analysing how the Hlengwe placed themselves within the struggle, and how their identity was defined within the logic of the liberation struggle. We argue that the liberation struggle in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas provided new dimensions for the re-working of Hlengwe ethnicity as the Hlengwe participated in the struggle and intermingled more with Karanga or Shona-speaking armed men in form of the ZANLA guerrillas and wings of the Rhodesian or colonial government soldiers. To the Hlengwe, the loss of social and traditional political power to guerrillas and Rhodesian soldiers necessitated a new way of doing things and a new way of co-existing with the Zimbabwean liberation cause. We argue that although the Hlengwe remained players in identity formation, they did so from a point of weakness as the gun gave advantage to the guerrillas and Rhodesian soldiers. This created opportunities for a salient reworking and congealing of Hlengwe ethnicity in response to perceived ill-treatment by the Shona gun-bearers. We also examine attempts by the Rhodesian government to openly interfere with processes of identity formation as they sought to win the hearts of the Hlengwe by creating an ethnic army, known as the “Shangaan (Hlengwe) Army.” Whilst according to Ranger among the Manyika the colonial social-engineering was in the early colonial period, among the Hlengwe it was deep into the liberation struggle as it was meant to serve the interests of the colonial master.

Chapter 8 is the penultimate content chapter. It focuses at Hlengwe ethnicity and how it is articulated in the postcolonial era. It analyses the firming or hardening of Hlengwe ethnic consciousness, where what was an identity of shame is becoming an identity of pride. It has become an identity where social, economic and political wars are fought in its name. The Hlengwe ethnies are seeking recognition and mobilising their ethnicity to fight for Hlengwe socio-political and economic space in a Shona dominated world where they feel they have been

grossly marginalised at national level. We start by examining how the formerly ‘underdog’ Hlengwe society, has risen to start fighting for recognition of their traditional and modern political leaders. As the chapter unfolds, we see the struggle in different arenas for the recognition and preservation of their culture especially their language and initiation rites which include *ngoma* or male circumcision and *tikhomba*, or female initiation. They want Xihlengwe their language to be taught in schools and be the language of communication in all public places. The early 21st century witnessed the rise of Hlengwe tribalism in struggles for land against the Karanga, in which groups of Hlengwe violently attacked and drove Karanga from what was deemed to be Hlengwe land. The land struggles were also witnessed following the land redistribution exercise which seemed to favour the Karanga. As the Hlengwe ethnic consciousness and pride in their identity grew they began to reject any imagined associations with the Gaza state preferring a cosmopolitan or transnational “Tsonga” ethnic identity to “Shangaan.” We thus analyse the emerging Hlengwe effort to deliberately invent a “Tsonga” identity, which proves that the newly acquired knowledge by the Hlengwe on the creation of identities is once again reshaping agency, where the elites are trying to build a large regional identity that will give them bargaining power in demanding political and other social benefits from the state. We also look at the Hlengwe attempts to aggressively market their identity, through cultural galas, which confirms the Commarovean argument that ethnicity is now entering the market place.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF EARLY HLENGWE SOCIETY

Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of the pre-colonial history of the Hlengwe as well as problematising Hlengwe identity. Confusion surrounding Hlengwe identity is compounded by a number of factors. Key among these factors is the limited study and scarcity of sources on

Hlengwe history. This has been further complicated by some writers, colonial and post-colonial officials failing to distinguish the Hlengwe from the Shangaan, and as such use the two appellations interchangeably. However, the key challenge associated with this conflation is that certain specific attributes of the different numerous Shangaan groups are mistakenly thought to be applying to all. Therefore, the chapter deals primarily with the problem of naming the Hlengwe which became evident in the colonial era and is still rife in the postcolonial period. Second, by examining the issues of pre-colonial Hlengwe ethnicity, this chapter revisits the key tenets of the invention of tribalism/ethnicity thesis, which was famed in the 1980s and 1990s and is still regarded as the standard interpretation of African social and political histories during the colonial era. We argue that even before the colonisation of Zimbabwe, a nascent form of Hlengwe ethnicity or ethnic consciousness existed in the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe and that the pre-colonial Hlengwe communities had identity markers or cultural symbols which distinguished them from their *Nyai*/Shona neighbours and were aware of their ‘otherness’ from the non-Hlengwe. This ethnicity was articulated socially in the day to day interaction in the Hlengwe moral economy.

Since Hlengwe ethnic identity is rarely understood by the Zimbabwean government and most ordinary Zimbabweans at large this study explains how Hlengwe ethnicity differs from the broad and generic Shangaan and Tsonga identities which define more of a regional identity than an ethnic one. This differs from Isak Niehaus’s study on a South African community, which he calls a Shangaan ethnic community where he treats Shangaan as an ethnic identity of Tsonga-speaking people of Bushbuckridge in the north-eastern lowveld of South Africa.¹⁷⁵ This identity for the Tsonga-speaking groups of South Africa has also been contested or, to be

¹⁷⁵ Niehaus, “Ethnicity and the Boundaries of Belonging,” 557-583.

precise, rejected in two publications on the history of the Tsonga published in 2013 and 2014.¹⁷⁶ We therefore show who the Hlengwe people are apart from being called Shangaan or Tsonga. The Hlengwe are heavily Shangaanised and Tsonga-ised to a point where they are studied and understood through writings about Shangaan and Tsonga found in Mozambique and South Africa, which blurs their specific historical experiences as a people in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this is a study of a specific group of people known as the Hlengwe, a component of the so-called Shangaan or Tsonga speaking people who, from the 18th century, occupied the south-eastern corner of Zimbabwe bordering Mozambique and South Africa, an area known today as Chiredzi District.

Problematising “Shangaan” Label in Hlengwe Ethnicity

The Hlengwe people of Chiredzi District in south-eastern Zimbabwe are generally referred to as part of “Shangaan” or Tsonga speaking people found in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa.¹⁷⁷ However, this “Shangaan” label is problematic given that the term was first applied only to the subjects of Soshangane, who fled from Nguniland to southern Mozambique in the early 1820s.¹⁷⁸ The Hlengwe did not come to the southeast Lowveld with Soshangane. To the Hlengwe, “Shangaan” is merely a political label that emerged because of their political subordination to Soshangane’s “snowball state”, which, like the Rozvi kingdom, allowed the conquered to retain their own chiefs as subordinate rulers and their own social and cultural practices so long as they paid tribute to the overlords.¹⁷⁹ The term “Shangaan” gained importance in the public domain because of a combination of the colonial politics of ethno-

¹⁷⁶ Mandla Mathebula, *800 Years of Tsonga History (1200-2000)*, Burgersfort: SASAVONA Publishers and Booksellers, (Pty) Ltd, 2013; Peter Halala and Samuel M. Mtebule, *A History of the Xitsonga-Speaking People in Southern Africa*, Giyani: Lingua Franca Publishers, 2014.

¹⁷⁷ Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 10-11; Mazarire, “Reflections on Pre-Colonial Zimbabwe,” 29; Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe, I*, 13-35.

¹⁷⁸ Bannerman, “Towards a History of the Hlengwe,” 483-96; Rassmussen, *Historical Dictionary of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia*, 293.

¹⁷⁹ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 36-37.

cartography and the politics of ethnic labelling by the Shona and Ndebele who settled among the Hlengwe from the 1950s. The term was further used on the Hlengwe by ZAPU nationalists at Gonakudzingwa and ZANLA guerrillas who operated in the study area from 1964 to 1979. At independence the post-colonial government adopted the social categorisation of Hlengwe as “Shangaan,” which now makes the appellation the Hlengwe’s official but not ethnic identity.¹⁸⁰

Writing in the 1970s, Bannerman and Mtetwa agree that although the appellation Shangaan is used to denote the Hlengwe, its use is inappropriate because the appellation should be applied only to the direct descendants of Soshangane’s Nguni, which the Hlengwe are not.¹⁸¹ Hlengwe genealogy, constructed from Hlengwe oral memory, does not make reference to Soshangane. Moreover, early scholars have established that the cultural and linguistic impact of the Gaza-Nguni on Hlengwe was negligible.¹⁸² R.A. Jubb, writing in the 1920s, argues that it is inappropriate to refer to the Hlengwe as Shangaan.¹⁸³ Mtetwa also notes that by the 1880s the term “Shangaan” was only directly associated with the Gaza Nguni. Citing a certain Richards’s letter to Kilborn, Mtetwa further argues that it is difficult to say when the term “Shangaan” was first used, but there is evidence that by 1884 the term was used to describe Mzila’s Ngoni emissaries who were sent to Shepstone in Natal.¹⁸⁴ Mzila was the son of Soshangane and heir to the Gaza throne after the death of Soshangane. Evidence from Junod in the 1920s suggests that among most Tsonga-speaking groups, the appellation “Shangaan” had no wide acceptance as it was seen as derogatory.¹⁸⁵ Junod mainly uses the term “Tsonga” to denote the Shangaan-

¹⁸⁰ Worby, “Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games,” 371-392.

¹⁸¹ R.M.G. Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic History of the Duma People of South-eastern Rhodesia from the Early Eighteenth Century to 1945”, D.Phil. Thesis, University of Rhodesia, (1976), 159; Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 13.

¹⁸² Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 12; Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic History,” 159.

¹⁸³ R.A. Jubb, “In Search of Fish: A Visit to the South-eastern Corner of Zimbabwe,” *Zimbabwe Wildlife*, 27, *June* (1981): 28.

¹⁸⁴ Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic History,” 159.

¹⁸⁵ Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*. 1, 16.

speaking people. Unfortunately, Junod does not explain why the Tsonga, who were called “Shangaan” by mine owners in the Witwatersrand mines, objected to the use of the term.

In 1906, De Lassoë - a colonial navigator- reached the Runde-Mutirikwe Rivers junction, and confirmed that the meaning of the term “Shangaan” was not clear among the Hlengwe of this area. He says, “...the term Shangaan, is very indefinite and therefore somewhat unsatisfactory. Probably no one would take it upon himself to give even a rough definition of what the word implies”.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Mtetwa observes that by the turn of the 20th century the meaning of the term “Shangaan” lacked clarity in Zimbabwe as it was used loosely to refer to the descendants of the Gaza Nguni who had left Natal with Soshangane and their closest associates, such as the Bhila clan from southern Mozambique, the Hlengwe in the lowveld north and south of the Runde and the Ndau in the Eastern Border Highlands of Zimbabwe.¹⁸⁷ Thus, the term lacks ethnic precision as it now refers to a general regional identity of mixed cultural groups of the south-east lowveld of southern Africa.

The use of the “Shangaan” appellation to denote the Hlengwe is a very complex affair. While most scholars admit that the Hlengwe are not Shangaan by descent, the term has been used in the colonial and post-colonial period to the extent that after the 1950s, it was used more than the term “Hlengwe” in the public domain. This was as a result of historical developments that will be discussed in detail below and in the chapters ahead. H.W.M. Chauke observes that the Hlengwe and Ndau people in Zimbabwe are now “...widely and officially...” referred to as Shangaans, a name that they have generally accepted.¹⁸⁸ However, Chauke refers to a period before a later wave of rejection of Shangaan identity by Hlengwe ethnic activists discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

¹⁸⁶ NAZ, BE8/11/2 Lundi and Sabi Rivers 1906

¹⁸⁷ Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic History,” 159-160.

¹⁸⁸ H.W.M. Chauke, “The Origins and Definitions of the Hlengwe”, *The Unpublished Works of Happyson Matsilele Chauke: Compiled by Tillman Houser*, (2009), 212, 213.

A number of perspectives have been proffered to explain why the term “Shangaan” is used to denote the Hlengwe. Mathebula argues that sheer ignorance was the cause of the seeming acceptance of the term “Shangaan” by some sections of the Tsonga or Shangaan-speaking people who include the Hlengwe. Mathebula notes that:

Even some of the Tsonga people who do not fall under the Shangane tribe have accepted being called Shangaans, apparently because they have been indoctrinated so or they are suffering from utter ignorance.¹⁸⁹

Mathebula’s description of the Tsonga people as “suffering from utter ignorance” should be understood in the context of his activism as a South African Tsonga who is contesting the Shangaan appellation which is also used to denote the Tsonga people of South Africa.

Scholars like Mtetwa and Bannerman deploy the instrumentalist constructivist thesis and argue that the appellation was actually popular especially with men who went to work in South African and Rhodesian mines.¹⁹⁰ This is supported by Beach who argues that “...the name ‘Shangana’ borrowed from Soshangane’s name became a prized title among south-eastern Shona and Tsonga” for the reason that Shangaans received higher pay in the South African mines.¹⁹¹ However, Junod indicates that the majority of Tsonga speaking people that went to the mines considered the appellation an insult to them.¹⁹² Given that Europeans had mythologised Shangaan diligence and reliability on the mines and offered preferential treatment to known Shaangaan workers over other ethnic groups, many non-Shangaan including the Hlengwe adopted the appellation as a strategy of survival on the mines. However, there were many Hlengwe who did not go to the mines and never understood or appreciated the appeal of an appellation whose value was attached to working in the mines. This is corroborated by De Lassoë who notes that there were very few people from the south-east

¹⁸⁹Mathebula, *800 Years of Tsonga History*, 5.

¹⁹⁰ Bannerman, “Towards a History of the Hlengwe,” 485; Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic History,” 160.

¹⁹¹ Beach, “The Zimbabwe Plateau and its Peoples,” 271.

¹⁹² Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, I, 16; Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 13.

lowveld of Zimbabwe who were willing to migrate to South Africa in the early years of colonial rule in search of employment in the mines. He says:

As regards the Rand and Rhodesian mines there is always a large number of natives who, as they say amongst themselves, “have no heart” for going far from home... Were work to be offered them, however, within reasonable distance of their villages, they would no doubt be glad to embrace the opportunity.¹⁹³

Allan Wright uses the “brainwashing” perspective to explain the conflation of Hlengwe and Shangaan ethnic identities. He says that about 1 000 wifeless Gaza Nguni warriors settled among the three main tribes found in Mozambique, Hlengwe, Ronga and Tswa and took Hlengwe and other women in marriage and “... convinced the Hlengwe people that they should be proud to be absorbed into what had become a new Shangaan nation.”¹⁹⁴ However, this explanation is not convincing as it is hard to explain how angry Hlengwe men who had lost their women, wealth and children would be simply “brain-washed” without force into accepting a new identity, worse still an identity of people that had taken their wives. It is not clear how the alleged brainwashing happened, and using what media, and when. Moreover, in his theory, his number of Gaza soldiers is too large when compared with that given by Monica Wilson who argues that original Gaza soldiers were only about 100 men.¹⁹⁵ However, it could be that Wright was referring to a later period after the Nguni had started incorporating some of the men from the snowball state.

Patrick Harries’s findings also contradict Allan Wright’s brainwashing argument as he asserts that in the Gaza Nguni society in the lower Limpopo, the *vatualizados*, were Zulu, Swazi and Natal Nguni migrants.¹⁹⁶ *Vatualizados* meant African communities that were incorporated

¹⁹³ NAZ, BE8/11/2 Lundi and Sabi Rivers, 1906.

¹⁹⁴ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 200.

¹⁹⁵ Wilson, “The Nguni People,” 100.

¹⁹⁶ Patrick Harries, “Slavery, Social Incorporation and Surplus Extraction: The Nature of Free and Unfree Labour in South-East Africa,” *Journal of African History*, 22 (1981), 319.

either voluntarily or forcibly to the Gaza Nguni homestead or had Nguni indunas imposed on them, which was not the case with the Hlengwe. The *vaturalizados* also adopted the language and many aspects of the material culture of the Gaza Nguni and were considered as such by subject and foreign people.¹⁹⁷ The Hlengwe were not *vaturalizados* as they belonged to a group of people on the periphery of the Gaza Kingdom, who “...were easily recognisable because of their non-Nguni language and material cultures...”¹⁹⁸ Mtetwa, notes that, though some Nguni words were adopted by the Ndaue and Hlengwe, “...their cultures remained distinct from those of the Gaza Nguni.”¹⁹⁹ Therefore, it is hard to justify the argument about brainwashing as the Hlengwe were not directly incorporated into the Gaza kingdom and were far from the centre of Gaza power. Harries says that:

The small number of Gaza Nguni and the large size of the Gaza state made it hard for the royal lineage to be the arbiter of differentiation and the old lineage structures were seldom destroyed, except in areas of heavy Nguni settlement like Bilene.²⁰⁰

A third explanation for the alleged conversion of Hlengwe into Shangaan is proffered by Beach who asserts that the conquered subjects of the Gaza Nguni, just like those of the Ndebele, wanted to imagine themselves as the conquerors. He assumes that the Ndebele and Gaza Nguni presented the young men with an opportunity to escape ‘the shackles’ of a society which was largely controlled by its elders so the young men “...enthusiastically assumed a Nguni identity.”²⁰¹ Beach further makes a subjective suggestion that both Ndebele and Gaza polities had “...a remarkable appeal...” for young Shona and Tsonga men. By stretching this argument, Beach downplays the fact that these polities (Ndebele and Gaza) spread their influence through violence, with the result that those who were incorporated did so against their will as they were either raided and drafted into the armies or had no option other than joining the armies for their

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁹⁹ Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic History,” 158.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 320.

²⁰¹ Beach, “The Zimbabwe Plateau and its Peoples,” 271.

own safety. Beach's thesis is also challenged by more recent research which proves that most captives of the Gaza and Ndebele returned to their original homes after the fall of both kingdoms and reasserted their original identities, hence dispelling the idea of "enthusiastically" assuming Nguni identity.²⁰² In addition, Beach's argument does not explain why those who escaped raids or were not raided later accepted the Shangaan identity.

The Hlengwe adopted Shangaan as a political identity for strategic or security reasons. J.J. da Silva, a Portuguese official, cited by Liesegang notes that migratory groups from South Africa in the 1820s "...inspired panic and terror..." in the African groups in Mozambique and the south-east lowveld south of the Save River.²⁰³ It is therefore most probable that weaker groups feigned a Shangaan identity in order to survive the Gaza Nguni attacks. The Hlengwe, for instance, adopted Gaza Nguni practice of piercing earlobes as a precautionary measure as some Hlengwe traditions have it that the Hlengwe had learned that the Gaza Nguni did not attack people with pierced earlobes as it was a symbol of being Shangaan²⁰⁴ We infer, therefore that the Hlengwe must have heard stories of Nguni raids from those that had escaped Gaza Nguni attacks and fellow Hlengwe from *Hosi* Sengwe's area as the latter is recorded in one colonial report as the only known Hlengwe chief to have paid tribute to the Gaza kingdom, and started to prepare for any eventuality.²⁰⁵ Thus, for the Ndau who were direct subjects of the Nguni the practice of piercing earlobes was enforced as noted by MacGonale, but among the Hlengwe, by virtue of the fact that they were far-away from the centre of Gaza power it was adopted as a defence mechanism to survive possible Gaza attacks.²⁰⁶ There was therefore a renegotiation

²⁰² Ranger, *Voices* 100; Macgonale, "Living with a Tyrant," 37.

²⁰³ Liesegang, "Nguni Migrations," 325.

²⁰⁴ NAZ, OH608(c) [Audio-tape] Philip Chauke, interviewed by Michael Kwesu of the National Archives of Zimbabwe, on March 14, 2010; Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi business centre, Matibi 2, August 14, 2014.

²⁰⁵ NAZ, N3/33/8, Zengwe Tribe, Bashlangwe People, Report of the Native Commissioner, Chibi, December, 1903.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014; NAZ, OH608 (c) [Audio-tape] Philip Chauke, interviewed by Michael Kwesu of NAZ, March 14, 2010.

of identity which saw the Hlengwe identity becoming dormant whilst the Shangaan identity was magnified. Shangaan therefore was and is not an ethnic but a political and security identity among the Hlengwe.

Pre-Colonial Hlengwe Ethnicity

As discussed earlier, the invention of tribalism/ethnicity theorists do not believe in the existence of precolonial ethnic identity in Africa as they argue that ethnicity was invented by colonial forces and agents in the colonial period.²⁰⁷ These scholars argue that African ethnic identities were invented by colonial forces and agents in the early colonial period. However, recent scholarship alludes to the existence of pre-colonial African ethnicity and ethnic identities. This is noted by Spear who argues that:

Far from being the unwitting creation of European administrators, then...ethnic concepts, processes and politics predated the imposition of colonial rule, developing in the context of conquest states, regional exchange networks, dispersion, migration and settlement and urbanization. Ethnicity has endured for a long time; it has its own integrity, cultural principles, transformative processes and histories.²⁰⁸

Ranger, who finds it hard to let go of his invention of tribalism thesis, begrudgingly accepts its existence among the Shambaa of Tanzania studied by Feierman in an article published in 1993, but still calls this evidence one of the “rare instances.”²⁰⁹ Msindo argues that pre-colonial African ethnicity did exist and gives clear evidence of the existence of ethnic consciousness in pre-colonial Kalanga and Ndebele communities in Zimbabwe.²¹⁰

In this section, we argue that signs of ethnic consciousness among the Hlengwe existed in pre-colonial times, well before the establishment of colonial rule and without the work of

²⁰⁷ Ranger, “Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika,” 118-150; Vail, “Introduction,” 1-20; Leroy Vail and Landeg White, “Tribalism in the Political History of Malawi,” in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. L. Vail (London: James Currey, 1989), 151-192.

²⁰⁸ Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits,” 24.

²⁰⁹ Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition,” 85-86.

²¹⁰ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, Chapter 2.

missionaries and 'modern' ideological entrepreneurs. Hlengwe were conscious of their identity and had clear identity markers, which distinguished them from neighbouring ethnic others such as the Karanga, Pfumbi and Duma. In this phase Hlengwe ethnicity was mainly articulated socially in their day to day activities and interaction with their ethnic 'Others.'

Although they were made up of numerous autonomous chiefdoms, Hlengwe people acquired numerous features of an ethnic community. We acknowledge however, like anthropologists and other historians that ethnicity is a very complex phenomenon and most of its definitions are highly contested.²¹¹ We therefore start by unpacking the concept, ethnicity, so as to give a framework that will serve as my analytical tool. Msindo notes that "...ethnicity is that capacity in people to classify themselves as social others."²¹² He further argues that:

...ethnic groups do not exist primarily as political institutions to fight off their opponents, but to preserve their cultural artefacts, their traditions and that which they imagine as the stuff from which their group is made.²¹³

Similarly, Gerhard Mare defines ethnicity as a social identity formation that rests on:

...culturally specific practice and unique set of symbols and beliefs...a belief in common origin and a common history (the past) that is broadly agreed upon, and that provides an inheritance of origin, symbols, heroes, events, values, hierarchies, etc...a sense of belonging to a group that in some combination...confirms social identities of people in their interaction with both insiders and outsiders.²¹⁴

These two definitions of ethnicity prove that for a group to be called an ethnic group it should have the ability or capacity to classify itself as social others in its interaction with those considered outsiders and insiders and have a cultural uniqueness with cultural artefacts and traditions which have a symbolic use as representing the group. An ethnic group should also have a common origin and a common history which is agreed upon by most of its members.

²¹¹ Gerhard Mare, *Ethnicity and Politics in South Africa*, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993) unpaginated Preface; Hutchinson and Smith, "Introduction," 4; Alex Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 61.

²¹² Msindo, "Ethnicity and Nationalism," 268.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 269.

²¹⁴ Mare, *Ethnicity and Politics in South Africa*, 23.

Msindo notes that “in its imaginative sense, an ethnic group appeals to those ancient elements of society and culture with a view to legitimising and solidifying its practices” and it is for this reason that “...ethnic groups usually ascribe primordial characteristics to their symbols and practices to legitimise themselves.”²¹⁵ Msindo further contends that ethnicity is also emotive as members of an ethnic group “... feel for one another and defend the group and one another where circumstances permit.”²¹⁶

Hutchinson and Smith believe that ethnic communities habitually exhibit certain features though in varying degrees in order for them to qualify the description of an ethnic community. Hutchinson and Smith note that an ethnic community should have a common proper name which identifies it and expresses the essence of the community.²¹⁷ This is similar to what Fredrik Barth calls “...categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves.”²¹⁸ Hutchinson and Smith also say that ethnic communities should have myths of common ancestry which give the idea of a common origin and “...a sense of fictive kinship,” common historical memories, elements of a shared culture, a sense of having a common homeland and a “...sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the ethnic’s population.”²¹⁹ In corroboration, Manning Nash adds that ethnic groups have clear boundaries but the index features of the boundaries must be visible to members of the group as well as to none members.²²⁰ The boundaries are largely the features that ethnic group members have and none members do not. These features are the cultural artefacts and traditions that are central in distinguishing the group from ethnic others. Nash categorises the index features into the primary which symbolise a blood relationship and the secondary which are surface pointers.

²¹⁵ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 16.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹⁷ Hutchinson and Smith, “Introduction,” 6.

²¹⁸ Fredrik Barth, “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,” in *Ethnicity*, eds. J. Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 75.

²¹⁹ Hutchinson and Smith, “Introduction,” 7.

²²⁰ Manning Nash, “The Core Elements of Ethnicity,” in *Ethnicity*, eds. J. Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25.

The primary include kinship, commensality and common cult while the secondary, which are culturally denoted, include things such as dress, language, house architecture, rituals, and even special economic activities. However, what is critical is the fact that the features should be indices of separateness from ethnic others.²²¹

There is, however, a distinction that has become important to make in trying to define ethnicity. This is the distinction between moral ethnicity and tribalism. John Lonsdale clarifies what ethnicity is by distinguishing 'political tribalism' from 'moral ethnicity.' He states that political tribalism is "...the instrumental use of ethnic identity in political competition with other groups," while moral ethnicity is "...the common human instinct to create out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labour a meaningful life for themselves within a more or less imagined community."²²² Lonsdale therefore sees moral ethnicity as a positive force creating communities peacefully through domestic debates over civic virtue.²²³ Similarly, Rene Lemarchande argues that:

Although overwhelming evidence points to the demonic face of ethnicity, not everything about ethnicity translates into bloodshed and genocide or into frenzied ethnic cleansing. Ethnic communities also generate responsible, civic minded leaders, anxious to speak on behalf of their constituents and willing to protect them against the abuses of the state...The sense of belonging to an ethnic community need not be synonymous with conflict and competition.²²⁴

What Lermachande says is echoed by J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith who assert that, though ethnic community and identity are often associated with conflict and political struggles in various parts of the world, there is no necessary connection between ethnicity and conflict.²²⁵

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

²²² John Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism," (Trinity College, University of Cambridge, 1998), 3.

²²³ John Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought," in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Book II: Violence and Ethnicity*, eds. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (Oxford: James Currey, 1992), 466.

²²⁴ Rene Lemarchande, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 49.

²²⁵ Hutchinson and Smith, "Introduction," 3.

They go further to say that, minus a few isolated cases, relations between ethnic communities and categories are frequently peaceful and co-operative.²²⁶ Suffice at this stage to say that, this idea is critical to our argument about Hlengwe ethnicity in pre-colonial times because *Hlengweness* or being Hlengwe was not characterised by violence or bloodshed or political tribalism.

The Hlengwe were recognisable as an ethnic group that ran by the name “Hlengwe” before the colonisation of their land. The origin of the term is not clear, but as early as 1868 Karl Mauch on his journey to Inyati recognised what he called three major tribes in south-eastern Zimbabwe who included *Bahloekwa* (Hlengwe), *Vanyai* (Venda and Pfumbi) and the *Makalaka* (Karanga-Shona).²²⁷ In 1878 one Swiss missionary Reverend Creux of the Mission Suisse Romande used the term “*moHlengwe*” to describe people under chief Chikwarakwara, a Hlengwe chief whose homestead was near the confluence of the Vubwe (Bubye) and Limpopo Rivers. Harold von Sicard quotes Creux’s reports where the latter said that in 1878 he visited “*Tshikoarrakoarra un chef mohlengwe*,” (translated *Tshikoarrakoarra* [Chikwarakwara] a Hlengwe chief.)²²⁸ Doyle, who reached areas to the south of the Save River on his way to Gungunyane’s capital in 1891, found what he called the “Hlenga” people south of the Save River. These people’s uniquely dispersed settlement pattern was similar to that of the Hlengwe and their geographical location was that associated with the pre-colonial Hlengwe by scholars.²²⁹

The first NCs in the south-east lowveld, which fell under the huge Chibi District, identified the Hlengwe as a specific ethnic group quite distinct from the Karanga and Shangaan. In one of his reports Ekstein, the NC of Ndanga District says that close to the junction of the Save and

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²²⁷ F.O. Bernhard, *Karl Mauch*, (Cape Town: Struik, 1971), 60.

²²⁸ Harold von Sicard, “Chikwarakwara Chauke and His People,” *NADA*, Vol X, 3, (1971): 98.

²²⁹ Dennis Doyle, “With King Gungunhana in Gazaland,” *Fortnightly Review*, 50, (1891), 115; D.N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2012), Maps on pages 166-169.

Runde Rivers were found “...a totally different tribe of natives called the *Hlengwi* with a sprinkling of Shangaans among them.”²³⁰ Thus the clear distinction between the Hlengwe and Shangaan was noted in official colonial records in the early years of colonial occupation. Peter Forrestall, the first NC of Chibi district, referred to Tshitanga (Chitanga), Vurumela (Furumela) and Sengwe’s people as “*Bashlangwe*” or “*Bashlungwe*,” (a distortion of *Bahlengwe*).²³¹ All the three chiefs’ bore the same totem, *Moto* (Fire), which is Chauke.²³² This shows that the use of the term Hlengwe was quite widespread by the time of colonial rule. Forrestall also collected oral traditions of the Hlengwe’s wars with non-Hlengwe groups of the *Vanyai* such as Matibi and Neshuro and the Shangaan, showing that the Hlengwe were aware of their otherness from those they were fighting against.²³³ He even writes about the numerous Hlengwe *tihosi* (chiefs) and their sub-chiefs, all subscribing to the same identity, which is ample proof that the Hlengwe were aware of their ethnic otherness from neighbouring Karanga groups and Shangaan and that there was a Hlengwe ethnic identity that was broader than chieftaincies which were a sub-set of this broader Hlengwe identity. The reports also prove that the Hlengwe were the dominant population or community in the southeast lowveld.²³⁴ By ‘dominant community’ I use Richard Schermerhorn’s definition, which is that it is “...a collectivity within a society which has pre-eminent authority to function both as guardians and sustainers of the controlling value system, and as prime allocators of rewards in society,” which Hlengwe were in the south-east lowveld.²³⁵

²³⁰ NAZ, N3/33/8 History of Ndanga District, Report of the Native Commissioner, Ndanga, 1903.

²³¹ NAZ, N3/33/8 Tshitanga Tribe, Bashlungwe People, Mutupu is M’oto, Report of the NC, Chibi, 1903; N3/33/8 Vurumela tribe: Bashlangwe People, Report of the NC, Chibi, 1903; NAZ, N3/33/8 Zengwe Tribe, Bashlangwe People, Report of the NC, Chibi, 1903.

²³² NAZ, N3/33/8 Tshitanga Tribe, Bashlungwe People, Mutupu is M’oto, Report of the NC, Chibi, 1902-1903; NAZ, N3/33/8 Vurumela tribe: Bashlangwe People, Report of the NC, Chibi, 1902-1903; NAZ, N3/33/8 Zengwe Tribe, Bashlangwe People, Report of the NC, Chibi, 1902-1903.

²³³ Ibid; NAZ, N3/33/8 NC Chibi, in a letter to acting CNC, 9 February 1904.

²³⁴ NAZ, N1/2/1-4 List of Paramount Chiefs, their sub-chiefs and headmen in the Chibi District on March 1st 1900.

²³⁵ Richard Schermerhorn, “Ethnicity and Minority Groups”, in J. Huthchinson and A.D. Smith (eds) *Ethnicity*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17.

The term Hlengwe, used interchangeably with the term Shangaan in colonial reports, was in use up to the 1970s. In 1920, the CNC indicated that “*Shangana* or *Bahlengwe*” were one of the principal tribes in Southern Rhodesia’s Mashonaland.²³⁶ W.E. Thomas, the Superintendent of Natives in the Victoria Province in a letter to the CNC, states that “...the best way to classify the natives in this district will be as follows, 1. *Barozvi/Banyai*, 2. *Shangaans/BaHlengwe*, 3. *Bakaranga*.”²³⁷ The 1948 and 1950 reports of the NC Chipinga District, distinguish between the Hlengwe of Mahenye and Shangaan of Mpungu and describe Shangaans as “...the descendants of a paramount race,”²³⁸ meaning Soshangane’s Nguni and *Hosi* Mahenye as “...*Muhlengwe* of the totem Chauke.”²³⁹ In 1951, N.J. Brendon (Assistant NC, Nuanetsi) referred to *tihosi* Chitanga and Sengwe as “Vashlengwe,”²⁴⁰ while in 1974, P.F. Parsons (DC, Nuanetsi) referred to the Hlengwe chieftainship as “Shangaan/Hlengwe.”²⁴¹ Scholars and writers have also used the term Hlengwe to denote this dominant community of the people and chieftaincies of the southeast lowveld of Zimbabwe. Henri A. Junod, in 1927, was able to distinguish the Hlengwe as a specific group and one of his six Tsonga groups.²⁴² Beach uses the term Hlengwe and at times Tsonga-Hlengwe to differentiate them from other Tsonga groups of South Africa and Mozambique. Wright and Wolmer in their separate publications acknowledge that the subjects of this study are the Hlengwe, but choose to call them by their generic name, “Shangaan”/“Shangane.”²⁴³ The missionary and author Tillman Houser, who worked among the Hlengwe for more than two decades, uses the term in his 2000 and 2007

²³⁶ NAZ, N3/3/8-10 CNC, in a letter to the Secretary Department of Administrator, 19 June 1920.

²³⁷ NAZ, N3/3/8-10 W.E. Thomas Superintendent, Victoria, in a letter to CNC, 31 March 1920.

²³⁸ NAZ, S3271/1 NC Chipinga in a letter to PNC Umtali, CNC’s Circular 287: NC Resolution by the Native Advisory Board on the Abolition of Redundant Chieftainships, 07 October 1948.

²³⁹ NAZ, S3271/1 NC Chipinga in a letter to PNC, Umtali, Redundant Chiefs: CNC Circular No.287 Addendum “B”, 07 July 1950.

²⁴⁰ PER5/8/51, N.J. Brendon (Assistant NC, Nuanetsi) in a letter to NC, Chibi, 27 November, 1951.

²⁴¹ PER5/Sengwe/74, P.F. Parsons (DC, Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria), 29 April 1974.

²⁴² Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe I*, 18.

²⁴³ William Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision to Farm Invasions: Conservation and Development in Zimbabwe’s Southeast Lowveld*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2007; Allan Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, (Cape Town: Cape and Transvaal Printers, 1972).

publications on the work of the FMC in Zimbabwe.²⁴⁴ Thus, the Hlengwe have existed since the pre-colonial times and the term Hlengwe as an ascription of this group has been acknowledged by the Hlengwe themselves, academics, writers and ethnic others.

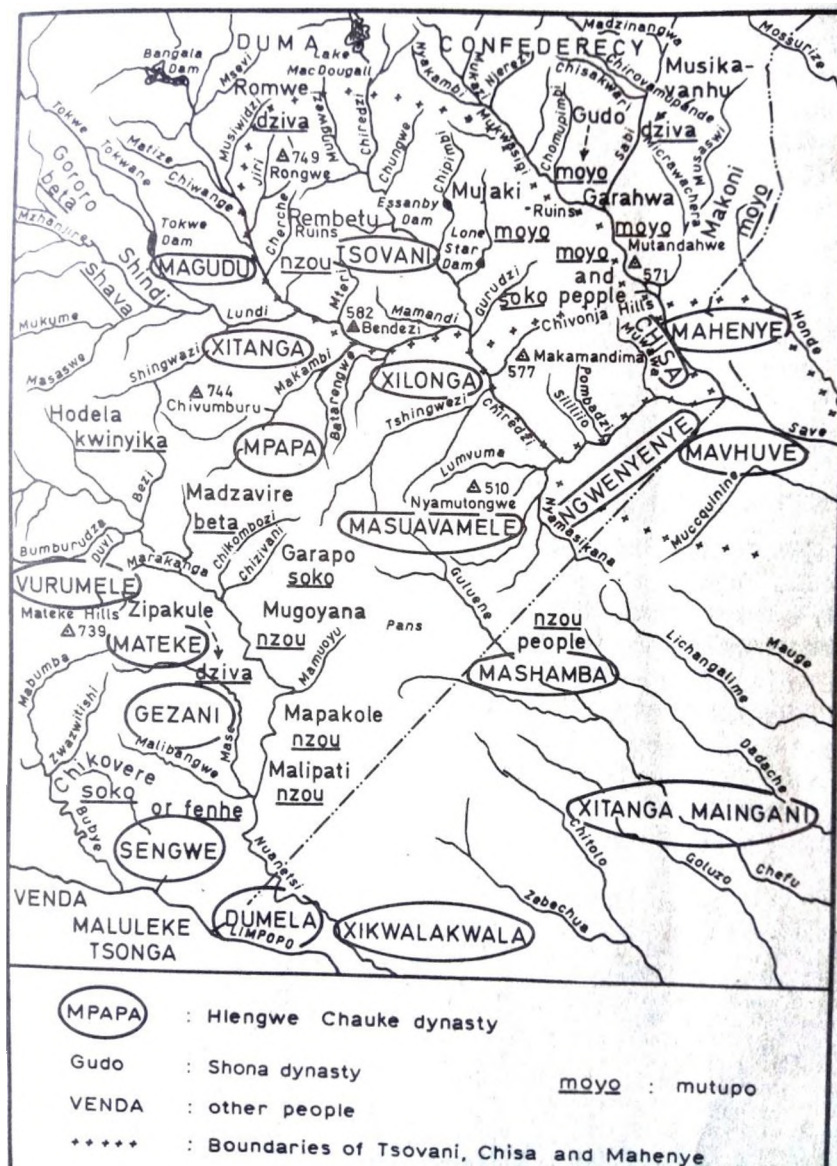
Lonsdale argues that “Contests about tribal identity (in Kenya) did not exclude and may have kindled a territorial...political imagination then...To rethink tribes may also be to rethink states.”²⁴⁵ John Lonsdale’s argument seems to support the idea of Hutchinson and Smith who note that ethnic groups have a sense of common homeland or that each ethnic group has a link with a territory which it calls its homeland. The Hlengwe’s imagined geographical space since the pre-colonial times is the south-east lowveld and the Hlengwe call it *Hlengweni*, meaning land of the Hlengwe. (See Map 3)

Though its boundaries are contestable, they generally encompass territories stretching from east and north of the Limpopo in Mozambique to south of the Save and Runde Rivers until the modern day Masvingo-Beit-Bridge road which marks the western border is reached. From there territory then stretches down the Bulyana River to its junction with the Limpopo, where some Hlengwe lived in northern Transvaal along the Limpopo.

MAP 3: SHOWING THE LOCATION OF HLENGWE CHIEFDOMS (HLENGWENI) IN THE SOUTH EAST LOWVELD OF ZIMBABWE BY 1890

²⁴⁴ Tillman, Houser, “*Let me tell you... A Memoir*, (USA: Self-Publication, 2007); Tillman Houser, Houser, Tillman, *Free Methodist and other Missions in Zimbabwe*, (Harare: Priority Projects Publishing, 2000); D.N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2012), 20, 31, 33;

²⁴⁵ Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: The Problem,” 268.



Source: J.H. Bannerman, 'Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe of the Lower Save and Lundi Rivers, from the Late-Eighteenth to the mid-Twentieth Century,' *Zimbabwean History*, 12 (1981): 5.

Hlengwe oral tradition talks of Hlengwe migrations from the eastern bank of the Limpopo River, occupying most of the land between the Save in the north and the Limpopo River. However, reasons for the movement are not clear but A.K Smith notes that “accelerated population dispersal (of Tsonga) was produced by fissiparous tendencies within their respective political units.”²⁴⁶ One of the key reasons given is population increase, which accounts for the

²⁴⁶ Smith, “The Peoples of Southern Mozambique,” 573.

breaking away of minor lineage clusters or families from the main group to seek independence or new agricultural land.²⁴⁷ This concurs with Hlengwe oral memory which talks of political instability and a search for new territories.²⁴⁸ Irrespective of these reasons for the migrations, Beach talks of Tsonga Hlengwe rulers Mpapa, Dumbo, Furumela, Sengwe, Tsovani and Mahenye occupying the south-east lowveld starting from the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century, taking up territory that had previously been Shona.²⁴⁹ The earliest colonial maps of the south-east lowveld drawn by the first NC in 1898 indicate that the whole area of study was under Hlengwe *tihosi* (chiefs) Mpapa, Chitanga, Chilonga, Masivamele, Chihosi, Furumela, Gezani, Ngwenyeni and Sengwe while Chinana, said to be Pfumbi, who lived along the Bubyie close to its junction with the Limpopo was their nearest neighbour.²⁵⁰ Even today the area of study is unique in that all the *tihosi* (Paramount Chief and all his headmen) owe their positions and legitimacy to their being Hlengwe.²⁵¹ This justifies the Hlengwe claims that Matibi 2 and Sengwe areas and the greater part of Chiredzi District which was turned into commercial farms is *Hlengweni*, land of the Hlengwe.

The Hlengwe seem to have moved into one of the “easiest frontiers,” to use Kopytoff’s words.²⁵² Easy frontiers are geographical areas that were sparsely populated and offered little political resistance to intrusion. Hlengwe oral memory talks of easy conquest of Pfumbi territories without any wars and some oral sources attributed this easy victory to Lomwe/Pfumbi and other *Nyai* groups’ mere fear of advancing naked spear and axe-wielding

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 573.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Hosi Macheme Chilonga, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014; Interview with Chikahura Makiri, (Village head) Chilonga, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014; Interview with Musisinyani Mundau, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013.

²⁴⁹ Beach, *War and Politics*, 20; Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe*, 305.

²⁵⁰ NAZ, N3/24/2-4, Location of Hlengwe Chiefs, NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC, 5 March, 1898.

²⁵¹ Interview with Herbert Phikela, (Founder and Director, Gaza Trust, Chiredzi, August 10, 2013; H.W.M. Chauke, “Hlengwe Political System,” *The Unpublished Works of Happyson Matsilele Chauke: Compiled by Tillman Houser*, (2009), 239.

²⁵² Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier,” 11.

Hlengwe warriors which caused instant flight.²⁵³ Bannerman says that Hlengwe penetration of areas along the Chiredzi, Mkwazine and Runde areas in the south-east lowveld was peaceful²⁵⁴ and Wright also says that Furumela, a Hlengwe chief, peacefully infiltrated Pfumbi land.²⁵⁵ Thus, the south-east lowveld area is where the Hlengwe established their hegemony over the weak Pfumbi/Venda or Lomwe/Romwe who were either driven out or assimilated into the Hlengwe community.²⁵⁶

Archaeological evidence proves that the Hlengwe moved into very sparsely populated areas hence the easy conquest of locals in the 18th century. Carolyn Thorp's archaeological findings prove that the Zimbabwean lowveld area, mainly Chiredzi District was occupied by agricultural and foraging communities from around the 6th century to the 15th century AD, a period after which there is no evidence of human settlement till the 18th century AD.²⁵⁷ The absence of human settlement in the south-eastern lowveld of Zimbabwe in this period is attributed to a phenomenon called the Little Ice Age or a period of cooling, which "...brought unpredictable weather patterns particularly in the Limpopo basin."²⁵⁸ This made Hlengwe occupation of the southeast lowveld area easy. The Hlengwe, following Igor Kopytoff's principle of authority of the first comer which stipulates that in a frontier, "...the first 'occupant' was in some sense the owner of the land, with a special ritual relationship to it and its spirits,"²⁵⁹ legitimised their

²⁵³ Interview with Musisinyani Mundau, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013; Interview with Jesphate Dumela, (Village head), Chilonga, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014; Interview with Philip Chauke, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013; OH/2/CHR/90 (NAZ- Masvingo Records Centre) interview between Chief Lusenga Tshovani and Patrick Ngulube of the NAZ October 05, 1990.

²⁵⁴ Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 490.

²⁵⁵ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 196.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Hosi Macheme Chilonga, Chilonga, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014; Interview with Chikahura Makiri, (Village head) Chilonga, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014; Interview with Sisel Kasha Dumela, (Village Elder-Chilonga area) Chilonga High School, Matibi 2, December 04, 2013; Interview with Hosi Amos Gezani, July 08, 2014.

²⁵⁷ Carolyn Thorp, "Landscape and Environmental Change in Semi-Arid Regions of East and Southern Africa: Developing Interdisciplinary Approaches: Summary of Results on Malilangwe Trust, South-Eastern Zimbabwe", (2005), 30.

²⁵⁸ Munyaradzi Manyanga, Innocent Pikirayi & Weber Ndoro, "Coping with Dryland Environments: Preliminary Results from Mapungubwe and Zimbabwe Phase Sites in the Mateke Hills, South-Eastern Zimbabwe", *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, 8 (2000): 75.

²⁵⁹ Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier," 53.

authority by virtue of being first comers. Hlengwe claim to be first comers, by virtue of being able to overrun the vast sparsely populated south-eastern lowveld and establishing themselves there, since the 18th century.

Once they established themselves on the land, the land became, in their imagination, *tiko ra vaHlengwe* or *Hlengweni* which means land of the Hlengwe. The common ideology of *Hlengweni* as “our Hlengwe land” emerged. This strong relationship to this *tiko* or land was and still is symbolised by a ritual during the initiation ceremonies where young men exchange the smeared “...white ochre body-paint for red, which symbolises the red fertile clay of Tsongaland...”²⁶⁰ Wolmer who also observed a strong Hlengwe attachment to their land says,

The landscape of Zimbabwe’s south east lowveld is riven with the memories and experiences of its Shangaan-speaking inhabitants. Mental maps of ‘Shangaan space’ of a bounded physical entity hemmed in by administrative and national boundaries, but define a range of overlapping or connected spaces spread out over what now constitutes commercial, communal and state land in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and South Africa.²⁶¹

Hlengweni virtually symbolised Hlengwe space. This is why in 1912 a semi-literate Hlengwe called Mikia Foromela, brother to Hosi Furumela, tried to incite the Hlengwe *tihosi* to agitate for a *Bahlengwe* protectorate similar to Basutoland over what he termed “Gazaland and Hlengaland.”²⁶² The *tihosi* included “...Bashlengwe Shangaan Chiefs Vurumela and Tshitanga of Chibi, Tsowane of Ndanga and Bashlengwe chiefs from Portuguese territory.”²⁶³ In his letter to J. Mbumeni (most probably Joseph Mboweni) Foromela says,

²⁶⁰ Thomas Johnston, “Secret Initiation Songs of the Shangana-Tsonga Circumcision Rite: A Textual and Musical Analysis,” *Journal of American Folklore*, Volume 87, 346, (1974): 331-332.

²⁶¹ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 49.

²⁶² NAZ, A3/18/5 Secretary, Dept of the Administrator to the Resident Commissioner (Salisbury), 8th February, 1912; NAZ, A3/18/5 Michael Foromele in a letter to Mr J. Mbumeni (Most probably Joseph Mboweni) 21 January, 1912.

²⁶³ NAZ, A3/18/5 Telegram from Scouts Chibi to Natives, (Salisbury) 8th February, 1912; NAZ, A3/18/5, letter from Scouts Victoria, to Natives, 7th February, 1912.

They (Hlengwe) must not act like children; tell them so truly, truly. Their country will come back to them. They must do what I tell [them] and they will get back their country back. Truly this is not a matter to trifle with, it is blood, truly! truly! truly!”²⁶⁴

Though, Foromela never met the *tihosi* as he had anticipated, Forrestall says, “I have no doubt, if the Hlengwe chiefs thought there was the remotest chance of their having a separate country of their own they would join the agitation.”²⁶⁵ B.P. Kaschula, a member of the colonial government’s delineation team, reports of some Hlengwe evicted from the modern day Hippo-Valley Triangle Sugar Estates complex to Ndanga Reserve in Karanga country in 1909, who by 1964 were still yearning to return to their former homelands which they referred to as, “*KwaHlengweni*.”²⁶⁶ In the 1930s some sections of the Hlengwe population resisted relocation from their traditional hot and dry land, forcing the NC to remark that, “This reserve is inhabited entirely by Shangaans (Hlengwe) who in spite of the hardships suffered most years due to a food shortage still cling to these parts and refuse to leave their old home.”²⁶⁷ In other words, they imagined this part of the country as Hlengwe homeland.

Also attempts by colonial administrators to evict the Hlengwe from Hlengweni in 1909 underscore the fact that Hlengwe ethnicity had developed to a point where it could be mobilised in the instrumentalist sense to defend their land. The colonial administrators’ attempts to relocate the Hlengwe chiefdoms to areas north of the Runde, where the Karanga lived, were thwarted by a mobilised sense of Hlengwe common identity. The Hlengwe resisted incorporation with the Karanga others as they feared loss of land and possible dilution of their culture. NC Peter Forrestall’s report for 1909 notes that:

²⁶⁴ NAZ, A3/18/5 Michael Foromele in a letter to Mr J. Mbumeni (Most probably Joseph Mboweni), 21 January, 1912.

²⁶⁵ NAZ, A3/18/5 NC, Chibi, in a letter to the Superintendent of Natives, Victoria, 1st April, 1912.

²⁶⁶ NAZ, S2929/8/4 Report on the Magatsi Headmanship and Community: Ndanga Tribal Trust Land, Zaka District, 17/09/1964.

²⁶⁷ NAZ, S1563 Report of the NC Ndanga District for the Year Ended 31st December, 1934.

Most of the natives of the lower District want to move into Reserves, but they say that they do not want to come north of the Lundi River as they are not in any way related to the natives living north of the river, and do care to be given country to live in where their neighbours would be against them, also that Makalaka [Karanga] women do not obey their husbands and their example would have a bad effect on their women.²⁶⁸

The Hlengwe argument proves that Hlengwe identity in this period was broader than the localised chiefdom and the Hlengwe were conscious of the social, cultural and political differences between them and the Karanga groups north of the Runde River. The Hlengwe actions confirm the Hlengwe belief that the land between Runde and Limpopo Rivers in the south east lowveld was theirs.²⁶⁹ Thus, the Hlengwe, did not want to leave what they imagined as Hlengwe land to live among ethnic others.

Kinship and social networks were also important in the making and sustenance of Hlengwe ethnic identity. This allowed them to help one another in times of difficulties, for instance in times of outbreaks of animal diseases. This is evidenced by NC reports in the early colonial period, which indicate that cattle belonging to some Hlengwe in disease-prone areas could be kept in safe areas elsewhere outside the affected Hlengwe chiefdoms by their fellow Hlengwe. Following an outbreak of a dreaded cattle disease in the Sengwe area in 1909 the NC wrote, "...56 head of cattle belonging to the Sengwe people have been moved back from the Crocodile River (Limpopo) to Sam's Kraal on the Nuanetsi River, 25 miles from the Transvaal and 20 miles from the Portuguese border".²⁷⁰ Sam (Samu) was a Hlengwe chief on higher ground in the south east of Sengwe's territory. Much later in the 1950s another NC, Wright, reported that Shilotela's people closest to the border with Mozambique had not kept their cattle with them due to diseases in their area, and these cattle were instead being looked after by the Hlengwe in Sengwe's area and by the Hlengwe living elsewhere. He wrote, "What cattle they owned, (meaning Shilotela's Hlengwe) were either held by relatives in the Sengwe T.T.L or by those

²⁶⁸ NAZ, NVC1/1/8 Native Reserves: NC Chibi Report 17 August 1909.

²⁶⁹ Interview with *Hosi* Makoti Sengwe (Paramount Chief), Sengwe Communal area, July 11, 2014.

²⁷⁰ NAZ File, NVC1/1/9 Chibi District: Report for the Month ended January 31st, 1909.

few families that dwelt some miles back from the border”.²⁷¹ These socio-economic ties between the Hlengwe were not new and were not a creation of the colonialists but were based on a common understanding between the Hlengwe themselves and on trust built over a long period of time. This was a display of group affection.

Hlengwe ethnicity also grew during the pre-colonial period through the incorporation of smaller groups of Pfumbi/Lomwe, the Baloyis and other migrant smaller groups speaking dialects similar to Xihlengwe like the Bhila.²⁷² The process is better explained by Wolmer and Kopytoff. Wolmer argues that “Tsonga social identity was rooted in the institution of chiefdom and not simply the clans or lineages.”²⁷³ It must however, not be forgotten that among the Hlengwe, the chiefdom was a sub-set of the broader ethnic identity, and Hlengwe chieftaincy was not contested by ethnic others, so it remained the centre of Hlengwe social organisation and localised identity. Also in the Hlengwe institution of chiefdom the following of an individual chief was never restricted to the ‘pure’ descent group of a single clan or extended family. Wolmer asserts that the chiefdom “...was an open institution attracting and incorporating outsiders prepared to subjugate themselves to the chief.”²⁷⁴ This was achieved because small migrant groups needed social and political security whilst for the *tihosi* it meant an increase in their military strength and power through increasing their followers.²⁷⁵ This largely explains the composition of Wolmer’s Hlengwe society which was made up of Chaukes, Hlungwanis/Sono, and *Vanyai* and Baloyis. Of these groups none is a descendant of the Gaza Nguni/ Shangaan group, and the social linkages between these groups and the Gaza were limited.

²⁷¹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 332.

²⁷² Interview with Dhumazi Mbokota (Village Elder), Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014; Interview with Mack Saulo Khosa (Village head) in the Gezani area, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

²⁷³ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 54.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁷⁵ Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier,” 40.

In Kopytoff's thesis, which tallies with Wolmer's ideas, the growth of social groups in African frontiers was motivated by "...the drive to acquire relatives, adherents, dependents and subjects and to keep them attached to oneself as a kind of social and political capital..."²⁷⁶ He identifies three related inherent processes which involved the "...search for patrons and protectors and a readiness to attach oneself to a superior power..."²⁷⁷ In this process inequality was instituted and maintained with circumspection to avoid losing dissatisfied followers through desertion, and as such, no matter how low the status of adherents was in the society "...they had to be well treated in everyday life, usually as quasi-kinsmen."²⁷⁸ This helped in knitting group unity with the enjoined strangers.

Following Kopytoff's argument, the Hlengwe migrants who entered the south-east lowveld were able to impose their culture on the indigenous Pfumbi/Lomwe groups they encountered as the latter were very small groups and to that end "...scarcely left any traces on the present population."²⁷⁹ Kopytoff also argues that such small groups "...did not represent the kind of large bodies of ancient and culturally disparate pre-existing populations that might have deeply and differentially influenced...the culture of immigrants as these moved into different regions."²⁸⁰ The Pfumbi that inhabited the areas that the Hlengwe occupied in Zimbabwe's south-east lowveld were very small communities.²⁸¹ Chirozva notes that the Venda/Pfumbi make up less than three percent of the population of Sengwe, while Hlengwe make up about seventy-five percent.²⁸² Their numerical inferiority explains why they were incorporated by small Hlengwe communities whose numbers of tax paying males by 1900 were as follows;

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁸¹ Interview with Hosi Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 07, 2014.

²⁸² Chaka Chirozva, *Progress Report: Exploring Future Ecosystem Services: A Scenario Planning Approach to Uncertainty in the South East Lowveld of Zimbabwe*, (Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, 2009), 5.

chief Tshironga's (Chilonga) Hlengwe, 100,²⁸³ with 33 huts,²⁸⁴ while Masivamele's population was 65²⁸⁵ with 36 huts and Sengwe had 280²⁸⁶ and Hlengwe 106 huts.²⁸⁷ Ngwenyeni had 54.²⁸⁸ The fact that the Hlengwe were clustered into small communities is proven by the fact that Karanga groups to the west of Hlengweni and North of Runde in wetter areas were larger as shown by the following statistics; Gororo had a population of 1095, Neshuro 840, Negalie (Negari) 340, Inyamonde 400, whilst the smallest Mrobie (Murove) had 290 tax paying males.²⁸⁹

Scholars like Bannerman actually argue that Hlengwe penetration of areas along the Chiredzi, Mkwazine and Runde areas in the south-east lowveld was peaceful²⁹⁰ as there is no evidence of forceful incorporation of the *Nyai* or Pfumbi population into the Hlengwe society. A map drawn by NC Forrestall shows that by 1900 in Matibi 2 there was not even one Pfumbi chieftainship, while in Sengwe Communal Area there existed a small Pfumbi chiefdom under chief Chinana, between Furumela and Sengwe's chiefdoms in Hlengwe-dominated territory.²⁹¹ Using this as an example, Lonsdale then is right when he argues that in pre-colonial Africa there was also "...co-existence of ethnic communities in a non-competitive manner... each with their 'moral economy' or means of judging civic virtue that were clothed in ethnic difference."²⁹² Although most of the Pfumbi were absorbed into the Hlengwe society, living side by side with the Pfumbi made the Hlengwe's ethnic otherness clearer.

²⁸³ NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC, October 7, 1900.

²⁸⁴ NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC 4 August, 1900.

²⁸⁵ NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC October 7, 1900.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC, 4 August 1900.

²⁸⁸ NAZ, N3/24/2 NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC October 7, 1900.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 490.

²⁹¹ NAZ, N3/24/2-4, Location of Hlengwe Chiefs, NC, Chibi, in a letter to CNC, 5 March, 1898.

²⁹² Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism," 7.

The Bhila, who shared numerous cultural aspects including language and the circumcision rites which are held as key markers of Hlengwe identity, should have been incorporated into the Hlengwe ethnic group in the manner described by Chet S. Lancaster in his case study of pre-colonial Goba communities. Lancaster observes that "...immigrants were also easily assimilated, the process being aided by regional cultural similarities and the loose descent system that accommodated new comers equally."²⁹³ Lancaster, like Wolmer, argues that this incorporation of strangers was essential to boosting one's military power. Therefore, Hlengwe ethnicity also grew as the chiefdoms incorporated ethnic outsiders. Two elderly men in the Gezani area who said that they were "*maBhila*" confirmed that their ancestors were migrants who came from Mozambique during the time of Gaza rule and joined the Hlengwe, but exactly how they could not explain. ²⁹⁴ We infer that most of the incorporated groups adopted most of the Hlengwe cultural practices and, being outnumbered, they gradually began to imagine a common Hlengwe identity. So Hlengwe ethnicity was fluid enough to allow for entry of new comers and this way Hlengwe identity grew.

The process involved in the construction of a wider Hlengwe ethnic community was therefore not elite centred. It was a two-way process involving commoners and the chiefly elite. In this process there was a convergence of needs by Hlengwe *tihosi* and commoners and the adherents which resulted in a two-way search described by Kopytoff as a "...search for patrons and protectors and a readiness to attach oneself to a superior power..."²⁹⁵ The Hlengwe *tihosi*, in their "search for patrons" wanted to boost their social and political capital. This was done as a strategy of increasing the size of their population for economic and military reasons. The

²⁹³ Chet S. Lancaster, "Political Structure and Ethnicity in an Immigrant Society: The Goba of the Zambezi", in *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, ed. Igor Kopytoff (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press, 1989), 107.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Dhumazi, Mbokota (Village Elder), Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014; Interview with Mack Saulo Khosa (Village head) Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

²⁹⁵ Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier," 40.

strangers and ethnic others who became adherents or subjects of the Hlengwe, in the ‘search for protectors’, were seeking social security or needed group protection and were willing to attach themselves to the Hlengwe superior power. Harries argues that migrants that did not join local chiefdoms remained outsiders who “...were effectively nameless and lived beyond the pale of society in the manner of slaves who entered the community as aliens stripped of all identity.”²⁹⁶ It was therefore advantageous to submit to a chief as the immigrant was assured of getting “...sufficient land and labour to establish an independent household within a village or homestead.”²⁹⁷

The Hlengwe commoners also played a key role in growing Hlengwe ethnicity in that the new comers did not live with the chiefs but amongst the Hlengwe commoners. Taking a cue from Lonsdale, who says that “All socialisation is a dual process of example and emulation, that teaches relationships and proper way of doing things,”²⁹⁸ it is possible to argue that the minority new comers were socialised into the Hlengwe society by the commoners. They must have learned about relationships and Hlengwe ways of doing things by emulation and example through living with the commoners. Thus, Hlengwe ethnicity was a product of indigenous agency and processes.

According to Hutchinson and Smith another key feature of ethnic communities are the myths of common ancestry which give the idea of a common origin. Similarly, Mare argues that “Ethnicity is characterised by a sense of history and origin that give coherence and legitimacy to the present existence of the group.”²⁹⁹ This ethno-history is central in drawing boundaries of the ethnic group and is the basis of inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, this ethno-history

²⁹⁶ Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, C. 1860-1910* (London: James Currey, 1994), 5.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹⁸ Lonsdale, “Moral Economy of Mau Mau, Wealth, Poverty,” 328.

²⁹⁹ Mare, *Ethnicity and Politics*, 14.

legitimises existing structures of authority.³⁰⁰ Thus, the pre-colonial Hlengwe were an ethnic conscious community as they had a sense of history and origin. In addition, the Hlengwe could trace their origin to the founder of the community as proven by the writings of literate groups they encountered in the early colonial period and all the Hlengwe communities had a common story.³⁰¹ The legend that constituted the history of their origin excluded “impure” Hlengwe from royalty and legitimised Hlengwe chieftaincy from time immemorial. The sense of history and common origin shows the Hlengwe’s understanding of their ‘otherness’ from those around them and a sense that they belonged to one big family. This supports Msindo’s observations that “...ethnic groups usually ascribe primordial characteristics to their symbols and practices to legitimise themselves,”³⁰² and the Hlengwe case proves that this was the case from the pre-colonial times.

Hlengwe ethno-history has a pre-colonial currency as Junod who worked among the Tsonga in the late 1890s to early twentieth century also recorded similar legends. The delineation reports drawn by Kaschula in 1967 and my own interviews indicate that all of the Hlengwe *tihosi* in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas claim descendancy from Matsena. It was also confirmed that all the Hlengwe imagine a close blood relationship which is an ascription of primordial characteristics to legitimize their authority.³⁰³ Therefore with all this in mind, we are persuaded that Hlengwe created myths of their origins and ascribed biological characteristics to themselves to justify their claims to land, chieftaincy and their identity in general, and these myths had precolonial currency.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁰¹ Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, I, 24.

³⁰² Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 16.

³⁰³ MS22 (NAZ Records Centre, Masvingo), B.P. Kaschula, *Delineation of Communities: Tribal Communities in the Nuanetsi District of Rhodesia*, August 1967.

Hlengwe oral history talks of the Hlengwe emerging from a small community, having usurped power from their Hlungwani/Sono overlords. In this story of origin, which makes the Chaukes and Hlungwanis key components of the Hlengwe ethnic group, it was Matsena (Chauke) and his mother, daughter of a Hlungwani chief who happen to be the hero and heroine. Matsena, a maternal grandson of the Hlungwani chief, and his mother stole fire from the Hlungwanis and took it to the Hlengwe (Chaukes) who had never used fire before for cooking purposes. The Hlengwe became strong after eating cooked food and wrestled power from the Sonos (Hlungwanis) in a war and became the rulers.³⁰⁴ However, the other Hlengwe believe that it is not fire which was stolen but *nzalama* which was a Hlungwani symbol of authority and source of chiefly power.³⁰⁵ *Nzalama* is believed to be a rare tiny object that is vomited by dying male lions.

Chauke claims these events happened in an area called *Swikhundwini* “*KaBileni*” in modern day southern Mozambique³⁰⁶ to the east of the Limpopo River, which is believed to be the place of origin of the Hlengwe. Once Matsena had the *nzalama* in his possession he was able to take power from the Hlungwanis, making the Hlengwe the rulers. No-one could challenge him because *nzalama* was believed to supernaturally give power to the beholder. The Hlungwanis were then assimilated into the Hlengwe community where today they play the role of mothers at the coronation of Hlengwe chiefs and headmen as it was their daughter who gave birth to Matsena, the first known leader of the Hlengwe.³⁰⁷ So the Hlengwe had a common history of their origin which proves that they imagined a common identity.

³⁰⁴ Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, 1, 24

³⁰⁵ Bannerman, “Towards a History of the Hlengwe,” 486; Interview with Gogo Dube (Mrs), Makosiya, Matibi 2, July 16, 2014.

³⁰⁶ Chauke, “Hlengwe Political System,” 239.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

Therefore, the pre-colonial Hlengwe communities in south-eastern Zimbabwe were ethnic conscious because they could classify themselves as social others as proven by the fact that they had a common name for their community, a common history of their origin, proven group affection and imagined common ownership of Hlengwe space *tiko ra vaHlengwe* and grew their ethnic community through assimilating other communities. The following section completes the argument that Hlengwe ethnicity had precolonial currency.

Artefacts, Traditions, Symbols and Hlengwe Identity

Paul Brass argues that a group of people is a self-conscious community when they use cultural artefacts and traditions as symbols or emblems in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups.³⁰⁸ This means that in ethnic communities cultural artefacts and traditions are criteria for inclusion into and exclusion from the group. Msindo's definition of ethnicity (given above) proves that an ethnic group has cultural artefacts and traditions which are imagined by the group as the stuff that makes it.³⁰⁹ Similarly, Nash says that cultural symbols are the visible boundary marking features of ethnic groups which determine membership and the minimum cultural items involved in membership.³¹⁰ Mare also adds that cultural symbols are common sense signs which show that people belong together.³¹¹ These cultural symbols make an ethnic community visible. Using these perspectives, we argue that precolonial Hlengwe as an ethnic group had symbols, traditions and values that they ascribed exclusively to themselves, and which they used to demonstrate their "...capacity ... to classify themselves as social 'others'".³¹²

³⁰⁸ Paul R. Brass, "Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Identity Formation", in *Ethnicity*, eds. J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 86.

³⁰⁹ Msindo, "Ethnicity and Nationalism," 269.

³¹⁰ Nash, "The Core Elements of Ethnicity," 24-25.

³¹¹ Mare, "Ethnicity and Politics," 12.

³¹² Msindo, "Ethnicity and Nationalism," 268-269.

Thus, pre-colonial Hlengwe were a ‘visible’ ethnic group that was conscious of its identity as they had the cultural artefacts and traditions which they could imagine as the stuff that identified them or made them “different others” and influenced their perception of ethnic ‘others’. This is in sharp contrast to Terence Ranger’s argument that one of the “historical realities” of Africans in Zimbabwe before 1890 was that “...they were not conscious of a cultural identity...”³¹³ Hlengwe had clear emblematic cultural practices that marked their shared identities. The key cultural symbols were initiation rites, marriages, burial rites and language. These were also complemented by other distinguishing traits such as their dress, diet, and economic practices, which significantly marked Hlengwe identity. Through these cultural practices Hlengwe were able to craft an identity and govern group social behaviour. To this end Lonsdale is right when he says that, “Ethnicity is universal; it gives the identity that makes social behaviour possible.”³¹⁴ Cultural symbols also helped in determining who to include and exclude in the Hlengwe social community. Hlengwe cultural artefacts and traditions were almost universal among most Hlengwe communities and as such made social behaviour possible.³¹⁵

Historically, in Hlengwe society, every young Hlengwe man and woman had to undergo initiation rites. Traditionally, those initiation rites were a preserve of the Hlengwe and non-Hlengwe who were not assimilated into Hlengwe society were barred from participation. One of the Hlengwe practices, which was a clear Hlengwe identity marker and proof of existence of Hlengwe ethnicity, was the initiation rite that every young Hlengwe man or woman had to undergo. Being Hlengwe determined inclusion or exclusion because initiation rites were a preserve of the Hlengwe and those who were assimilated. Among Hlengwe the initiation of men, which included circumcision, was called *hoko* or *ngoma* or *murhundu* whilst the initiation

³¹³ Ranger, “Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika,” 120.

³¹⁴ Lonsdale, “Moral Economy of Mau Mau, Poverty, Wealth,” 328.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 328.

of women was called *tikhomba*. Oral and written sources have demonstrated that these ceremonies had their origins in pre-colonial times.³¹⁶ Junod says that, “There is little doubt that circumcision was practised throughout the Thonga (Tsonga) tribes in former times.”³¹⁷ He further dismisses the view that the practice was introduced by Semitic masters especially the Lemba given that in southern Africa the “*Ngoma* is much older than the arrival of the Ma-Lemba,” whose arrival date was around the 18th century.³¹⁸ To this end, Chauke notes that as far as Hlengwe are concerned male circumcision is “...*ngoma yavatatani*, meaning that it was a culture of their forefathers and it has become part of the permanent Hlengwe culture.”³¹⁹

Chauke also claims that, “There are glaring differences between the conducting of Semitic, VaLemba and Hlengwe circumcision ceremonies.”³²⁰ The VaLemba circumcision has religious connotations which link circumcision with purification whereas among the Hlengwe circumcision:

...has no spiritual idea attached to it, but inspired by some deep and true sense of necessity in evolution of man, of a progress consisting in renunciation of a miserable past and an introduction to new life. A deep analysis of Hlengwe circumcision ceremonies has revealed an attachment to strong moral lessons which are taught to initiates.³²¹

The Hlengwe initiation ceremonies were critical in ethnic identity formation. In the Hlengwe initiation school the young initiates were taught the law or prescription, what Chauke calls the Hlengwe “formulae” or *nawu*. The *nawu* sharpened ethnic consciousness as it underscored among other things “...Hlengwe history, laws, culture, endurance, obedience and manliness.”³²² Therefore, information about what it meant to be Hlengwe was disseminated.

³¹⁶ Interview with Ndavani Chauke, Headman Gezani’s homestead, Sengwe Communal Area, August 10, 2014; Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, I, 71-2.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

³¹⁹ H.W.M. Chauke, “The Hlengwe Circumcision School,” *The Unpublished Works of Happyson Matsilele Chauke: Compiled by Tillman Houser*, (2009), 287.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 290.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

³²² Chauke, “The Hlengwe Circumcision School,” 313.

The initiation rites also prepared boys for their adult roles as Hlengwe men, such as military, political, religious, legal, marital or sexual responsibilities. Women were equipped with life skills essential to a Hlengwe woman.³²³ A study by C. Chikunda *et al* in the Chikombedzi area reveals that for women the curriculum was mainly centred on gender roles of Hlengwe women and the expected behaviour for women in the society. It emphasised on producing "...an ideal woman suitable for marriage. A woman who is humble, morally upright, voiceless and submissive - not only to the future husband but other males and older women."³²⁴

From pre-colonial times, the Hlengwe initiation was an important rite in that it helped them to develop a full social-cultural Hlengwe citizen. Initiation was a rite of passage that gave rights and privileges of Hlengwe citizenry in that it was only after going through the process of initiation that one could be allowed to attend 'tribal' meetings or courts or be admitted to the councils of the community. An uninitiated Hlengwe remained a social minor and one's wisdom would not be taken seriously in society and at Hlengwe meetings.³²⁵ Only after initiation would one be allowed to marry, plough his own field, and hold political or other positions of authority in the village.³²⁶ The significance of initiation was seen in that all uninitiated males and females were considered to be minors irrespective of age.³²⁷ At some social functions they would neither drink nor sit with village adults.³²⁸

The initiation rites and their role in Hlengwe ethnic identity formation underscore the fact that Hlengwe ethnic identity formation was an indigenous process through the agency of not only the ruling elite but the commoners as well. The *tihosi* and their councils of elders (*tinduna*)

³²³ *Ibid.*, 296.

³²⁴ Charles Chikunda, E. Marambire and R. Makoni, "The Impact of Khomba- a Shangaan Cultural Rite of passage – on the Formal Schooling of Girls and on Women's Space in the Chikombedzi Area in Zimbabwe," *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 5, 2, (2006): 149.

³²⁵ Chauke, "The Hlengwe Circumcision School," 298.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

³²⁷ Chikunda, *et al.*, "The Impact of Khomba," 151.

³²⁸ NAZ, OH 608 (b) [Audio-tape] Philip Chauke interviewed by Michael Kwesu at NSSA Building, Chiredzi, on March 14, 2010.

organised the initiation ceremonies every four to five years or after every good harvest. Good harvests were important in that a large number of people was involved, about four hundred to five hundred young men or more, therefore there was need for a good supply of food.³²⁹ The commoners were involved as *vadzabhi/switsiva* (attendants, shepherds or “teachers” at the initiation lodges)³³⁰ while the parents of the initiates encouraged their children to attend, supplied the food and paid the initiation costs in form of fowls and goats. The *vadzabhi/switsiva* were mainly graduates of the most recent initiation school and their task was to impart what they had learnt of Hlengwe history, norms, values, responsibilities and culture to the new initiates. This allowed for traditions, values and norms to be passed on to the new initiates by means of active mentorship, oral instruction and through being role models.

Hlengwe marriages were also symbolic of Hlengwe identity and were one way through which Hlengwe ethnicity was articulated. Hlengwe oral memory confirms that Hlengwe parents refused to marry their children to non-Hlengwe and those outside the imagined kinship group. The marriages were therefore quasi-endogamous and arranged to avoid situations where there would be intermarriages especially with the Nyai/Karanga and possibly perceived enemies.³³¹ Writing in the 1970s, Wright confirms that “...the Shanganes observe the custom of almost complete endogamy.”³³² Even today there are still Chaukes or people of the same totems who marry among themselves in the Hlengwe community.³³³ The uninitiated women from the Nyai/Karanga were perceived to be uncultured and disobedient. In his monthly report for August 1909, the NC’s reported that the Hlengwe expressed sentiments that “...Makalaka (Karanga) women do not obey their husbands and their example would have a bad effect on

³²⁹ A.L. Sparrow, “A Lowveld Rite: A Shangaan Circumcision Lodge”, *NADA* XI, 4 (1977): 394; Thomas Johnston, “Secret Initiation songs of the Shangana-Tsonga Circumcision Rite, A Textual and Musical Analysis”, *Journal of American Folklore*, 87, 346, (1974): 328-330.

³³⁰ Chauke, “The Hlengwe Circumcision School,” 307.

³³¹ NAZ, OH608(c) P. Chauke, interviewed on March 14, 2010.

³³² Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 201.

³³³ Interview with Philip Chauke, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013.

their (Hlengwe) women.”³³⁴ To this effect Hlengwe young men and women were simply told whom to marry. In these arranged marriages a Hlengwe adage, *dyana muhanzu uwutivako*³³⁵ (literally translated, eat a fruit that you know), was the paramount guiding ideology. The idea was to guard against bringing into the family some unwanted cultural influences and practices through marrying “unknown” people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. This means that the Hlengwe community, commoners and elite played a key role in maintaining Hlengwe ethnic cultural “purity” for they are the ones who did not want their children to marry outside the kin group and chose spouses for their children. The marriage system therefore played a major part in preserving the purity of “Hlengweness.”

Hlengwe burial rites also differentiated them from their non-Hlengwe neighbours. Non-Hlengwe people were not allowed at the burial sites. The Hlengwe did not eat meat or shake hands (*kubata maoko*) as a sign of commiseration at their funerals and this distinguished them from the *vaNyai* who did it.³³⁶ Instead, the bereaved and the mourner would hold different ends of a dry soft stick between them and break it to signify that the bereaved family had been “broken.” Hlengwe oral memory confirmed that the Hlengwe had deep fear of death which accounts for the location of burial sites very far away from the homestead, mainly along rivers as opposed to those of *Nyai* neighbours which were closer to the homestead.³³⁷ Among the Hlengwe, the deceased was buried with almost all of his or her movable property except livestock and after burial the Hlengwe graves were never visited again.³³⁸ If it was the head of the household who had died, the homestead would be abandoned within two years from the time of burial of the deceased, which the *vaNyai* did not do.³³⁹ Hlengwe burials were

³³⁴ NAZ, NVC1/1/8 Native Reserves: NC Chibi’s Report, 17 August 1909.

³³⁵ Interview with Hlengani Machuvukele Muninginisi, Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, July 03, 2014.

³³⁶ Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014; Group interview, Gonese Village elders, Chanienga, Matibi 2, July 16, 2014.

³³⁷ NAZ, OH638 (Audio-tape), Isaac Matsilele, interviewed by Brenda Mamvura of the NAZ, Chiredzi, March 16, 2010.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ Interview with Hosi Freddy Gamba Masivamele, Masivamele, Matibi 2, August 13, 2013.

immediate, on the day of death and if the dead body was not buried on the day of death for any good reason, it was taken for burial before sunrise the following day and was not taken out through the door, but an opening made by demolishing the wall directly opposite the door.³⁴⁰ These burial practices were peculiar to the Hlengwe hence clearly differentiated them from their Duma and Pfumbi neighbours and through the burial rites, ethnic differences were magnified.

As Msindo says, language difference provides an anchor for ethnic identity.³⁴¹ The Hlengwe language was therefore a central ethnic boundary marker between Hlengwe and their *Nyai* neighbours. Being Hlengwe was expressed through speaking Xihlengwe language, which differentiated Hlengwe from Pfumbi or Karanga speakers. Houser likened the differences between *Nyai*/Karanga languages and Xihlengwe to the difference between “German and English.”³⁴² Speaking of the peculiarity of Xihlengwe, linguist Blake-Thompson also states in a letter to G. Fortune:

Speaking of the Hlengwe living near the Sabi River both in the Nuanetsi area of Southern Rhodesia, also some in the Ndanga-Zaka and Chipinga and their dialects; I have found after over three years amongst them that as far as my knowledge goes they do not speak the Transvaal Shangaan. They appear to have reverted to the tongues of their mothers...³⁴³

In the letter Blake-Thompson proves that in the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe Xihlengwe was the Hlengwe’s *lingua franca*. It was unique and made them visible as ethnic ‘others’. The Hlengwe were concerned about keeping it ‘pure’, hence their resistance to early missionary teachings for the reason that the early Free Methodist Missionaries were not using Xihlengwe but *Tswa/Citswa*, a Mozambican Tsonga dialect which the missionaries assumed to be similar

³⁴⁰ Interview with Kokwani Shamba, Village 12, Mushandike Resettlement Scheme, Masvingo, July 07, 2014.

³⁴¹ Msindo, “Language and Ethnicity in Matebeleland,” 79.

³⁴² Tillman Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions in Zimbabwe*, (Harare: Priority Projects Publishing, 2000), 11.

³⁴³ NAZ, TH10/1/1/361-362 Joseph Blake-Thompson in a letter to Professor Mitchell and Father G. Fortune of the University of Rhodesia, 14th June, 1958.

to Xihlengwe.³⁴⁴ (We will discuss this issue in full in Chapter 3). Speaking Xihlengwe was therefore associated with articulating Hlengwe ethnicity.

Hlengwe attire was also one of the cultural symbols that distinguished the Hlengwe from ethnic others in and around the south-east lowveld. The Hlengwe had a unique dress code, especially for women. (See Figure 1 showing the traditional *xibabela*. Also see Figures C1 to C5 in the Appendices)

FIGURE 1



A woman in the Chikombedzi area, Matibi 2, holding a traditional *xibabela*. (Picture taken by the researcher on 13/7/2014).

³⁴⁴ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 12.

Hlengwe women were easily identifiable by their ethnic skirt, the *xibabela*. Mathebula calls it *dovani*.³⁴⁵ *Xibabela* is a heavy skirt, with many layers of cloth and decorated with beads of single or different colours. It was worn together with linen called *ceka*. The *ceka* was loosely hung on one shoulder for the unmarried while married women wore two which were also loosely hung on both shoulders. This attire had not changed much by the 1950s and on NC Wright's familiarisation tour of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas he distinguished the Hlengwe women from the newly settled Ndebele and Karanga by the *swibabela*. Wright says that "The Shangane (Hlengwe) kraals we now passed every few miles were typical of these people... The young women wore their rather cute little skirts... with nothing but a few beads over their bare breasts."³⁴⁶

Hlengwe diet was another important factor of their ethnic identity. Oral tradition reveals that Hlengwe ate the meat of most animals in their environment including what was shunned by ethnic others.³⁴⁷ They consumed creatures like bull-frogs (*makuthla*), big monitor lizards (*makwahle*) and tortoises (*swibhotse*) which *Nyai* groups did not eat.³⁴⁸ The Hlengwe also had exclusive meals with Hlengwe names. The food unique to the Hlengwe included *chimbundwa*, *chigugu*, *fuma/hwakwa*, and *chinyamadulu*. *Chinyamadulu* was said to have been the most special Hlengwe dish. It was prepared from special fat meat which was dried and pounded into a powder and boiled. Peanut butter was added to thicken the soup. It was a special dish served to important guests or the family meal on a special day.³⁴⁹ *Chigugu* was made from salted roast maize which was mixed with peanuts. The mixture was pounded in a mortar to a thick stuff which was made into rolls.³⁵⁰ *Fuma* was a powder made from the fire-dried soft cover of the

³⁴⁵ Mathebula, *800 Years of Tsonga History*, 7.

³⁴⁶ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 57.

³⁴⁷ Interview with Julius Matsuve, Gaza Limpopo Festival, Chiredzi, June 22, 2013.

³⁴⁸ Interview with Solomon Chauke (Pastor and Retired National Overseer) Alliance Church, Gweru, May 28, 2014; Interview with Titos Musengi, (Villagehead), Chibwedziva, Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 05, 2014.

³⁴⁹ Interview with Hosi Freddy Gamba Masivamele, Masivamele, Matibi 2, August 13, 2013.

³⁵⁰ Interview with Village Elder Mapengo, Masivamele, Matibi 2, August 13, 2013.

seed of *makwakwa* (*wild oranges*) which was ground or pound into a tasty powder.³⁵¹ From the same *makwakwa*, the soft seed cover could be removed and dried and eaten in that state, and this was known as *mabhewu*. *Makwakwa* were also an important source of food during drought and most NCs' reports talk of the Hlengwe surviving on *hwakwa* as a coping strategy.³⁵² During the 1914 drought many Hlengwe left the country for Mozambique in search of *hwakwa*, according to the NC's annual report.³⁵³ *Chimbundwa* was made from raw fresh maize seed which was pounded, wrapped in fresh maize leaves and boiled till it was ready for serving.

Other Hlengwe identity features were self-induced bodily markings. These included facial scarification for women and the piercing of ear-lobes for both sexes. In facial scarification the three-dot marks forming a triangle on each cheek and the forehead were known as *tihlanga*. The *tihlanga* are still evident on very few elderly women, showing that it is a dying tradition. *Tihlanga* served the purpose of enhancing one's beauty. For men, it was mainly the cutting or piercing of earlobes or *kubhoshiwa tindleve*. There are still many elderly men with cut earlobes among the Hlengwe. The practice was done for identification purposes.³⁵⁴ However, some Hlengwe interviewees said that it was conducted as a way of preventing their children from being stolen by *Mabhurandaya* (Malawians) who passed through the area on their way to and from South African mines.³⁵⁵ The informants, who said earlobes were pierced out of fear of *Mabhurandaya* could not explain the association between the two, so this argument is not tenable. At the same time, we do not rule out that this could be a sign of a morphing of Hlengwe political symbols of identity into social symbols because of changing circumstances, but

³⁵¹ Interview with Hlengani Machuvukele Muninginisi, Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, July 03, 2014.

³⁵² NAZ, NVC2/1/1 Chibi District: Annual Report for the Year Ended 31st December, 1914.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ NAZ, OH608(c) [Audio-tape] P. Chauke, interviewed by Michael Kwesu, Chiredzi, March 14, 2010; interview with Ndavani Chauke (Villagehead), Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 10, 2014; Interview with Titos Musengi (Villagehead), Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, July 05, 2014.

³⁵⁵ Interview with Pastor David Hobyane, National Overseer of Alliance Churches in Zimbabwe and Consultant on issues of Hlengwe Chieftainship, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 07, 2014; Interview with Titos Musengi, July 05, 2014.

without sufficient evidence from the informants it remains difficult to explain this development.

The Hlengwe were also identifiable by their preferred dispersed settlement pattern which was different from that of the *Nyai* whose homesteads were closely spaced. Joseph Blake-Thompson, who lived among Ngwenyeni's people, observed that the Hlengwe were "...not so gregarious as many Bantu but are inclined to spread out their hutments widely - they say a man ought not to be living close enough to his neighbour to hear the quarrelling."³⁵⁶ Therefore, each Hlengwe *muti* (homestead) was secluded from other homesteads (*miti*). The idea of seclusion of Hlengwe homesteads is captured in a Hlengwe adage, "*tihuku ta muti wun'wana atifanelangi ku fika ka muti un'wani*" (Fowls or chickens from one homestead should never be able to reach the next homestead).³⁵⁷ This is confirmed by Doyle who states that "*Hlenga*" homesteads were "so dispersed."³⁵⁸ The NC Chibi's 1913 report says that the "...hunting *Bahlengwe* tribe..." live in scattered communities and are fortunately not very numerous."³⁵⁹ Hlengwe architecture was also unique as NC Wright distinguished homes of the Hlengwe from Ndebele and ethnic others because of the peculiar Hlengwe "...largish hut..." which was "...loosely thatched and surrounded by a pole supported veranda."³⁶⁰ Also unique to the Hlengwe were the "*ngulas*"³⁶¹ which Wright describes as "Great basket weave grain storage containers – the size of a small hut which lay scattered about" the Hlengwe homes.³⁶² (See Figures B1 and B2 in the Appendices).

³⁵⁶ NAZ, TH10/1/1/361-362 Joseph Blake-Thompson in a letter to Professor Mitchell and Father G. Fortune of the University of Rhodesia, 14th June, 1958.

³⁵⁷ Interview with Sisel Kasha Dumela, Chilonga High School, December 04, 2013.

³⁵⁸ Doyle, "With King Gungunhana," 15.

³⁵⁹ NAZ, N9/1/16 NC, Chibi's Annual Report for the Year 1913.

³⁶⁰ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 57.

³⁶¹ Interview with Julius Matsuve, Gaza Limpopo Cultural Festival, Chiredzi, June 22, 2013; Interview with Julius Matsuve, Kambako Museum of Bushcraft, Malilangwe Conservancy, August 09, 2013; Interview with Hosi Makoti Sengwe, Sengwe communal area, July 11, 2014.

³⁶² Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 57.

The role of the environment though crucial in identity formation has generally been ignored by most social constructivists, yet it determines some social and economic activities that are critical in group identity formation or in the ascription of certain attributes to specific ethnic communities. The south-east lowveld environment was rich in fauna from which the Hlengwe obtained their sustenance.³⁶³ Thorp's archaeological evidence also supports that the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe supported foraging or was a forager's paradise.³⁶⁴ Therefore, from their economic activity of hunting the Hlengwe developed hunting skills which earned them the "*vahloti*" (hunter) identity. NC Wright calls them "...fearless and effective hunters."³⁶⁵ An earlier report by the NC Chibi District describes them thus:

The *Bashlangwe* tribe have always been hunters, and until quite lately have not gone in for agriculture; even now it is only those who have Makalakas living with them who do so to any extent.³⁶⁶

Even as late as the 1930s and 1940s the Hlengwe were described as tough, hunting people who survived mainly on game meat and *mulala* palm wine called *njemani*.³⁶⁷ In a 1946 annual report the NC says that Hlengwe "...have existed since on (game) meat and *mulala* palm. This is quite normal. They are tough and they manage well."³⁶⁸ To this end, Hlengwe economic activities distinguished them as more of foragers or hunter-gatherers than agriculturists because of an environment which did not support agriculture. Beach even argues that the "Tsonga speakers in the south-east lowveld placed less emphasis than the Shona on agriculture."³⁶⁹ Therefore, hunting was of great significance in the Hlengwe economy compared to other African groups that also practised it, that it became associated more with Hlengweness.

³⁶³ Thorp, "Landscape and Environmental Change in Semi-Arid Regions," 12.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁶⁵ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 201.

³⁶⁶ NAZ, N3/33/8 Tshitanga Tribe, Bashlungwe People, 1902-1903.

³⁶⁷ NAZ, S1563 Report of the Assistant NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1934; NAZ, S235/518 Report of the Acting NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1946.

³⁶⁸ NAZ, S235/518 Report of the Acting Native Commissioner, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1946.

³⁶⁹ Beach, "The Zimbabwe Plateau and its Peoples," 248.

With all this evidence it can be asserted that Hlengwe culture and traditions were not invented by Europeans as the Hlengwe were culture-conscious well before colonial rule.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the problem of naming and identifying the Hlengwe. It has been established that the Hlengwe are not descendants of the Shangaan but Shangaan is a political identity adopted to survive Gaza-Nguni attacks. Though the Hlengwe assimilated many ethnic groups, Hlengwe remains the ethnic identity as the people under the Hlengwe *tihosi* prior to the arrival of the Karanga/Shona and Ndebele after 1950, followed the Hlengwe culture and were active participants in the Hlengwe moral economy. Soshangane and his successors were not seriously engaged in social engineering to build a new identity, so the non-*vatualizados* like the Hlengwe maintained their culture and language.

We have also argued that the pre-colonial Hlengwe were ethnic conscious as they had the capacity to classify themselves as social ‘others’. They had cultural artefacts and traditions which they could imagine as the stuff that identified them or made them “different others” and influenced their perception of ethnic ‘others’. They also had a group name, a ‘mental map’ of Hlengwe space, an ethno-history about their origin, a distinctive language, unique attire, marriage systems, burial practices, architecture, bodily scarification and other bodily markings, *ngoma* and *tikhomba* rites and diet which made them culturally visible. All this evidence proves that Terence Ranger’s view that one of the “historical realities” of Africans in Zimbabwe before 1890 was that “...they were not conscious of a cultural identity...”³⁷⁰ does not apply to the Hlengwe communities. Ranger seems to miss the point that although cultures change, cultural consciousness is a key component of a community’s interpretation and understanding of its ethnic identity. Hlengwe ethnicity had roots in the pre-colonial era and it emerged as a function

³⁷⁰ Ranger, “Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika,” 120.

of indigenous processes. Agency was therefore not exogenous as the key players were Hlengwe commoners and their *tihosi* as they constructed a manageable socio-political order to make social living possible.

In the next two chapters, we argue that colonial agency was marginal in the construction of Hlengwe identity in the early colonial period as colonial administrators/agents and missionaries had limited contact with the Hlengwe commoners to have a social engineering impact.

CHAPTER 3

HLENGWE AND THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER IN MATIBI 2 AND SENGWE COMMUNAL AREAS, 1890s-1940s

Introduction

The early historiography of ethnicity in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Southern Africa has located the creation of colonial identities in the early colonial encounter and advanced the argument that ethnic identities were creations or inventions through the agency of colonial administrators, missionaries, African educated elite or migrant workers. Leroy Vail asserts that in African societies where there were no missionaries or the introduction of education on western lines, the development of ethnic ideologies was stalled or never occurred.¹ Terence Ranger, an earlier proponent of this school of thought, later admitted the weaknesses in the term “invention” but begrudgingly acknowledged the role of commoners in the creation of identities. We say “begrudgingly” because he (Ranger) still maintains that the initial stage in the creation of ethnic identities among Africans is best explained by his invention of tribalism/ethnicity thesis.² Similarly, William Wolmer attributes the growth of the Hlengwe or Shangaan identity in the south-eastern lowveld of Zimbabwe to colonial and missionary agency.³ This chapter examines the role and limitations of colonial administrators, missionaries and Hlengwe migrant workers in the evolution of Hlengwe ethnic identity in the period 1890 to the 1940s. In addition, the chapter also considers how the Hlengwe reacted to the early encounter with European agents. It will be argued that in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas there were few colonial officials whose access to certain portions of the district was curtailed by limited road networks and much more office work. Thus, these colonial officials’ capacity to undertake serious social engineering among the Hlengwe was severely limited. It

¹ Vail, “Introduction,” 12.

² Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited,” 84, 87.

³ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 4-5.

is equally important to observe that there were also many economic and environmental factors which made the area unattractive to European settlers and missionaries. Although the Hlengwe community in Matibi 2 and Sengwe was not an insular society, there was very little socio-cultural contact between the assumed “agents of ethnic invention” and the Hlengwe subjects, for the former to effectively invent, codify and impose European traditions on the Hlengwe. Even if this contact was there, the creation of tribalism thesis portrays a scenario that is much more dramatic than real.

NC Allan Wright of the then Nuanetsi District from 1958, acknowledged the limited direct contact between colonial administrators and the Hlengwe when he observes that “For forty-five years (in the colonial era)...the Shanganes (Hlengwe) of Nuanetsi went their own independent ways, paying scant attention to authority in the form of administrators or police with white skins...”⁴ In the Matibi 2-Sengwe area colonial administrators seldom visited the area and missionaries were conspicuously absent save for unscrupulous white adventurers.⁵ Writing more than 30 years later, Wolmer reinforces this point when he states that “...within the new Rhodesian state...Hlengwe speakers comprised a small community who were physically and linguistically isolated from the rest of the population”.⁶ Thus, in reality Hlengwe interaction with colonial outsiders was tenuous and fragile. This confirms Msindo’s observation that in early colonial years, colonial rule was weak, had administrative difficulties and “...was not so entrenched as to have been able to create and cement social ideologies among Africans”.⁷

However, a closer analysis of the colonial administration’s feeble attempts to implement government policy in this very remote part of Zimbabwe would not completely rule out some

⁴ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 203.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 144

⁶ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 40.

⁷ Msindo, “Social and Political Responses to Colonialism,” 117.

subtle forms of social engineering as the new policies had a bearing on some Hlengwe customary or cultural practices and socio-economic activities. This interference with established Hlengwe socio-cultural systems resulted in numerous responses as the Hlengwe tried to preserve the pre-colonial social, economic and political systems which had given them their identity and the terms under which they participated in Hlengwe moral economy, which was now being threatened by the new colonial order.

Early Hlengwe Encounter with Whites

The first known Europeans to establish themselves in areas close to Hlengwe chiefdoms in Zimbabwe were the Portuguese in Mozambique. However, there is little evidence to suggest the existence of any strong interaction between the Portuguese and Hlengwe chiefdoms which could seriously influence Hlengwe identity formation. Allen and Barbara Isaacman's description of the Portuguese presence in Mozambique on the eve of the Partition of Africa proves that the Portuguese who claim to have colonised greater parts of east Africa many centuries before the Scramble for Africa, had very little influence on the interior, particularly on Hlengwe communities in Zimbabwe's south-east lowveld. This area was very far away from the coast and was generally not hospitable enough, from a climatic point of view. Allen and Barbara Isaacman argue that:

After more than three hundred years of nominal rule, Portugal's position in Mozambique was tenuous at best. On the eve of the "scramble," or the partition of Africa...Lisbon's influence was essentially limited to a small number of coastal settlements...In important administrative centres, such as Quelimane, Inhambane, and Lourenço Marques, Portuguese military and civilian personnel, although more numerous, were poorly trained and concerned primarily with self-aggrandizement. Beyond the immediate confines of these towns Lisbon rarely exercised any authority. One colonial official acknowledged that Portuguese influence did not extend more than 2 miles (3.2 kilometres) outside the capital of Lourenço Marques. "No control whatever is exercised over the neighbouring chiefs, and the oaths of allegiance sworn by some of them represent a ... farce."⁸

⁸ Allen Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman, *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution*, (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1983), 19.

At Massangane post in Mozambique, which was the nearest Portuguese post to the area of the Hlengwe, there were only two Portuguese officers by 1910. These officers are reported to have spent most of their time drinking alcohol than administering the area.⁹ De Lassoë, commenting on Portuguese administration in 1906, notes that:

The Portuguese native administration appears to be not inefficient, but it seems to be singularly devoid of object and definite result. The Portuguese are there as rulers of the country...but beyond this there appears to be no intercourse or exchange of adaptation whatever between them and the natives.¹⁰

The scattered Portuguese posts mainly in Mozambique were severely understaffed and the Portuguese were generally settled in at the coast in forts. It does appear to be that there was little for them to obtain from the Hlengwe in the far interior because the Hlengwe territory was not endowed with any known mineral deposits. Bhila, who devoted two chapters of his book to Portuguese trade with African groups in the interior, does not mention trade links between Portuguese and the Hlengwe of any sort.¹¹ Dennis Doyle, who visited the Gaza Kingdom in 1891, discovered that there were very few Portuguese in the interior and virtually no remnants of Portuguese settlements in Hlengwe territory. For a distance of 800 miles that he covered from Manica to the new capital of Ngungunyane in Bilene, Doyle came across only one old Goanese (Indian) "...who acknowledged Portuguese in some way."¹²

Also a number of scholars who studied Portuguese activities in south-east Africa from the coast of Mozambique indicate that from the 16th century Portuguese trade activities were concentrated in the Mutapa Empire, which geographically was in the northern part of the Zimbabwean plateau and was so divorced from the area of the Hlengwe to the south of the Runde River. Beach defines the boundaries of the Mutapa state as,

⁹ T.V. Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail*, (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1955), 208.

¹⁰ NAZ, BE 8/11/2 Lundi and Sabi Rivers, 1906.

¹¹ H.H.K. Bhila, *Trade and Politics in a Shona Kingdom: The Manyika and the African and Portuguese Neighbours, 1575-1902* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1982), Chapters 6 and 7.

¹² Doyle, "With King Gungunhana in Gazaland," 112.

...a triangle of land between the Zambezi river in the north, the Hunyani (Manyame) river and Umvukwes range on the southwest and the Mazoe and Ruenya rivers on the southeast. It thus consisted of a small segment of the southern Zambezian plateau and an arc of the Zambezi valley lowlands.¹³

Innocent Pikirayi and Gilbert Pwiti indicate that in the areas where Portuguese were active, such as northern and eastern parts of the Zimbabwean plateau, they left traces of their activities especially in the form of writing in official and non-official Portuguese documents. Where Portuguese were not very active their history remained largely unrecorded.¹⁴ The lack of Portuguese records on their interaction with the Hlengwe can be a sign of negligible contact between the two groups though it may not be quite conclusive. Elizabeth MacGonagle also indicates that from the sixteenth century the Portuguese traded cloth and beads with Africans in exchange for ivory, slaves and gold,¹⁵ the last two items being commodities that the Hlengwe are not known to have traded in as there were no rich gold deposits and slaves there for barter trade. Although the term *kumbi* (slave) exists in *Xihlengwe*, local oral memory does not provide evidence of Hlengwe participation in the slave trade. MacGonagle also indicates that the key centres of Portuguese trade at Sena and Tete were along the Zambezi valley, showing that they were too far away from the land of the Hlengwe¹⁶. MacGonagle even states that the Portuguese got most of the ivory from the Ndau areas north of the Save and Quiteve and areas near Sofala.¹⁷ Thus, given this limited interaction between the Portuguese and the Hlengwe, there is no way the Portuguese would have been an important factor in Hlengwe identity formation before colonisation of the Hlengwe and soon after and before the 1920s.

¹³ D.N. Beach, "The Mutapa Dynasty: A Comparison of Documentary and Traditional Evidence," *History in Africa*, 3, (1976): 1.

¹⁴ Innocent Pikirayi and Gilbert Pwiti, "States, Traders and Colonists: Historical Archaeology in Zimbabwe," *Historical Archaeology*, 33, 2, (1999): 74.

¹⁵ Elizabeth MacGonagle, "Mightier than the Sword: The Portuguese Pen in Ndau History," *History in Africa*, 28, (2001): 171, 177.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 171-172

¹⁷ MacGonagle, "Mightier than the Sword," 178.

However, although there was limited interaction between the Portuguese and the Hlengwe in the 1890s and before, the earliest British South Africa Native Commissioner (NC) among the Hlengwe did find some evidence of Portuguese's contested claim over the land occupied by the Hlengwe. In 1897, Peter Forrestall, the first Native Commissioner of Chibi District, found some Portuguese flags in chief Mpapa's area. The chief himself insisted that he was in Portuguese territory when he met Forrestall in 1897.¹⁸ The presence of these flags, however, is not indicative of the fact that Portuguese authority was firmly rooted in this area. Beach helps us try to solve this puzzle of existence of Portuguese flags among the Hlengwe. He argues that in 1889 the Portuguese tried to stop Cecil John Rhodes and the British South Africa Company's eastwards expansion into Mozambique by sending expeditions laden with guns and ammunition among the Shona chiefs in the contested eastern border areas. In return for flying the Portuguese flag and resisting British encroachment, the Portuguese offered African chiefs firearms.¹⁹ It is very likely that Mpapa was one of the African chiefs in the south-eastern lowveld of Zimbabwe reached by the Portuguese expeditions. In addition, Mpapa might have claimed to be under Portuguese control to avoid paying tax to the new British South Africa Company regime of Southern Rhodesia.

Additionally, an account by T. V. Bulpin suggests that there was contact between the Portuguese and the Hlengwe communities as evidenced by the presence of a trade route that followed the Limpopo and linked Sofala to the interior.²⁰ However, Bulpin's account is sketchy as it does not specify the destination of the trade route. From the same account, it is clear that if the route followed the Limpopo River it circumvented the Hlengwe area because the Limpopo was the southern boundary of Sengwe's country.²¹ Interestingly, Mtetwa, who

¹⁸ NAZ, NVC 1/1/1 NC (Peter Forrestall) to Chief Native Commissioner, Folio 131, Weekly Report, August 1897.

¹⁹ Beach, "The Zimbabwe Plateau," 276.

²⁰ Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail*, 31.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

studied Hlengwe trade in pre-colonial times, does not mention Hlengwe trade with the Portuguese but African communities.²² Bannerman just mentions Hlengwe trade with the coast in pre-colonial times without naming the coastal traders.²³ Thus, if ever there was any trade between the Hlengwe and the Portuguese, it was most probably so minimal that it was not of great significance and that it was not prolonged on account of the general inaccessibility of the Hlengwe areas.

There is also evidence that the Hlengwe interacted with one other unorganised group of white adventurers who were not under the control of any government between Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. These white adventurers that frequented the south-eastern lowveld interacted with some Hlengwe of Sengwe, Ngwenyeni, Shilotela, Furumela and Gezani. Bulpin describes them as white men who came from different parts of the world and lived in an area known today as “Crooks’ Corner”, which is at the junction of the Limpopo and Luvuvhu/Pafuri Rivers and is the meeting point of three neighbouring countries - Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. The Crooks’ Corner was described as a “secluded and sinister wedge of land...a last home for many a curious and lawless character: a sanctuary from civilisation...last stronghold of the lawless.”²⁴ According to Bulpin some of the characters, such as William Pye had a philosophy, “...to hell with the king governments and mosquitoes”, because “...they were all pests.”²⁵ Pye, an Irishman and a prominent member of the Crooks’ Corner community, in conversation with a new illegal dweller of the area nicknamed Bvekenya (real name was Barnard), who later became an infamous poacher operating in the three named countries above had this to say:

²² Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic History,” 265-267.

²³ J.H. Bannerman, “A Short Political and Economic History of the Tsovani, Chisa and Mahenye Dynasties of the Ndanga, Chiredzi and Chipinga Districts to CA. 1950”, (Unpublished Paper, Kept at the National Archives of Zimbabwe), 9.

²⁴ Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail*, 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

...if you want to know why so many of us live here in the bush, I'll tell you. Crooks' Corner they call this. Well, at the corner, where the rivers meet there's a wonderfully handy beacon. East of it is the Portuguese land; north of it is Rhodesia; west of it is this new-fangled Union of South Africa; and south of it is what they want to call a game reserve. If you ever get into trouble, just remember that beacon. That's why most of us live here. Whoever, comes for you, you can always be on the other side in someone else's territory; and if they all come at once, you can always sit on the beacon top and let them fight over who is to pinch you.²⁶

Bvekenya (Barnard) later made good use of the advice in escaping the law enforcement agents of the three colonies when he became a poacher. Thus, Bulpin says that:

He made a semi-permanent camp there and prized the beacon loose. If anybody did come for him he simply moved the beacon, and placed himself in safety without the necessity of breaking camp.²⁷

This was the type of the white men that the Hlengwe in the south-eastern part of Zimbabwe interacted with before the colonial administration was fully established in the area. Some of the white men like Pat Fay, who drank and ate himself to death, were gun-runners and others adventurers and unauthorised hunters.²⁸ The key point is that these men were illegal persons. Most of these whites were living in shacks which "...were in the bush, miles apart and were known to hide in the bush or under beds if visitors appeared."²⁹ They are said to have been the type that talked about everything else "...except themselves."³⁰ In one official record they were named "bandits."³¹ Martin Murray described them as "...lawless gangs," "scoundrels," "unscrupulous fortune hunters," and also as men "not bound by shared codes of conduct or conventions..." and their behaviour as "...reprehensible."³² Martin Murray further argues that these whites were "poachers pure and simple."³³ However, the usage of negative stereotypes

²⁶ Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail*, 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁸ NAZ, NVC1/1/1 NC Chibi, (P. Forrestall) Yearly Report, 4th April 1898; Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail*, 26-29.

²⁹ Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail*, 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

³¹ NAZ, A3/18/30/22 Administrator, Salisbury, in a letter to the High Commissioner, South Africa, 16/2/1916.

³² Martin Murray, "Blackbirding at 'Crooks' Corner': Illicit Labour Recruiting in the Northeastern Transvaal, 1910-1940," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 3, (1995): 374.

³³ *Ibid.*, 374.

to describe these whites also underscores how they were perceived to be a danger to the BSAC's colonial project.

It can be argued that this type of the early white men who were in contact with the Hlengwe cared less about carrying out any social engineering work among the indigenous people. Considering the pursuits of these white men, it is hard to justify that they could have invented traditions or influenced ethnic identity formation among the Hlengwe as they spent most of their time running away from the law enforcement agents and would not want to leave any easy trace of themselves chasing elephants or looking for illegal gun buyers. In short they were minding their own business. In addition, these white men do not even seem to have posed any threat on the Hlengwe to necessitate the mobilisation of the latter's ethnicity to defend their cultural artefacts and traditions.

Limitations to Colonial Agency in Hlengwe Identity Creation Up to the 1940s

Whilst invention/creation of identity theorists of the 1980s and 1990s believe that colonial administrators, missionaries and mission-educated African elite and migrant workers played a key role in the creation of ethnicity,³⁴ the same cannot be said of the growth of Hlengwe ethnic consciousness. Vail's statement that where there was no missionary work or introduction of missionary education and no African intellectuals, "...the development of ethnic ideologies was stalled or never occurred,"³⁵ does not correctly describe the Hlengwe situation as in the early colonial period Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas were unlike other parts of Zimbabwe such as the Highveld and Matebeleland. The Hlengwe areas were characterised by a marked absence of colonial agents, educated elites and missionaries and there is evidence

³⁴ Vail, "Introduction," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. L. Vail (London: James Currey, 1989); T. Ranger, "Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika: The Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. L. Vail (London: James Currey, 1989); Patrick Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa," in *The creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. L. Vail, (London: James Currey, 1989)

³⁵ Vail, "Introduction," 12.

that Hlengwe ethnicity predated these colonial agents for the greater part of the colonial era. Therefore, it was hardly the colonial administrators, missionaries and educated elite who played a significant role in the creation of Hlengwe identity, but the commoners and some of their chiefs especially in their responses to changing political contexts of the early colonial era.

There is abundant evidence to prove that right from the onset of colonial rule Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas were devoid of colonial government officials, settlers and missionaries compared to Matebeleland and the Highveld in general as the lowveld was a low priority area to the colonial regime. The government invested little financial and human resources towards the lowveld's development and administration. The area was shunned by white settlers due to factors such as the scarcity of valuable minerals, environmental constraints associated with Zimbabwe's south-east lowveld, and the area's remoteness from the then key administrative centres, Chibi (Chivi) the district headquarters, Fort Victoria (Masvingo) the provincial capital and Fort Salisbury (Harare) the capital city.³⁶ To add to its unattractiveness were natural hazards associated with the lowveld, especially malaria and trypanosomiasis and the threat of droughts as the lowveld is known for having one good rain season in every four years.³⁷

Bannerman argues that "Prior to the 1896-7 rinderpest panzootic (pandemic), the whole of the Limpopo, the lower Nuanetsi, Lundi and Save Valleys were infested by (tsetse) fly and had in all probability been so for thousands of years."³⁸ Similarly, Wolmer also observes that "One of the more pervasive early narratives attached to the lowveld was that it constituted an unhealthy, disease ridden landscape that was unfit for white habitation".³⁹ A discourse about the

³⁶ T.H. Chisi, "Colonial Economic Disempowerment and the Responses of the Hlengwe Peasantry of the South East Lowveld of Zimbabwe: 1890-1965," *Afrika Zamani*, 20-21, (2012-2013):173-174.

³⁷ NAZ, V1/10/7 Reports of Tsetse-Flies, 8 October, 1923; J.H. Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe People of the South of Rhodesia," *NADA*, XI, 5, (1978):483.

³⁸ Bannerman, "A Short Political and Economic History," 11.

³⁹ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 32.

unsuitability of the lowveld for white settlement was reinforced by a South African Health officials' report that malaria in Northern and eastern Transvaal "...made the lowveld unsafe for white settlement and therefore prevented its successful exploitation."⁴⁰ This scared off the Zimbabwean whites because Transvaal shared a border directly with the Zimbabwean lowveld. These fears therefore contributed to the slow uptake of land in the south-east lowveld to the extent that by 1910 there was only one application for land by a Mr T.W. James, in Native Reserve 37, (Matibi).⁴¹ This slow uptake of land by whites gave the Hlengwe the leeway to run their local affairs like they had done in the past. Many Europeans shunned the area and remained as absentee landlords till the 1950s.⁴² Tillman Houser, a white missionary of the Free Methodist Church who entered the Sengwe area in the late 1940s observed that by the close of the 1940s, the area was "...so remote..." and "...seemed not worthy of much attention by the administration of the southern Rhodesian government".⁴³ By the late 1940s the white population in the Matibi 2, which is the Sengwe area comprised of only "...Mr and Mrs George Palfrey who operated a labour recruiting service for the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) in Johannesburg".⁴⁴ In the whole of Sengwe area there was only one store selling African goods run by the Palfreys at Malipati.⁴⁵ The Southern Rhodesian European census record for 1936 also indicates that there was no white person resident in Matibi 2 or Sengwe, and even in the Nuanetsi sub-district of Chibi as a whole.⁴⁶ Thus, there was no direct European presence to be of much impact in transforming Hlengwe ways of life. To understand

⁴⁰ Randall Packard, 'Malaria Blocks Development' Revisited: The Role of Disease in the History of Agricultural Development in Eastern and Northern Transvaal Lowveld, 1890-1960," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27, 3, (2001): 591.

⁴¹ NAZ, NVC1/1/9 NC, Chibi, in a letter to Superintendent of Natives, Victoria, June 14, 1910.

⁴² NAZ, S2827/2/2/5/3 Annual Report of the NC Nuanetsi, For the Year ended 31st December, 1957.

⁴³ Houser, "Let metell you," 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁶ NAZ, S901/1/34 Southern Rhodesia Census (European), 1936.

Hlengwe society and culture, we therefore need to understand how the Hlengwe internalised their own identities in general in this time.

As far as the presence of colonial administrators was concerned, it is clear that a greater majority of Africans in the Nuanetsi sub-district were not under the close control of the NCs from 1890 right up to the 1940s. Allan Wright, the NC, Nuanetsi from 1958, even says that:

When I took over Nuanetsi in 1958 I found the internal affairs of the Sengwe area were conducted on a closed shop basis by chief and tribal leaders. Even such serious crimes as rape were adjudicated on by tribal courts – nobody, not even complainants wanted the white police or magistrates at Nuanetsi to play any part in their affairs...in 1897, I suspect, the chief and his headmen were a law unto themselves and it would have been seldom that *Ndambakuwa* Forrestall stationed in far-off Chibi would have been informed of any matter affecting the tribe.⁴⁷

Thus, about five Hlengwe chieftaincies in the eastern and southern part of the district Sengwe, Gezani, Furumela, Samu and Ngwenyeni were not under close supervision even beyond the 1940s. This does not only prove that the colonial administration had not fully penetrated many parts of the study area by the close of the 1940s but that there was also very little communication between colonial administrators and the Hlengwe people. Wright proves the shambolic nature of colonial administration in the Nuanetsi sub-district (the section of Chibi district where the Matibi 2 – Sengwe area lay) when he says that by 1958 there was no courtroom, no African staff office and waiting room and that because of chronic staff shortage office records and revenue work had been sorely neglected.⁴⁸ This shows that colonial administrators had their own challenges that limited them from fully colonising the areas under their control and therefore could not transform Hlengwe identity or culture and traditions to their own ends. This is exemplified by Mr. Colin Loades, the Assistant NC of the Nuanetsi-sub district, who had to resign because of frustration as his “...pleas for more money, additional staff and

⁴⁷ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 78

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

accommodation had fallen on deaf ears”.⁴⁹ To make matters worse even after the creation of an autonomous Nuanetsi district, the new district remained as big as any two normal administrative districts combined, yet the NC had to run it with the assistance of only two cadets.⁵⁰ Wright says that the district’s size approximated that of Swaziland and was Rhodesia’s largest district but critically understaffed.⁵¹ This, therefore, frustrated any efforts at fully controlling politics and society among the Hlengwe.

Colonial administration, in addition to the lack of sufficient Native Department officials, was also limited because of the rate of NC turn-over at Nuanetsi. Their high turnover meant that they had insufficient time to invest their energies in studying to acquire any deeper knowledge of how the people under their charge operated in terms of their customs, cultures, politics and economic practice. This background knowledge is critical in any social engineering process. Wright indicates that from the inception of colonial rule the NCs and the BSAC operated from Chibi office which was over one hundred miles from the Hlengwe areas. Between 1922, (when a resident Assistant NC for Nuanetsi sub-district was appointed) and 1953, most NCs served for very short periods and most of the times they merely visited the Matibi 2-Sengwe area once per year during the times of tax collection.⁵² There was therefore rarely any direct regular contact with the Hlengwe.

The NCs’ high turnover scuttled continuity and effective policy implementation as it became almost impossible to establish or set up administrative structures relevant for the purpose. In October 1922, Assistant NC, F.E Hulley who set up the first Nuanetsi sub-district station in March of the same year left for Chibi office when the rains started in late October and never returned. He had served for only about seven months. In April 1923 H.C. Malone was sent to

⁴⁹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 204.

re-open the station but gave up after four months' service and in August of 1923 left only to be replaced by E.T. Palmer, who in 1924 resigned in frustration after being overlooked for promotion when his junior was made Acting NC of Chibi. Wright notes that Palmer packed his bags and left, abandoning "...poor Nuanetsi to its fate."⁵³ Palmer was replaced by H. Child whose departure a few years later saw a succession of Assistant NCs holding sway at Nuanetsi until 1953 when Nuanetsi was excised from Chibi and became an independent district under NC Colin Loades. Loades was NC for four years and resigned in frustration in 1957 over lack of resources and government support.

Infrastructural challenges such as poor road network made effective penetration of Matibi 2 and Sengwe by colonial administrators very difficult. This means that most often than not, direct communication between colonial administrators and the Hlengwe was quite infrequent. The Assistant NC Nuanetsi confirms in his 1925 report that the first serious attempt to link Matibi 2 with the Nuanetsi sub-district office was made in that year. He says in his report that:

An attempt has been made to render the Eastern side of the area a trifle more accessible; a road has been cut round three sides of No 2 Reserve (Matibi 2) joining up with another road cut from the Eastern boundary of the reserve to the Portuguese boarder.⁵⁴

In 1934 D. Townley, in a letter to the Minister of Transport and Commerce, Mr R.P. Gilchrist indicated that over 7 000 Hlengwe, in North-eastern Matibi 2 were "...not properly looked after.." because they were "...apparently too far away from a Native Commissioner to be visited in person."⁵⁵ Houser, a missionary mentioned above, stated that the Sengwe Communal area had no roads by the 1940s as the whole area had only bush roads with animals roaming

⁵³ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 14.

⁵⁴ NAZ, S235/503, Report of Assistant. NC, Nuanetsi for Year Ended 31st December, 1925.

⁵⁵ NAZ., S1532/91/2 Game 1922-1939 Vol.2, D. Townley, Report on proposed game reserve (Gona-re-zhou) to Mr R.P. Gilchrist the Minisiter for Commerce and Transport, 5/10/1934.

everywhere.⁵⁶ The idea of poor communication in Matibi 2-Sengwe area is also proven by NC, Wright, who says in one of his reports in the 1950s that:

This district is an area of vast distances and few roads. The administrative quarters are in the centre of the European area and it is necessary to travel 40 miles before any native area is entered. There is no doubt that the distances involved and the paucity of the communications have prejudiced the development of the district. During the year a Special Committee considered the administration of the district and concluded it could not be administered efficiently from the present site.”⁵⁷

Such statements prove that lack of a good road network made it not only difficult to implement policy effectively but also militated against engaging in more sophisticated processes of interacting with the communities in ways that would have transformed them in any meaningful way.

One key hindrance to effective colonial influence and work among the Hlengwe, even if the colonial administrators had hoped to do so, was the mode of transport that they were using in the early colonial years. In oral interviews, it was revealed that when NCs were visiting African reserves in the then Chibi district in the early colonial days up to the 1930s, their mode of transport was “*mangwanda*.”⁵⁸ *Mangwanda* were pole-made stretchers on which the NCs sat or lay while being carried by about six African men.⁵⁹ It is most likely that the fear of tsetse flies stopped the use of horses in the study area. This mode of transport was very slow and made it difficult to effectively administer an area the size of Swaziland or get time to study and understand the Hlengwe culture or to know what was happening in the villages. This challenge also hindered the possibility of natural cross-cultural exchanges through a process defined by S. Thompson as ethno-cultural drift.⁶⁰ Ethno-cultural drift refers to the flows of particular

⁵⁶ Houser, “*Let me tell you*,” 70.

⁵⁷ NAZ, S2827/2/2/5/3 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958.

⁵⁸ NAZ, NVC1/1/1 NC. Chibi, P. Forrestall, Yearly Report, 4th April 1898; Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail*, 26-29.

⁵⁹ Interview with Makoti Sengwe (Paramount Chief) Sengwe Communal area, July 11, 2014; Interview with Mrs Magret Mahlekete (Villagehead) Hosi Chilonga’s Court, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014.

⁶⁰ S. Thomson, “Revisiting “Mandingization” in coastal Gambia and Casamance (Senegal): Four Approaches to Ethnic Change,” *African Studies Review*, Volume 54, Number 2, (2011): 100.

objects, images and ideas from one cultural or ethnic group to the other.⁶¹ The Hlengwe and colonial administrators knew very little about each other for the latter to even start codifying the Hlengwe language or making customary laws based on Hlengwe traditions. To exacerbate the situation, the absence of fully functional courts in Matibi 2 and Sengwe made it difficult for the colonial authorities to enforce and rigidify the customary laws.

While in other areas the colonial administrators were effectively represented by the African elites such as agricultural demonstrators, health workers and teachers, who helped in propagating and disseminating European ideas and new colonial ideologies which are deemed to have speeded social change among Africans, evidence from colonial reports proves that even this kind of elite was not found among the Hlengwe in Matibi 2 and Sengwe until the 1950s. This slowed change in some Hlengwe traditions. In agriculture the total absence of demonstrators in Matibi 2 and Sengwe saw a failure in the implementation of some government policies, especially Emory Alvord's ideas of conservation and centralisation which were introduced elsewhere since 1929.⁶² By the 1930s Hlengwe agriculture in Matibi 2 and Sengwe was still untouched by new farming ideas although there is evidence of adoption of the plough by a few Hlengwe communities which had been resettled among the Karanga in the southern Ndanga District. In Matibi 2 and Sengwe the Hlengwe were still depending on palm wine (*njemani*), hunting and crops they grew on small patches of land along river valleys.⁶³ Even as late as 1946 the Acting NC Nuanetsi reported that in the south-east lowveld "...the reserves had not been centralised and no conservation work was undertaken."⁶⁴ Hlengwe old agricultural practices continued till the 1950s as evidenced by the NC's report in 1958. The NC reported that "Land Development Officers and demonstrators are a fairly recent phenomenon

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶² NAZ, S1563 Annual Report of the Director of Native Agriculture, E.D Alvord, for the Year 1946.

⁶³ NAZ, S1563 Report of the Assistant NC Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December 1934; NAZ, S1618, Report for the Assistant NC for the Quarter ending 30th September 1951.

⁶⁴ NAZ, S1563 Report of the Acting NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended December 1946.

here – the first Land Development Officer was appointed in 1954 – and very little impression has been made on the 2 800 000 acres of native area.”⁶⁵ Therefore, the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe had not been affected by events taking place in other areas of the country since 1929 due to an absence of colonial administrators or officials to implement policy. Consequently, the Hlengwe continued with their agricultural practices which became major ethnic identity markers between them and the Karanga and Ndebele who were resettled in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas in the 1950s as discussed in Chapter 4.

Due to lack of modern health facilities, hospitals or clinics in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas, indigenous methods of medication remained quite dominant up to the 1940s. The NC, Chibi district’s report for 1913 says that “There are no native hospitals in the district.”⁶⁶ In the same report when addressing the Hlengwe situation specifically the NC says that “...the hunting or *Bahlengwe* tribe live about 60 miles away from the Chibi station” (where there was the only clinic).⁶⁷ This means that if the nearest modern clinic to Hlengweni by 1913 was 60 miles away, modern medical facilities were inaccessible to the Hlengwe. By 1939 the situation for most of the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe area had not changed much in terms of better access to modern medical facilities as proven by the Acting NC Nuanetsi’s report which reads:

The sub-district (Nuanetsi) is still without any medical facilities, the nearest being at Chibi, 60 miles away and the clinic at Chiduma in Ndanga District and is about 20 miles from Matibi No 2 Reserve and at least 50 miles from the majority of the natives in this part of the sub-district.⁶⁸

In the absence of medical facilities, western ideas could not easily transform established norms and practices on hygiene. In the Hlengwe’s interactions with Karanga and Ndebele later on in the 1950s, the Hlengwe’s poor hygienic practices became important as a tribal label. The

⁶⁵ NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2 Annual Report of the NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958.

⁶⁶ NAZ, NVC2/1/1 NC Chibi District, Annual Report for the year Ended 31st December 1913; NAZ, NVC2/1/1 NC Chibi District, Annual Report for the year Ended 31 December 1914.

⁶⁷ NAZ, NVC2/1/1 NC Chibi District, Annual Report for the year Ended 31st December 1913.

⁶⁸ NAZ, S235/517 Report of the Assistant NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ending 31st December 1939.

Hlengwe were labelled “dirty people” by the Karanga and Ndebele newcomers who relocated to Matibi and Sengwe reserves in the 1950s. This aspect will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The colonial administration also failed to have a major impact on shaping or influencing Hlengwe identity formation through some of its land policies such as labour tenancy. Labour tenancy was a colonial system of controlling African residence or stay on white-owned farmland.⁶⁹ The idea was first adopted in South Africa’s Cape in 1869 and later imported to other former British territories; Natal in 1896, Transvaal in 1887, Orange Free State in 1893, Southern Rhodesia in 1908, Nyasaland in 1917 and Kenya in 1918.⁷⁰ It was a relation of serfdom which emerged wherever white farmers with limited capital took land from Africans and caused them to either pay rents or provide labour as a form of payment for staying on that land.⁷¹ Rent tenancy, a system whereby Africans paid rent to colonial government agents, was common in the south-east lowveld as there were just a handful of white settlers presently on the land and most of the land had been annexed to the B.S.A. Company itself.⁷² Between 20 February and 8 December 1919, owing to the absence of white settlers on Company land between Mwenezi and Buby Rivers, the Hlengwe under chiefs Sengwe, Gezani, Samu and Furumela, who were inhabitants of the area, were forced to sign agreements which turned them into rent paying tenants.⁷³

The Hlengwe, as a consequence of these agreements, were not evicted from the land but were given permission to continue “...occupying portions of the said land for the purposes of

⁶⁹ J.K. Rennie, “White Farmers, Black Tenants and Landlord Legislation: Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1930,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol 5, No.1. *Special Issue on Themes in Agrarian History and Society* (Oct, 1978): 86.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷² Larry W. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia: White Power in an African State* (Cambridge/ Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), 14.

⁷³ NAZ, NVH 1/1/1 Nuanetsi Native Tenants on Company Land, 1919.

residences and of cultivation and depasturing their flocks and herds...”⁷⁴ Thus, the Hlengwe remained leading their way of life as long as they paid rent. Consequently, Hlengwe traditions and culture were not immediately challenged. In 1939 the Assistant NC, Nuanetsi, made observations that there were many scattered small villages, mainly Furumela and Gezani’s people, on the Ranches and in his annual report he says that “The result is that natives enjoy almost complete freedom from official supervision.”⁷⁵ Even after World War 2 when other areas of Zimbabwe were inundated with white farmers escaping post-war economic austerity in Europe, in the Nuanetsi district it was reported, as late as 1957 that “Many of the landholders are not resident on their ranches and the labourers are squatting on these farms in idleness”.⁷⁶

Even other key land policies, which were promulgated between 1908 and 1930 when the colonial government made land acquisition a key colonial drive, had minimal impact on Hlengwe social organisation and community life. The social changes that occurred among the Hlengwe as a result of the implementation of these policies were not intentional but indirect or “accidental”. It can then be argued that, some of the changes that affected Hlengwe society while colonial administrators were addressing economic and security concerns were not motivated by social engineering concerns. Colonial policies therefore “accidentally” impacted on the growth of Hlengwe ethnic consciousness and what constituted Hlengwe land, which the Hlengwe called *Hlengweni*⁷⁷ (the land of the Hlengwe).

The recorded Hlengwe movements between 1919 and the 1940s were those of *Hosi* Mpapa and *Hosi* Masivamele. In 1919, *Hosi* Mpapa and his people were moved from the Chivumburu hills location in today’s Triangle Sugar Estates into Matibi 2 Reserve to make room for BSAC cattle

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ NAZ, S235/517 Report of the Assistant NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ending 31st December 1939.

⁷⁶ NAZ, S2827/2/2/5/3 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December 1957.

⁷⁷ NAZ, S2929/8/4 Nuanetsi District, Report on the Magatsi Headmanship and Community: Zaka District, 17/9/1964.

coming into the Nuanetsi Ranch.⁷⁸ This was followed in 1920 by the relocation of *Hosi* Masivamele and some of his people into the Matibi 2 Reserve from the Gonarezhou forest area, which was along the border with Mozambique when it became a National Park. This movement was necessitated by the undesirability from a colonial administration perspective to have native reserves along the borders of the most remote areas of the country as this had security implications. It should be underscored also that these movements were integral to the colonial government's policy to have Africans herded into reserves so as to ensure that previously dispersed populations would be more easily taxed and administered. Wolmer believes that the latter reason was particularly true of the lowveld where the colonial authorities viewed the Hlengwe population as very scattered and isolated and hence difficult to control.⁷⁹ However, true as Wolmer's argument maybe, the overriding factors for the 1919 and 1920 resettlement of Mpapa and Masivamele were largely economic and security concerns respectively. Therefore, direct colonial agency was marginal in the creation or invention of Hlengwe identity as it was not the reason for the resettling of the Hlengwe in these new areas. In addition, the two *tihosi* (chiefs) were placed in a section of Matibi 2 which was almost devoid of population because of poor water supply as noted in the reports of Peter Forrestall, the first NC of the Chibi District, whose reports had indicated that this section of the former large Matibi Reserve was "waterless and uninhabitable."⁸⁰ Only the drilling of boreholes in this area made it habitable. This means that although this helped in the growth of Hlengwe ethnic consciousness through the resettlement of Hlengwe communities closer to each other by colonial

⁷⁸ Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 42.

⁷⁹ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 79-80.

⁸⁰ NAZ, N3/24/1/2 (Vol2) W.J. Arthursstone (Surveyor General), in a letter to the Secretary for Mines and Works, on the subject, Native Reserves: Southern Rhodesia, 17/08/1908; NAZ, N3/24/1/2 (vol.2) NC Chibi, to Superintendent of Natives Victoria: on the subject, Information on the Native Reserves in the district, 25/3/1913.

administrators, the growth occurred accidentally because the administrators were addressing more pressing concerns than issues of Hlengwe identity.

To further prove that the social engineering of Hlengwe identity was not a major concern of the colonial administrators some of Masivamele's people were made to remain in the Gonarezhou courtesy of recommendations from colonial officials who felt that removal of all Africans from this remote part of the country into reserves would be tantamount to surrendering the lowveld to uncontrolled growth of the wilderness which would "...make the task of the settler more difficult when opening up."⁸¹ It was also felt that the presence of Africans in these remote parts of the country had some advantages in the future such as ensuring "...an adequate supply of labour to prospective (white) settlers."⁸² Thus, taming the wilderness was more important than the social engineering of "Hlengwe" identity.

The idea of leaving some Africans in their homelands also fitted well in the early colonial economic development vision of very remote areas, first mooted in 1919 where tourism was seen as the engine for the development of such areas. In this vision, Africans were viewed as part of the overall tourist experience as they were seen as objects of tourist attraction. This tourist scheme promoted the construction of an image of Africans as a people who were primitive and virtually untouched by European civilisation. The idea was first implemented in South Matebeleland where the Matopos was described as "an unspoilt Eden ... untouched by civilised man and remains in its natural state of wild beauty..."⁸³ It was argued that the few Africans within the area needed "...not be disturbed as their picturesque kraals, their costume, cattle, crops and customs would add features of interest to many visitors..."⁸⁴ This approach to development saved communities in the Matopos from eviction between 1919 and the 1940s.

⁸¹ NAZ, N9/1/24 Acting NC Ndanga's Annual Report for 1921.

⁸² NAZ, S235/504 NC Ndanga Annual Report for 1926.

⁸³ E.A. Nobbs, cited by Terence Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks*, 61.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

The similar application of this colonial policy in the south-east lowveld saw the Hlengwe of Shilotela and Ngwenyeni also remain in their home area which was to be part of the Gonarezhou game reserve with little interference from colonial administrators except for tax collection right up to the 1960s.⁸⁵

The Hlengwe of Shilotela and Ngwenyeni were not any different in economic and cultural practices, from the other Hlengwe in Matibi 2 and Sengwe. Kaschula, in his 1967 Delineation Report, describes the Hlengwe of Shilotela and Ngwenyeni using the same terms applied to the Hlengwe found elsewhere.⁸⁶ He calls them primitive and isolated people who wanted to be left alone and not interested in western education. This is underscored by the fact that at the only local school opened by missionaries in 1956, the total enrolment from Grade 1 to 4 was only 35 pupils of whom only four were girls, making it an average of 1 girl and 9 boys per class.⁸⁷ The Hlengwe of Shilotela and Ngwenyeni made extensive use of *mulala* palm leaves for basket work, ropes and thatching. Their economy was based on hunting and fishing and this poisoned their relations with Game Scouts and wardens of the Gonarezhou Game Park as the Hlengwe poached animals. Agriculture was also very important as they grew in small quantities sorghum, maize and pumpkins. Their diet was also supplemented with wild fruits and they brewed alcoholic beverages such as ‘*njemani*’ from *mulala* palm and ‘*mukumbi*’ from the fruits of the marula tree. They were not cattle keepers but kept small stock especially goats and fowls. However, though they were described as primitive and isolated, it is clear that they were not an insular community as their material culture showed use of foreign goods. Kaschula says that “...the only effects of civilisation observed were the bicycle, some European-style clothing and

⁸⁵ Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 34.

⁸⁶ MS22 (NAZ-Masvingo Records Centre), “Report on the Ngwenyene Headmanship and Community: Chief Chitanga Matibi II Tribal Trust Lands”, B.P. Kaschula, *Delineation of Communities: Tribal Communities in the Nuanetsi District of Rhodesia*, August 1967.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

enamel plates.”⁸⁸ The source of these “civilised commodities”, as De Lassoë calls them, was South Africa, underscoring the role of migrant workers in changing the material culture of the Hlengwe.⁸⁹

Therefore, some Hlengwe communities were for economic and security reasons, left by colonial administrators with some breathing space to continue with their customs and traditions with little pressure for cultural modification from the colonialists. Thus, colonial administrators slowed change in pre-colonial notions of Hlengwe identity through some of their policies among the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. The colonial administrators and their agents in the area had other pressing security and economic concerns than directly shaping the nature and course of change of Hlengwe identity. If colonial administrators were concerned more about security and economic issues, it was the Hlengwe who were key drivers of social change as they reacted to activities of colonial agents in their area. This will be discussed below under Hlengwe responses to the colonial encounter.

It is also worth noting that, the Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal area from the 1890s-1940s was also unique in that there was no recorded contestation to the area from ethnic others right up to the time of arrival of the Karanga and Ndebele in the 1950s. This factor contributed immensely to the development of the notion of *Hlengweni*. Thus, the regrouping of Hlengwe chiefs for economic and security reasons already mentioned above also indirectly helped to reinforce ethno-histories centred on the notion of the first comers thesis discussed by Murphy and Bledsoe and gave new meaning to Hlengwe territory. Murphy and Bledsoe argue that “Being first,” is a widespread notion in Sub-Saharan African societies. This notion emphasises that “...first occupation of a territory legitimises the first comers and their descendants as

⁸⁸ MS22 (NAZ-Masvingo Records Centre), “Report on the Ngwenyene Headmanship and Community: Chief Chitanga Matibi II Tribal Trust Lands”, B.P. Kaschula, *Delineation of Communities: Tribal Communities in the Nuanetsi District of Rhodesia*, August 1967.

⁸⁹ NAZ, BE8/11/2 Lundi and Sabi Rivers, 1906.

“landowners” who allocate land to later arrivals and have special claims to their allegiance.”⁹⁰

The splitting of the huge Matibi Reserve into Matibi 1 in the west and Matibi 2 in the east through the creation of the Nuanetsi Ranch significantly reduced the size of *Hlengweni*. This was exacerbated by the creation of the Gonarezhou Forest which also took a huge chunk of land from the former Matibi Reserve. The loss of land to the Nuanetsi Ranch and Gonarezhou Forest practically shrunk the area that the Hlengwe had imagined as *Hlengweni* in pre-colonial times and raised the value of the land they were left with. The Hlengwe were powerless at this stage like Africans in other areas to reclaim lost lands, but were forced by circumstances to defend what was left of that territory. The contest for land that emerged when the Karanga and Ndebele were resettled in Matibi 2 in the 1950s, where some Hlengwe openly tried to defend their land using narratives that justified their claims to land in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas as first comers, exemplify this. This aspect is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Weaknesses associated with the colonial system also made colonial administrators ineffective inventors of identity and traditions. The proceedings of the Conference of NCs held at Victoria (Masvingo) from the 10th to the 11th of June 1926 typify this. Most significantly is the view that most NCs had limited power to enforce certain laws. For example, they had no power “...to order natives to keep their kraals in a sanitary condition and good state of repair.”⁹¹ This explains why *Hosi* Masivamele never complied with this order for a long time, much to the frustration of NCs. The NCs could also not refuse to register a marriage even if “...age, infirmity or disease in either of the contracting parties rendered the proposed marriage

⁹⁰ William P. Murphy and Caroline H. Bledsoe, “Kinship and Territory in the History of a Kpelle Chiefdom (Liberia),” in *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, ed. Igor Kopytoff (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 121.

⁹¹ NAZ, S235/489 Conference of NC held at Victoria on the 10th and 11th June, 1926.

repugnant to natural justice or morality”.⁹² Thus, the Hlengwe, just like other Africans throughout Zimbabwe, continued to take advantage of these loopholes in the colonial system.

At times some Proclamations were not clear or definite about the responsibilities and limits of the NC’s power. This is revealed by the NCs’ recommendations at the Victoria Conference where they stated that:

(a) it is desirable to amend the High Commissioner’s Proclamation with a view to making a Native Commissioner’s powers more clear and definite. (b) A Native commissioner should be empowered to punish summarily any act of a native involving any contempt of himself or his authority.⁹³

To add confusion to colonial administration in the early years, there was no standard customary law to guide the NCs in issues regarding customary marriages. Consequently, cases where NCs on their own and NCs and missionaries differed on implementation of the law were numerous. This is exemplified by the case of H.N. Waters, the NC of Bikita, who differed with NC Sweeney of Chibi district, on the issue of child pledging to older men, where the former argued that “...a native woman without a husband was despised, a girl would prefer an old man to none,” while the latter argued that “...the girl might be really acting under compulsion.”⁹⁴ The Victoria Conference also took a different stance from that of the resolution of an earlier Salisbury Conference of NCs, with regards to the issue of *lobola* (bride price). Whilst the Salisbury Conference resolved to limit *lobola*, the Victoria Conference opposed the imposition of limitations to the amount of *lobola*.⁹⁵ The CNC responding to issue of condemnation of

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

lobola by some missionaries wrote; “I do not associate myself with any sweeping condemnation of *lobola*.”⁹⁶

Therefore, the very little impact of the colonial encounter on Hlengwe identity formation up to the 1940s was a result of the fact that Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas were low priority and low risk areas to the colonial administrators. This determined the limited interaction between the European administrators and Africans as compared to Matabeleland and the Highveld which were high priority areas. The influence that the colonial administrators had on Hlengwe identity was accidental and there is neither any evidence of a deliberate attempt to create a Hlengwe identity nor does it seem like it was the colonialists’ motive. It cannot be denied that the colonial administrators provided a new environment within which the Hlengwe had to rework their identity and reframe their notion of *Hlengweni*. However, this should not be interpreted to imply that the colonial administrators invented or created a Hlengwe identity nor did they deliberately create clear conditions under which Hlengwe identity was imagined. The colonial administrators were far removed from the Hlengwe to even understand the Hlengwe way of life and were so understaffed to effectively implement policy which might have had a major bearing on Hlengwe ethnicity or identity formation. Therefore, the process of transformation of most of the pre-colonial notions of Hlengwe identity was extremely slow as compared with the period after the resettlement of Karanga and Ndebele in Matibi 2 and Sengwe in the 1950s.

Limitations to Missionary Creation/Invention of Hlengwe Ethnicity and Traditions

In the sections above, it has been argued that colonial influence in identity formation among the Hlengwe before the 1940s was largely minimal for many reasons. This section considers the role played by missionaries and migrant workers among the Hlengwe before the 1940s. It

⁹⁶ NAZ, S235/432 CNC in a letter to Secretary to the Premier (Native Affairs) 6th August 1930.

is critical to note that missionaries did not establish mission stations in this area before the 1940s. Scholars such as Ranger, Harries, Vail, and Chimhundu, have noted that ethnic consciousness grew as a result of the missionary influence, particularly through their work of codifying African languages through their Bible translations and vernacular translations, thereby rigidifying linguistic maps into ethnic maps.⁹⁷ However, the failure of missionaries to establish mission stations among the Hlengwe in the early colonial period meant that there were no African intellectual elites in the area to create and propagate Hlengwe ethnic ideologies. In addition, there were also no people to reduce the Hlengwe language into writing during this time.

The first recorded link between missionaries and any Hlengwe chiefdom occurred in the late 1890s when Swiss Mission missionaries from Valdezia Mission in South Africa crossed the Limpopo River and tried to establish a mission station among Chief Sengwe's people.⁹⁸ These missionaries retreated back to South Africa after about only three years as a result of challenges such as "...sickness, primitive living conditions, and lack of positive response to their missionary efforts."⁹⁹ To add to their woes was the flooding of the Limpopo River, which made the missionaries' communication with their support group in South Africa very difficult.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Swiss missionaries did not have any pervasive impact among the Hlengwe as they were in the area for a very short time. Consequently, these missionaries failed to produce the critical Hlengwe elite to study and codify Hlengwe customs and traditions and create a Hlengwe language and orthography as happened among Ranger's Manyika in the development

⁹⁷ Ranger, "Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika," 118-150; Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism," 82-90; Chimhundu, "Early Missionaries and the Ethnolinguistic Factor," 87-109; Vail, "Introduction," 11-15.

⁹⁸ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

of Manyika identity. Therefore, right from the very onset the area was starved of Vail's cultural brokers and ideology creators.¹⁰¹

The Dutch Reformed Church as from 1913 also tried to penetrate Hlengwe country through a Hlengwe migrant worker, Joseph Mboweni¹⁰² who during his stay in South Africa had "...spent evenings at night school learning to read and write his own language."¹⁰³ The church had realised his leadership abilities in the church in South Africa and trained him for several years to serve as an evangelist. However, a report by the Assistant NC Nuanetsi indicates that Mboweni's level of education, Standard III, was very low, as it was the equivalent of Grade Five or five years of primary school education.¹⁰⁴ Joseph Mboweni, on his return to Zimbabwe, targeted the Hlengwe under chief Chitanga in Matibi 1 and opened a school in the area. However, Chief Chitanga did not allow girls to be enrolled as he feared that "...girls if educated would grow up to be prostitutes in the towns."¹⁰⁵ The school was later closed in 1916 after the chief's son who attended the school absconded and went to South Africa without the chief's knowledge. The chief blamed his son's disappearance on the bad influence of modern education. Mboweni was forced out of the area and instead went to build his school at Rata Mission in Shona country after having served for not more than three years in Hlengwe country.

Houser argues that after the relocation of the school, the chief and "...his people missed the opportunity of having their children in school, because of the distance from Rata Mission."¹⁰⁶

The time between 1913 and 1916 was too short to have created Hlengwe educated elites and to establish a written Hlengwe language and orthography and to have codified Hlengwe traditions as well. Mboweni's school remained the only school in the whole of the Nuanetsi

¹⁰¹ Vail, "Introduction," 11-15.

¹⁰² NAZ, NVC2/1/1 NC Chibi District, Report for the Month Ended 30th September 1913.

¹⁰³ Houser, *Free Methodist and Other Missions*, 11; NAZ, NVC2/1/1 NC Chibi: Report for the Month Ended 30th September 1913.

¹⁰⁴ NAZ, S235/511 Report of the Assistant NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31 December 1933

¹⁰⁵ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

sub-district of Chibi that by 1933 the Assistant NC of Nuanetsi wrote in one of his reports; “There is only one kraal school in this area, established in No. 1 Reserve under the Dutch Reformed Church.”¹⁰⁷ This was the situation up to 1939 when a Free Methodist Church established a school at Lundi Mission, which means that there were no schools in all areas under Hlengwe chiefs in the Nuanetsi sub-district. Therefore, missionaries did not produce Hlengwe educated elites or influence or codify Hlengwe customs or invent traditions.

Even after the opening of the FMC mission station among the Hlengwe of Chitanga in 1939, the missionaries did not quickly have an impact among the Hlengwe. The Acting NC for Nuanetsi sub-district’s report indicates that the FMC missionaries intended “...to concentrate more on the Shangaan native among whom they had been working in Portuguese Territory”¹⁰⁸ but the Hlengwe were slow to accept colonial and missionary education compared to Ranger’s Manyika who had great hunger for education and readily exchanged grain for books.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, among the Hlengwe the growth of a mission educated elite class was extremely slow. Even many years later in 1946 after the opening of schools in the Nuanetsi sub-district the Assistant NC’s report for that year states that:

Thirteen out of the fourteen kraal schools are controlled by the Free Methodist Church in Matibi. There seems to be no burning thirst for knowledge. The mission superintendent complains bitterly of the paucity of attendance, and the lack of co-operation on the part of parents, who prefer their children to herd stock... The same denomination is building another mission in Matibi No.2 Reserve, I fear the Superintendent has many heartbreaks ahead of him in that area.¹¹⁰

This negative attitude towards white education among the Hlengwe is evidenced by the fact that Hlengwe chiefs were by 1939 still averse to the opening up of schools in their areas mainly for fear of western education’s influence on Hlengwe women. In 1939 *Hosi Zava Mpapa* in Matibi 2 blocked Ralph Jacobs from establishing what could have been the first FMC mission

¹⁰⁷ NAZ, S235/511 Report of the Assistant NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31 December 1933.

¹⁰⁸ NAZ, S235/517 Report of the Assistant NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ending 31st December, 1939.

¹⁰⁹ Ranger, “Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika,” 128.

¹¹⁰ NAZ, S235/518 Report of the Acting NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended, 31st December, 1946.

station at Chikombedzi, fearing like *Hosi* Chitanga earlier on that educated Hlengwe girls would become prostitutes.¹¹¹ *Hosi* Helani Chitanga in Matibi 1 for the same reason also tried to block Jacobs from opening the mission station at Lundi only to be forcefully persuaded by the Acting NC to grant Jacobs permission to do so.¹¹² It is reported that he only agreed to the opening of the school after being persuaded by the Acting NC Mr. Ling, this being helped by the fact that he was nearest to the District office and easily accessible as his homestead was close to the Fort Victoria (Masvingo)-Beit-Bridge road unlike the majority of Hlengwe *tihosi* in the Matibi 2-Sengwe area. Grace Chauke (Mrs Manokore) confirmed that even by the close of the 1930s and throughout the 1940s *Hosi* Chitanga did not want girls to attain western or missionary education.¹¹³ Thus, boys only were allowed to attend school. However, some boys were also not allowed by their parents to attend school as they wanted their male children to look after cattle.¹¹⁴ In addition, many parents were discouraged from sending their children to school as they feared to be charged school fees. Grace Chauke is on record as being one of the first Hlengwe girls to go to school at the Free Methodist's first primary school at Lundi mission.¹¹⁵ This negative attitude towards education among the Hlengwe was also noted by Allan Wright in the 1950s when he visited *Hosi* Ngwenyeni. Wright, writing about his visit to Ngwenyeni's place, says that the chief and his people wanted:

...nothing from the European but concede that a mission school was useful as long as the missionary did not try and get them to have their daughters educated. This was typical Shangaan attitude – girls could learn nothing useful at school. If the school closed down they assured me, they would not complain.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Interview with Lisenga M. Hayisa, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

¹¹² Houser, *Free Methodist Church and other Missions*, 11.

¹¹³ Interview with Grace Chauke (Mrs Manokore) Mkoba 14, Gweru, February 21, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Ndavani Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 10, 2014; Interview with *Hosi* Amos Gezani, (Hosi) Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Grace Chauke, Mkoba 14, Gweru, February 21, 2016.

¹¹⁶ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 47.

Kaschula's delineation report also says of Ngwenyeni's people that "Parents discourage their daughters from attending school. Education definitely is not considered a felt need".¹¹⁷

Besides the resistance to modern education by the majority of the Hlengwe, the missionaries failed to make great strides among the Hlengwe because the mission school at Lundi and a few outlying mission schools that were opened up had great difficulty in getting Hlengwe teachers.¹¹⁸ The white missionaries remained at Lundi Mission station doing administrative work, far away from Matibi 2 and Sengwe. The teacher problem was only partially resolved by securing the services of *Xitswa* or *Tswa* language speaking teachers from Inhambane province of Mozambique where there existed an established FMC mission. *Xitswa* is a dialect of the Tsonga or Shangaan language which in spite of its dialectical variation is comprehensible to most *Xihlengwe* speakers.¹¹⁹ This exposed the Hlengwe to *Xitswa* literature brought by the missionaries from Mozambique.¹²⁰

However, the use of Mozambican teachers created confusion and resistance to missionary teaching among the Hlengwe as most of these Mozambican teachers assumed that they had come to teach the Hlengwe to be *Tswa*. This saw the teachers trying to impose the imported Mozambican *Tswa* traditions on Hlengwe communities. Houser noted that some Mozambican teachers even tried to introduce the production of *manioc*, a coastal crop brought from Mozambique among the Hlengwe, an experiment which eventually failed as a result of Hlengwe disinterest and extreme climatic conditions.¹²¹ By 1947 the FMC had not realised

¹¹⁷ MS22 (NAZ-Masvingo Records Centre), "Report on the Ngwenyene Headmanship and Community: Chief Chitanga Matibi II Tribal Trust Land," B.P. Kaschula, *Delineation of Communities: Tribal Communities in the Nuanetsi District of Rhodesia*, (1967), 88.

¹¹⁸ NAZ, S1563, Report of the NC Chibi for the Year Ended 31st December 1940.

¹¹⁹ Houser, *Free Methodist and Other Missions*, 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

much success among the Hlengwe and the Acting NC for Nuanetsi in one of his reports states that the FMC had had fair success in the Karanga speaking country (Matibi 1) but:

Amongst the *Bahlengwe* they made little impression. The main objections seem to be firstly that the vernacular used is the dialect of Inhambane P.E.A. (Portuguese East Africa) there is no *Bahlengwe* literature and the *Bahlengwe* are apparently linguistic purists.¹²²

Similarly, Houser says that:

These transplanted missionaries (meaning men from Mozambique) did not learn the local Hlengwe dialect and insisted on speaking *Tswa* in all the services. These attitudes raised barriers to the reception of the gospel.¹²³

Therefore, the language problem became a great hindrance to acceptance of missionary teaching among the Hlengwe in the early years. The Hlengwe rejected the *Tswa* dialect in defence of their own dialect. All these challenges that the Free Methodist missionaries encountered at the centre and out-school system slowed the rise of Hlengwe elites in Matibi 2 and Sengwe.

After having initially failed to open a station at Chikombedzi in Matibi 2 in 1939, the first school in the reserve was finally opened at Chilonga in 1940, by an African evangelist Luka Mbiza.¹²⁴ However, his academic background and training is not clear. Another evangelist to be sent in 1949 to Matibi 2 and Sengwe by the Free Methodist Church was a Mozambican called Philip Mberane. He is not known to have started any academic work in the Matibi 2-Sengwe area, save evangelising. He returned to Mozambique in 1951 after having stayed or only about two years. Reasons for his early return to Mozambique are not stated but it is likely that it was as a result of frustration. Though his achievements have not been quantified, Houser states that Mberane had too many and risky challenges in his work, which must have contributed to his early retirement. Houser argues that Mberane "...travelled widely from the

¹²² NAZ, S1563/3, Report of the Acting NC, Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31st December, 1947.

¹²³ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 13.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

Lundi River in Matibi No.2 Native Reserve to the Limpopo River in Sengwe's area. The long trips were usually made by bicycle through wild lion and elephant country."¹²⁵ Thus, Mberane was so inadequately resourced for his missionary work for him to have a great impact in such a vast area.

It can therefore be argued that up to the end of the 1940s, missionaries had very little impact on the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe. Houser's evaluation of early Free Methodist Missionaries' work attests to this. Houser believes that the FMC Missionaries were not very successful in reaching the Hlengwe in the early years because most evangelists "...had no formal introduction to anthropological studies to make them aware of the need to communicate in another culture."¹²⁶ Most of them spoke Portuguese, which was not in use in Zimbabwe. To make matters worse the evangelists shot themselves in the foot by their mistaken belief that "...they came to the Hlengwe people to teach them their home culture of Mozambique."¹²⁷ Houser further argues that there were clashes between Mozambican evangelists and converted Hlengwe Christians over customary practices.¹²⁸

The missionaries' poor approach to the Hlengwe underscores their lack of understanding of Hlengwe culture and traditions. This was the key reason for Hlengwe resistance to the spread of mission education in the Nuanetsi sub-district until much later. Resultantly, right up to the end of the 1940s there lacked influential educated elites among the Hlengwe. This means that Free Methodist Missionaries were not quick to establish cultural brokers and propagators of the Hlengwe customs and traditions according to the Rangerian model. However, this neither killed nor eradicated notions of Hlengwe ethnicity which had taken shape in the precolonial times. It is also clear that the Hlengwe were fighting against the imposition of traditions and a

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²⁶ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 11.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

foreign language upon them. They rejected the Mozambican crops, the *Tswa* dialect and Mozambican wedding traditions in defence of their practices. Thus, the Hlengwe, by the end of the 1940s, had successfully resisted Hlengwe identity imagined by the missionaries for them. Therefore, it is clear that missionaries were not central in the early development of notions of Hlengwe ethnicity and by the 1940s had not made much progress in changing the Hlengwe culture and way of thinking. The Hlengwe were up to this stage guided by the pre-colonial *Hlengwe* social ideology.

Hlengwe Migrant Workers and Identity Formation

Ranger argues that migrant workers who had worked in South Africa and in Zimbabwe's urban areas also played a significant role in the development of ethnicity in Zimbabwe. Ranger's studies prove that the migrant workers in South Africa and local urban centres defended the Manyika ethnicity which had been created by the missionaries and African intellectuals through supporting the "Manyika" struggle against the spreading Zezuru influence especially "...the use of Chizezuru books in Manyikaland."¹²⁹ Zezuru identity is associated with communities in Mashonaland provinces around the capital city of Harare stretching from Mashonaland East to Mashonaland West. The Jesuit missionaries who were trying to impose on the Manyika Chizezuru literature produced at their other Mission Centre at Chishawasha were accused by the Manyika of "...taking away our (Manyika) language...our King Mtasa...the religion of our forefathers."¹³⁰ However, Ranger's elite migration and identity formation thesis cannot be sustained by the development of ethnicity among the Hlengwe. In actual fact there is scant evidence on the agency of Hlengwe migrants in identity formation in the region. This does not mean that there were not any Hlengwe migrant workers at all, but that there is little documentation of their role in social and political change in Matibi 2 and Sengwe

¹²⁹ Ranger, "Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika," 138.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

Communal areas. NCs' reports mainly dwell on the going to South Africa of Hlengwe migrant workers but are silent about their return. The documented case of Joseph Mboweni, a migrant worker who returned from South Africa as an evangelist, proves that he did not enter Matibi 2 and Sengwe and failed to have a significant impact with his new teachings among the Hlengwe. Furthermore, having tried to work among the Hlengwe in *Hosi* Chitanga's area, Mboweni was forced to retreat to Shona country after only about three years.

In 1912, one Hlengwe migrant worker by the name of Mikia Foromela (aka Michael Chahoka) in the Transvaal wrote letters trying to incite the BaHlengwe to break away and seek British Protectorate status over "Hlengaland and Gazaland." The territory he was referring to as Hlengaland and Gazaland was stretching from Zimbabwe to Mozambique.¹³¹ It turned out to be a non-event because his letters were intercepted by the colonial state and Foromela was never seen in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas after writing his letters.¹³² So he had no effect on the Hlengwe.

It is true that there were many Hlengwe men who went to work outside their homes but due to lack of official records of such movements it is hard to quantify them and their overall impact on Hlengwe ethnicity. However, critical to this study is the nature of the migrant workers' influence in shaping the Hlengwe identity. From available sources it is evident that a common ethnic ideology did not take root among the Hlengwe migrant workers and there is no record of any influential returning Hlengwe migrant workers in Matibi 2 and Sengwe. It is therefore imperative to consider the factors that hindered the development of a powerful ethnic ideology among the Hlengwe migrant workers, the majority of whom went to work in South Africa than locally. As early as 1898 the NC Peter Forrestall indicated that:

¹³¹ NAZ, A3/18/5 Michael (Mikia) Foromele in a letter to Mr J. Mbumeni (most probably J. Mboweni), 21 January, 1912; NAZ, A3/18/5, Mikia Foromela (aka Michael, Mikia Chahoka) in a letter to Mr Isaac Khumalo, 22 January, 1912; NAZ, A3/18/5 Telegram from Scouts Chibi to Natives, Salisbury, 8 February, 1912.

¹³² NAZ, A3/18/5 NC, Chibi, in a letter to the Superintendent of Natives, Victoria, 1 April, 1912.

The natives of the East and south east part of the district (Chibi District then) have been in the habit of going to the Transvaal mines, this year some going by the Middel drift road were turned back...I have spoken to them about going to the mines in Matebeleland, but they prefer going to the Transvaal where they state they can get better wages.¹³³

In 1917, the CNC also wrote that, “For some years a percentage of natives from Melsetter, Ndanga (Southern portion), Chibi...have been in the habit of seeking employment in the Transvaal.”¹³⁴ This trend had not changed by 1939 because the NC Chibi states in his report that “...local natives from Nuanetsi go to the Union (of South Africa) for employment. This exodus is nothing new...”¹³⁵

Thus, one is tempted, from the nature of the migrant worker flow to South Africa, to conclude that migrant workers possibly played a critical role in the development of a Hlengwe ethnic ideology. However, this study has proven that it was hardly so and three key factors account for that discrepancy. These factors were namely; the duration of one’s stay in South Africa; the distribution of the workers in South Africa and the level of education of the Hlengwe migrant workers. Some Hlengwe went to South Africa for very short periods and this compromised their ability to acquire new ideas that were relevant to identity formation to a level of being able to articulate them effectively. Banard, (Bvekenya) a European poacher already mentioned in the preceding section, is reported to have met at one time some “Shangane” speaking people close to the border with Mozambique, who had:

...been driven out of their homes to work by the drought. They had worked the shortest contract period possible and were hastening home with what little money they had earned hoping that the families they left behind were still alive.¹³⁶

¹³³ NAZ, N9/1/4 NC Chibi (Peter Forrestall), Yearly Report, 4th April 1898.

¹³⁴ NAZ, S246/716 CNC in a letter to the Secretary Department of Administrator, Salisbury, 11 October, 1917.

¹³⁵ NAZ, S235/517 Report NC Chibi, 31 December 1939; NAZ, S235/501 Nuanetsi District Report of the ANC of the Year Ending 31 December 1923 (See also, NAZ, S235/503 Report of the Assistant NC Nuanetsi, for Year Ended 31st December 1925).

¹³⁶ Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail*, 44.

These were the Hlengwe of either, Shilotela, Ngwenyeni or Masivamele, for these are the groups of Hlengwe that lived along the border with Mozambique at the time of Banard's arrival in Zimbabwe's south-east lowveld. The CNC in a letter to the Secretary, Department of Administrator, in 1917 also indicated that the migrant workers went for about six months to a year and he gave the reason for doing so as "...their desire to earn the wherewithal to discharge their debts to the government for grain advanced to them when faced with famine, and to meet their domestic and other obligations."¹³⁷ It is therefore apparent that some migrant workers went to South Africa for very short periods just to satisfy immediate needs such as getting money to buy food in times of drought or for tax payment.

Houser also states that some Hlengwe from the Sengwe area spent on average two to three years in South Africa.¹³⁸ This period could have allowed them to gain new insights and ideas sufficiently enough to disseminate them but what is important here is that they did not go to the same destinations. Their destinations in South Africa were varied as they were scattered throughout South Africa. Some worked in copper mines around Messina while others were employed in Natal sugar plantations and on farms in Transvaal and an unknown number made it to the Rand mines.¹³⁹ This means that they were exposed to different ideas and interacted with different people and were so scattered in South Africa that communication among them was difficult. Furthermore, reports from Nuanetsi sub-district indicate that in reality the number of males that went to South Africa was very small, this is in spite of the fact that they represented the majority of those who went out to look for work from the Matibi 2 and Sengwe areas. This argument is supported by De Lassoë who observed that most Hlengwe preferred to

¹³⁷ NAZ, S246/716, CNC, in a letter to the Secretary Department of Administrator, Salisbury, 11 October, 1917.

¹³⁸ Houser, "*Let me tell you*," 76.

¹³⁹ NAZ, S246/716 CNC, in a letter to the Secretary Department of Administrator, Salisbury, 11 October, 1917; NAZ, S1561/10/1 W.E Thomas, Superintendent of Natives (Victoria), in a letter to CNC, 10/4/1964; NVC2/1/1 NC, Chibi, Annual report for the year Ended 31st December, 1913.

stay at home than go to the Union of South Africa.¹⁴⁰ Thus, it was very difficult for this small and scattered migrant population to develop a common ethnic ideology as it was not easy to establish contacts necessary for forging strong ties among when in South Africa.

Most of these Hlengwe migrant workers were employed in menial jobs because of their very low level of education. Bannerman argues that the Hlengwe often went to South Africa via Mozambique where they passed themselves off as people from that country "...in order to obtain employment with Europeans as hunters and herdsman."¹⁴¹ Houser, who interacted with many Hlengwe at his newly established mission station at Dumisa in Sengwe Communal Area and at Chikombedzi mission hospital, notes that most of the migrant workers "...worked as cooks and house-servants, farm labourers in fields and citrus orchards, plaster carriers in building construction, and helpers for white mechanics in garages."¹⁴² Houser therefore indicates that he did not encounter any Hlengwe who had worked in the Rand mines, which proves that amongst his informants there were very few Hlengwe who reached the Rand mines where the formation of the "Shangaan" identity mainly occurred according to some scholars.¹⁴³ That few Hlengwe reached the Rand mines is confirmed by Mr Mucholo Chauke who stated in an interview that the Hlengwe were uneducated and worked mostly on farms as herd boys or potato pickers in different parts of South Africa.¹⁴⁴ Very few reached Johannesburg mines. Most of these jobs were low status jobs which underscores the high illiteracy rate among the Hlengwe migrant workers. The nature of the jobs that the Hlengwe were engaged in did not give them great exposure to sophisticated ideas relevant to formulation of a common Hlengwe ideology or empower them to speak in support of their Hlengwe identity. They were,

¹⁴⁰ NAZ, S235/518, Report of the Acting NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31st December 1946; NAZ, BE8/11/2 Lundi and Sabi Rivers, 1906.

¹⁴¹ Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 490.

¹⁴² Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 7.

¹⁴³ Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism," 102-103; Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 51-52; Niehaus, "Ethnicity and the Boundaries of Belonging," 562.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Mucholo Ndalega Chauke, Mkoba 1, Gweru, March 3, 2016.

technically, not elites in the way the term is used by proponents of the invention of ethnicity thesis. Grace Chauke (nee-Chauke) dismissed the suggestion that the returning migrant workers from South Africa played a significant role in the growth of Hlengwe consciousness as they concentrated more on their own welfare, married many wives and bought cattle while a few of them built better homes.¹⁴⁵ The first black nurse at the Chikombedzi Mission hospital starting from 1956 said that she does not remember seeing any modern zinc or asbestos sheet roofed houses in the Matibi 2-Sengwe area during the visits she made with doctors in the rural areas in the 1950s.¹⁴⁶ Houser also reports that on the first visit to the Hlengwe area by two veteran missionaries Ralph Jacobs and Jules Ryff in 1930 on a surveillance mission of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas, "...they followed a small stream called Chingwedzi – along which the Hlengwe built traditional mud and thatched homes."¹⁴⁷

A striking difference between the Manyika in Ranger's case study who defended the Manyika identity against encroaching Zezuru influences and returning Hlengwe migrant workers is that on their return the latter did not contribute much to the development of a Hlengwe ethnic ideology but rather impacted Hlengwe material culture through foreign merchandise that they brought from South Africa such as colourful clothing, tools and blankets and money for *lobola*, debt and tax payment.¹⁴⁸ This is confirmed by Wolmer who argues that "...repatriated wages became an important pillar of the local economy."¹⁴⁹ As for new ideas, Houser, in his memoirs remembers the Hlengwe returnees mainly retelling their families fascinating "*Joni*" (Johannesburg) stories of the "...strange world of *valungu* (whites) in the cities where people

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Grace Chauke (Mrs Manokore), Mkoba 14, Gweru, February 21, 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Mrs Rulani Chisi, (nurse at Chikombedzi Mission hospital from 1956), Ivene, Gweru, December 28, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ Houser, *Free Methodist and Other Missions*, 8.

¹⁴⁸ Houser, "*Let me tell you*," 76.

¹⁴⁹ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 77; NAZ, S1563, Report of the Assistant NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31st December, 1934.

bathed in their own dirty water by sitting in bathtubs.”¹⁵⁰ If they spread any new social ideologies it could have been at the village consultative meetings which were not recorded.

There is scant information on the activities of returning Hlengwe migrant workers which can be associated with their participation in any forms of mass mobilisation or formation of welfare associations and native councils as these institutions were none existent in the whole of the Nuanetsi sub-district right up to the end of the 1940s.¹⁵¹ Therefore, the Hlengwe migrant workers seem not to have helped in advancing any common ideology either Christian, political or social. These Hlengwe migrant workers were simple unschooled men who lacked the tools to initiate a discourse that promoted a new way of imagining Hlengwe identity apart from the *status quo* born of the initiation school. They appear to have remained loyal disciples of the Hlengwe initiation school where they were taught ‘*nawu*’ the Hlengwe laws, rules and regulations, customs and gender responsibilities, discussed in Chapter 2.

If the Hlengwe migrant workers played any major role in the matters discussed above, then it was done so secretly, or since NCs and colonial officials’ visits to Matibi 2 and Sengwe were not so frequent, the officials failed to notice it. This is why the reports of the NCs to the CNC confirmed the passive role of the Hlengwe in socio-political issues in the Nuanetsi sub-district. A report of the NC Chibi for 1925 says that “The natives have been peaceful and law-abiding. They are apathetic and backward in the extreme and evince no interest in any scheme.”¹⁵² In 1932 the Acting NC Nuanetsi also reported that:

Natives of this sub-district being generally peaceful and law-abiding and appear to evince but little interest in anything beyond their own domestic affairs. Nothing has been heard of any activity on the part of the ICU or similar bodies.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Houser, “*Let me tell you*,” 76.

¹⁵¹ NAZ, S1618, Report of the Assistant NC, Nuanetsi, for the quarter Ending 30th September 1951; NAZ, S2827/2/2/4/2, Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1956.

¹⁵² NAZ, S235/503, Annual Report of the NC, Chibi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1925.

¹⁵³ NAZ, S235/510, Report of the Acting NC Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31 December 1932.

Additionally, in 1946 the Assistant NC Nuanetsi also reported that “The District is peaceful and law abiding. Natives have money and are least interested in the troublous world outside.”¹⁵⁴ The ICU mentioned in the 1932 report was the Industrial Commercial Workers’ Union which was a radical movement of workers first formed in South Africa with the aim of creating one big union of workers south of the Zambezi. It sought to transfer the means of production from the capitalist class to the workers.¹⁵⁵ It mobilised workers and called for strikes in South Africa in the 1920s. Lucien van der Walt says that “...the rivers of labour flowing within the sub-continent profoundly shaped the spread of the ICU northwards from South Africa, which gave it an additional element of transnationalism.”¹⁵⁶ However, the Hlengwe migrant workers did not play the role mentioned by van der Walt on their return to Zimbabwe which may prove that they were not in the centres where it was highly active and as such did not participate in its activities or that their low level of education hindered the Hlengwe participation in its activities. Consequently, the Hlengwe migrant workers did not learn the ICU’s mobilisation skills which could have been handy back home in mobilising the Hlengwe to either form development associations or societies for Hlengwe advancement.

Wolmer believes that migrant labour helped in the transformation of Hlengwe culture as labour migration came to be viewed increasingly as a stage in a boy’s passage to manhood (*gayisa*).¹⁵⁷ However, this view is contested by Hlengwe ethnic activists who argue that *gayisa* is neither a Hlengwe term nor is it in common use in Zimbabwe.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, Wolmer should have borrowed the term and practice from some Shangaan group in South Africa, and applied it to

¹⁵⁴ NAZ, S235/518, Report of the Acting NC Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December 1946; NAZ, S235/510, Report of the Acting NC Nuanetsi for the year ended, 31st December 1932.

¹⁵⁵ Lucien van der Walt, “The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the IWW, and the ICU, 1904-1934”, *African Studies*, 66, 2-3, August-December, (2007): 239.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁵⁷ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 77.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Herbert Phikela, Chiredzi, March 24, 2016.

the Zimbabwean Hlengwe, which is highly problematic. This is actually the challenge of loosely applying the term Shangaan to denote the Hlengwe. In addition, Mr Herbert Phikela argued that among the Hlengwe nothing can be a substitute to the Hlengwe initiation school and for this reason many uninitiated Hlengwe boys in South Africa have been called back home by elders or their parents to attend the initiation school each time it is in session.¹⁵⁹

That the returning migrant workers were not so influential and failed to rise to become the elite is also reflected by the fact that even as late as 1952, whilst the greater Chibi district boasted of 19 black general dealers (shop owners), 5 butchers, 2 carpenters, 1 blacksmith, 3 Eating Houses, 3 mill sites, 5 tailors and 6 bakers, the whole of the Nuanetsi sub-district from Sengwe to Matibi 1 had none.¹⁶⁰ This means that the returning migrant workers were not the leading lights in socio-economic development by the 1940s. Most of these migrant workers did not invest their money into the development of their area or start small businesses or engage in any welfare scheme to benefit their communities. Most continued to follow their chiefs as mere commoners which was one of the cardinal teachings of the initiation school.

Therefore, the situation in Matibi 2 and Sengwe, unlike among the Manyika, did not allow for missionaries and migrant workers to play complementary roles in the invention of Hlengwe ethnicity and in influencing Hlengwe imagination of their identity. This was because missionaries failed to establish themselves among the Hlengwe till after 1939 and therefore failed to create a Hlengwe language, orthography and codify Hlengwe customs, which the migrant workers should have defended in the areas where they were working. The migrant workers were also not equal to the task of inventing Hlengwe ethnicity or creating a Hlengwe ideology. They were unschooled young men scattered in South Africa that even communication between them, which would have helped in the creation of a common ideology even among

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ NAZ, S2403/268, Report of the NC, Chibi for the Year Ended 31st December, 1952.

them, was difficult. In addition, these Hlengwe migrant workers were quite few and employed in menial jobs mainly in farming areas where they were not exposed to new ideas of group mobilisation. Therefore, the Rangerian model has serious limitations in explaining the growth of Hlengwe ethnic consciousness in the early phase of the colonial encounter up to the 1940s.

Hlengwe Responses to Missionary Teachings and to the Colonial Encounter.

The discussion above has shown that the creation of tribalism thesis does not adequately explain the growth of Hlengwe ethnicity during the period before the 1940s. This is so because the invention of ethnicity thesis depends on the availability of certain combinations of ideological players for the inventive process to happen. The key ideological players in the invention theory were either absent or ineffective in the Hlengwe area before the 1940s. In this section, we argue that the Hlengwe were not mere consumers of invented traditions and colonial policies. The Hlengwe responded to various colonial policies in ways that reflect a serious attempt to defend their ‘traditions’ even in times of change. They were influenced by an imagination of their precolonial identities. The effectiveness of Hlengwe responses to the colonial encounter can be summed up in the words of one frustrated NC who says in his report in 1946 that “The average native is not ready for Christian or civilised customs.”¹⁶¹ Such a remark is clear testimony to the effectiveness of African resistance to the so-called colonial civilising mission and its associated invented traditions or customs. In places where colonial rule was weak, like Hlengwe areas, the process of embracing colonial ideologies was very slow and in fact belated, with a number of precolonial ideologies and traditions perpetuated during the greater part of the colonial period. Hlengwe chiefs and commoners interpreted the new colonial policies in the context of their pre-colonial customs and beliefs and resisted to become mere consumers of colonial ideas.

¹⁶¹ NAZ, S235/432, NC, Shangani Reserve, in a letter to Provincial NC, Bulawayo, 9 November 1946.

One of the key markers of Hlengwe identity, which survived with little adjustment up to the 1940s, was that of early marriages and the pledging of the girl child for marriage to an older person who pays bride price to the parents when such a child is still young. Although the colonial regimes invented customary law and tried to regulate marriage practices among Africans, there was huge resistance in some African communities, especially the Hlengwe, to this colonial invention. By the 1950s when Allan Wright took over Nuanetsi district office as NC, he found out that there were no records of marriages that were solemnised and registered as required under the 1898 Order-in-Council Native Marriage Ordinance which was also amended in 1917 and 1929.¹⁶² The colonial administrative office there was understaffed for it to prioritise marriage registration.¹⁶³ Before 1939, there were also no missionaries who could have introduced new doctrines on marriage. When the FMC missionaries entered the area in 1939 with their Mozambican evangelists, one missionary Tillman Houser admits that there were contradictions in the interpretation of Christian weddings between them and the Hlengwe, with the latter resisting such missionary marital rites in favour of their own. Houser says that at one Hlengwe wedding, one Mozambican African Missionary in attendance disparagingly remarked, “We don’t do things this way in our church in Mozambique”,¹⁶⁴ showing that the Hlengwe were not merely accepting new traditions, but instead they renegotiated their marriage rituals and adopted what they felt was good for them. Unfortunately, Houser does not spell out what the Hlengwe were doing in their weddings or what the Mozambican African missionary felt was being wrongly done.

¹⁶² Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 3.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁶⁴ Houser, *Free Methodist and Other Missions*, 13.

Hlengwe resistance to the invention of customary law or created marriage customs is clearly shown when after two decades of the colonisation of Zimbabwe the NC Chibi's report for 1910 says of the Hlengwe,

The Marriage Ordinance does not appear to have done away with child marriages as natives still pay lobola for children and chance whether in the girls will have them when they are old enough to have the marriage registered, and in case they refuse they rely on custom and the sending of evil spirits (Ngosi) to have their cattle back.¹⁶⁵

In the 1950s and 1960s the practice of child pledging and accepting *lobola* payments for young girls was still rife among the Hlengwe. This is confirmed by Wright who states that:

Most of the young girls were (and probably still are in spite of strict laws against the practice) pledged to some future husband, often many years older than themselves, in return for some *lobolo* payments "on account." On reaching the age of puberty about 12 years she is despatched to her husband's home.¹⁶⁶

The perpetuation of this Hlengwe tradition was, according to one former African nurse at Chikomedzi hospital in 1956, embedded in the Hlengwe belief that the earlier a woman married the greater were her chances of having many children. The nurse further said that the Hlengwe believed that with each menstrual cycle a woman lost a child ("*wasati ulahla n'wana*") through losing her "eggs". Thus, a delay in marriage could mean a woman losing most of her "eggs" and there was fear that she would be incapable of bearing many children.¹⁶⁷ Surprisingly there was no clear Hlengwe specific reason for wanting to have many children besides the reasons common to most African and other developing subsistence economies. The reasons given by most interviewees included the need to increase the number of children to ensure the perpetuation of family traditions and to ensure the survival of some in the event of deaths (*vanwani vata hanya*). Children were also seen as source of labour (*kupfuna mintirho emutini*), mutual insurance and especially care of parents in old age (*ekuhlayisa vatsvali*).

¹⁶⁵ NAZ, NVC1/1/9 NC, Chibi, Report for the Year Ending 31 December, 1910.

¹⁶⁶ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 202.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Mrs R. Chisi, Ivone, Gweru, December 28, 2015.

Hlengwe value of children over-emphasised the positive function of having children.¹⁶⁸ What is clear is that the Hlengwe *tihosi* being the custodians of culture or group traditions were not willing to stop the practice of early marriages. Therefore, the *tihosi* and Hlengwe commoners never made any attempt to stop child pledging and early marriages. Wright confirms that, by 1958, *Hosi* Sengwe and his people were still running their own affairs independent of the colonial administrators, while Chauke notes that it was not only Sengwe, but all Hlengwe *tihosi*.¹⁶⁹ It is therefore clear that colonial administrators and missionaries were not inventors of Hlengwe marriage customs or traditions nor did they codify them. As already argued in the preceding chapter, the initiation school remained the chief enforcer of Hlengwe traditions including marriage traditions as this is where young girls and males were also taught about Hlengwe marriage practices.¹⁷⁰

The Hlengwe prided themselves in their own customs, and just like their Lemba neighbours who also resisted many colonial traditions, they saw themselves as a "...different and a special group."¹⁷¹ This emphasis on being different and unique is underscored by the Hlengwe resistance to resettlement in Karanga/Shona country north of the Runde River. In his report in 1909 cited elsewhere above Peter Forrestall, the NC Chibi district shows that the Hlengwe did not want to mix with the Karanga for fear that their wives would emulate the "bad" ways of the Karanga women who had no respect for their husbands.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Acheampong Y. Amoateng and Tim B. Heaton, "The Sociodemographic Correlates of Timing of Divorce in Ghana," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 20, 1 (1989): 79; B. Nauck, "Value of Children and the Framing of Fertility: Results from a Cross-Cultural Comparative Survey in 10 Societies," *European Sociological Review*, 23 No. 5 (Dec-2007): 616-617; Akbar Aghajanian, "The Value of Children in Rural and Urban Iran," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 19, 1 (Spring 1988): 85.

¹⁶⁹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 78; Chauke, "The Hlengwe Political System," 256.

¹⁷⁰ Chauke, "The Hlengwe Political System," 256.

¹⁷¹ D.C. Chigiga, "A Preliminary Study of the Lemba in Rhodesia," History Seminar Paper, University of Rhodesia 1971-72 Research Project, (September 1972), 1.

¹⁷² NAZ, NVC1/1/8, NC Chibi's Report on Native Reserves, 17 August, 1909.

Hlengwe resistance to being moved to *Makalaka* (Karanga) country was informed by their ethnic consciousness and a desire to safeguard their cultural practices from being diluted by ethnic others, the *Makalaka* (Karanga). The Hlengwe might have also tried to use the colonial logic of ‘tribes’ and difference in ways that helped them to stake claims to land. It was most probably a successful way of outwitting the colonial system by using the colonial logic. The fact that they were ready to be resettled in Transvaal than north of the Runde River shows that they imagined and believed in the oneness of Hlengwe-speaking people beyond the border and desired to remain in a territory of the Hlengwe than live among ethnic others. The notion of Hlengwe and Karanga ethnic and cultural zones in question were not a colonial invention but predated colonial rule. The Hlengwe, conscious of the existence of these zones, wished them to be maintained hence their resistance to being settled among the Karanga. In addition, this Hlengwe resistance was also motivated by the fear of loss of territorial sovereignty which would have entailed loss of identity through being swallowed by ethnic others. The fact that the colonial administrators did not move the Hlengwe into Karanga country was a victory for Hlengwe ethnicity.

The Hlengwe hunting tradition is another tradition which presumed primordial characteristics that colonial administrators failed to eradicate. This was in spite of the existence of laws prohibiting hunting. It has to be understood that although many African groups practised hunting, their difference with the Hlengwe was that among the Hlengwe hunting was a pre-colonial livelihood strategy adopted for survival in a harsh environment. The Hlengwe area is characterised by food shortages associated with dry conditions and in the absence of alternatives in the early colonial period, the Hlengwe had no reason to stop this practice. Given this magnitude of Hlengwe involvement in hunting, the Karanga and Duma speaking neighbours and even the European administrators used hunting as a Hlengwe identity

marker.¹⁷³ Even today most Hlengwe generally refer to themselves as “*vahloti*” (hunters). Most Hlengwe believe that they were born hunters and hunting is in their blood. By the 1950s the Hlengwe’s ‘illegal’ hunting activities were still rife in Nuanetsi district. This was noted by Wright who states that:

It is important to appreciate that, within the African community, there is absolutely no resistance to the snarer and nobody, from the chief through the school teacher right down to the simple peasant ostracises a man who cruelly ensnares wild animals regularly...the snarer is recognised as a man of standing in the community...¹⁷⁴

Prior to Wright’s coming to Nuanetsi sub-district, his predecessors and police details had developed an attitude that “...you could not stop a Shangane (Hlengwe) poaching...” and as a result snaring and hunting were being carried out with almost complete abandon.¹⁷⁵ To this end, irrespective of attempts to curtail the Hlengwe hunting tradition most Hlengwe continued to imagine themselves as a hunting community and as a result generated Hlengwe ethno-discourses of Hlengwe hunting prowess. The ethno-discourses were imagined to have started from time immemorial and as such justified Hlengwe poaching activities which wearied the early colonial administrators to the point of believing that it was unstoppable.

One senior *hosi*, most probably Mpapa because he is the only *hosi*, who even today is referred to by most Hlengwe as *Papa* (“Father”), is reported to have said to NC Wright, “Can I stop my followers from drinking water?”¹⁷⁶ This was after being asked to account for the snaring and hunting activities of his people. Thus, chiefs and their followers united in breaking the colonial law in their attempts to keep their traditions alive. Wright summarises this well when he states that “Some tribes are more active in the snaring field than others and I believe that the

¹⁷³ NAZ, N9/1/16, NC Chibi’s Annual Report for 1913; Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic,” 363; NAZ, L2/2/12/2, JCI Cooper on tour with Mr P. Walsh in the Chibi and Ndanga Districts, 6; NAZ, NVC2/1/1, NC Chibi, Annual Report for the year Ended 31st December 1913.

¹⁷⁴ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 142.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

Shanganes (Hlengwe) of our Lowveld rank as the most persistent in all Rhodesia.”¹⁷⁷ In later years even some Hlengwe government employees participated in illegal hunting. Wright cites two examples, one when an employee of the Nuanetsi Ranche ensnared game and killed four giraffes, a wildebeest, three impalas and one zebra in a five-week period, while a prison guard bought meat from the poacher.¹⁷⁸

The Hlengwe also took long to embrace the European notions of international boundaries and national identity because of the weaknesses of the colonial administration in enforcing policy in *Hlengweni*. W.M Songdell writing in a letter to the Administrator says,

The Portuguese Commandant of Messurize is not surprised to find natives moving across the border as ever, since the demarcation of the boundary they have been coming over to us on their own account and initiative... Any steps to prevent the migration will be impossible now unless very drastic measures are adopted.¹⁷⁹

The Hlengwe continued right up to the 1940s to imagine a “*Hlengweni*” which meant territory lying to the South of the Runde River and crossed into Mozambique. In Chapter 1, we have shown that, one small section of Hlengwe under Tobani who were moved to Ndanga (a separate district altogether from Nuanetsi) where they were a minority, maintained their territorial attachment to “*kwa Hlengweni*”.¹⁸⁰ The notion of *Hlengweni*, which developed in the precolonial times, delayed Hlengwe acceptance of the limitations of the Mozambique-Zimbabwe international boundary to their freedom of movement within *Hlengweni*. This is reflected by continuous Hlengwe movements across the border into Mozambique without passes and without informing government officials to source food in times of drought and evade taxation or to continue hunting.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 157-8.

¹⁷⁹ NAZ, A11/2/12/8-9, Civil Commissioner, W.M. Songdell to the Administrator, on the subject of border migrations, 16 January, 1902.

¹⁸⁰ NAZ, S1563, Report of the Native Commissioner Ndanga District for the year ended 31 December, 1934.

Many NCs' reports prove that there were frequent Hlengwe movements across the porous and unpoliced Anglo-Portuguese border. The 1914 report of the NC Chibi says that:

There is a slight increase in the population as compared with last year, owing to the shortage of food in the far southern portion of the district and there being a better crop of "*Wakwa*" oranges in Portuguese Territory during the year more natives have left the territory for Portuguese Territory than have come to this territory from there. ("*Wakwa*" correctly spelt "*hwakwa*" was an important element of the Hlengwe diet, unique to the Hlengwe as discussed in Chapter 2).¹⁸¹

By 1933, there were still fears among colonial administrators that the Hlengwe living along the border could move into Mozambique if put under some kind of pressure by colonial administrators. The CNC, in a letter to the Minister of Commerce and Transport, R.P. Gilchrist, on the subject of evicting Ngwenyeni and Shilotela's people from land envisaged to be a game reserve to dry Matibi 2 Reserve, said that if this move was carried out, "those living near the border would probably move into Portuguese territory."¹⁸² This shows that the colonial regime had not succeeded in creating the notion of southern Rhodesian citizens in them and that the Hlengwe were prepared to join their fellow Hlengwe in *Hlengweni* just across the border. Even in 1935, the NC Chipinga indicated that there was a Hlengwe chief called Mahenye who claimed to have subjects in Mozambique and the NC recommended that the chief be left untouched.¹⁸³ The NC feared that abolishing Mahenye's chieftainship would result in the chief crossing the border into Mozambique. Masivamele is also reported to have made claims of territory "...bounded by the Rhodesia/P.E.A. border commencing at Malvern as far as the Lundi R, thence up the Lundi R. This it turns out was the Headman's old area."¹⁸⁴ Masivamele's claim is undated but it was after his relocation from Gonarezhou. Thus, by the

¹⁸¹ NAZ, NVC2/1/1, Chibi District: Annual Report for the Year Ended 31st December 1914.

¹⁸² NAZ, S1542/G1/1, CNC, in a letter to the Minister of Commerce and Transportation, 13 November 1933.

¹⁸³ NAZ, S3271/1, NC, Chipinga, in a letter to Provincial NC Umtali, on CNC's Circular 287: NC Resolution by the Native Advisory Board on the abolition of Redundant Chieftainships, 7 October, 1948.

¹⁸⁴ MS22 (NAZ-Masvingo Records Centre), B.P. Kaschula's Report on The Masuamele Headmanship and Community: Chief Chitanga: Matibi II TTL, (1967), 73.

1940s the notion of *Hlengweni* still had great appeal among the Hlengwe who still made territorial claims to the area.

The European attempt to create the institution of Paramount Chief, which was unknown to the Hlengwe, and attempts to impose one on them was met with strong resistance by the Hlengwe even as early as 1898. The institution of Paramount Chief was a tradition based on European liking of clear-cut hierarchies of status in order to firm up networks of power and control over the Africans. However, most of the *tihosi* who were placed under the appointed Paramount Chief continued to operate as though the appointed Paramount Chief did not exist right up to the end of the 1940s and well into the 1950s. As early as 1898 Mpapa indicated that he was not willing to recognise Chitanga as his Paramount Chief and colonial threats had to be used to make him comply. Forrestall says in one of his reports:

...on the 12th August, I held an Indaba with Mparper (Mpapa) and informed him that he was in Company's territory (BSAC) and that the Portuguese had no authority over him and that all disputes would have to be referred to me and that he would have to recognise Chitanga as his Chief.¹⁸⁵

The other Hlengwe *tihosi* as well did not recognise Chitanga's authority and did not comply with his orders. B.P. Kaschula's delineation report indicates that even after 1935 and 1951, when most *tihosi*'s positions were reduced to that of Headmen, they refused to recognise Chitanga as their Paramount Chief. Kaschula in his report says that "Chief Chitanga's influence is virtually non-existent...it appears they respect him as their chief as long as he stays where he is...The title chief (paramount) as far as they are concerned is merely an honorary one."¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Wright confirms B.P. Kaschula's findings and says,

These three "headmen" (Masivamele, Chilonga and Mpapa) are to all intents and purposes chiefs as they acknowledge the sovereignty of Chitanga only in theory. The

¹⁸⁵ NAZ, NVC1/1/1, NC Chibi, Yearly Report, April 4th 1898.

¹⁸⁶ MS22 (NAZ-Masvingo Records Centre) B.P. Kaschula's Report on The Masuamele Headmanship and Community: Chief Chitanga: Matibi II TTL, 1967, 73.

relationship between them and their titular chief seems to be, “You stay in Matibi No.1 and don’t interfere with us down here and we will recognise you as our “Chief.”¹⁸⁷

This was also confirmed by some interviewees who said that the rejection of Chitanga as Paramount Chief by *tihosi* emanated from the fact that the Hlengwe did not believe in the institution of Paramount Chief and even in the pre-colonial times had no senior or junior *hosi* (chief) as they were all equal.¹⁸⁸ In 1900 Peter Forrestall realised this and listed most of the *tihosi* as paramount chiefs.¹⁸⁹ Forrestall in his 1912 report underscores the fact that all the *tihosi* were equal. He says:

The headmen under Chibi are of the same importance as the Chiefs Tshitanga, Vurumela, Sengwe – these headmen (Masuamela, Tshironga, Ngwenyenyi, Mpapa, Tshinana, Gezane, Samu) having been, even prior to the advent of the white men practically independent of Chibi in most matters.¹⁹⁰

At this stage Chief Chibi was treated as senior to Chitanga and all other chiefs and *tihosi* in the then Chibi District which encompassed Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas.

Thus, in the early colonial encounter, the Hlengwe were not mere imbibers of the imported or European created/invented traditions. The Hlengwe maintained their early marriages and payment of lobola against the Native Marriage Law amended in 1917 and 1929. In addition, the Hlengwe continued with their hunting activities which distinguished them from their Shona-speaking neighbours and breached the colonial boundaries which they continued to cross without passes into Mozambique. This also reflected a resistance to the concept of Rhodesian citizenship. The colonial creation of the institution of Paramount Chief was treated

¹⁸⁷ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 199.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with P. Chauke, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013; Tolola (Not real name) interviewed at his homestead in Gezani area in Sengwe Communal area, 09/07/2014.

¹⁸⁹ NAZ, N1/2/1-4, List of Paramount Chiefs, their sub-chiefs and Headmen in the Chibi District on 1st March 1900.

¹⁹⁰ NAZ, N3/4/1-2, NC Chibi, letter to Superintendent of Natives on the Subject Chiefs and Headmen: Chiefs and Order of Importance, 4th January 1912.

with contempt with the *tihosi* reduced to Headmen refusing to pay homage to the paramount Chief.

Conclusion

The creation of Hlengwe ethnicity up to the 1940s was not predominantly an exogenous process as there was very little interaction between Hlengwe and European administrators and missionaries. There were no permanent white residents in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas and the colonial administrative offices were very far away and understaffed to be able to enforce colonial demands and transform Hlengwe ethnic identity. This was worsened by a poor communication system and transport network between the administrative centres and the Hlengwe areas. The Europeans who were in the Hlengwe area in the early years of colonial rule were mainly illegal fortune seekers hence did not engage in social engineering work. Hlengwe migrant workers, unlike Ranger's Manyika migrant workers who helped to invent Manyika ethnicity, were not prominent ethnic activists. They were largely uneducated and their contact with other groups of Africans in South Africa did not do much to transform their consciousness as they seemed eager to acquire cloth and tax money and improve their homestead economy than engage in identity creation. These migrant workers were also scattered in different dispersed mines, farms and numerous labour centres in South Africa to be able to formulate a common Hlengwe ideology. Their marginal role in Hlengwe identity creation is testified by their inability to form any Hlengwe pressure groups, ethnic associations or even councils on their return. There was also a dearth of the educated elite since there were no missionary or government schools in Matibi 2 and Sengwe. Thus, the Hlengwe educated elite who would act as the Rangerian cultural brokers did not emerge in the absence of a school system. In addition, there were no community demonstrators in the study area to engage in community improving enterprises as was happening in Shurugwi district where some cultural practices were beginning to be affected by the ideas of conservation and centralisation and

modern farming methods whose architect was Emory Alvord. However, the failure of colonial administrators and missionaries to influence Hlengwe identity in this period was a result of overt and covert Hlengwe resistance to the feeble attempt at social engineering by these agents in an attempt to maintain the old or pre-colonial way of life. The Hlengwe resisted relocation into Karanga country as they feared that their women would be corrupted by Karanga women. Early marriages and child pledging continued unabated in the Hlengwe society. Uncontrolled Hlengwe movements in what their “mental maps” of Hlengwe space told them was *Hlengweni* which transcended colonial boundaries into Mozambique and South Africa continued. The Hlengwe also resisted the idea of Paramount Chief and rejected the imposition by FMC missionaries of the Mozambican *Tswa* language, marriage practices and crops. Therefore, the Hlengwe were neither mere recipients of missionary and colonial ideologies nor did they easily acquiesce to imposed identities and traditions. The Hlengwe’s ability to resist colonial and missionary orders in this phase meant that Hlengwe commoners and *tihosi* in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas continued to formulate and play an active role in their socio-cultural transformation in response to a new colonial socio-political order. Therefore, Msindo’s observations are justifiable when he says that:

...although the colonial state had within its power the ability to make laws...and enforce certain social aspects in defence of so-called colonial civility [it]...was also a disorganised institution...without a well-informed understanding of African systems and lacking close ties with African communities. Its inventive power was limited both by the colonisers, inadequate knowledge of their subject peoples and by their inability to enforce some of their new laws.¹⁹¹

Hlengwe identity formation exposes critical weaknesses and serious limitations of the invention of tribalism or ethnicity thesis. This thesis, while applicable in the Manyika context, does not adequately explain the growth of the Hlengwe ethnicity in the early colonial period

¹⁹¹ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 8.

up to the 1940s. Hlengwe identity formation happened without the agency of colonial administrators, missionaries, educated African elite and migrant workers.

Great change among the Hlengwe came after the opening of a new ethnic frontier with the coming of Ndebele and Karanga in the 1950s, which is the subject of the next chapter. At that stage the Hlengwe had to deal with new challenges threatening the “old” Hlengwe socio-cultural order. This necessitated a re-working and re-imagining of Hlengwe identity. Even though the laws and statutes did exist at national level, what mattered at the ground level was the enforcement, an area in which NCs were found wanting hence allowing the old African systems to be perpetuated.

CHAPTER 4

AFRICAN SETTLERS, COLONIAL ADMINISTRATORS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF HLENGWE ETHNICITY, 1950s-1960s

Introduction

This chapter explores the transformation of Hlengwe identity from the 1950s to the 1960s following the resettlement of the Karanga and Ndebele by colonial administrators in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. This development created avenues for a more differentiated way from the former of reworking Hlengwe identity within new broader political, social and economic contexts. BaHlengwe re-imagined their identity as they tried to cope with the Karanga and Ndebele influx, especially as claims to land mirrored ethnic loyalties. During this period, the number of ideological players increased in the Hlengwe communities to include colonial officials, Hlengwe commoners, Hlengwe *tihosi*, Karanga and Ndebele newcomers. However, although colonial authorities, missionaries, African educated elites, and new Karanga and Ndebele settlers were involved in the Hlengwe identity transformation process, it was not a top-down process but a complex process in which the Hlengwe commoners were also very active players.

Hlengwe and Their Encounter with Karanga and Ndebele Newcomers in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas

After World War II there was a major policy shift by the colonial regime with an emphasis on entrenching its segregationist policy that safeguarded white interests.¹ These included, among a host of other things, a fuller implementation of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and the enactment of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951.² The implementation of these policies

¹ I. Phimister, "Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context: Conservationism and Ideas about Development in Southern Rhodesia 1930-1950", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, 2 (1986):274.

² J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893-2003* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 39, 44-47; Pius S. Nyambara, "Madheruka and Shangwe: Ethnic Identities and the Culture of Modernity in Gokwe, Northwestern Zimbabwe, 1963-79", *Journal of African History*, 43 (2002):287-306.

by the colonial regime opened a new ethnic frontier in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas as non-Hlengwe, mainly Karanga and Ndebele, were resettled therein between 1952 and 1956, bringing together three different linguistic and cultural groups into closer contact. This resettlement was made possible due to colonial development work such as the sinking of boreholes. The Ndebele were mainly from Filabusi and most were resettled in Sengwe Communal area whilst some were resettled in Matibi 2's Chompani area. The Shona-speaking groups, mainly of Karanga origin, who came from Masvingo formerly Victoria District, Gutu District and Zvishavane (formerly Shabani District), were resettled in Matibi 2.³ Many more Ndebele and Karanga continued to settle into both Matibi 2 and Sengwe that in 1959, the NC, Nuanetsi, reported that "...a number of Natives from Gwelo, Selukwe, Belingwe, Shabani, Fort Victoria, Chibi and Filabusi had illegally taken up residence in various areas during the years 1952/57."⁴ In 1961 the same Native Commissioner further reported that "distant relatives of those who moved are still arriving to join families here. It would appear that this trickle will continue indefinitely."⁵ This population build-up generated resentment from the Hlengwe as it affected their farming, hunting pursuits, grazing lands and reduced land for the settlement of Hlengwe future generations.

Houser describes the coming of Karanga and Ndebele into Matibi 2 and Sengwe as a period of shock for the Hlengwe. Houser notes that "It is quite a traumatic experience to be conquered after one is accustomed to being the conqueror. The Hlengwe people may be undergoing that kind of shock."⁶ The "shock" resulted in a number of reactions from Hlengwe, which impacted heavily on Hlengwe ethnic-consciousness. One key result of the interaction between the Hlengwe and the newcomers was a congealing or hardening of Hlengwe identity, as Hlengwe

³ Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 492.

⁴ NAZ, S2827/2/2/7/3 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1959.

⁵ NAZ, S2827/2/2/8/3 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December 1961; NAZ, S2827/2/2/3/2 Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1955.

⁶ Houser, "The Extent of Karanga Speaking Spirit Possession," 1.

ethnicity or more closely ‘political tribalism’ was mobilised to defend Hlengwe heritage. The Hlengwe made strong claims based on ancestry and their history which justified their claims over land by virtue of being the “first-comers” and as such denied the new-comers rights over control of land in Matibi 2 and Sengwe. Bannerman says that the coming of the Karanga/Shona speaking people and Ndebele between 1952 and 1956 caused friction and “...the Hlengwe have not always welcomed the settlement of these people amongst them.”⁷ Hlengwe ethnicity was mobilised and manifested in contestations over land. The Karanga and Ndebele, but especially the former, were seen as intruders and land grabbers. The Karanga, who belonged to the bigger Shona group, were seen as arrogant people with hegemonic tendencies, ever wanting to dominate the Hlengwe. This saw Lisimati Mpapa, Lisenga Chilonga, Chabwa Chavani and a few other Hlengwe activists, who argued that Matibi 2 and Sengwe or *Hlengweni* belonged to the Hlengwe and their children, fighting hard to stop the resettlement of Karanga and Ndebele.⁸ A former Agricultural Demonstrator said in a recorded interview that the resettlement of new comers in Matibi 2 and Sengwe almost caused a Hlengwe uprising and the leader of this resistance, Lisimati Mpapa, personally went about pulling out pegs that marked boundaries of new lands where the new-comers were to be resettled.⁹ In the Chilonga area, Lisenga Chilonga, and in the Machindu area, Chabwa Chavani, were mentioned as the other Hlengwe men who challenged and interfered with activities of government agricultural officers. It was only after the NC, Nuanetsi, threatened to use force that Hlengwe resistance to Karanga settlement was put under check.¹⁰ However, as the demonstrator confirmed, the situation remained tense and Shona-speaking demonstrators were always being threatened by some Hlengwe as they went about their official duties.¹¹ Hlengwe resistance is the reason why G.L. Millar (DC Nuanetsi)

⁷ Bannerman, “Towards a History of the Hlengwe,” 492.

⁸ Interview with Aniel Kandai Chisi, (Agricultural Demonstrator in Matibi 2 and Matibi 1, 1956-1976) Plot 12 Mushandike Resettlement Scheme, Masvingo, February 23, 2013.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

states in a letter to the Provincial Commissioner (Victoria) that “I might add here that the attitude of most chiefs and Headmen in this District is one which makes working conditions of our agricultural staff very difficult.”¹² Lazarus Zanamwe, who hails from Matibi 2, said that the colonial administrators were forced to use borehole numbers as points of reference to identify Karanga areas of settlement in Matibi 2 because the area peg-markers were being uprooted by some angry Hlengwe.¹³ The Karanga were settled around boreholes which were numbered from J1 to J49. The boreholes had the advantage that they could not be easily uprooted at night and were also a valued source of water in the dry south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe.

By 1973, the Hlengwe resistance to Karanga settlement in Matibi 2 was still high in some areas as revealed by the Victoria Provincial Agricultural Officer’s report that:

Headman Mpapa is progressive as he wants to start Veld Management Projects. The trouble lies with his ‘council’. The council will not give land to the Karanga who came from Fort Victoria (Masvingo); they wish to drive these people out. The council talk to Mpapa and always get him to reverse his decisions. They will not do anything because of the Karanga ... The Shangaan in Matibi No.2, are at loggerheads with the Karanga.¹⁴

Mr Ailes Baloyi, former MP of Chiredzi South Constituency (Matibi 2 and Sengwe), also confirmed that the Hlengwe objected to the resettlement of the Karanga in Matibi 2. He stated that the Hlengwe anger was worsened by the violent suppression of dissenting voices among the Hlengwe and as a result there has not been any mutual understanding between the Karanga settlers and the Hlengwe autochthons.¹⁵ The rise of Hlengwe political tribalism underscores the importance of the notion of territory among the Hlengwe as a rallying point, as land was imagined as belonging to the Hlengwe ethnic community. Frustrations over the issue of land ownership following Karanga settlement united the Hlengwe who were imagining themselves

¹² PER4/MASIVAMELE/1/72, G.L. Millar (DC. Nuanetsi) in a letter to the Provincial Commissioner (Victoria Province) 21 July, 1972.

¹³ Discussion with Dr Lazarus Zanamwe, Geography Department, University of Zimbabwe, January 14, 2016.

¹⁴ NAZ, S2929/8/4 Nuanetsi District, Report of the Provincial Agricultural Officer, Victoria, T.W.F Jordan, 15 March, 1973.

¹⁵ Interview with A. Baloyi (Member of Parliament for Chiredzi South Constituency) Tshovani Township, Chiredzi, August 12, 2013.

as the rightful owners of the land against Karanga ‘Others’. Therefore, what was observed among the African communities by the Attorney General in 1916 was still applicable to the Hlengwe in the 1950s to the 1970s. In a letter to the Administrator in 1916, the Attorney General wrote, “At the present time, they (natives) cannot be brought to appreciate the connotation of the term “individual ownership,” in regard to land. They do not recognise it, except as to cultivated or actually occupied land”.¹⁶ *Hlengweni* was owned communally by the Hlengwe and imagined as Hlengwe space. This threat to squash them in what used to be Hlengwe open space heightened ethnic differences between the Hlengwe and the ethnic others, the latter being deemed outsider intruders.

The ethnicisation of land ownership in Matibi 2 created tensions which further intensified the ethnic divide between Karanga and Hlengwe. Mr C. D. Chirove, a Karanga village head from Masvingo district who was resettled in the Malisanga area under chief Mpapa, said that after the arrival of the Karanga, the Hlengwe chiefs and headmen started a parallel resettlement programme as they sought to safeguard their land by resettling Hlengwe families in areas set aside for the newcomers. This was irrespective of the fact that there was plenty of room elsewhere for resettlement as indicated by colonial officials’ reports and interviewees’ accounts which stated that *Hlengweni* was underpopulated.¹⁷ On being asked about the Hlengwe attitude towards the Karanga, a Karanga informant said, “*havatidi muno vanhu ava*” translated, “these people do not like us here.”¹⁸ The ethnic divide intensified because the Karanga also saw the settling of Hlengwe families among the Karanga as a Hlengwe encroachment onto Karanga land which the Karanga were entitled to by virtue of the government’s resettlement programme. The Karanga settlers had come to Matibi 2 willingly and had been assured by the colonial

¹⁶ NAZ, N3/16/9-10, The Attorney General (C.H. Tredgold) in a letter to the Administrator, 2 June 1916.

¹⁷ Interview with Tolola, Gezani area, Sengwe Communal Lands, July 09, 2014.

¹⁸ Interview with C. Anonymous, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

regime that they were being given their own lands since they were overcrowded and landless in their original homelands or districts where they were coming from.

It must be understood that this resettlement programme was unique in that prior to the eviction of the newcomers, selected Ndebele and Karanga elders and village heads had at government's expense been given chance to assess the suitability of Matibi 2 and Sengwe for settlement and had been satisfied that it was a good land. The new settlers, who had never owned such big pieces of land, were said to be very happy with their new big fields and grazing areas and were not willing to go back, but instead began to invite relatives who had remained behind in the crowded older colonial reserves.¹⁹ It is in this context that Houser describes this resettlement process as akin to Karanga and Ndebele colonisation of the Hlengwe area with the help of the Rhodesian government.²⁰ Sensing this threat of being squeezed out of their traditional hunting grounds and land in general, Hlengwe commoners with the support of their *tihosi* built homes among the Karanga without following the orderly resettlement pattern of homes in lines.²¹ This was easy to do for the Hlengwe by virtue of the fact that, though a certain amount of demarcation work had been done by 1958 and Karanga and Ndebele resettled on a Land Husbandry pattern, "...no actual allocation of farming or grazing rights had taken place..." in Matibi 2 and Sengwe.²² The *tihosi* supported the commoners in that even if the Karanga reported the matters to the *Hosi's court* no action was taken against the Hlengwe villagers.²³ The government officials also did not interfere with the Hlengwe who continued to take advantage of the government's administrative weaknesses and staff shortage to resist the new-

¹⁹ Interview with Mr Ndirowei, Malisanga School, Matibi 2, July 07, 2014; Interview with Calvin D. Chirove, Malisanga, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013; NAZ, S2827/2/2/7/3 Annual Report of the NC Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1959.

²⁰ Houser, "The Extent of Karanga Speaking Spirit Possession," 2.

²¹ Interview with Calvin D. Chirove, Malisanga, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

²² NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958; NAZ, S2827/2/2/7/3 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1959.

²³ Interview with Calvin, D. Chirove, Malisanga, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

comers. Thus, a short time after the settlements many Hlengwe homes emerged interspaced with Karanga and Ndebele homes as the Hlengwe refused to move and give way to the newcomers.²⁴

In other parts of Matibi 2 and Sengwe where relocation of newcomers took place, resource competition fuelled ethnic tensions, away from the state. The tension was over control of water sources. No ethnic group was to be found using the other group's borehole for the simple reason that water was a scarce resource and boreholes formed the basis of water supplies for livestock and humans.²⁵ Boreholes therefore became the resource whose access was closely tied to one's identity in the unwritten community law in Matibi 2 and Sengwe. In this way, Hlengwe ethnicity was solidified in response to competition over the scarce land and water resources. In the Chompani area, Borehole No.2 was borehole *yeMakaranga*²⁶ while Borehole No.3, close to *KwaMaNyathi*, was borehole *yemaNdebele*²⁷ (Ndebeles' borehole). Herbert Phikela said that among the young men, battles for boreholes were fought in the Boli-Mhlanguleni area if members of one ethnic group were found "stealing water" from another group's borehole. The unwritten rule was that the group nearest to the borehole became the owners or had right to use of the water before the ethnic others did.

It is true that by carrying out this rapid resettlement exercise, the colonial government officials created conditions for conflict but this made their role in the transformation of Hlengwe identity indirect. It was indirect in that the transformation was coincidental because the purpose for resettlement of Karanga and Ndebele had nothing to do with the creation of Hlengwe identity but other significant political and economic considerations discussed below. It is significant to

²⁴ Interview with Sonny Mabhulo Ncube, Chompani, Matibi 2, July 15, 2014.

²⁵ NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958.

²⁶ Interview with an elderly woman called by the name of Tete Mai Erisha, Chompani, Matibi 2, July 15, 2014.

²⁷ Interview with Sibezwile Dlodlo, Chompani, Matibi 2, July 15, 2014; Interview with Gogo Manyati, Mrs George Dlodlo, Chompani, Matibi 2, July 15, 2014.

note that from the time of the settlement of the Karanga and Ndebele in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas Hlengwe political tribalism was one form of ethnic identity which co-existed with moral ethnicity, and it manifested in competition for resources especially the land and other community resources.

Naming and Stereotyping in the Transformation of Hlengwe Identity: 1950s-1960s.

Hlengwe identity, following the resettlement of Karanga and Ndebele in Matibi 2 and Sengwe, changed in a radical manner with the politics of ethnic naming, labelling and stereotyping taking centre stage. Elsewhere, Terence Ranger and those in support of his version of social constructivism overemphasise the role of African elites, missionaries and the colonial officials in identity formation. Transformations in the identities of indigenous groups in the Shangani Reserve of northern Matabeleland are ascribed to ‘modernity’, with missionary trained evictees taking a prominent part whilst in the Gokwe area it was the more ‘modern’ “Madheruka” immigrants.²⁸ The history of Hlengwe interactions with the Karanga and Ndebele is fascinating in that unlike in the Gokwe area where some of the newcomers were well trained farmers and reasonably educated, in Sengwe and Matibi 2 Reserves, some of the newcomers were generally poor; uneducated or only had basic education. They had not been brought to the area on a ‘civilising mission’ but only came as landless “natives” desperately looking for a place to make home.²⁹ The new settlers were victims of colonial attempts to address new challenges of a colonial political economy whose primary goal was to safeguard white commercial interests.

²⁸ Alexander, and McGregor, “Modernity and Ethnicity in a Frontier Society,” 187-201; Nyambara, Pius S., “Madheruka and Shangwe: Ethnic Identities and the culture of Modernity in Gokwe, North-Western Zimbabwe, 1963-79”, *Journal of African History*, 43, (2002):287-306.

²⁹ Interview with C.D. Chirove, Malisanga, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013; Interview with “Mbuzizinengi” Dube, (Claimed to be the oldest surviving member of the Filabusi evictees), Malapati, Sengwe Communal Area, July 11, 2014; Interview with Group of elders, Gonese village, Chanienga, Matibi 2, July 16, 2014; NAZ, S2827/2/2/4/2 Report of the NC, Gutu, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1956; NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958; NAZ, S1618, Report of the NC, Filabusi:

The arrival of Karanga and Ndebele settlers changed the significance attached to the name Hlengwe, as they helped to imprint the term “Shangaan” when referring to the Hlengwe. Previously the colonial administrators had used Hlengwe and Shangaan interchangeably in colonial records and documents. Before their departure for Matibi 2 and Sengwe, the newcomers were told by colonial administrators that they were being resettled among the Shangaan people.³⁰ In this regard it is correct to say that the Karanga and Ndebele worked in unison with the Native Commissioners Collin Loades and Allan Wright to popularise the Shangaan appellation in denoting the Hlengwe. At the time it does not seem like the Shangaan appellation was perceived in negative terms by the Hlengwe. Phikela said that some accepted the Shangaan label because it was associated with the mighty Gaza kingdom and took pride in its exploits in countering negative labelling by the Karanga.³¹ However, the popularisation of the term Shangaan happened more in the day-to-day interaction between the newcomer commoners and the Hlengwe.

As explained by Elizabeth MacGonagle, labels given by ethnic ‘others’ tend to stick as powerful identifiers that come to be appropriated by ethnic groups.³² In the same vein, the Hlengwe came to tolerate the Shangaan label which came into use more than the Hlengwe label. Previously, various NCs had used in colonial documents the appellations Hlengwe and Shangaan interchangeably, but the Karanga and Ndebele who were told by Native Commissioners that they were going to the land of the Shangaan did not care much to learn about the preferred self-identification of the Hlengwe and continued to use the term Shangaans or “*Machangani*” or “*Tshanganis*” to refer to the Hlengwe. The Hlengwe appeared powerless

Insiza District for the Quarter ended 31 March, 1952; NAZ S1618, Report for the Assistant NC, Fort Rixon, Quarter Ending 31 March, 1952.

³⁰ Interview with Paradzai Zvokureva, Chanienga, Matibi 2, July 15, 2014; Interview with Dube, “Mbuzizinengi” (Claimed to be the oldest surviving member of the Filabusi evictees) Malapati, Sengwe Communal Area, July 11, 2014.

³¹ Interview with Herbert Phikela, (Founder and Director, Gaza Trust), Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

³² MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity*, 96.

at the time to refuse the label which had been used from the days of the Gaza kingdom to survive attacks by Soshangane's Nguni. Although, the term Shangaan was popularised ahead of Hlengwe from the 1950s onwards, the Hlengwe *tihosi* guarded the institution of *vuhoi* (chieftaincy) by ensuring that only autochthonous Hlengwe ascended the throne. To this effect Hlengwe inheritance to the throne follows the system of primogeniture, where only the eldest son of the *hosi* by his first wife inherits the throne.³³ Only imagined "pure" Hlengwe *tihosi* have control over the land in the whole of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas. The term Shangaan, it should be noted, is a generic term and lacks any ethnic meaning to the Hlengwe. It generally connects the Hlengwe to an international, cosmopolitan Shangaan group identity shared by communities in Mozambique and South Africa which operate under the same name. The FMC missionaries who worked more closely in terms of day to day interaction with the Hlengwe preferred to use the Hlengwe appellation instead of the Shangaan label.³⁴

The resettlement of Karanga and Ndebele also re-configured the sense and significance attached to the name Hlengwe or "Shangaan," to one of contempt or ridicule through naming and labelling that occurred between the Hlengwe and the newcomers. Being Hlengwe was seen by the newcomers as belonging to the lower social classes and being primitive when compared to Karanga and Ndebele identity. Hlengwe identity therefore changed significantly as the Hlengwe either adopted or rejected features imposed on them by the newcomers and colonial administrators. Naming as used in this case is best described by John Lonsdale when he says that "...the inner and outer faces of identity are admittedly inseparable. To illuminate what is

³³ PER4/SENGWE/74, P.F. Parsons (DC. Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria), 9 April 1974; PER5 HM/Chilonga/68, N.D. Sinclair (DC, Nuanetsi) to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria Province), 13 May, 1969; PER5/10/60, A. Wright (NC. Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Native Commissioner (Victoria), 12 December, 1960; PER5/GEZANI/78, G.D.K. Barlow (DC. Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria), 18 August 1978.

³⁴ Tillman Houser, *Let me tell you...A Memoir*, (USA: Self-Publication, 2007); Tillman Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions in Zimbabwe*, (Harare: Priority Projects Publishing, 2000); Tillman Houser, "The Extent of Karanga Speaking Spirit Possession Among the Hlengwe in Rhodesia," History of Central African Religious Systems Conference: Lusaka, August 30-September 8, (1972):1-10.

‘our own’ darkens the shadow of “the other.”³⁵ In the process of naming, different ethnic communities try hard to illuminate each other’s dark side in the day-to-day interactions; in competition for resources such as shared water sources and land in rural areas, at the market, at social gatherings such as cultural festivals, beer drinking parties, sports fields and in schools or in short in the shared social space. This happens because usually when strangers meet perceptions are quickly built based on what is observable at the point of encountering each other, with other perceptions developing, disappearing or being modified as spheres of interaction expand.

Naming had serious implications for the transformation of Hlengwe identity with regards to Hlengwe self-image or how being Hlengwe in general was imagined. There was both positive and negative development of Hlengwe identity. Recasting Hlengwe image in a negative manner resulted in the creation of an inferiority complex. Consequently, some Hlengwe in reworking their ethnic identity chose to reject the Hlengwe name and adopted what they perceived to be better ethnic identities. However, some radical Hlengwe, especially the elderly, defended their ethnic identity than abandon it and at times accepted modifications to certain cultural aspects or traditions. Therefore, to some Hlengwe naming weakened them, while to others, it reinforced their ethnic identity by magnifying differences between them and ethnic others.

The interviews that I conducted and recorded in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas revealed that being Hlengwe represented everything that the newcomers were not in almost every aspect of life. In popular Ndebele and Karanga discourses, the Hlengwe were cast as “backward” and “primitive” neighbours. These new-comer descriptions of the Hlengwe are similar to Worby’s findings about the Shangwe of north-western Zimbabwe who were depicted

³⁵ John Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: The Problem,” in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (eds), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Book II: Violence and Ethnicity*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1992):268.

as "...ignorant and even defiant, of the culture of modernity."³⁶ This is also corroborated by Alexander, McGregor and Ranger who argue that in north-western Zimbabwe the Ndebele also described their neighbours in ethnic and derogatory terms. All aspects of life ranging from diet, attire, deportment, gender relations, to how homes were built and kept, how fields were tended, others' attitudes towards education, and many other economic and social issues were viewed in ethnic terms.³⁷

Almost all the Ndebele and Karanga had similar perceptions about the Hlengwe. The latter's diet was said to be offensive as they ate certain animals that the new-comers did not eat such as *makwahle* (monitor lizards), *makutla* (bull frogs) which Karanga and Ndebele mockingly called *homu yatatani* (Hlengwe phrase for 'the father's cow') and *svibotse* (tortoises), all associated with 'primitive' diets.³⁸ Mrs Manzini typified this hatred of the Hlengwe diet when she graphically described it as "*idhothi yonke*"³⁹ (they ate all sorts of rubbish) as it included boiled old animal skins which the Hlengwe ate in times of famine.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Hlengwe were described as a people who consumed rotting meat, infested with worms.⁴¹

In terms of health, the Hlengwe were labelled as a "dirty people" who shunned bathing. Hlengwe women were described as not willing to take off their clothes when bathing and bathed mostly the top half of the body, without soap, and rarely cleaned their private parts.⁴² For this reason the Karanga mocked the Hlengwe saying *Jangani harigezi rine tsvina* (Shangaans don't bath, they are a dirty people). *Jangani* is a derogatory term referring to a

³⁶ Worby, "Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games," 389.

³⁷ Alexander, *etal*, *Violence and Memory*, 55.

³⁸ Interview with James Mupereri, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014;

³⁹ Interview with Mrs Mafidhi Manzini, Malapati, Sengwe Communal Area, July 12, 2014.

⁴⁰ Interview with Morosi Dube, (businessman at Malapati Business Centre) Malapati, Sengwe Communal area, July 11, 2014.

⁴¹ Interview with group of Gonese Village elders, Chanienga, Matibi 2, July 16, 2014.

⁴² Interview with group of Gonese Village elders, Chanienga, Matibi 2, July, 16, 2014; Interview with Mr Mkhaphe, Makosiya, Matibi 2, July 18, 2014.

Hlengwe person in general. The Karanga even had songs like, *Machangana mvura yakanaya gezaivo*, translated, “Shangaans! The rains have fallen, take a bath!”⁴³ The Hlengwe were even labelled names such as *Mambwende*, which means cowards. Some Karanga went to the extent of labelling the Hlengwe as cannibals. These Karanga argued that the secrecy maintained in the circumcision lodges was to cover up for the evils of eating human flesh from the removed foreskins, which the Karanga people alleged that the Hlengwe would boil and eat. However, these allegations were vehemently denied by my Hlengwe informants.⁴⁴ Hlengwe women were also termed bad dressers who wore *imbikiza* or *swibabela* leaving the breasts exposed.⁴⁵

The Hlengwe were also associated with laziness and poor agricultural practices. This perception was confirmed by colonial administrators and partly admitted by some of my Hlengwe informants who stated that they only planted crops on small patches of land.⁴⁶ Mrs Esther Tolola had this to say of the Hlengwe, “*avaku Muchangana angasvikoti kutirha masin’wini*”, (they (Karanga) said a Shangaan cannot work in the field). The Hlengwe were said to be people who broadcast seed and did not remove weeds from the fields. An informant said that most did not cultivate their fields so much that their crops were choked by weeds. The informant further said that most of the Hlengwe were so lazy that they would weed the fields with hoes while sitting down.⁴⁷ While the Ndebele and Karanga called the Hlengwe lazy farmers, the colonial administrators also described the Hlengwe as “...lackadaisical agriculturalists, untidy hut-builders and not even good stockmen – they do not emulate the Ndebele, their cousins who are fine cattlemen.”⁴⁸ What is missing from these stereotypical narratives is the story of how colonial officials failed to develop this area for close to 60 years

⁴³ Interview with Musisinyani Mundau, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013; Interview with Mrs Mapimele, Gezani area, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

⁴⁴ Interview with Musisinyani Mundau, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013.

⁴⁵ Interview with group of Gonese Village elders, Chanienga, Matibi 2, July 16, 2014.

⁴⁶ Interview with Ramakiri Chikahu, Hosi Chilonga’s Court, Matibi 2 Communal Area, July 02, 2014.

⁴⁷ Interview with Pachipo Malvern Manhumba, Masivamele area Matibi 2, July 17, 2014.

⁴⁸ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 201.

since the colonisation of the country. This, left the Hlengwe generally cut off from interacting with other communities where agricultural practices were changing. There was nothing inherently Hlengwe in their not having sufficient farming skills, but this became a feature by which the Hlengwe were identified with by 'ethnic others' and many Hlengwe accepted it.

In the naming and stereotyping that occurred in Matibi 2 and Sengwe, the colonial administrators also played significant role in influencing the different ethnic groups' perceptions of each other. However, colonial officials were not solely responsible for creating or inventing the damaging stereotypes that the different ethnic groups created about each other. The colonial administrators played their role just before evictees were relocated to the new areas and were being informed about the character of people they were going to meet or when originals were being briefed on the characters of people coming to their area. It was a common practice of the colonial administrators to portray very negative images of one ethnic group to the other. For example, in the Shangani Reserve in north-western Zimbabwe the original Shangwe were told that the coming Ndebele settlers were "...witches and thieves and have venereal diseases."⁴⁹ Alexander *et al* say that this was part of the divide and rule tactics of the white men to destroy any possibility of socio-political cohesion in the new inter-ethnic community, which colonialists feared would create new problems for the colonial administrators especially in the light of the rise of nationalist politics.⁵⁰

The colonial administrators entrenched fear and suspicion between the Hlengwe and the newcomers by adding an element of surprise to the resettlement exercise. The Karanga and Ndebeles were dropped at boreholes at night and the Hlengwe would wake up to find in their area groups of strangers who they knew very little about except what they were told by the NCs

⁴⁹ Alexander, *etal*, *Violence and Memory*, 54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 54; Worby, "Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games," 379.

that another different kind of people would come. This made positive interaction very difficult in the early years of contact. To the Karanga and Ndebele the NC emphasised that the Hlengwe were “...still very primitive...” and “...scorn the trappings of our civilisation and tolerate nothing more.”⁵¹ Mr Dube said that they had been told four things about the Hlengwe by the colonial administrators; that they were uneducated people, poor agriculturalists, ignorant people or people of little knowledge and that “...*abehlala egangeni*” (they lived in the bush or were bush people).⁵²

The Hlengwe also said that the NCs impressed upon them that the Karanga and Ndebele were bad people and that they were not to marry or establish friendly relations with them. One informant said that the NC, Allan Wright, had told the new settlers that “*Machangana ivanhu vantsama kahle ne van 'wani. Vahava huwa. Rixaka rorhula.*” (Shangaans live well with other people. They are not given to violent behaviour. They are peaceful people).⁵³ In other words as stated by other informants, Wright was implying that the other groups were bad people. It was also stated by one informant that Wright told headman Mpapa that, “*vanhu vandanyisa indururani, vanonetsa. Musamwa mvura yavo, musaroora vana vavo,*” which is translated to mean “The people I have brought to you are mischief makers, they are troublesome. You should neither drink their water nor let your children marry among them.”⁵⁴ Another Hlengwe informant said that they were advised by the NC not to befriend or marry among the Karanga for the reason that Karanga women beat their husbands with cooking sticks.⁵⁵ A Karanga informant, Pachipo Manhumba confirmed that the Hlengwe were told that Karangas were witches and thieves.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 201.

⁵² Interview with “Mbuzizinengi” Dube, Malapati, Sengwe Communal Area, July 11, 2014.

⁵³ Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014.

⁵⁴ Interview with Herbert Phikela, (Founder and Director of Gaza Trust) Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

⁵⁵ Interview with Sisel Kasha Dumela, Chilonga High School, Matibi 2, December 04, 2013.

⁵⁶ Interview with Pachipo Malvern Manhumba, Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 17, 2014.

Wright proves in his book that he believed that the Karanga were thieves while the Hlengwe were honest people, and he shared these ideas with the Hlengwe. He says:

Shanganes (Hlengwe)...can also evoke admiration by their transparent honesty and fierce pride in themselves, their language and their past history. I would happily leave my car with doors unlocked and clothes and personal effects if I was in a true Shangane area. If anything were stolen, I would know that some wandering member of another tribe had been responsible. Thieves are not tolerated by the true Shangane.⁵⁷

Wright also mentions his conversation with two Hlengwe elders who came to him complaining about the newcomers saying, “Their (newcomers’) children are teaching our children to steal.”⁵⁸ Thus, colonial administrators portrayed the Hlengwe as honest people and the Karanga as thieves. However, colonial administrators also depicted the Karanga as “civilised” and “modern”, while the Hlengwe were represented as backward and primitive. In so doing the colonial administrators played a part in building and reinforcing negative African perceptions about each other, which were interpreted in ethnic terms by the Hlengwe, Karanga and Ndebele.

All this naming and labelling saw the Hlengwe reworking their identity and aspects of its content and traditions. They defended and in other instances modified aspects that they could whilst as individuals some virtually abandoned some practices and succumbed to the inferiority complex associated with the Hlengwe label and feigned other identities. It can therefore be argued that, one of the earliest Hlengwe responses was the mobilisation of Hlengwe ethnicity as a resource in defence of cultural space and hegemony which was under threat of being squeezed out by a ‘superior’ culture. This manifested in the form of the Hlengwe engaging in some form of counter stigmatisation and stereotyping of their new neighbours.

The Hlengwe referred to Karanga as *Manyai* but there does not appear to have been any derogatory term used to refer to the Ndebele. As stated by Philip Chauke, when used by the

⁵⁷ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 201.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

Hlengwe, the term *Munyai* is derogatory.⁵⁹ It signifies everything that the Hlengwe are not and it made the Karanga feel their otherness, and that they did not belong to the area. The absence of a derogatory Hlengwe term for Ndebele and *vice-versa* probably shows that there was greater competition or rivalry between the Karanga and Hlengwe than between the Hlengwe and Ndebele. This is because the Ndebele that were brought to Sengwe and Matibi 2 were too few when compared to the Karanga. Only about 10 Ndebele families were resettled in Chompani near Chikombedzi.⁶⁰ Also the Ndebele's awareness of their numerical inferiority and consequent vulnerability must have made them adjust and adopt some aspects of the Hlengwe culture such as circumcision earlier than the Karanga. T.W.F. Jordan in his report says that the Ndebele at Chikombedzi "...get on well with Headman Mpapa."⁶¹ This may have also been helped by the general and misinformed Hlengwe belief that the Hlengwe and Ndebele have the same ancestral roots. Old man Mbokota even said that "Ndebele were brought here (Sengwe Communal Area) because they are *maNgoni* like us."⁶² *MaNgoni* when used by the Hlengwe refers to Soshangane's Gaza Nguni. Mr Makondo and *Hosi* Sengwe, said in separate interviews that the Ndebele adoption of Hlengwe culture was quick as opposed to the Karanga who openly resisted.⁶³ This is a sign that relations between Ndebele and Hlengwe became more cordial with time than were Karanga-Hlengwe relations.

The Hlengwe called the Karanga all sorts of bad names they could think of. They called them *Mabhinya*⁶⁴ (murderers) and *valoyi*⁶⁵ (witches). An informant said that the Karanga were

⁵⁹ Interview with Philip Chauke, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013.

⁶⁰ Interview with a woman called Gogo Manyati (Mrs Dlodlo), Chompani, Matibi 2, July 15, 2014.

⁶¹ NAZ, S2929/8/4 Nuanetsi District, Report of the Provincial Agricultural Officer, Victoria, T.W.F Jordan, 15 March 1973.

⁶² Interview with Mbokota, Dhumazi, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

⁶³ Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi business centre, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014; Interview with Makoti Sengwe, (Paramount Chief) Sengwe Communal area, July 11, 2014.

⁶⁴ Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi business centre, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014; Interview with Philip Mbiza, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

⁶⁵ Interview with Kokwani Shamba Zananwe, Village 12 Mushandike Resettlement Scheme, Masvingo, July 08, 2013; Interview with Pachipo Malvern Manhumba, Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 17, 2014.

witches because “*zvidhoma*” (ghosts) were heard chatting on buses and huge open-trucks that ferried them to Matibi 2.⁶⁶ However the Hlengwe naming of the Ndebele was not as intensive as that between the Hlengwe and Karanga. The Hlengwe also castigated Karanga newcomers’ inabilities and the nature of their civic virtue. The Hlengwe described the Karanga as “*Makalanga (Karanga) angasvikoti kukhanda and vahava nawu*” (Karangas are not good at pounding grain cereals and are immoral).⁶⁷ The Hlengwe also believed that they had better clothing than the Karanga. Unlike young Shona males, the Hlengwe did not wear *migwada* (loin cloths). It was argued that for this reason the Hlengwe called the Karanga “*Munyai wa chideka*” (A Munyai who wears a loin cloth).⁶⁸ The Karanga and Ndebele were also called *maxuvurhi*⁶⁹ (“*xu*” is pronounced ‘shu’) meaning the uncircumcised, immoral and uncultured people. The Hlengwe prided themselves in moral behaviour and decency, which was supposedly, inculcated in their initiation schools which the Karanga did not have. The Hlengwe also boasted about their hunting prowess, whilst they mocked the Karanga men for eating small animals like mice and squirrels which was game for little boys still learning the art of hunting. Tolola said that the Hlengwe also mocked Karanga men and women as people who would spend a whole night watching over the hole of an animal as small as a squirrel hoping to catch it.⁷⁰ Some issues had to do with comportment as the Hlengwe saw new-comer women of both Ndebele and Karanga origin as people of loose morals who neither feared nor respected men, including their husbands. Karanga and Ndebele women were also called “*mahule*” (prostitutes)⁷¹ as they spoke freely with their men, which the Hlengwe considered an anathema. Even today this difference is observable between Hlengwe and non-Hlengwe women. In my research Hlengwe women would just greet me and disappear or if I got to a place where

⁶⁶ Interview with Mr Mapimele, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

⁶⁷ Interview with Mrs Esther Tolola, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

⁶⁸ Interview with Mrs Mapimele, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

⁶⁹ Interview with Shepherd Hanyani, Midlands State University, Gweru, November 13, 2013.

⁷⁰ Interview with Tolola, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

husbands were not present the women would refuse to be interviewed, insisting that they “did not know” or that it was only the husbands who knew the answers. The common frustrating response that commoner Hlengwe women would give to almost every question was “*anithivi*” (I don’t know). Shona women were also called *maraha njovo* (one who kicks the skin). The Hlengwe interpretation of the behaviour of Karanga women was that they were careless people who in their manner of walking would expose their nakedness as they could not keep the skins they were wearing firmly in position. These differences were taken as ethnic identity markers.

One area in which Hlengwe ethnicity continued to be articulated in the early years of interaction was through refusal by the Hlengwe to have their children marry among the Karanga and Ndebele. This, to some extent, was also assisted by Ndebele ethnicity as reflected by Ndebele refusal to have their children marry among the Hlengwe. In the early years of their settlement in Sengwe and Matibi 2 the Ndebele are said to have preferred to marry amongst themselves. They would leave Nuanetsi and “...go to Filabusi to look for wives and to Nkayi and Lupane.”⁷² At times the Hlengwe used force to stop their children from marrying among the new-comers. One young woman, Muhlava Dhuladhula Manyise of the Makambe area in Matibi 2, who wanted to marry a resettled Karanga man, Silvester Nyama, is said to have been followed by her father who beat her in the presence of the Agricultural Demonstrator and his wife where she had gone to take refuge.⁷³ However, by the 1970s the custom was breaking down and more young people were marrying anyone they wanted from Ndebele, Karanga and Hlengwe.⁷⁴ But as stated by an informant, Mbuya Midzi, all the young people that married amongst the Hlengwe were forced to undergo the circumcision or *tikhomba* ordeal in order to

⁷² NAZ, S2929/8/4 Nuanetsi District, Report of the Provincial Agricultural Officer, Victoria, T.W.F Jordan, 15 March, 1973

⁷³ Interview with Rulani Chisi, (Nurse at Chikombedzi Mission Hospital from 1956) Village 12 Mushandike Resettlement Scheme, Masvingo, February 23, 2013.

⁷⁴ NAZ, S2929/8/4 Nuanetsi District, Report of the Provincial Agricultural Officer, Victoria, T.W.F Jordan, 15 March, 1973.

be accepted by their Hlengwe-in-laws.⁷⁵ Thus, marriage became central in the assimilation of new-comers into the Hlengwe culture. However, the Hlengwe custom of arranged marriages began to breakdown as well.

There were several other changes that took place in the status and content of Hlengwe identity. One negative key change that took place among the Hlengwe as a result of this incessant naming and labelling was the development of inferiority complex. This resulted in many Hlengwe elevating Karanga and Ndebele identities as superior to Hlengwe in the new imagination of Hlengwe identity. The Hlengwe in this phase of transformation of their identity became objects of scorn in the shared social space. As Phikela said, some Hlengwe sunk and abandoned their identity and language and went to live in urban areas in Mashonaland.⁷⁶ Another informant, Josefa Chauke, said that most of these Hlengwe adopted new Karanga names and the Karanga way of life and where one's Hlengwe name was *Tsakani* (Rejoice) it became *Farai*, its Shona equivalent.⁷⁷

One major aspect that contributed to the emergence of an inferior Hlengwe identity in the 1950s to 1960s was the lack of 'modernisation' in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas due to the colonial government's failure to effectively occupy these marginal areas. Wright notes that "Nuanetsi, like so many lowveld areas at the time had been completely neglected and nobody appeared to appreciate its great potential."⁷⁸ Because of neglect *Hlengweni* missed out on programmes such as E.D. Alvord's demonstration work and centralisation projects which were credited for initiating a "Social Revolution" in other parts of Zimbabwe where they were implemented.⁷⁹ Demonstration had promoted better farming methods which helped increase

⁷⁵ Interview with Mbuya Midzi, Masivamele, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

⁷⁶ Interview with Herbert Phikela, (Founder and Director of Gaza Trust), Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

⁷⁷ Interview with Josefa Chauke, Hippo Valley Estates, Chiredzi, June 23, 2013.

⁷⁸ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 2.

⁷⁹ NAZ, S1563 Annual Report of the Director of Native Agriculture (E.D. Alvord) for the Year, 1946.

crop yields. Centralisation, which was the separation of arable and grazing lands, helped to improve the grazing areas and the quality of livestock. The programmes had also resulted in the adoption of progressive attitudes towards life and a desire for higher standards of education and life among the Karanga/Shona and Ndebele.⁸⁰ The Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas that were not affected by this social revolution lagged behind in terms of social development. Thus, there were no visible signs of modernisation, such as good brick houses, toilets, well laid out fields and grazing areas, and there was no hunger for education or the European way of life. Even some Hlengwe chiefs had poorly built huts. Wright's description in 1958 of *Hosi* Masivamele's homestead typifies this as he says;

I was struck by the dilapidated nature of this Headman's kraal. It consisted of three derelict huts of pole and daga which even lacked the customary Shangane veranda...ten years later he was still living in the same ragged structures.⁸¹

The absence of the markers of 'modernisation' and 'civilisation' resulted in Karanga and Ndebele negatively stereotyping the Hlengwe. This was rubbed in, in the ensuing ethnic discourse and debates in the shared social space in the rural areas of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas where being Hlengwe was associated with everything negative. Therefore, to some being Hlengwe became an identity of shame because it now signified backwardness. Even uneducated Karanga and Ndebele imagined themselves as being better than the Hlengwe by virtue of their ethnic identities. Being Karanga or Ndebele meant being "enlightened" or modern, while being Hlengwe signified being "uncivilised" or "primitive". This way, Hlengwe as an inferior identity was reinforced by Karanga and Ndebele.

The development of Hlengwe inferiority complex was also a function of a school system which promoted the use of Karanga/Shona speaking teachers who had a low opinion of the Hlengwe.⁸²

⁸⁰ NAZ, S1563 Annual Report of the Director of Native Agriculture (E.D. Alvord) for the Year, 1946.

⁸¹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 24.

⁸² Interview with Phikela Herbert, (Founder and Director of Gaza Trust), Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

This resulted in serious communication breakdown between the teachers and Hlengwe pupils to whom Karanga/Shona was a foreign or strange language. As a consequence, early years in school were “like torture” to the Hlengwe pupils as many soiled themselves as they lacked the “appropriate” language to communicate that they wanted to visit the public conveniences. This embarrassed the Hlengwe pupils whilst it brought laughter to the ‘fortunate’ Karanga pupils who ended up belittling and labelling the Hlengwe pupils as “classroom or bench-wetters”.⁸³ As though this was not enough, some Karanga teachers, like a Mr Mukwena, who had a low opinion of the Hlengwe, would ask all Hlengwe pupils to stand up while he made remarks that ridiculed all the Hlengwe. Phikela emphasised that many Karanga/Shona teachers used the Hlengwe as the best illustrations of anything bad. Hlengwe pupils were used as examples of dirty, ignorant, backward and illiterate people. Karanga/Shona pupils also took the cue from their teachers and in turn treated the Hlengwe pupils as backward or primitive and would always exclude them in social interaction. This made the Hlengwe feel unwanted, isolated and inferior and it further entrenched ethnic differences between the Karanga and the Hlengwe from a tender age.⁸⁴

The teachers also worsened the situation by giving preferential treatment to the Karanga pupils who always performed better than their Hlengwe counterparts because of language capital. This created an impression in the Hlengwe imagination that Shona was the language of the school and that the Karanga/Shona teacher was the model to be emulated. Therefore, the few Hlengwe pupils who strove on aimed to be like the Karanga/Shona teacher and as such an identity shift from their “inferior” Hlengwe identity to Karanga/Shona identity occurred.⁸⁵ In the community, shop owners like Mr Pilo Ruwanza and Jeremiah Moyo at Chikombedzi, the shop-keepers, policemen, messengers, bus conductors, and teachers who came to the area, were

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

mainly Karanga/Shona speakers with a few Ndebele. Because of the social positions of these Shona economic and educated elites, Shona became a localised ‘social and official language’ in the area.⁸⁶ Philip Chauke also said that Shona was used in schools in higher grades and was the only examinable vernacular language while Xihlengwe was taught from Sub A to Standard 1 or lower grades. Thus, the Karanga ridiculed the Hlengwe arguing that Xihlengwe was not of any value.⁸⁷ As such, Xihlengwe became marginalised in the public domain and some Hlengwe dropped it for a language that would make them participate in the emerging Karanga/Shona speaking world. Consequently, Hlengwe language became restricted to Hlengwe homes and social functions. The role of the Hlengwe commoners and chiefs in saving their language will be discussed below. Phikela also said that many Hlengwe as a result became shy to be associated with their language. A number of Hlengwe university students feel that even today, the Hlengwe language is still considered inferior in spite of its upgrading to an official language in the 2013 Zimbabwean Constitution, and the Hlengwe continue to be considered as second class citizens by other ethnic groups.⁸⁸ As Jacqueline S. Solway observed among the Kgalagadi Khoikhoi of Botswana, a lack of defined markers of “civilisation” such as improved standards of living and certain standards of education continued to mark the Hlengwe as second class citizens.⁸⁹ This is one indelible mark left by the early years of Hlengwe, Karanga and Ndebele interaction. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, the Hlengwe are now fighting this stigma.

However, in spite of the stigmatisation, in the Hlengwe villages some radical Hlengwe commoners and *tihosi* became hardened and fought hard to defend their language. H.W. M.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Interview with Philip Chauke, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013.

⁸⁸ Interview with Artwell Mpapa, Midlands State University, June 06, 2014; Interview with Angela Chauke Midlands State University, Gweru, June 07, 2014.

⁸⁹ Jacqueline S. Solway, “From Shame to Pride: Politicized Ethnicity in the Kalahari, Botswana”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 28, 2, (1994):261.

Chauke says that many Hlengwe parents or elders rebuked their children for speaking in Shona.⁹⁰ Hlengwe women, like the Ndaui women observed by MacGonagle, continued to play their role as transmitters of various aspects of Hlengwe cultural identity.⁹¹ The Hlengwe elders continued to speak to their children in Xihlengwe and it was the language of the *tikhomba* and circumcision lodges. The radical Hlengwe also forced outsiders to speak Xihlengwe when dealing with the originals. Mbuya Midzi said that even if they understood Karanga, the Hlengwe would refuse to converse in it, demanding the Karanga to speak in Xihlengwe.⁹² The situation was also indirectly helped by the fact that the newcomers were all placed under Hlengwe chiefs, such that Xihlengwe remained as the court language within Hlengwe controlled areas. This is why Phikela said that “Our language (Xihlengwe) is only spoken in our area and despite challenges, the language has survived.”⁹³ This language’s survival is attributed to the continued use of Xihlengwe by Hlengwe commoners and *tihosi* in their homes and at various functions. This varies significantly from Ranger’s Manyika example where he sees all the ethnic or dialectal groups that became the Manyika dropping their languages or dialects in favour of ChiManyika.⁹⁴ The majority of the Hlengwe stuck to their language, only using Shona in school, Shona-owned shops, when speaking to bus conductors and policemen or in social transactions in Shona-controlled small spaces, but at their homes and in their community speaking Xihlengwe.

Change in Hlengwe Customs and Traditions 1950s-1960s

The interaction between the Hlengwe and the new-comer groups of Ndebele and Karanga resulted in several noticeable changes in many practices that had become socio-economic

⁹⁰ H.W.M. Chauke, “History and Culture of the Hlengwe People”, The Unpublished Works of Happyson Matsilele Chauke: Compiled by Tillman Houser, (2009):285-346.

⁹¹ MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity*, 96.

⁹² Interview with Mbuya Midzi, Malisanga, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

⁹³ Interview with Herbert Phikela, Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

⁹⁴ Ranger, “Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika,” 125-141.

markers of Hlengwe identity. Some of these practices were abandoned while others were transformed or modified. This underscores a great transformation in the Hlengwe identity from what it was prior to the 1950s. This change was evident in some symbolic physical body marks, the diet and economic activities such as agricultural practices of the Hlengwe.

It is not very clear when the cutting of ear-lobes stopped among the Hlengwe. However, my observations during the field study show that the practice has since stopped because it was mainly my interviewees who confirmed to be above 70 years of age who had cut ear-lobes. To the middle-aged and younger generations, the cutting of ear-lobes was said to be a shameful thing now. Amos Masiya Chauke a middle-aged man said that “*Ahi boshiwa tindleve, se makuno swa nyumisa*” (We used to have cut ear lobes, but now it is a shameful act).⁹⁵ The diet of the Hlengwe has also significantly changed. Interviewees highlighted that most of the young people no longer eat bull frogs and monitor lizards though very few elderly people still partake in the delicacy.⁹⁶ By the mid-1950s bullfrogs were still considered a delicacy as typified by one Hlengwe woman in the Dumisa mission area in Sengwe who presented the missionary Houser with “...bullfrogs she had caught down the river,” as a thank you gift after he had taken the risk of rushing her to hospital when she had been attacked by her husband, *Hosi* George Samu.⁹⁷ One elderly man confessed that he still enjoys eating *makutla* and *makwahle*, but bemoans the fact that it is hard to find them nowadays.⁹⁸ However, this dietary transformation was mainly provoked by the interaction between Hlengwe and Karanga/Ndebele. Wright cites a senior station sergeant in the British South Africa Police, who after a short visit to Sengwe Communal area said that “My own relatives really surprised me – why, they even eat lizards.”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Interview with Amos Masiya Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 10, 2014.

⁹⁶ Interview with Selina Kwinika, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 15, 2014.

⁹⁷ Houser, “*Let me tell you*,” 141.

⁹⁸ Interview with Titos Musengi, Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, July 05, 2014.

⁹⁹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 201.

This testifies to the fact that there were some Hlengwe elites who abandoned the eating of lizards in the 1950s and 1960s.

At the time of the encounter, agricultural practices were key identity markers between the Hlengwe and new-comers. However, in the 1950s there was noticeable change in the agricultural practices of the Hlengwe. Nevertheless, the process was very slow as indicated by the NCs' reports. In a 1955 report the NC wrote that "The stumping of lands in the newly settled areas is progressing, the older inhabitants (Hlengwe) are more difficult to persuade; they do not like new innovations."¹⁰⁰ Hlengwe slow response could be seen as part of African resistance to the NLHA (1951) policies which, as Alexander claims, "...provoked the most violent outbreaks of rural opposition."¹⁰¹ However, the NC saw it as a consequence of Hlengwe backwardness than violent reaction to colonial policies as in his 1956 report he says that:

The people (Hlengwe) are very backward in this district and improvement in farming methods is very slow... A certain amount of winter ploughing was done by new settlers (Karanga and Ndebele) from other districts. This apparently aroused the interest of old residents of whom a number followed suit.¹⁰²

Although some Hlengwe mimicked new agricultural practices, the fact that the Hlengwe were not mere or quick imbibers of colonial ideologies is revealed by the NC's report for 1958 which states that:

The term 'backward' can still be applied to agricultural standards in most areas of the District. LDOs and Demonstrators are a fairly recent phenomenon here - the first LDO was appointed in 1954 - and very little impression has been made on the 2 800 000 acres of native area.¹⁰³

The "little impression" mentioned by the NC underscores to some extent Hlengwe resistance, showing that commoners were not easily amenable to colonial dictates. Wolmer even attributes

¹⁰⁰ NAZ, S2827/2/2/3/2 Report of the NC, Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31st December, 1955.

¹⁰¹ Jocelyn Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making and the Politics of Land In Zimbabwe 1893-2003* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 44.

¹⁰² NAZ, S2827/2/2/4/2 Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1956.

¹⁰³ NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2, Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958.

change in Hlengwe agricultural practices more to the interaction between new-comers and Hlengwe than between Hlengwe and colonial administrators. He says that:

...an influential factor in encouraging the adoption of ‘modern’ and ‘improved’ methods of agriculture in the communal areas of the lowveld proved to be, not the activities of the agricultural demonstrators, but the increasing immigration of Shona and Ndebele families to the area from the 1950s. They brought maize, grew cash crops and practised winter ploughing and planted in lines rather than broadcasting seeds. Initially Shangaan (Hlengwe) speakers rejected many of these modern techniques but increasingly began to adopt some of them.¹⁰⁴

Most Hlengwe interviewees acknowledged that they were taught better crop husbandry by the Karanga and Ndebele. The Karanga and Ndebele also acceded to the fact that they taught the Hlengwe new farming methods. Mimicry was therefore a feature of the interaction between the Hlengwe and the new settlers. The Karanga and Ndebele adopted “Hlengwe crops.” It is necessary at this stage to mention that by the time of the arrival of Karanga and Ndebele in the 1950s crops defined ethnicity. The Hlengwe were producers of *mapfunde*/sorghum known as “*chiwedhlani* (*chibedlani*) yellow white in colour, *masharani* (*maxalani*) which was white in colour and *chifumbati*, (*xifumbati*) white with a black marking,”¹⁰⁵ whilst when the Karanga and Ndebele arrived they continued to grow maize, peanuts and *rukweza* (rapoko). *Mhunga* (finger millet) was only grown among the small Pfumbi community under *Hosi* Chinana, while the neighbouring Hlengwe under *tihosi* Sengwe and Furumela did not.¹⁰⁶ A retired Agricultural Demonstrator, who operated in Matibi 2 for a long time, notes that the Karanga and Ndebele were quick to adopt Hlengwe crops as maize did not thrive well under lowveld conditions.¹⁰⁷ Thus, by the 1960s crops grown in *Hlengweni* had ceased to be identity markers as all ethnic groups grew similar crops.

¹⁰⁴ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 84.

¹⁰⁵ NAZ, S235/510, Report of the Acting NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year ended 31 December 1932.

¹⁰⁶ NAZ, S235/510, Report of the Acting NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year ended 31 December 1932.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with A.K. Chisi, (Agricultural Demonstrator in Matibi 2 and Matibi 1, 1956-1976) Village 12, Mushandike Resettlement Scheme, Masvingo, February 23, 2013.

Whilst some of the Hlengwe traditions were becoming extinct, some were retained, especially hunting and circumcision practices. The latter will be discussed in detail under missionary influence in the next chapter. As late as 1955 the Hlengwe commoners continued with their hunting activities in the white ranches and protected areas. These hunting activities made the NC to report that "...there is little meat sold as most natives own cattle and there is game on the ranches, which is freely poached."¹⁰⁸ In 1957, the NC interpreted the poaching problem or the violation of the Game and Preservation Act as "...no more than the expression of the traditional way of life of the Shangaans."¹⁰⁹ In the 1958 report the NC reported that "The Shangaans of the lower areas are essentially law abiding. Their main transgressions concern the game laws – alien to their traditional hunting customs."¹¹⁰ He further says that "...only two butcheries operate in the area. Both are fairly patronised but the Shangaans prefer game meat and continue to hunt and snare game in the traditional manner."¹¹¹ Even by 1961, the hunting tradition was still very much in existence, reinforcing the Hlengwe's hunter identity. In his report for the same year, the NC whose title had been changed to District Commissioner says that grass fires still continued to destroy forests and these fires were "...started by natives smoking out bees and hunters drying game meat."¹¹² The NC proceeded to say that "... the main meat source is derived from snared game meat...Heavy penalties imposed on offenders have little effect."¹¹³ Illegal hunting was only reduced after the full enforcement of game protection laws in the 1970s, but not without resistance from the Hlengwe.

Conclusion

¹⁰⁸ NAZ, S2827/2/2/3/2, Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1955.

¹⁰⁹ S2827/2/2/5/3 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1957.

¹¹⁰ NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2, Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958.

¹¹¹ NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2, Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958.

¹¹² NAZ, 2827/2/2/8/3, Annual Report of the Native Commissioner Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1961.

¹¹³ NAZ, S2827/2/2/8/3, Annual Report of the Native Commissioner Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1961.

The 1950s to 1960s era was a very critical phase in the complex reworking of Hlengwe identity. This period saw being Hlengwe interpreted differently and some identity markers, such as “primitive” diet and physical bodily marks such as cutting ear-lobes, being abandoned as shameful practices. In addition, the Hlengwe socio-political space was invaded by other ethnic groups which threatened the Hlengwe’s virtual existence as a self-conscious community. Though the Hlengwe had encountered these groups, Karanga and Ndebele at some level of interaction, this time it was different as they were to live side by side on a permanent basis, sharing the same social space and competing for the same resources. The reworking of Hlengwe identity in this phase became a function of multiple-agency including Ndebele and Karanga settlers and colonial administrators interacting with Hlengwe *tihosi* (chiefs) and commoners. The reworking of Hlengwe identity was not a top down process as Hlengwe commoners with their *tihosi* were also active players in defending their territorial integrity against encroaching ethnic others. The Hlengwe continued to speak in their language in their homes, initiation camps, and local courts and in day-to-day interaction with the new settlers. They also played a significant role in naming and counter-stereotyping and continued with their age-old traditions of male circumcision and *tikhomba*. Thus, even in the post-World War II era, colonial social engineering was not the main force behind transformations in Hlengwe identity in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas. The transformation of Hlengwe identity that took place as a result of colonial policies was mainly coincidental and more a product of the Hlengwe attempts to defend their way of life than colonial social-engineering.

One of the notable developments was the imprinting of the appellation Shangaan upon the Hlengwe which blurred the term “Hlengwe” in everyday usage when denoting the Hlengwe. This process was associated with the new-comers who continuously used the term Shangaan or *Machangani* in day-to-day interactions. In this era, political tribalism also emerged and co-existed with moral ethnicity in *Hlengweni*, as the Hlengwe tried to stop the resettlement of the

Karanga and Ndebele in Hlengwe hunting grounds and areas of future settlement for Hlengwe children. There were also struggles for control of water sources which saw control of boreholes being contested on ethnic lines and young men fighting for control of boreholes, further heightening ethnic differences. Hlengwe ethnicity congealed in the naming and renaming, stereotyping and counter-stereotyping between the new settlers and Hlengwe commoners. This naming and renaming resonates with Worby's understanding of ethnicity as the power to name and to refuse to be named.¹¹⁴ Being Hlengwe was also interpreted differently by the Hlengwe as one of the key changes was the development of an inferiority complex among several Hlengwe. This inferiority complex was triggered by the perceived lack of most features of 'modernity,' which the new settlers seemed to have. This acceptance by the Hlengwe of the inferior tag permitted the new-comers to label the Hlengwe "uncivilised" and "backward". Thus, Hlengwe identity became one of shame and resulted in some Hlengwe feigning Karanga/Shona identities. Being Hlengwe or Shangaan was treated as synonymous with being "backward," "primitive" and "uneducated" irrespective of social class. Furthermore, this inferiority complex became a subjective feature of Hlengwe identity. However, it is critical to observe that the radical and conservative among the Hlengwe continued to use their language and even forced the new-comers to use it in the shared social space. Initiation rites, *nghoma* and *tikhomba*, which are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter continued.

The use of the term "Hlengwe" which previously was used interchangeably with Shangaan became blurred as the latter was popularised through the agency of Karanga and Ndebele. The Karanga and Ndebele had been informed by colonial administrators that they were coming to the land of the "*Machangana*," "*Tshangani*" or "Shangaan". The Hlengwe, however, maintained their unique practices and language though a number of their traditions and cultural artefacts were modified. Some eating habits, especially the eating of foodstuffs associated with

¹¹⁴ Worby, "Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games," 372.

primitive diets such as *makwahle* and *makutla*, and the cutting of ear-lobes exemplify this. Although colonial administrators tried to influence the way each ethnic group perceived the other, through a policy of divide and rule, they were not solely responsible for creating or inventing the damaging stereotypes that came to be associated with the Hlengwe. The fact that the Hlengwe, Karanga and Ndebele inter-married testifies to the fact that the influence of colonial administrators was limited.

It is apparent then that historical developments in Hlengweni, triggered by the change in government policy and the resettlement of Karanga and Ndebele, brought about major and complex changes in Hlengwe identity and transformed Hlengwe traditions and cultural artefacts. However, the Hlengwe commoners were not only interacting with colonial administrators, Karanga and Ndebele but FMC missionaries as well who also played a part in the transformation of Hlengwe identity and cultural artefacts in this phase as will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH MISSIONARIES IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF HLENGWE IDENTITY, 1950s-1960s

Introduction

Some literature on the creation of tribalism focuses on the ways in which Christian missions became sites of influence through Bible translations and other language work, and through raising educated Christian elites who became ideological entrepreneurs. In the process, language work and the role of missionaries and African educated elites became important in rigidifying ethnic maps and zones in the early colonial period, from 1890s to early 1930s. In Zimbabwe, most of this work focuses on the role of missionaries and African elites in the early colonial period. No clarity is provided on the processes that took place later in the colonial era, such as what happened among the Hlengwe in the late 1950s. Among the Hlengwe, the role of the missionaries was only felt in the 1950s. In this chapter, it is argued that the transformations that happened among the Hlengwe in the 1950s when missionaries took a more active role in the area must be considered as part of the broader processes of evolving Hlengwe ethnicity since the precolonial and early colonial era. The FMC's activities influenced the growth of Hlengwe ethnic consciousness and the transformation of some Hlengwe traditions. However, the church's role should not be overstated or exaggerated as it was not acting on a passive Hlengwe mass. The Hlengwe commoners and elite should not be conceptualised as "plain slates" on which missionaries wrote and imposed their teachings and ideology. The Hlengwe, whilst they allowed Christian missions to be established and accepted some of the Christian teachings, also fought hard to protect and preserve their age-old traditions and culture in the face of growing Christian influence. Christianity therefore in some instances worked to stimulate the hardening of Hlengwe traditions as a reaction to foreign teachings. It is also argued that the FMC missionaries and the educated elite were not always successful cultural

brokers among the Hlengwe as they failed to codify the Hlengwe language by creating a common Hlengwe language. In addition, the missionaries and the educated elite left very few imprints on Hlengwe culture.

As stated earlier, the FMC was the first missionary group to successfully establish missionary work among the Hlengwe. From the onset, the FMC missionaries had the intention to work among the Hlengwe ethnic group only in Zimbabwe as confirmed by the NC, Mr Ling in his 1939 report when he says, “The Free Methodist Church intent to concentrate more on the Shangaan (Hlengwe) natives among whom they have been working in Portuguese Territory.”¹ The missionary intention to concentrate their activities among the Hlengwe created a wedge between the new-comers (Ndebele and Karanga) who had been resettled in the 1950s and the Hlengwe. This was mainly because the missionaries tended to give preferential treatment to the Hlengwe than the Ndebele and Karanga ethnic others. Reasons for choosing to work among the Hlengwe will be explained below, but it is apparently clear that though the FMC influenced the transformation of Hlengwe identity its intention was not to invent an exclusive Hlengwe identity.

Ethnicity in the FMC

The FMC missionaries’ preferential treatment of the Hlengwe in their missionary work in Matibi 2 and Sengwe created an ethnic rift between the Hlengwe and ethnic others, which intensified the growth of Hlengwe ethnic self-consciousness and resulted in the FMC being regarded as the church of the Hlengwe. Luke Klemo said that from the onset, the missionaries showed a bias towards working with Hlengwe than the Karanga and Ndebele.² The missionary Houser had limited interaction with people who did not speak Xihlengwe and even when he

¹ NAZ File, S235/517 Report of the Assistant NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ending 31st December, 1939.

² Interview with Luke Klemo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 07, 2014.

was based in Harare in the late 1970s and 1980s still focused his attention on the young and educated Hlengwe.³ Reverend Ralph Jacobs, founder of the Free Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, is also said to have made it clear that he had come for the Hlengwe and taught his converts in *Xitswa* which was related to Xihlengwe and refused to use any other language when communicating with Africans.⁴ However, this focus on the Hlengwe can be read as a product of limitations of the language as the FMC missionaries only spoke *Xitswa* which they had learnt in Mozambique and South Africa as FMC policy.⁵ Another member of the FMC emphasised that this church came specifically for the Hlengwe. Ralph Jacobs is cited as often having said:

Nzivuyele muHlengwe...Nzilava muHlengwe. Nzativa hloko yamuHlengwe iwomile ngovhu. Kambe loko aza akoma nchumu angatsikeleti. Ufanana ne ribye lamundotsi", translated, "I came here looking for *muHlengwe*...I want a *muHlengwe*. I know that a *muHlengwe* is hard headed. But once he accepts anything he does not let go. He is like a black stone of the river bed."⁶

Houser confirms Jacobs's policy about evangelising to the Hlengwe when he states that:

When Jacobs began the mission work in Southern Rhodesia, the Hlengwe people were his target... Jacobs once specifically stated that his mission was to the Hlengwe people. He reasoned that the Karangas already had missionaries serving their language group - the Church of Sweden (Lutheran) to the west and the Dutch Reformed Church from South Africa to the North... Let them provide schools, hospitals and churches to the Karangas.⁷

This pro-Hlengwe missionary attitude made the Hlengwe and ethnic others believe that the FMC was a Hlengwe church. This was reinforced by the fact that the book of rules entitled *The Book of Discipline*, translated into *Xitswa* "...was taught wholesale in all the new Hlengwe churches," even though there was a Karanga membership.⁸ Houser says that at the newly established Lundi Mission School "...African languages were severely restricted among students. If they were spoken, only *Tswa* was allowed because that was the only language the

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Houser, *Free Methodist and Other Missions*, 7, 21.

⁶ Interview with Philip Mbiza, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

⁷ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 15.

⁸ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 16.

missionary teachers knew. Karanga was completely banned...”⁹ Houser further claims that the Karanga were aware of this language policy as one Karanga woman declared in his presence that, “The missionaries do not really love us the Karangas because they do not learn our language.”¹⁰

Missionaries also promoted the growth of Hlengwe ethnicity within the Christian community by employing almost strictly the Hlengwe in non-skilled jobs in the mission institutions.¹¹ Young Hlengwe men and women were also sent to school and were financially assisted to acquire professional qualifications as teachers, nurses and administrators. These Hlengwe young men and women, after completing their studies, were employed in the newly opened Free Methodist Mission schools and health institutions in Matibi 2, Sengwe Communal areas, and in Matibi 1. These were men and women like Grace Chauke (Mrs Manokore, a teacher), Sarah Chauke (Mrs Chauke, a nurse), Bettina Mashava (Mrs Chauke, a nurse), Titos Mukungulushi Chauke, Wilson Macheke (a teacher), Elias Chauke (a teacher) and Joseph Muzamani (teacher and Hlengwe school inspector). However, given that missionaries urgently needed professionals of Hlengwe origin, they did not want them to go to university.¹² Joshua Manyoshi Chauke was one of the very few sent to the United States of America for further studies.¹³ However, there were also very few Karanga Christians from Matibi 1 where the church had opened schools such as Chitanga, Masogwe, Shazhaume and Gwamatenga assisted by the missionaries. One of my oral informants, Mr. Klemo, could remember only two, Joram Shumba and Sungai Dziva.¹⁴ Therefore, the Free Methodist missionaries followed a quasi-exclusivist policy which showed a preference for the Hlengwe.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹ Interview with Luke Klemo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 07, 2016.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Interview with Grace Chauke, (Mrs Manokore) Mkoba 14, Gweru, February 20, 2016; Interview with Luke Klemo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 07, 2014.

¹⁴ Interview with Luke Klemo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 07, 2014.

Whenever female missionaries like Ruth Smith, a teacher, and Laverna Grandfield, a nurse, did missionary and social work in the rural areas, they were always accompanied by Hlengwe young men and women. In her interview with Houser, Laverna Grandfield indicated that after she dropped nursing to start evangelical work, she used to go into the rural areas with Lundi Secondary School Hlengwe students like Joshua Chauke, Majoko brothers (named Luke and Francis) and Beatrice Muzamani. In the Chikombedzi area she would visit surrounding areas with others like Emelina Mavunda, Daina and Lusinga (Chilonga) Chauke, and Liza Chauke.¹⁵ This made the Hlengwe consider themselves as the missionaries' favourites and therefore built in them the attitude that they were better than the other ethnic groups.

However, as time went on some Free Methodist missionaries began to closely cooperate with their Karanga converts. For instance, at the 1965 Annual Conference of the FMC the missionaries suggested that they should produce a Shona version of the Free Methodist Book of Discipline, owing to the increase in the population of Karanga converts. This growth is attributed to the fact that the Karanga settlers found the FMC the dominant Christian denomination in Matibi 2.¹⁶ However, when the missionary idea of producing literature for the Shona was brought to the Hlengwe church leaders it became a seriously contested issue. Houser says that, "Three Hlengwe church leaders, Naison Chauke, Elesinah Chauke and Luke Klemo asked me not to go ahead with the project."¹⁷ The reason for this resistance was that the Hlengwe language would decline if Karanga was extensively used in the church.¹⁸ The Hlengwe felt duty-bound to protect their language and dominance within the church against a spreading Karanga influence. This is why some gate-keepers of the Hlengwe identity thought

¹⁵ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 61.

¹⁶ Interview with elderly woman called Tetemai Erisha, Chompani, July 15, 2014.

¹⁷ Houser, "Let me tell you," 109.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

that the opening of missionary work in Matibi 1 where the Shona were in the majority was a “mistake” since the missionaries had come specifically for the Hlengwe.¹⁹

Although the Hlengwe received many aspects of the missionary teaching, there was also a progressive *Hlengwenisation* of the FMC through naming church organisations or groups in Xihlengwe, though these groups or organisations were multi-ethnic. The Women’s Organisation was named *Vahlanganyeti*, a Hlengwe word which means “keepers of fire,”²⁰ whilst the Free Methodist Youth Organisation was called “*Vahlauliwa Vatshwa*” (The Young Chosen Ones).²¹ The women in the church also went against Church policy and missionary opposition, and produced a symbol of *Vahlanganyeti* identity in the form of a uniform which constituted of a dark blue skirt, a blouse trimmed in white and a white hat. The colours did not symbolise anything other than being a female member of the FMC. However, Houser states that “In spite of the missionary thinking about uniforms, the African women insisted that uniforms were necessary to their movement.”²² Houser does not specify the “missionary thinking” besides indicating that the missionaries were opposed to the idea of a uniform for the church women. In other words, Christian Hlengwe commoners were not passive recipients of western ideas and neither did the missionaries have their own way all the time. The commoners were active agents in deciding how they wanted to brand their own church-based groups.

It was, however, in the church youth movement, *Vahlauliwa Vatshwa*, in the 1960s that a common inter-ethnic Christian identity developed. Houser notes that the Hlengwe youth agreed to the use of the Karanga version of the organisation’s name, “*Vasharudzwa Vatsva*,”²³ which co-existed with its Hlengwe version. It was not the missionaries’ decision and choice but that

¹⁹ Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014.

²⁰ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 58.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²² *Ibid.*, 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, 66.

of the young church members who tried to put into practice the biblical principle of one-ness derived from Galatians Chapter 3 verses 26-28, which Klemo directed me to in the bible. The bible verses read:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This was further reinforced in Colossians Chapter 3 verses 10-11 which reads:

And (you) have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

At a Youth Camp meeting held in 1965, Dr Clarke DeMille, the missionary involved with youth work, said in an interview with Houser that he did not see any signs of tension between Hlengwe and Karanga youths as they tended to call one another as common Christian brothers.²⁴ He attributed this mainly to the use of both languages in proceedings, which meant that for each session there were interpreters/translators. DeMille said that he encouraged youths to learn each other's language as a way of solidifying their Christian brotherhood. However, when a Conference President was elected a few years later, around 1972, Luke Klemo, a Hlengwe, became the first president. In a Youth Council that was also set up, the first leaders were mainly Hlengwe, including Joseph Muzamani, Joel Chauke and Andrew C.T. Chauke.²⁵ Although some Karanga and Ndebele were incorporated as committee members with no special functions, it is clear that it was a Hlengwe-led youth movement. What is evident is that though they believed in their Christian brotherhood the majority of the Christian "brothers" voted with their ethnicity in putting youth leaders in office.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 67.

Tolola, an oral informant, said that there were Hlengwe people within the FMC who saw the church as a preserve of their ethnic group. Tolola further said that the Hlengwe strongly resisted the elevation of Karanga or Shona to high positions within the church.²⁶ Even though the Christian Hlengwe commoners could not confirm that this was the case, results of elections for church positions would always find a Hlengwe in charge. Since the 1960s to the time I conducted my field-study, higher leadership positions have never been held by either a Karanga or Ndebele. The existence of political tribalism within the church was also confirmed by Tolola who said that one national church Bishop was of the view that the FMC was a Hlengwe church and therefore should have the Hlengwe dominating the higher positions especially that of *Muangameli*, which means the National Overseer.²⁷ In the Masivamele area, Mbuya Midzi, a Seventh Day Adventist church member said that at some time the Hlengwe congregants refused to speak Karanga language to a Shona pastor who was sent to the area. They preferred their own language and this made the pastor's task very difficult.²⁸

The FMC and Hlengwe Customs and Traditions

The Free Methodist missionaries, through their teachings, also influenced Hlengwe traditions, especially the initiation ceremonies. However, neither the state nor the missionaries had any sophisticated knowledge of Hlengwe initiation rites as these remained shrouded in secrecy. Up to now, there is no published work on the Hlengwe *nghoma* and *tikhomba*, which are central components of Hlengwe cultural rites. Hlengwe 'traditionalists' fought hard to protect the institution of circumcision and *tikhomba*, while Hlengwe Christian converts also refused to abandon their cultural practices, choosing instead to reimagine Hlengwe traditions and practise

²⁶ Interview with Tolola Gezani area, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Interview with Mbuya Midzi, (Elderly woman) from Manhumba Village, Masivamele, at Malisanga Seventh Day Adventist Church retreat camp, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

them in a Christian way. Hlengwe Christians still viewed initiation ceremonies or circumcision as the rite of passage into Hlengwe adulthood.

After the establishment of missionary work in Matibi 2 and Sengwe, the Hlengwe community became divided between ‘traditionalists’ and Christians over the issue of initiation ceremonies, *ngoma* and *tikhomba*. Many Hlengwe were faced by a serious dilemma on whether to attend the initiation schools or not. To resolve the conflict some ended up attending secretly as they feared other Christians who were preaching against it. However, the missionaries later changed their stance towards male circumcision and *tikhomba* following pressure from the Christian Hlengwe. This saw the emergence of ‘modern’ Christian initiation ceremonies where the *vadzabhi* (overseers and instructors at the circumcision lodges) were Hlengwe evangelists and pastors. The Christians were opposed mainly to the use of obscene language often used during the ‘traditional’ circumcision sessions. Hlengwe Christians believed that such language perverted “...the minds of the boys and constituted an immoral preparation for sexual life.”²⁹ In addition, the Hlengwe Christians were also opposed to the use of traditional medicines which were applied on the initiates or administered in the lodges.³⁰ Consequently, a previously wholly Hlengwe institution was transformed through the agency of missionaries and their African converts. However, as Chauke notes, Christianity “...reduced the didactic functions of circumcision schools but it failed to make the rite redundant.”³¹ For the Hlengwe Christians, attending the initiation school was important as initiation was seen as a way of protecting Hlengwe values and norms. To this end, most parents ensured that their children attended.

In 1953, Chief Mpapa allowed Christian Hlengwe to set up the first Christian circumcision camp in Chikombedzi. This development marked a radical shift to Hlengwe initiation

²⁹ Chauke, “The Hlengwe Circumcision School,” 303.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 318-320.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 317.

ceremonies. For the first time, uncircumcised foreign medical doctors were allowed close to a Hlengwe circumcision camp. Added to this was that the white doctors, a male and a female doctor, Naomi Pettengill, participated in the circumcision of the initiates. Prior to this occasion it was taboo for any woman to enter a circumcision lodge. Wright, commenting on this event, says that, “The extra-ordinary facet of this previously unheard of exercise was that one of the doctors was a European woman!”³² The other major change was that Christian pastors became overseers at the circumcision lodges. For instance, Louis Mdungazi Chauke was the overseer of the first camp near Chikombedzi mission. Two graduates of this first camp said that instead of being taught the Hlengwe “*nawu*,” circumcised Hlengwe pastors took turns to preach the word of God, conduct bible lessons and prayers to the initiates.³³ However, the majority of the initiates at this new camp were children of evangelists and new converts.³⁴ Houser says that “Over the years these Christian camps became so popular that several hundred men attended each one.”³⁵ Houser further states that many men who joined the Christian camps were attracted by the hygienic conditions as they saw that wounds of men circumcised by missionary doctors had no infections.³⁶ Doctors, Paul Embree and Lionel Hurd, performed operations on Christian initiates in 1959 and 1974 respectively.³⁷ This shows that although these new converts felt that they were following the new way (Christianity), inwardly they felt that they were Hlengwe and wanted to fulfil the requirements for being a full-fledged member of the Hlengwe society. Therefore, in the Church, Hlengwe ethnicity co-existed with Christian values and was perpetuated through some church activities.

³² Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 201.

³³ Interview with Philip Mbiza, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014; Interview with Tolola, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

³⁴ Interview with Tolola, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014; Interview with Philip Mbiza, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

³⁵ Houser, “*Let me tell you*,” 121.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁷ Interview with Tolola, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

In the Chilonga area the District Commissioner reported in 1959 that:

For the first time the ‘elders’ who run the Shangaan circumcision schools in Headmen Chilonga’s area agreed to allow those pupils who fell ill during the long and rigorous “schooling period” to be taken to the mission hospital for treatment. This I regard as a major ‘break through’ by the Mission ‘Medicos’. The conservative and backward Shangaans have resolutely refused to allow pupils to leave the circumcision schools in past years and deaths from exposure, blood poisoning *etc.* have marred each school.³⁸

The Hlengwe society was beginning to experience certain forms of transformation, but in these changes, they were not passive agents. In the Masivamele area, Houser says that a traditional healer, Chavani, allowed missionaries into a circumcision lodge and gave them permission to take pictures of the camp.³⁹ Previously this was not allowed. In 1959, Headmen Mpapa also agreed that circumcision at the traditional lodge in his area should be done by the mission doctors. He allowed them to erect a small temporary clinic in the bush at the site of the “school” where the mission doctors performed 194 successful operations.⁴⁰

However, the encroachment of Christian teachings into the initiation ceremonies did not go down well with radical sections of Hlengwe traditionalists who felt that this was a desecration of a traditional rite. Wright says that “...many other elders were shocked when they were told of the part played by the missionaries and instructions were given that such assistance must never again be sought or sanctioned.”⁴¹ In the Sengwe communal area there was greater resistance to missionary involvement in the circumcision of initiates and in the initiation ceremonies. Consequently, they continued to conduct these ceremonies in the bush of Sengwe where they used traditional doctors. This was a case of commoners and chiefs resisting foreign influence to their traditions.

³⁸ NAZ, S2827/2/2/7/3 Annual Report of the NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31st December, 1959.

³⁹ Houser, “*Let me tell you*,” 120.

⁴⁰ NAZ, S2827/2/2/7/3 Annual Report of the NC Nuanetsi for the Year Ended 31st December, 1959.

⁴¹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 202.

Although the Christianised Hlengwe continued to influence the tradition of initiation, the popularity of traditional *ngoma* never waned. Evidence suggests that the numbers of people who undertook traditional circumcision at the traditional lodges continued to grow and the population of these was higher than that of Hlengwe who attended formal educational schools. In 1974, A. L. Sparrow wrote about a circumcision lodge on the Save River in the Chiredzi district which was attended by about 600 Hlengwe males.⁴² At this lodge the Hlengwe did not use foreigners, whilst in the Chikombedzi Christian lodge of 1974, Dr Hurd was used. Young men at traditional lodges continued to learn “*nawu*” and a set of secret circumcision songs which are still considered an extremely important part of the Hlengwe rite of passage today. The songs are important in that they contain much verbal symbolism and are a form of credential in later life as “...they constitute proof that circumcision was not acquired in a white man’s clinic”.⁴³ In other words, Hlengwe ‘traditionalists’ viewed their own initiation rites as more “authentic” than the Christian ones and continued to resist the Christian way.

What is clear among the Hlengwe is that there was general resistance to imposition of wholly foreign ideologies by both Christian converts and traditionalists. The Hlengwe refused to abandon their cultural practices which they still considered a critical marker of their identity. Ritual circumcision and other traditional rites were seen as a new birth. One Hlengwe man who had just graduated from one of the initiation schools said:

I am happy and this is the day that I had been waiting for and finally it has come. I was successfully circumcised and initiated...Something was not complete in me before but now everything has been settled.⁴⁴

⁴² A.L. Sparrow, “A Lowveld Rite: A Shangaan Circumcision Lodge”, *NADA*, 7, 4, (1977):394-396.

⁴³ Thomas Johnston, “Secret Initiation Songs of the Shangana-Tsonga Circumcision Rite: A Textual and Musical Analysis”, *Journal of American Folklore*, Volume 87, 346, (1974):328.

⁴⁴ *Masvingo Mirror*, October 3, 2013.

After circumcision most of the traditionalists, Hlengwe elite and commoners imagined having achieved a completeness that they could not attain before initiation and which Christianity could not help them to attain.

Missionaries also thought that by Christianising the Hlengwe they would transform them from their 'ungodly ways' and 'civilise' them. Evidence, however, proves that very few Hlengwe commoners and elites wholly accepted missionary teaching by the time of the nationalist and liberation struggle. The majority of them merely feigned a Free Methodist Christian identity. Reverend Malalani Hayisa, of the Free Methodist Church, confirmed in an interview that very few Hlengwe accepted the Christian teaching in the early years of missionary work.⁴⁵ The majority of those counted as Free Methodist members were school children aged between 10 and 15 years who were coerced to attend Church services by overzealous teachers or were adults who came to church for material, social or economic benefits.⁴⁶ Houser says that:

The accelerated increase of church full membership growth between 1958 and 1970, was due to mostly students in the primary school system under the churches' control... There was little, deep religious commitment of the candidates to Christ and the church. They did not cooperate with the pastors to further the work of the churches.⁴⁷

Houser further states that: "The children viewed joining the church as part of the school programme. When they left the school, church activities were no longer vital in their lives. They left the church."⁴⁸ Luke Klemo said that for many men who sent their wives to church, the idea was not really for the women to be Christians. They wanted their wives to learn good moral behaviour since the church preached against adultery.⁴⁹ In the Boli Mhlanguleni area, in Matibi 2, one female missionary, Ruth Smith, is said to have visited 208 Hlengwe homes and 2 304 people attended her preaching and teaching sessions, but out of all her efforts only 12

⁴⁵ Interview with Rev. Malalani Lisenga Hayisa, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

⁴⁶ Houser, *"Let me tell you,"* 111.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁹ Interview with Luke Klemo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 07, 2014.

conversions were recorded.⁵⁰ Some of the women came because they were given pieces of cloth after correctly reciting biblical verses, and they would use the cloth to make children's clothes, bedcovers and carpets. Others joined the church so as to get jobs as the missionaries mainly recruited church members for the different jobs. Many Hlengwe feigned a Free Methodist Christian identity whilst they continued with their conventional practices such as *kupahla* (ancestral worship) and *kuya tihlolweni* (consulting witch-doctors). Most of the serious converts found themselves in a dilemma. The extended biological family and traditional society to which they belonged required them to attend functions to appease ancestral spirits, failure of which they or a loved one would die, which was contrary to the teachings of Christianity. The Christian religion taught them that appeasing spirits of the dead was worshipping "*madhimoni*" or demons/evil spirits or idols. To make matters worse some traditional doctors' directions required participation by the whole family for an illness or problem to be solved. Because of the entrenched traditional beliefs, Hlengwe Christians resolved the conflict by secretly attending traditional ceremonies.⁵¹

Tihosi had mixed feelings towards missionaries. Mpapa Zava in Matibi 2 did not allow them to build a mission station when he was approached by Ralph Jacobs in the late 1930s.⁵² Mtarini Gezani Mashava, acting *Hosi* Samu in Sengwe Communal area welcomed the Housers in 1951 and allowed them to build a mission station at Dumisa but did not become a Christian. Houser has this to say of Mtarini Gezani Mashava:

Mtarini was most helpful in every way...He often attended church, but did not become a Christian...I approached him one time about his becoming a Christian. He responded that he was the intermediary between the "Living Dead" (his ancestors) and his people. He feared that if he became a Christian, his people would be harmed by those who had previously died, yet were closely watching him and his people to be certain they

⁵⁰ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 60.

⁵¹ Interview with Luke Klemo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 07, 2014.

⁵² Interview with Rev. Malalani Hayisa, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2,

followed their customary teachings of life-style. He was very willing that his children attend school and church, and become Christians.⁵³

It is evident that Mtarini Mashava was not ready to abandon his traditional belief and Houser was powerless to convert him. Houser also notes the case of *Hosi Chilonga* in Matibi 2 who did not stop practices such as child pledging which even the colonial law was trying to stop. *Hosi George Samu* who took over after Mtarini was even very hostile to missionaries. He bitterly resented the building of Dumisa mission houses on what he termed his father's land and proceeded to construct his own homestead on the mission property.⁵⁴ The missionaries could not drive him from there. Therefore, even later in the colonial period missionaries did not have that magical power over the Hlengwe to make them do as the missionaries wished.

One other area where the FMC had limited success in influencing Hlengwe traditions was with regards to issues of child pledging (see Chapter 3) and Hlengwe marriage practices in general. Their cultural broking capacities of elites described in Leroy Vail were limited.⁵⁵ The missionaries lacked the wherewithal to enforce their desired cultural change among Africans. Houser even explains how, at one time, he failed to save *Hosi Chilonga's* 16-year-old daughter who had been pledged in marriage to an old man who already had many wives. Houser says that though the girl pleaded with him to take her into his (Houser's) home as a maid in order to save her from this arranged marriage, his dilemma was that although the Church preached against the practice, they needed to maintain cordial relations with the chiefs so as to be allowed to remain in the area. Secondly, Houser knew from the Hlengwe custom that if he took this poor girl into his house to protect her, Hlengwe culture would deem him to have married that girl by default hence *lobola* or bride price would be demanded from him.⁵⁶ Therefore, although he knew that child pledging was wrong, he could not do much to solve the problem. Some male

⁵³ Houser, "Let me tell you," 140.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

⁵⁵ Vail, "Introduction," 10-16.

⁵⁶ Houser, "Let Me tell you," 102.

congregants also challenged Houser on the issue of polygamy that the FMC preached against. Houser states that after preaching "...it was wrong before God to have plural wives," one member asked him, "What about the Old Testament characters who had several wives? What about David whom God called "A man after my own heart?"⁵⁷ The local Hlengwe church leadership also allowed a polygamist "...more freedom if he took the wives before he was a Christian."⁵⁸

Missionaries also failed to influence change in Hlengwe marriage practices towards modern Christian marriages as evidenced by the very limited number of Christian weddings in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas. Between 1940 and 1958 the missionaries solemnised only one modern 'white wedding.' However, it must be noted that it was not between Hlengwes but a Karanga Agricultural Demonstrator and a Hlengwe-speaking Chikombedzi Hospital nurse whose Karanga father, a former civil servant spoke *Xihlengwe* fluently while her mother was Hlengwe.⁵⁹ Thus, the Hlengwe were not easily influenced to change their cultural practices which they called the way of the fathers.

Although Free Methodist missionaries are said to have been active among the Hlengwe, there were areas in *Hlengweni* where their influence was minimal for them to transform Hlengwe identity. In *Hosi Chilonga's* area in Matibi 2 missionaries had only one small school offering classes up to Standard 2, the equivalent of four years of elementary or primary school education. This school was manned by a few African teachers with no resident white missionaries present.⁶⁰ In Sengwe, *Hosi Sengwe* said that most parents did not send their children to school because the Free Methodist missionaries were demanding school fees. This

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶⁰ Interview with Mrs Margaret Mahlekete, (Village head), *Hosi Chilonga Court*, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014; *Hosi Ben Macheme Chilonga*, *Hosi Chilonga's Court*, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014.

frustrated the missionaries, who then left in 1959.⁶¹ *Hosi* Gezani said that missionary failure in Sengwe Communal area can be attributed to the fact that missionaries were focusing on evangelising the locals than opening affordable schools. In addition, the missionaries' emphasis on age limits for school enrolment conflicted with the unique situation in the area where the Hlengwe allowed only boys past the cattle-keeping age to go to school by which time they were considered too old by the missionaries.⁶² Ndavani said that "our fathers would not allow us to go to school as we were expected to look after cattle."⁶³ Therefore, the Hlengwe "cattle keeping versus-education" conflict slowed the growth of a Hlengwe educated elite.

What worsened the slow growth of a Hlengwe educated elite was that western education was not of great value to most Hlengwe at that time. The Hlengwe resistance to missionary education is shown by that, although the cost of sending a child to an initiation school was higher than that of sending a child to a formal school, the Hlengwe parents sacrificed all they had to send their children to the *nghoma* lodges but would not do the same to send children to formal schools.⁶⁴ This is why, when commenting about attitude towards western education among the Africans in the district by 1955, the NC states that, "Attendance is not very constant as the Shangaan is not a scholar... The new arrivals in the district from Gutu and Filabusi are more education-minded."⁶⁵ A school established in Marumbini by the Assemblies of God in 1956 also had a very low enrolment, just like the FMC schools. The NC reported that:

There does not seem to be the same thirst for education down here amongst the Shangaans as there is further north. The Missionary at Marumbini in particular finds his task a hard one as the Shangaans are half-hearted scholars.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Interview with *Hosi* Makoti Sengwe, (Paramount Chief), Sengwe Communal area, July 11, 2014.

⁶² Interview with *Hosi* Amos Gezani, *Hosi* Gezani's Court, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

⁶³ Interview with Ndavani Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 10, 2014.

⁶⁴ Interview with Joel Kanuka, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 15, 2014.

⁶⁵ NAZ, S2827/2/2/3/2 Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1955.

⁶⁶ NAZ, S2827/2/2/4/2 Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1956.

Thus, missionaries were not very effective cultural brokers among the Hlengwe. This was mainly because the missionaries were numerically inferior and this greatly affected their work. Houser indicates that it took missionaries about two to three years to reach some of their outlying stations and possibly yet another two to three years to revisit the areas.⁶⁷ Missionaries also did not have a clear understanding of Hlengwe society for them to fully insert their voice in everyday Hlengwe society.

Free Methodist Missionaries and the Hlengwe Language

Whilst elsewhere missionaries were credited with the creation of rigid linguistic zones through their involvement in language translations and developing the written rules of grammar for such languages,⁶⁸ the FMC was not successful in this endeavour as it encountered many challenges. To begin with *Xitswa*, a Tsonga dialect that they tried to introduce was not well received by the Hlengwe as Houser states.⁶⁹ Second, as Chauke notes, “When the Free Methodist missionaries opened formal schools in colonial Zimbabwe in 1939 they taught *Xichangana*, mainly *Xitswa* and *Xitsonga*, at the expense of the *Xihlengwe* spoken by the majority of the Shangaan in Zimbabwe.”⁷⁰ According to Harries, it was the American missionaries in Inhambane, Mozambique, who produced “*Tswa*” as a written language.⁷¹ Missionary Houser and some Hlengwe in Zimbabwe argue that *Xitsonga* is the language of the *Tsonga* ethnic group in South Africa.⁷² *Tswa* is said to be heavily influenced by the Portuguese language while *Xitsonga*, the written language used in South Africa, is a hybrid language

⁶⁷ Houser, “*Let me tell you*,” 103.

⁶⁸ Ranger, “Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika,” 118-150; Chimhundu, “Early Missionaries and the Ethnolinguistic Factor,” 87-109; Vail, “Introduction,” 1-19.

⁶⁹ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 12-13.

⁷⁰ H.W.M. Chauke, “The Role of the European Christian Mission in the Development of the Xihlengwe (Xichangana) Language in Zimbabwe Until 1980,” *The Unpublished Works of Happyson Matsilele Chauke*: Compiled by Tillman Houser, (2009):354.

⁷¹ Harries, “Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism,” 87.

⁷² Houser, *Let me tell you*,” 75; Interview with Solomon Chauke, (Pastor and Retired National Overseer of the Alliance Church in Zimbabwe), Gweru, May 28, 2014; Interview with Patrick Zumbo, (Of the Curriculum Development Unit, Minority Languages, Zimbabwe), Chiredzi, August 09, 2013.

officially created in 1875 at the Valdezia Mission Station by the Swiss missionaries Paul Berthoud and Ernest Creux.⁷³ It is said to be a combination of diverse east coast dialects such as *Xigwamba*, *Xinkuna*, *Xihlengwe*, *Xitembe*, *XiValoyi*, *Xinyembani*, *Xitswa*, *XiRonga* and *XiChopi*.⁷⁴ However, though understandable to Xihlengwe speakers *Tswa* and *Xitsonga* dialects differ from Xihlengwe spoken in Zimbabwe. In 1962 the Rhodesian colonial government banned the teaching of minority languages, which included the teaching of *Xitswa* and *Xitsonga*. Although the FMC missionaries continued to teach *Xitswa* from Sub A to Standard 1 (the first three elementary school levels) at their mission schools up to 1969, to all intents and purposes the missionary attempt at developing a vernacular language that the Hlengwe understood was dealt a severe blow.⁷⁵ The efforts to promote this minority language faced a real challenge in that there was competition from union Shona, which was taught in all schools in the Mashonaland Circle since the unification of the Shona dialects and this language which the Hlengwe still called *Chikaranga*, was the only examinable indigenous language at higher primary school level in the district. This is why Houser remarks in the 1970s that:

Hlengwe culture is fast disappearing under the impact of relocation schemes where Karanga are moving back into the Nuanetsi District. Primary schools use *Chikaranga*, a dialect of the official Shona.⁷⁶

According to Bannerman it was among other considerations the use of Shona in the schools in Matibi 2 and Sengwe which forced the Hlengwe to withdraw their children from school.⁷⁷

Prior to the ban on the teaching of indigenous languages the development of Xihlengwe dialect was not easy as most of the white government education officers who visited the mission schools each year had "...little time for the African traditional culture, because their aim was

⁷³ Language: Tsonga Resources accessed at, (<http://resources.ear2hear.co.za/portfolio/language-tsonga-resources/>); P.Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism," 86-87.

⁷⁴ Language: Tsonga Resources accessed at, (<http://resources.ear2hear.co.za/portfolio/language-tsonga-resources/>).

⁷⁵ Chauke, "The Role of the European Christian Mission," 354.

⁷⁶ Houser, "The Extent of Karanga Speaking Spirit Possession," 2.

⁷⁷ Bannerman, "Towards a History of the Hlengwe," 491.

to civilise the African children. Very few could speak an African language well.”⁷⁸ Little effort was therefore made to encourage the teaching and study of the local Hlengwe language and culture. In addition, the nature of the school curriculum did not also promote the effective teaching of the language as missionary schools prioritised the teaching of English, Mathematics, mental Arithmetic, penmanship, Physical education and gardening.⁷⁹ This was further worsened by the shortage of Hlengwe teachers which forced missionaries to hire qualified teachers from elsewhere who were not familiar with *Xihlengwe*.⁸⁰ Therefore, there were no Hlengwe language specialists to produce *Xihlengwe* literature. The mission-trained pastors did not play a key role in this development because most of them had very little academic Bible training and most professional teachers considered them “backward and unprofessional.”⁸¹

Attempts by missionaries to produce a Hlengwe written language failed during this period. As observed by Houser, a key challenge in developing *Xihlengwe* literature was the abundance of *Xitswa* literature in the form of bibles and hymn books. Most early FMC missionaries thought that *Xitswa* was an authentic Hlengwe dialect as they reflected the common western view that language is only authentic if it is based on written literature rather than speech.⁸² However, as stated in Chapter 3, *Xitswa* was not popular with the Hlengwe. Houser, in 1958 in an attempt to reach the Hlengwe FMC church members through written material, oversaw the process of translating and producing a *Xihlengwe* version of the *Book of Discipline*, which was to be the first published work in Southern Rhodesian *Xihlengwe*. However, as a consequence of the lack of relevant mission educated Hlengwe elites to do the job, some Hlengwe from Mozambique, who also found the *Xitswa* dialect to be different to *Xihlengwe*, were tasked to assist with

⁷⁸ Houser, “*Let me tell you*,” 99.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 102

⁸² Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 50.

translation. Nonetheless, Houser says that “The book was not well received because of dialectical differences even in Hlengwe. It did not really fit the Hlengwe of Rhodesia and of Mozambique.”⁸³ The magnitude of Hlengwe resentment of the book was so high that by 1991, copies of the 1 500 books published in 1961 were still gathering dust on the shelves, with few interested buyers.⁸⁴ This rejection of the book by the Zimbabwean Hlengwe shows that Hlengwe were self-conscious and had great pride in their *Xihlengwe* language. They could tell that the language used was not their dialect.

The Hlengwe continued to speak *Xihlengwe* in their homes and at other Hlengwe functions. They were aware of the potential extinction of their language should they not jealously guard it. The failure of this missionary initiative brings to question the key assumption of social constructivists like Benedict Anderson, whose notion of print capitalism and the popular imagination has informed social constructivists since the early 1990s.⁸⁵ However, the process was different among the Hlengwe as there was no press to talk about.

Conclusion

There were several processes after the early colonial encounter of the 1890s to the early 1930s that were critical to Hlengwe identity transformation. The missionaries, that had never played any critical part in Hlengwe identity formation, began to have a bearing on social transformation among the Hlengwe through their teachings and interaction with Hlengwe and non-Hlengwe groups from the 1950s. They heightened differences between the Karanga and the Hlengwe through their preferential treatment of the latter but were never very successful at cultural broking as the Hlengwe fought hard to defend their cultural practices and beliefs. The missionaries also failed to rigidify traditions and codify Hlengwe languages. The Church was

⁸³ Houser, “*Let me tell you*,” 108.

⁸⁴ Houser, *Free Methodist and other Missions*, 50.

⁸⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24-28.

only useful to most of the Hlengwe as a way of getting western education, jobs within the mission and other social benefits. Child pledging, polygamy and consultation of traditional healers remained rife. It was also noted that the Hlengwe could not abandon their initiation ceremonies which were popular with both traditionalists and Christians. These initiation ceremonies were seen as the only avenue to the realisation of their completeness as Hlengwe, which Christianity could not offer. In addition, Hlengwe marriage customs remained almost unchanged for a long time, which is why the Hlengwe were thought of as conservative, obstinate, very primitive and a people scorning the trappings of western civilisation.⁸⁶

However, though the role of missionaries in identity formation elsewhere seems to have been exaggerated by some scholars who missed or glossed over certain critical issues by an obsession with the idea of invention and missionary agency, the Hlengwe case proves the missionaries were not all powerful. The FMC missionaries were neither inventors of Hlengwe ethnicity nor very successful cultural brokers, but also played a critical role in influencing the transformation of some social aspects of Hlengwe identity, through their interaction with the Hlengwe commoners from the 1950s to the 1960s in the broader processes of evolving Hlengwe ethnicity. The next chapter focuses on the nationalist phase and the changing face of agency interacting with the Hlengwe in these broader processes of transformation of Hlengwe ethnicity.

⁸⁶ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 201.

CHAPTER 6

ZAPU NATIONALISTS AND HLENGWE ETHNICITY: 1964-1975

Introduction

This chapter examines how the rise of the nationalist movement transformed Hlengwe identity in Zimbabwe from the mid-1960s to 1975. Calhoun defined nationalism as the “...pre-eminent rhetoric for attempts to demarcate political communities, claim rights of self-determination and legitimate rule by reference to ‘the people’ of a country.”¹ The focus of this thesis is not to debate what nationalism is or not, but to use nationalism as a pointer to a specific period whose specific events had some influence on the Hlengwe identity. We call it the struggle for self-determination, for a down-trodden indigenous people within a colonial state, who imagine a common identity in the Andersonian sense. In this thesis we divide Zimbabwean nationalism into two phases, the non-violent phase (1950s to early 1970s) and the phase of militant or violent nationalism which in Matibi 2 started in 1975 to when the war ended in 1979. This chapter examines how the early non-violent phase of nationalism influenced the transformation in Hlengwe identity. It was the period when the Hlengwe interacted with nationalists detained at Gonakudzingwa restriction camp in the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe who included Joshua Nkomo the President of ZAPU and over a thousand of his followers at Gonakudzingwa.² Whilst Mtisi *et al* note that during the nationalist phase “...the idea of the ‘nation’ had to compete for loyalty with more parochial interests related to class, gender, religion and ethnicity,”³ we argue that in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas the social and political intercourse between the Hlengwe and elite ZAPU nationalists in the period 1964 to

¹ Craig Calhoun, “Nationalism and Ethnicity,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19, (1993), 235.

² NAZ, MS 589/12 DEFA RESEARCH/CONF DOCS, Transcript of Joshua Nkomo Interview in Lusaka, by Suzzane Cronje, 1977.

³ Joseph Mtisi, Munyaradzi Nyakudya and Teresa Barnes, “Social and Economic Developments during the UDI Period”, in B. Raftopoulos and A.S. Mlambo, (eds) *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*, (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009), 125.

the early years of the liberation war in 1975, restored Hlengwe pride in their identity as nationalism co-existed than compete with Hlengwe moral ethnicity. The co-existence of the two is attributed more to the ZAPU mobilisation strategy which was not a threat to Hlengwe socio-cultural systems.

ZAPU allowed the Hlengwe to negotiate their entry into nationalist politics as opposed to use of force. Dabengwa says, ZAPU like its predecessor the NDP, "... appealed to, and had membership across ethnic and tribal groupings throughout the country. At that time the language that one spoke did not seem to matter: people made a conscious effort to understand languages other than their mother tongue."⁴ Therefore, instead of contesting, nationalism and ethnicity co-existed as was also observed by Msindo in Bulawayo urban between 1953 and 1963.⁵ We also argue that the growth of nationalism among the Hlengwe was not a simple top-down process as the majority of the Hlengwe who also had grievances against the colonialist regime played a key part in spreading the ideas of the nationalist struggle and winning adherents to the struggle. This would have been difficult for the ZAPU nationalists in detention to accomplish. It will be argued too that the imagining of Hlengwe identity changed from that of inward looking, docile and peaceful people to active nationalists ready to engage the colonial regime peacefully or violently, to regain their land and freedom from colonial oppression.

Hlengwe before the Nationalist Phase

Diverse perspectives have come from scholars about the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism. In a study on the evolution of Zimbabwean nationalism from the beginning of the twentieth century into the 1960s, Gatsheni-Ndlovu concludes that, the spirit of localism and

⁴ Dumiso Dabengwa, "ZIPRA in the Zimbabwe war of National Liberation," in *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War, Volume One*, eds. Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 2000), 25.

⁵ Msindo, "Ethnicity and Nationalism," 267-290; Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 178-210.

ethnicity embodied in various societies retarded and at times sustained nationalism.⁶ Msindo sees nationalism as an identity that rose in the mid-1950s but argues that its relationship with ethnicity was not straightforward.⁷ He posits that the relationship between the two identities, ethnicity and nationalism, is problematic partly “...because of the popular, but erroneous, perception that these identities are either polar opposites or successors to each other.”⁸ They are polar opposites in that, ethnicity has often been seen as a parochial attachment to tribe which was against the rise of national unity, and so it was supposed to die if nationalism was to develop. Thus, nationalism is conceptualised as the next social order after the death of tribalism. This thinking is exemplified by one late Zimbabwean nationalist leader cited by Msindo who said that “From tribalism – what’s next? Of course, African nationalism.”⁹ This reflects a strong belief in the death of tribalism following the triumph of nationalism, or the displacement of tribalism or ethnicity by nationalism. However, as Calhoun, MacGonagle and Berman have observed, ethnicity is not vanishing. This study focuses on how the early nationalist phase, or the period of nationalist politics just before the outbreak of militant resistance to colonial rule influenced transformation of Hlengwe identity. We argue that, the ZAPU version of nationalist politics promoted the free expression of Hlengwe ethnicity and turned the once politically docile people into vocal political activists, thus destroying the myth that the Hlengwe were inward looking, backward, peaceful and not interested in politics.

Mtisi *et al*, view the post-Second World War period as an era marked by an upsurge in African nationalism.¹⁰ Similarly, Alexander describes the 1950s and early 1960s in Southern Rhodesia as a period marked by a boom in and radicalisation of nationalism where nationalists moved

⁶ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Do ‘Zimbabweans’ Exist? Trajectories of Nationalism, National Identity Formation and Crisis in a Postcolonial State*, (Oxford, Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang AG, 2009), 93

⁷ Msindo, “Ethnicity and Nationalism,” 267-268.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁹ Ndabaningi Sithole, *African Nationalism*, (London: 1968), 98, cited in E. Msindo, “Ethnicity and Nationalism in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe: Bulawayo, 1950-1963”, *Journal of African History*, 48 (2007): 268.

¹⁰ Mtisi, Nyakudya and Barnes, “Social and Economic Developments,” 115.

“...from a posture of negotiation and participation in political institutions to an aggressive demand for self-rule.”¹¹ However, among marginal Hlengwe communities of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas entry into mainstream nationalist politics was slow as there is scant evidence of their participation in the pre-1960 nationalist politics which had seen the formation of parties like the African National Congress in 1957, the National Democratic Party in 1960 and even earlier organisations like the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). In 1932, the Acting NC, Nuanetsi, had described the political situation in Matibi 2 and Sengwe as follows:

The political situation gives rise to no comment, natives of this sub-district being generally peaceful and law-abiding and appearing to evince but little interest in anything beyond their own domestic affairs. Nothing has been heard of any activity on the part of the ICU or similar bodies.¹²

In 1933, he followed this up by saying, “ICU has no followers in the district”¹³ while in 1946 the Acting NC Nuanetsi wrote, “The District is peaceful and law abiding. Natives have money and are little interested in the troublous world outside.”¹⁴

As late as 1955 the then NC, Nuanetsi, commenting about African participation in nationalist politics which was becoming a problem affecting many parts of the country, says that “Nothing to report; there have been no bad influences at work.”¹⁵ Allan Wright, the NC, Nuanetsi appointed in 1958, a year after the formation of the African National Congress (ANC) which was the first mass nationalist party in Zimbabwe, also says in his annual report, “At the moment there is nothing to suggest that politics interests local natives (Hlengwe).”¹⁶ Even forms of local social organisation such as welfare associations and native councils did not exist in Matibi 2

¹¹ Jocelyn Alexander, “Nationalism and Self-Government in Rhodesian Detention: Gonakudzingwa, 1964-1974”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, 3, (2011): 552.

¹² NAZ, S235/510 Acting NC, Nuanetsi sub-District, Annual Report for the year 1932.

¹³ NAZ, S235/511 Report of the NC, Chibi District, for the Year Ended 31st December 1933.

¹⁴ NAZ, S235/518 Report of the Acting NC, Nuanetsi, for the year ended 31st December 1946.

¹⁵ NAZ, S2827/2/2/3/2 Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December 1955.

¹⁶ NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958; Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 184.

and Sengwe communal areas as the NC, Nuanetsi, says in his annual report about councils and native associations, "...there are none in the district and no present signs that they will be asked for in the foreseeable future."¹⁷ True to the NC's judgement, by 1975 there were no councils even in Paramount Chief Sengwe's area.¹⁸ This shows that Hlengwe participation in nationalist politics or other overt forms of political organisation prior to the 1960s was insignificant.

However, non-participation in nationalist politics does not rule out the fact that the Hlengwe had used various methods to show their resentment to colonial interference. This resistance, it must be noted, was localised and highly individualised. Chisi covers in detail various passive and active methods of resistance used by the Hlengwe in resisting colonial rule. The Hlengwe defied colonial orders, resisted eviction, committed acts of sabotage by starting veld fires, destroying farm property, poaching and even attacked pursuing white farmers with bows and arrows.¹⁹ By 1961 there were growing signs of Hlengwe agitation to increased evictions from cattle ranches by colonial administrators to pave way for white owners who were taking over the land. The NC, Nuanetsi, says in his 1961 report, "There have been signs of ever increasing restlessness amongst these people (Hlengwe) and undoubtedly they would be fertile ground for agitators."²⁰ However, in the same report he commends the Hlengwe for "...their good sense of remaining aloof from political agitation throughout the year."²¹ Talking of the NDP's support in the Nuanetsi District as a whole, the NC, Nuanetsi, says that "...their following could be counted on the fingers of the two hands."²² Thus, up to the time of the formation of the National Democratic Party (N.D.P), which was the immediate predecessor nationalist party to ZAPU, there is very little evidence of Hlengwe participation in nationalist politics. This is

¹⁷ NAZ, S2827/2/2/6/2 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December, 1958.

¹⁸ PER5/GEN/75 P.F. Parsons (DC, Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria), 5 Decemeber, 1975.

¹⁹ Taderera H. Chisi, "Colonial Economic Disempowerment and the Responses of the Hlengwe Peasantry of the South East Lowveld of Zimbabwe:1890-1965," *Afrika Zamani*, 20-21, (2012-2013): 182-194.

²⁰ NAZ, S2827/2/2/8/3 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December 1961.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

the reason why J. Blake-Thompson, who lived among the Hlengwe for a long time, says of the Hlengwe, “They are much more practice (practical) than most Bantu, but not so well developed politically...”²³

By the mid-1960s, Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas were linked to other parts of the country by feeder roads that linked with the main Beit-Bridge road and the Lourenco Marques railway. The areas were also linked to Fort Victoria (modern day Masvingo) and other towns by buses which offered regular transport service even to the remotest parts of the Nuanetsi district. However, in spite of the improvement in road and railway systems passing through the study area, which should have made the propagation of nationalist ideas easier, there is scant information linking any Hlengwe political activists with the ANC, NDP and even ZAPU in its formative years. Even in the urban areas like Bulawayo and Masvingo where *Hosi* Sengwe said there were some Hlengwe who were working there, the Hlengwe were not very visible in active politics. Msindo, who studied the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism in Bulawayo between 1953 and 1963, which forced him to study ethnic-based organisations such as burial societies, seems not to have encountered a Hlengwe/Shangaan burial society.²⁴ Also records of early political restrictees for the period 1961 to 1962 kept at the NAZ, bear no names of Hlengwe political activists.²⁵ To make matters worse the newly resettled Karanga and Ndebele, who travelled regularly back and forth to places that they had come from, were not as politically influential as Alexander *et al*’s Ndebele Christian community that was settled in the Shangani Reserve and was instrumental in spreading nationalist ideas in Shangani.²⁶ Thus, the resettled Ndebele and Karanga were not the elite that could teach about nationalist politics. The NC,

²³ NAZ, TH10/1/1/361-362 J.Blake-Thompson Marumbene: Nuanetsi, 14th June 1958, in a letter to Professor Mitchell and Father G. Fortune, 14th June, 1958.

²⁴ Msindo, “*Ethnicity and Nationalism*,” 73-74.

²⁵ NAZ, S3338/2/2/2 Restrictes 1961-1962, S.E. Morris (Secretary for Native Affairs) to the Secretary Justice and Internal Affairs, 26/3/1962.

²⁶ Alexander, *etal*, *Violence and Memory*, 81.

Nuanetsi, attributed the lack of political activism in this period of political agitation, 1957 to 1961, to the "...sobering influence of local Shangaans (Hlengwe) backward though many of them maybe..."²⁷ So prior to 1964, in Matibi 2 and Sengwe, Hlengwe participation in nationalist politics remained low profile to be noticed by the colonial regime. We can therefore conclude that in socio-political terms up to the 1960s in Matibi 2 and Sengwe the Hlengwe maintained the trait of being inward looking and "not warlike people"²⁸ as the colonial regime had labelled them from the early colonial period.

The Influence of ZAPU Nationalists on Transformation of Hlengwe Identity in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas, 1964 to 1974

The political scenario in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas stated above changed radically from mid-1964. The key political development which accelerated Hlengwe transformation from, inward looking, 'peaceful' or 'not war-like' people, a trait their identity had been associated with for a long time was the detention of Joshua Nkomo the president of ZAPU and his other party leaders at Gonakudzingwa. The Hlengwe began to imagine a nationalist identity which co-existed with their ethnic and other identities, such as family, clan and chieftaincy.

Hosi Makoti Sengwe revealed in an interview that, prior to the detention of ZAPU nationalist leaders at Gonakudzingwa, most Hlengwe were sceptical about the idea of black self-rule, arguing that black people had no capacity to dislodge the white man from power and worse still to rule the country. They only became convinced after listening to Nkomo when he was in restriction.²⁹ By virtue of their proximity to detained ZAPU nationalist leaders the Hlengwe identified more with ZAPU. So besides being ethnically Hlengwe their nationalist political identity was ZAPU, which meant also imagining a larger nationalist identity. Most of the

²⁷ NAZ, S2827/2/2/8/3 Annual Report of the NC, Nuanetsi, for the Year Ended 31st December 1961.

²⁸ NAZ, N3/14/3 NC, Chibi, Confidential Report to the CNC, 9 October, 1914.

²⁹ Interview with *Hosi* Makoti Sengwe, Sengwe Communal area, July 11, 2014; David Birmingham and Terence Ranger, "Settlers and Liberators in the South," in *History of Central Africa, Volume Two*, eds. D. Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin, (eds) (London and New York: Longman, 1986), 371.

Hlengwe talk of this period with a passion and had great admiration of Joshua Nkomo. In this brief period, animosity towards the other ethnic groups was reduced, as everyone thought of themselves as “mwana wevhu” translated “son of the soil.” Dabengwa says, “At that time the language one spoke did not seem to matter: people made a conscious effort to understand languages other than their mother-tongue... The Shona phrase was used untranslated because its meaning was comprehensible to all.”³⁰

The presence of ZAPU leaders greatly influenced the growth of nationalist consciousness amongst the Hlengwe and this was facilitated by the inter-play of numerous factors. Key amongst these was the unlimited access that people of any social class had to the nationalist leaders in restriction camps. The Secretary for Native Affairs clarifies this in his letter to the Secretary for Justice and Internal Affairs in 1962. He says, “Friends of the restrictees are allowed to visit them at any time, provided they are indigenous Africans.”³¹ This condition was still applicable in the case of Gonakudzingwa restrictees in the early period of their detention.³² Joshua Nkomo also confirms that the detainees “...were allowed visitors, and anyone who wanted to come could do so...”³³ This is corroborated by Alexander who notes that in the early years Gonakudzingwa restriction area was lightly policed and porous with detainees less closely monitored or controlled than WhaWha detention camp. The detainees’ were allowed to freely interact with the local people and even went to beer drinks and dances and received a steady flow of hundreds of visitors.³⁴ To their advantage, Nkomo owned a landrover which he kept at Gonakudzingwa and had the liberty to drive anywhere in the restriction area, which was

³⁰ Dabengwa, “ZIPRA in the Zimbabwe War,” 25.

³¹ NAZ, S3338/2/2/2, Restrictes 1961-1963, S.E. Morris (Secretary for Native Affairs) in a letter to the Secretary Justice and Internal Affairs, 26/3/1962.

³² NAZ, S3331/5/2/1, Appeals J.Nkomo and others versus Minister L.O: Sworn Statement by William Bremner (Superintendent in the BSAP and Officer in Charge of the Administration of Gonakudzingwa Restriction Camp), 26/4/1965.

³³ Joshua Nkomo, *The Story of My Life*, (Zimbabwe: Pacprint (Pvt) Ltd, 2010), 124.

³⁴ Alexander, “Nationalism and Self-Government,” 554.

over 400 square miles.³⁵ Wolmer notes that this was possible because, “The restrictees, having challenged the terms of their restriction orders under the Law and Order Maintenance Act in the High Court, won the right to live normal lives in a tribal area and to move around that area and receive visitors.”³⁶ Wright succinctly observes that:

...the actual terms of the restriction orders, issued under the L. and O. (Law and Order) Act were challenged (by restrictees) and the judges of the High Court in a notable judgment which was probably the indirect cause of the ultimate subversion of the whole Shangane (Hlengwe) tribe and other groups in the Nuanetsi and neighbouring districts, held that all restrictees must be allowed to live normal lives in a tribal area and to be free, if they so wished, to cultivate lands and grow their own crops. In fact, they were to be permitted to conduct their lives like any other tribesman, provided that they did not stray beyond the borders of that part of the tribal land to which they were restricted. Confinement within the perimeter of the Gonakudzingwa Camp was a thing of the past!³⁷

Soon after getting a copy of the High Court ruling Wright, whose title was by then District Commissioner (DC), made a note in his diary; “This may mark the end of peace and quiet here in dear old Nuanetsi!”³⁸ His judgment was justified by events that followed the landmark ruling. The whole of the Sengwe Communal area was included in the expanded restriction camp, thus giving about 600 restrictees at Gonakudzingwa freedom to interact with the Hlengwe in that part of the country.³⁹ Nkomo would go as far Mr Palfrey’s store, where he interacted with the Hlengwe locals.⁴⁰ Msika in his replying affidavit, in the detention case shows that the restrictees had unlimited access to about “...500 tribesmen who are infact members of the Shangaan (Hlengwe) Tribe, very few of whom know any language and with whom generally I and the other restrictees communicate through interpreters.”⁴¹ These were

³⁵ NAZ, S3331/5/2/1, Appeals J.Nkomo and others versus Minister L.O: Sworn Statement by William Bremner (Superintendent in the BSAP and Officer in Charge of the Administration of Gonakudzingwa Restriction Camp), 26/4/1965.

³⁶ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 58.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 363.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 363.

³⁹ Nkomo, *The Story of My Life*, 124.

⁴⁰ NAZ, S3331/5/2/1, Appeals J. Nkomo and others versus Minister Law and Order: Sworn Statement by William Bremner (Superintendent in the BSAP and Officer in Charge of the Administration of Gonakudzingwa Restriction Camp), 26/4/1965.

⁴¹ S3331/5/2/1 Appeals: Joseph Msika’s Replying Affidavit in his Case with J.M. Nkomo, R.K. Naik (undated)

within the restriction area and just adjacent to the restriction area there were other 6 500 “tribesmen” in Sengwe Tribal Trust Land (communal area).⁴² The nationalists were therefore able to learn about the Hlengwe grievances and culture and to spread their nationalist ideology which was received by the aggrieved Hlengwe.

The factors observed by JoAnn McGregor, as having given momentum to the crystallisation of Nambya and Tonga ethnic minorities of Hwange and Binga respectively in her study of the development of nationalism among Zambezi valley communities after the 1950s, are also applicable to the Hlengwe case. She says that,

...the new educated African leadership used the strategy of telling the history of state intervention in a very different way from colonial politicians and white popular writers, by constructing their own public histories, promoting their own connections to the landscape and protesting their exclusion and these new histories were cast in both ethnic and African nationalist terms.⁴³

The Gonakudzingwa nationalists retold the history of state intervention and focused on state oppression and as Alexander *etal*, also observed among the Africans in the Shangani reserve, the nationalists popularised the notion of the people’s rights as citizens of an African nation, to land and resources and to dignity and freedom.⁴⁴ These were issues at the core of the Hlengwe society, commoners and elites’ in their resentment to colonial rule. These developments justify Ranger’s elitist approach, where the elite nationalists were seen to be articulating African issues against the colonial regime. While it is true that the elites were articulating African grievances, it should not be forgotten that the Hlengwe commoners were giving them audience because, they were aware of these issues and had suffered at the hands of colonial administrators and even tried through passive and other means to resist but without success. So to the Hlengwe, the ZAPU nationalists were saviours, opening a new window of opportunity to rid them of

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ JoAnn McGregor, *Crossing the Zambezi: The Politics of Landscape on a Central African Frontier*, (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009), 129.

⁴⁴ Alexander *etal*., *Violence and Memory*, 85.

colonial oppression. But the nationalists also needed support of the commoners. It was, thus prudent for the Hlengwe and nationalists to co-operate because none of the two sides could realise its goals without the other.

Wright says that Joshua Nkomo (whom he called Constanto Ncube, because the colonial security legislation forbade the publication of names of restrictees)⁴⁵ tried hard during this time to win the hearts and minds of the Hlengwe by breaking whatever suspicions and negative perceptions the Hlengwe might have had about the nationalists. He says that all restrictees were given instructions to endear themselves to the nearest Hlengwe communities in Shilotela's area, "...who at first were most suspicious, reserved and resentful of the incursions into their kraals and beer drinks of well-dressed, glibly-spoken members of other tribes which they disliked and indeed, despised."⁴⁶ However, as Wright further says:

...within a few weeks, the Shanganes (Hlengwe) changed their views. The strangers the white men had put at Villa Salazar were found to be free-spenders, who were at pains to behave with kindness and decorum at all times. Soon they were welcome guests at beer parties and once they had ingratiated their way into the social life of the Shanganes and the resettled Ndebele of Malipati, the processes of subversion were speeded up.⁴⁷

Hlengwe interviewees claim that they were taught many things by Joshua Nkomo and his Gonakudzingwa restrictees. The nationalists advocated the return of ancestral lands and taught the Hlengwe that the land was theirs, "*itiko lahina*."⁴⁸ Nkomo says that, "Our message was that the land belonged to all the people who lived there, and everyone had a right to a share in the work of governing it."⁴⁹ Thus, the Hlengwe understood the new nationalists as a people seeking Hlengwe assistance and help in liberating and ruling the country. The Hlengwe interviewees also insisted that they were taught by ZAPU nationalists to cast away fear and confront the

⁴⁵ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 362.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁴⁸ Interview with Hosi Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

⁴⁹ Nkomo, *The Story of My Life*, 125.

whites and tell them that they wanted their land back.⁵⁰ This supports Wright's view that the restrictees quickly established more than a foothold in the Sengwe communal area and were encouraging people to engage in acts of sabotage like burning down the office of the District Commissioner.⁵¹ The Hlengwe learnt from the restrictees who, as per their set plan, "...embarked on a campaign to show the tribesmen that authority in form of the police could be insulted and jeered at without fear of repercussions..." as they were told Nkomo would protect them.⁵² Thus, patrolling African constables "...were sneered at, denigrated and abused publicly, as they cycled about on their duties and this sort of thing was usually done at beer drinks when many local Shanganes were present and noted that the constables just rode on..."⁵³

Nkomo was also said to have taught against ethnic hatred and encouraged people to unite. This corroborates Birmingham and Ranger who argue that the nationalists did not speak in tribal or regional terms, but emphasised on national emancipation.⁵⁴ This was confirmed by *Hosi Gezani* who said that Nkomo did not practise "*chihlawu-hlawu*" (separatism or discrimination based on tribe or ethnic origin)⁵⁵ and preached about the importance of unity among the Africans. This helped to imagine a new Zimbabwe national identity among the Hlengwe.

In trying to forge nationalist unity with the Hlengwe, there was need to find a common base on which to build a common identity and as such Hlengwe and Ndebele ethno-histories were retold. Thus, the nationalist elite engaged in deliberate social engineering to produce an acceptable nationalist identity to which all black people of Zimbabwe belonged. As observed by Ranger, Nkomo was a great synthesiser, who believed in multiple identities, such as being Kalanga at home, Ndebele in Bulawayo and nationalist in Rhodesia.⁵⁶ This helped him forge

⁵⁰ Interview with *Hosi Amos Gezani*, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

⁵¹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 364.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 365.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 365..

⁵⁴ Interview with *Hosi Amos Gezani*, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Ranger, *Voices*, 211.

strong relations with different groups of Zimbabweans. At Gonakudzingwa, Nkomo capitalised on the Hlengwe's imagined links with the Gaza kingdom of Soshangane to prove that the Ndebele and Shangaan (Hlengwe) had a common origin. Historical facts were distorted and Nkomo called himself Ndebele and the Hlengwe were linked with the mighty exploits of Soshangane, and this way he emphasised their shared 'Zulu' identity.⁵⁷ This strategy worked because there was little resistance from some of the Hlengwe who believed in their Nguni identity as some do even today.⁵⁸

Wright observed Nkomo's nationalist building strategy and says,

...Constanto Ncube (Joshua Nkomo) was determined to breakdown the suspicion of the Shanganes and as many of the restrictees spoke Ndebele, a language of a different group to the Hlengwe spoken by the Shanganes but nevertheless bearing points of similarity due to the influence of the Zulu spoken by the invaders under Soshangane who established themselves in the old Hlengwe tribal areas, they had some sort of common base on which to build.⁵⁹

To emphasise their oneness Nkomo, who himself had cut ear-lobes, also took advantage of this symbol to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that Ndebele and Shangaan (Hlengwe) were the same people. One informant said that when they visited Gonakudzingwa restriction camp Nkomo showed them his cut-ear lobes, claiming that he was of the same origin with them.⁶⁰ This earned him acceptance and legitimacy as a true nationalist leader among the Hlengwe. The generic Shangaan appellation became more popularised than Hlengwe but it is hard to tell whether it was deliberate or out of ignorance as usual. However, Nkomo believed that Shangaan spoken by the Hlengwe resembled *Sindebele*.⁶¹ Whatever, the case might be it

⁵⁷ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 58.

⁵⁸ Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014; Interview with Mbokota, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

⁵⁹ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 364.

⁶⁰ Interview with Titos Musengi, Chibwedziva- Masivamele, Matibi 2 July 05, 2014.

⁶¹ Nkomo, *The Story of My Life*, 124.

worked well for the reconstruction of a nationalist history linking the Ndebele with the Hlengwe as Shangaans into one assumed common Nguni identity.

The fact that nationalism helped in the promotion of Hlengwe pride in their ethnicity in the period 1964 to 1974 is revealed by Joshua Nkomo's encouragement of the expression of an openly Shangaan (Hlengwe) identity by wearing prohibited wild animal skins and furs.⁶² Though animal skins and fur hats were part of the general ZAPU regalia, Nkomo linked it with the Hlengwe hunting tradition. This proves that Hlengwe ethnicity did not compete but co-existed with nationalism. This was the only way by which the Hlengwe could rid themselves of colonial oppression and regain their dignity. Nkomo's fur hats and *tinlonga* (staff) were also adopted by the Hlengwe as symbols of their new political identity, uniting Hlengwe in their imagination with ethnic others into one nationalist identity.⁶³ This was a complete shift from the Hlengwe's formerly inward-looking nature to a more open community, ready to work with ethnic others in the nationalist struggle. A Hlengwe traditional leader who was interviewed by the District Commissioner revealed that, Nkomo had even instructed the local Hlengwe leadership to approach the District Commissioner to request him to stop collecting dipping fees, personal and dog taxes, and that he had influenced them to disobey all government orders.⁶⁴ In trying to weave certain specific Hlengwe grievances into the nationalist grievances, Nkomo also told the Hlengwe that, after liberation the Hlengwe would be able to hunt the wild animals as they used to do in the days before the Europeans came and as Wright says, this really appealed "...to the hordes of disgruntled Shangane poachers".⁶⁵ Finally, the people

⁶² Alexander, "Nationalism and Self-Government in Rhodesian Detention," 561.

⁶³ Interview with Ndlaleni Moyana, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area July 10, 2014; Interview with Titos Musengi, Chibwedziva-Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 05, 2014.

⁶⁴ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 372.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 372.

(Hlengwe) were advised to wait until Joshua Nkomo gave them “word” to take the country.⁶⁶

From then onwards the Hlengwe adopted an attitude of open defiance to colonial authority.

However, if what one interviewee, P. Makondo said is true, some Hlengwe expressed a nascent form of ethnic hatred or political tribalism during this period. He said that, there was a ZAPU activist called J.T. Maluleke, who besides teaching the Hlengwe about the need to join the fight to liberate the country also said that,

N'wina Machangana, VaHlengwe, namubyela tiyiso, hiswona mutapfunetela. Loko muvona Nkomo angahwini, kuhwina mun'wani. Mutaendla rikumbi relixaka lelo. (You Machangana, VaHlengwe, I am telling you the truth so that you will assist in the struggle. If Nkomo loses and someone else wins, you shall be slaves to that ethnic group).⁶⁷

The Karangas or Shona were the other ethnic group that Maluleke was referring to. This is so because as indicated earlier on in Chapter 4, colonial reports indicated that the Hlengwe had more cordial relations with the Ndebele and Nkomo had won over most of them to the nationalist cause. However, the Hlengwe imagined neither Ndebele nor a Shona identity. But if Maluleke dissuaded the Hlengwe from supporting leaders from any other ethnic group except Nkomo, it means that there were some Hlengwe who had not yet grasped the sense of the “nation” that Nkomo was talking about and to them the “nationalist rhetoric” was still empty.⁶⁸ However, whatever, the case might be, the majority of the informants proved that for a short-while during the 1960s and 1970s the so-called “nationalist rhetoric” or the independent “Zimbabwe nation” was imagined by most Hlengwe and it held sway among them from the period that Nkomo was at Gonakudzingwa to the time of the liberation struggle.

Hlengwe Commoners Take up the Nationalist Struggle

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁶⁷ Interview with P. Makondo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014.

⁶⁸ Alexander, *etal*, *Violence and Memory*, 83.

Once the nationalist ideas of African liberation were articulated by ZAPU nationalists to the Hlengwe, nationalism spread through the agency of Hlengwe commoners. Through commoner effort, the nationalist wave spread like wildfire throughout Matibi 2 and Sengwe as more and more Hlengwe visited Gonakudzingwa restriction camp. The BSAP officer in Charge of Administration of Gonakudzingwa in his sworn statement states that, “Since August 1964 there has been a steady stream of visitors to the area and this continues.”⁶⁹ The Hlengwe commoners and elite who had visited Joshua Nkomo became the agents for spreading the nationalist fire. Tolola said that it was hard to define the specific people spreading the nationalist ideas, but in the rural homes the new ideas became the common subject discussed among the commoners. Therefore, the commoners became key players in the development of the nationalist identity. However, these “unknown” people worked closely with Titos Mukungulushi and two Hlengwe teachers, John Mandleve and J. T. Maluleke, whom I consider part of the Hlengwe elite.⁷⁰ The Hlengwe populace at large also began to talk about self-rule.⁷¹ This way the dominant colonial stereotype of Hlengwe or Shangaan as docile and peaceful or as a people “...not so well developed politically...”⁷² was quashed. The emerging Hlengwe image made NCs’ former reports and Wright’s 1959 report, in which he described the Nuanetsi District as “...a quiet and peaceful district,”⁷³ sound like a misrepresentation of facts. It was this stereotyping of the Hlengwe as peaceful people which made the colonial regime relocate the so-called recalcitrant ZAPU detainees from Lupani in northern Matabeleland. The ZAPU detainees are reported to have “...been causing a tremendous amount of trouble that the district commissioner there was

⁶⁹ NAZ, S3331/5/2/1, Appeals J. Nkomo and others versus Minister L.O: Sworn Statement by William Bremner (Superintendent in the BSAP and Officer in Charge of the Administration of Gonakudzingwa Restriction Camp), 26/4/1965.

⁷⁰ Interview with Pachipo Manhumba, Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 17, 2014; Interview with Tolola (not real name) Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014; Interview with Philip Mbiza, Chikombedzi, July 13, 2014; Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014.

⁷¹ Interview with Tolola (not real name) Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 07, 2014.

⁷² NAZ, TH10/1/1/361-362 J. Blake-Thompson Marumbene: Nuanetsi, 14th June 1958, Letter to Professor Mitchell and Father G. Fortune, 14th June, 1958.

⁷³ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 358.

just about at the end of his tether.”⁷⁴ Nuanetsi was in the perception of the colonial administrators a politically neutral and quiet District and therefore suitable for the relocation of such people.⁷⁵ The fact that the colonialists believed that the Hlengwe were non-violent people is exemplified by the DC Nuanetsi after the government had made a decision to send ZAPU political restrictees to his district. In his memoir he notes that:

Naturally, I was disturbed and disheartened when this scheme was explained to me – why insert corrupting forces in a tranquil district, especially as the main tribe was Shangane (Hlengwe)...I gathered it was felt that as there were no Shanganes among the restrictees and the tribe was known to be intensely inward-looking, its members would not be affected by dissidents from other tribes wandering among them.⁷⁶

The colonial administrators’ decision proves that the administrators did not have full knowledge or understanding of their Hlengwe subjects, which was a common challenge to most administrators. This is confirmed by Wright when he says that for European administrators, “...it is difficult to get through to real African thoughts and feelings.”⁷⁷ His reason for saying so being that:

The average African has become a *virtuoso* in the art of disguising true feelings when talking to strangers – including all Europeans – even the friendly missionaries... They tell you what they think you would like to hear. When one understands all this one readily appreciates the difficulty in really getting to know what lies behind the smiling mask of the tribesmen...⁷⁸

The Hlengwe, as a consequence of the interaction with the ZAPU nationalists detained at Gonakudzingwa, gained new insights and began to see things differently than before and were ready to fight the colonialist regime and regain their independence and land. Wright confirms that the majority of the people that visited Joshua Nkomo were from Sengwe and Matibi 2 communal lands and it was difficult for him to contain the situation.⁷⁹ Even a severe famine in

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 217

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 366.

Matibi 2 in 1965 did not deter the Hlengwe from supporting the nationalists at Gonakudzingwa.

Wright says that:

I felt this pre-occupation with the growing famine problems might keep the Matibi No.2 Shanganes busy with things more important than the *masaramusi* (wonders) at Vila Salazar. But on the 4th April 1965, I received a disturbing report over the radio from D.M. Kanosi (District Messenger) at my Boli sub-office. A party of at least 40 men, drawn from all the areas controlled by the three headmen (Mpapa, Chilonga, Masivamele), and obviously some sort of representative delegation had secretly proceeded that very day by cycle to the V.S (Vila Salazar) restriction camp...⁸⁰

Wright's further investigations in Matibi 2 communal area revealed that:

...scores of Shanganes from kraals all over the huge T.T.L ... (were) making the journey – as I had feared – and these men were said to be going to V.S for the purpose of “signing their names” – obviously Ncube (Joshua Nkomo) was compiling a register of recruits! Was this to be the nucleus of an “army”?⁸¹

Thus, the Hlengwe were becoming receptive to outside ideas and had cast off the old image of a peaceful, inward-looking tribe and were taking an active part in nationalist politics. They were now obsessed with the idea of liberation from white oppression than being the loyal honest colonial subjects. This transformation marked a change in the imaging of Hlengwe identity.

Serious attempts by the colonial regime to apprehend those involved in nationalist politics failed due to strong ethnic and political ties where the Hlengwe and others actively engaging in nationalist politics were protecting each other. *Tihosi* co-operated with the locals who were visiting Gonakudzingwa restriction camp and refused to supply any information by professing ignorance about such visits in their areas. Wright says that even threats to cease relief food supplies till names of the supporters of Joshua Nkomo were reported to the colonial administrators failed to induce *tihosi* to disclose the names. Wright says that when he threatened to stop relief food supplies, three *tihosi*, Chilonga, Mpapa and Masivamele “... were

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 367.

alarmed at the course events were taking but retreated behind a cloak of professed ignorance, although their demeanour could not have been more revealing.”⁸² .

Wright also testifies to the marked growth in Hlengwe nationalism by 1965 when he observes that:

Within days of the tempo of events showing a marked increase, the grim picture unfolded – a whole tribe subverted by the men of Vila Salazar! The Shanganes had found what they believed was a new Messiah who would help them to retake the country they had captured by force of arms in the middle nineteenth century, only to lose it again in the last years of that same century to the all-powerful white races. Here was a man, of another tribe – yes, but a black man, nevertheless – who had shown himself...to be beyond the reach of those who were responsible for law and order – or so they thought.⁸³

As the nationalist consciousness of the Hlengwe deepened, they began to engage in acts of violence and used threatening language against perceived enemies or agents of the state. Those who did not go to visit Joshua Nkomo were threatened with unspecified action. Some local African policemen were threatened by the Hlengwe to the extent that they ceased to co-operate with the DC and had to be relieved of their duties. One District Messenger came back from a spying mission having been threatened and on his return maintained that he recognised none of the militant people he had met. Of this incident Wright says:

...I was convinced he had been frightened into silence and I took him off intelligence duties at once. Within a year or two, he had to be discharged – whatever he heard on that day so affected him that he never recovered his confidence and proved most unreliable.⁸⁴

Wright also gives examples of two Hlengwe *tihosi* who refused for a long time to visit Nkomo at Gonakudzingwa but finally bowed to relentless pressure from the commoner political activists:

One of these leaders, in particular, kept me constantly informed of the pressure being brought to bear on him but said he would never go to Gonakudzingwa to *hombera* (pay

⁸² *Ibid.*, 368.

⁸³ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 368.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 368.

homage to) the foreigner that ruled there (Joshua Nkomo). Then one day I had a desperate appeal from him he feared that he would be killed if he did not make the pilgrimage to V.S. and even members of his own family were tearfully urging him to fall in line with all the others.⁸⁵

Wright says that even after giving this *Hosi* a gun for self protection,

...the day after the shotgun had been handed to him (*Hosi*), his immediate superior, an important Chief who had been holding out too, had arrived at his kraal and persuaded the headman to go with him to Vila Salazar to “sign on” – Constanto Ncube’s net had entrapped the most important birds of all. To all intents and purposes he now controlled the Shangane tribe and there was no doubt that any orders he gave them would be carried out, no matter how catastrophic they might be.⁸⁶

By mid-May of 1965 the DC admitted that the “...Nuanetsi District was fast slipping from (his) hands.”⁸⁷ The Hlengwe took matters into their own hands and there were increasing signs of civil disobedience everywhere in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas.⁸⁸ One Hlengwe activist, J. T. Maluleke who had a long history of defying colonial authority, is said to have at one time pulled the DC’s tie in a feat of rage after a disagreement.⁸⁹

From Sengwe communal area was received a letter warning the DC of impending danger.⁹⁰

The letter read:

We are some women of your Sengwe who are worried by our husbands’ ideas (things they will do) and there will be a killing of all these people. We want *Ishe Chibgwe*, (Note: My African name) to meet us to talk on Monday and we will be at ...old kraal near the big *mukamba* tree there in the morning.⁹¹

When the DC met the Hlengwe women he was told of terrible plans being brewed in the Sengwe T.T.L.

I heard of sharpened spears hidden in the bush, of fresh arrows being made and old muzzles being resurrected from koppie hiding and cleaned and readied, and of secret meetings in the night. The names of six Europeans who were to be murdered were given to me – one lived in the West Nicholson area, one near Beitbridge, three in the Mateke

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁸⁹ Interview with Philip Mbiza, Chikombedzi Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

⁹⁰ *Wright, Valley of the Irowoods*, 374.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 374.

Hills adjoining Sengwe and finally, one man who ranched across the Lundi River in the district of Chiredzi.⁹²

The women made it clear that the Hlengwe were only waiting for word from Joshua Nkomo to act. This is clear evidence of Hlengwe submission to a nationalist leader, who would lead the imagined independent Zimbabwe. However, what is not clear here is whether the names of the white farmers had been compiled by the Hlengwe or whether the Vila Salazar men had ordered any killings at all. However, Wright notes that "...it may well have been that the local tribesmen themselves considered these attacks were necessary when the country was in process of being taken on behalf of Constanto Ncube."⁹³

In Matibi 2, on the 8th of May 1965, at 10.00 p.m. Dr Paul Embree's family, European nursing sisters and other European staff, arrived at the Nuanetsi Police Camp in cars packed with their belongings fleeing from Chikombedzi Mission station. They had received information from one of their trusted African nurses that:

The local Shanganes...were calling a mass meeting of Matibi No.2 members of Constanto Ncube's "army" and she had been told that an attack on the mission would follow the meeting! The distraught nurse begged the Sister to leave at once and to persuade the Doctor and all the other staff to go, too, as she was afraid that if they remained they would all be massacred.⁹⁴

These two incidents in Sengwe and Matibi 2 demonstrate that the Hlengwe had established their own ethnic-based social networks responsible for disseminating information which excluded other ethnic groups and testifies to the growth of nationalism among the Hlengwe. It is clear that every white man to the Hlengwe now symbolised oppression and the hated colonial regime. This hatred of white people is testified by the fact that the FMC missionaries whom the Hlengwe wanted to kill were not British but North Americans who actually came to the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe to help the Hlengwe having seen that they had been neglected

⁹² *Ibid.*, 375.

⁹³ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 375.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 378.

for a long time by other white groups in Zimbabwe. The missionaries in the area were mainly doctors, nurses and teachers who had no record of engaging in politics but their whiteness turned them into possible targets for Hlengwe attack.

Growing Hlengwe anger against colonial rule was also demonstrated on the 9th of May 1965 in the Chikombedzi Dam incident. The nurse's alarm mentioned above proved to be true as on this day about 500 men assembled at Chikombedzi Dam, without the approval of the DC as the colonial Law and Order Maintenance Act required. The Police's effort to disperse the Hlengwe dominated crowd was met with defiance and about 173 men were arrested.⁹⁵ Wright says of the arrested people:

I recall the wild singing of those who had been arrested as the trucks (police) rolled right past my front gate on the way to the Police Camp... Many were fanatically imbued with the spirit of defiance of law and order... A few short months before, these basically law abiding men were cheerfully cultivating their lands and tending their cattle – now they were chanting war songs and ready to kill if necessary...⁹⁶

Although many people were arrested DC, Wright says that the real ring leaders were not apprehended. This justifies Tolola's claims that there were no clearly defined local leaders of the nationalist parties in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas. Interviewees confirmed the cases of defiance displayed by the Hlengwe at the Chikombedzi Dam incident. Some people are said to have thrown soil at the "*mujoni*" (white police officer) which all along was unheard of in this part of the country.⁹⁷ Tolola could still remember a certain Matios Mapikule as one person who addressed the people and when he was arrested many Hlengwe volunteered to be arrested together with him and followed all the way to Nuanetsi office.⁹⁸ One of the people who was also arrested and detained was Titus Mukungulushi, a former graduate of Lundi mission school.⁹⁹ In terms of ethnic composition of the assembled crowd Tolola said that the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 378.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁹⁷ Interview with Philip Mbiza, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

⁹⁸ Interview with Tolola (not real name), Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

⁹⁹ Interview with Mrs Mukungulushi, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

majority were Hlengwe for many of the resettled Shona who knew the possible consequences of such action remained behind. However, what this shows is that when the nationalist wave reached Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas many Hlengwe embraced the ideas of nationalism and this influenced their behaviour.

This incident changed the colonial perception of the Hlengwe as the colonial administrators discovered the danger of Hlengwe unity. The DC of Nuanetsi District, realised that he was sitting on a time bomb, as intelligence information revealed that there was great possibility of the outbreak of another general uprising of the Hlengwe and that the very recent Chikomedzi incident:

...was no run-of-the-mill political disturbance, which would follow the usual course of sporadic acts of arson and violence; this was a tribe, cohesive and proud, subverted and any action would be on a tribal basis.¹⁰⁰

The DC, was therefore convinced of the existence and power of Hlengwe ethnicity. Thus, the DC recommended that a State of Emergency be declared to cover the Nuanetsi District and Gonakudzingwa restriction area in an urgent meeting called to review the Chikomedzi Dam incident on the 11th of May 1965.¹⁰¹ This recommendation was supported by Hostes Nicolle, the Deputy Secretary for Law and Order, Andy Fleming the Deputy Commissioner of Police, and the police commanders of the Midlands Province and the Victoria Police District.¹⁰²

Although it is also argued that Nkomo had advised *tihosi* to refrain from participating in politics, there is one *Hosi* Makumba Jackson Masivamele who engaged in the politics of defiance in Matibi 2 during Nkomo's detention at Gonakudzingwa. In 1972 G.L. Millar (DC, Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner indicated that he was not happy with the performance of *Hosi* Makumba Jackson Masivamele, because he was always defying

¹⁰⁰ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 379.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 379; Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 58.

¹⁰² Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 379.

government policies. Makumba Jackson opposed the government's Veld Management and conservation schemes and absconded meetings with Agricultural Officers and barred his people from attending the meetings as well.¹⁰³ He gave his people permission to use sleighs which promoted soil-erosion.¹⁰⁴ He also welcomed and gave land to prohibited immigrants from Portuguese East Africa.¹⁰⁵ For these offences Jackson Makumba Msivamele's annual subsidy was halved to \$120.00 from \$240.¹⁰⁶ *Hosi* Mukachana Sengwe also engaged in acts of insurbodination and would not refrain from over-consuming beer, even when he knew that the DC and government officials were visiting him.¹⁰⁷ At one time when the DC was on a security patrol in the Sengwe area, Mukachana "indulged in a ridiculous pantomime of shooting with a rifle (taking aim at the government troops)...My seargent and messenger were so disgusted that they tried to remonstrate with him, but to no avail."¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the spirit of defiance had gripped everyone, including this hosi who was supposed to be loyal to the colonial authority.

The events and issues hitherto described and analysed show a major transformation in aspects of Hlengwe identity. The "peaceful" Hlengwe, who since the beginning of the 20th century had not seriously threatened colonial national security, had transformed to become the centre of political attention and a security risk to the colonial state by the mid-1960s. From the beginning of the 20th century, there had only been two reports of incidences of Hlengwe political instability; in 1912 as explained in Chapter 3 and 1918. In 1918 colonial attention was drawn to Sengwe Communal area, when Klaas, a coloured 'thief' from the Transvaal made a false report at Chibi NC's office that the Hlengwe had murdered European labour recruiters along

¹⁰³ PER4/MASIVAMELE/1/72 G.L. Millar (DC Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria Province), 21 July 1972.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ PER5/HM/NTI/5 J.B.W. Anderson (Secretary for Internal Affairs in a letter to the Provincial Commissioner (Victoria Province), 11 September, 1972.

¹⁰⁷ PER5/SENGWE/73, P.F Parsons (DC. Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria) 4 December, 1973.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

the Limpopo and some Portuguese in Mozambique.¹⁰⁹ Klaas absconded while accompanying the Rhodesian troops to Sengwe area.¹¹⁰ It is also clear that once the Hlengwe joined nationalist politics they no longer waited to be led by outsiders or have political programmes designed for them from outside. They began to redefine issues of local concern within the framework of a nationalist project and started charting their own course of action. In this they were led by their own commoner leaders, whom Feierman in his own study in Tanzania calls peasant intellectuals who created a dissenting discourse against colonial rule.¹¹¹ It is evident that though the Hlengwe were engaging in the nationalist discourse they also had local Hlengwe concerns or grievances against the local colonial regime.¹¹²

Whilst Nkomo's failure to mention the "big" 9 May 1965 Chikombedzi Dam incident in his 1977 interview and also in a book published in 2000 might mean that he did not want to acknowledge popular agency and was trying to emphasise his own heroics and achievements, it could also be evidence that Nkomo was not involved in its planning.¹¹³ This was a big incident which led to the immediate declaration of a State of Emergency in the Gonakudzingwa and surrounding areas and could not have gone unmentioned by Nkomo. Basing on this argument, we can infer that the Chikombedzi incident was a Hlengwe commoner organised act of resistance. This proves that within the main nationalist struggle there was also the growth of local Hlengwe nationalism.

Alexander *et al* argue that in the Shangaan Reserve in Matebeleland, the pioneers of nationalism were the missionary elites, the Christian modernisers who had been evicted from

¹⁰⁹ NAZ, A3/18/43-44, Klaas's Statement to C.E. Pitt Schenkel (Captain) and Corporal V. Malpage, Chibi Office, 6 September, 1918.

¹¹⁰ NAZ, A3/18/43-44, CNC, in a letter to the Secretary Department of Administrator, 11 September, 1918.

¹¹¹ Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals, Anthropology and History in Tanzania*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 40-42.

¹¹² Alexander, *et al*, *Violence and Memory*, 85.

¹¹³ NAZ, MS 589/12 DEFA RESEARCH/CONF DOCS, Transcript of Joshua Nkomo Interview in Lusaka, by Suzzane Cronje, 1977; Nkomo, *The Story of My Life*, 125-126.

Fort Rixon.¹¹⁴ However, the same cannot be said of the Christian elites in Matibi 2 and Sengwe. In the study area, the Hlengwe Christian elites and those from the resettled Karanga and Ndebele communities did not play a central role in spreading nationalist ideas. Instead, most of them were opposed to participating in nationalist politics and some even betrayed the aspirations of local nationalists. In addition, *tihosi* had been advised by Joshua Nkomo to "...be quiet and pretend to follow the government until Ncube (Joshua Nkomo) takes over."¹¹⁵ Thus, the Hlengwe commoners were the ones playing a central role in nationalist politics. The Christian elites also had no interest in indulging in politics because at one time they took Dr Paul Embree, a missionary doctor at Chikombedzi Mission hospital, to task for visiting Joshua Nkomo and other detainees at Gonakudzingwa. The missionary doctor reported to the DC that his Christian followers had challenged him for visiting Gonakudzingwa restriction camp and are quoted as having said to Dr Embree:

We have heard the *Mfundisi* (Preacher) went to Gonakudzingwa last week to sign the book there. This does not please us! Why does the *Mfundisi* go and sign Constando Ncube's book when he has been put there because of the bad things he has done?¹¹⁶

It was also the Christian elites who revealed in a letter mentioned elsewhere about a plot by the Hlengwe of Sengwe Communal area to rebel and kill some selected white farmers. That these people were connected with missionaries is reflected by the fact that the letter came from a mission station in Transvaal and was written by a mission carpenter as confirmed by Wright. Also, the fact that many people than the three Hlengwe women were involved is reflected by the fact that the letter was written in English yet the women who met the DC at the rendezvous were not fluent in the language and they conversed with the DC in vernacular. In another instance, a day before the Chikombedzi Dam incident it was again a Hlengwe Christian nurse

¹¹⁴ Alexander, *etal*, *Violence and Memory*, 87.

¹¹⁵ Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, 373.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 374.

who alerted the missionaries about a possible insurrection, resulting in the whole plot being reported to the police.

Whilst Hlengwe nationalist consciousness continued to develop in the villages where it was co-existing with ethnic consciousness, one other arena where this was happening was in the detention camp at Gonakudzingwa. The Hlengwe who were also arrested and detained had the idea of a nationalist community carefully cultivated in them from the moment of their arrival in detention.¹¹⁷ Alexander notes that at Gonakudzingwa the nationalist leaders "...focused on creating and maintaining a shared identity among a diverse and shifting community."¹¹⁸ She further argues that the senior nationalist leaders took it upon themselves to welcome the newcomers who were often disoriented and fearful and impressed on them that they should take pride in their detention.¹¹⁹ There were some Hlengwe who were detained from 1965, such as Saulo Makondo, Dumazi Mbokota, Titus Mukungulushi and Matios Mapikule.¹²⁰ These Hlengwe restrictees were integrated with people from other ethnic groups and on their release helped in spreading the ideas of nationalism among fellow Hlengwe. One of Alexander's sources named Dulini Ncube said that the prisoners had a policy of integrating people and "...weren't living as Ndebele, Shona, Tonga. We ate in groups of five to learn about others' culture. That was Josh's [Joshua Nkomo] idea."¹²¹ This was also confirmed by Dumazi Mbokota, a Hlengwe detainee who said that that during Joshua Nkomo's days at Gonakudzingwa they lived as one family and always ate together.¹²² This is why most describe

¹¹⁷ Alexander, "Nationalism and Self-government," 557-558.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 558.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 558.

¹²⁰ Interview with Mrs Mukungulushi, interviewed on July 13, 2014; Interview with Dumazi Mbokota, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014; Interview with Tolola, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

¹²¹ Alexander, "Nationalism and Self-Government," 558.

¹²² Interview with Dumazi Mbokota, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

Nkomo as a person who did not want *chihlawuhlalu*, meaning that he discouraged ethnic segregation.¹²³ Thus, nationalism co-existed with and did not threaten Hlengwe ethnicity.

Alexander also gives a more detailed account of interactions within the detention camp which helps explain how the nationalists managed to instil nationalist ideals into the Hlengwe during this period. Alexander notes that detainees received lectures on political education conducted by senior ZAPU nationalists like Josiah Chinamano and people were encouraged to discuss their problems and experiences under colonial rule and share stories about eviction from their land. Thus, Alexander believes that "...an inclusive and hierarchical broader nationalist political mythology was created that fitted the stories of new arrivals from all classes, ages and regions into a broader narrative of political struggle, equipped detainees with a common culture of song, dance, history and politics..."¹²⁴ This was quite critical in countering the colonial regime's divide and rule policies which had promoted negative stereotyping of the Hlengwe. At Gonakudzingwa, insulting language was forbidden and the new political identity had a new ascription of, "*mwana wevhu*" (son of the soil), which gave everyone a common nationalist identity through promoting the imagination of jointly owning Zimbabwean soil. This was an attempt to magnify the national identity.¹²⁵ Msindo articulates this development well when he states that:

An important innovation of the nationalist movement was the coining of political language of nationalism. Regardless of their ethnic origins all black Africans were described as "sons and daughters of the soil"...Black people had been victims of changing stereotypical labels-from "kafirs to "natives" and others. The notion of children of the soil was part and parcel of an exercise in self-definition; the phrase carried with it a sense of entitlement both to the soil and to physical space in biologically and spiritually conceived senses.¹²⁶

¹²³ Interview with Hosi Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

¹²⁴ Alexander, "Nationalism and Self-Government," 558.

¹²⁵ Alexander, "Nationalism and Self-Government in Rhodesian Detention," 561.

¹²⁶ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, p.190.

This to some extent helped to restore Hlengwe dignity in the eyes of the Ndebele and Karanga settlers who in the 1950s had regarded Hlengwe as primitive.

After the incarceration of Nkomo there were many notable acts of resistance even by tihosi in matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas. G.L. Millar (DC. Nuanetsi) reports that he was not happy with the performance of *Hosi* Makumba Jackson Masivamele, because the latter engaged in various acts of defiance against government policies. He was opposed to the government's Veld Management and conservation schemes and absconded meetings with Agricultural Officers and barred his people from attending the meetings as well. He gave his people permission to use sleighs which promoted soil-erosion.¹²⁷ He also welcomed and gave land to prohibited immigrants from Portuguese East Africa.¹²⁸ For this his annual subsidy was halved to \$120.00 from \$240.¹²⁹ *Hosi* Mukachana Sengwe engaged in acts of insubordination and would not refrain from over-consuming beer, even when he knew that the DC and government officials were visiting him.¹³⁰ In 1973, when the DC was on a security patrol in the Sengwe area, Mukachana "indulged in a ridiculous pantomime of shooting (the troops) with a rifle...My sergeant and messenger were so disgusted that they tried to remonstrate with him, but to no avail."¹³¹

We have proved that just before the outbreak of the war of liberation in the mid-1970s, a nationalist identity was also in the making among the Hlengwe. The respect of ethnic diversity by nationalist leaders is underscored by the fact that the nationalists were not willing to prescribe a language for the slogan "son of the soil." As such the slogan was expressed in local

¹²⁷ PER4/MASIVAMELE/1/72 G.L. Millar (DC Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria Province), 21/July 1972.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*

¹²⁹ PER5/HM/NTI/5 J.B.W. Anderson (secretary for Internal Affairs in a letter to the Provincial Commissioner (Victoria Province), 11 September, 1972.

¹³⁰ PER5/SENGWE/73, P.F Parsons (DC. Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria) 4 December, 1973.

¹³¹ PER5/SENGWE/73, P.F Parsons (DC. Nuanetsi) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria) 4 December, 1973.

ethnic languages and this promoted the notion of equality of all ethnic groups. The Hlengwe as such mixed freely and on equal terms with ethnic others from all over Zimbabwe.¹³² A slowly growing national consciousness among the Hlengwe saw most of them adopting Nkomo's party symbol of a fur hat and staff.¹³³ These became symbols of defiance and gave people a common national political identity. The Hlengwe could now be found chanting publicly "the land is ours" "*Tiko rahina*" in their Xihlengwe to signify their growing imagination a new nationalist identity.¹³⁴

Conclusion

For Hlengwe ethnicity, the period of the nationalist movement was an era of positive transformation. ZAPU nationalists emphasised the importance of embracing ethnic and cultural diversity. All languages were treated as equal. The ZAPU nationalists mixed freely with the Hlengwe and other people, and encouraged the Hlengwe to wear animal skins and fur hats which had two meanings. On one hand this signified Hlengwe self-assertiveness as 'vahloti' (hunters) community and on the other their nationalist identity as ZAPU. Hlengwe as Shangaan, an identity which Nkomo promoted began to imagine a common identity with the "Ndebele" identity, since they were both Nguni identities. This reduced the rift between Hlengwe and ethnic others created by the naming and labelling of the 1950s and early 1960s, where Hlengwe was seen as a shameful identity. Also in this phase the Hlengwe people who were viewed as, submissive, peaceful, inward-looking and self-conscious shed off their old image and embraced the language of nationalism and were willing foot-soldiers of the new dispensation. They slowly began to engage in political violence, unlike in earlier years, to liberate themselves. These socio-political developments in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal

¹³² Wright, *Valley of the Ironwoods*, p.368.

¹³³ Musengi, interviewed on 05/07/2014.; Moyana interviewed on 10/07/2014.

¹³⁴ Amos Gezani interviewed on 08/07/2014.

areas were not an imposition from the top but a situation where Hlengwe commoners were empowered through learning from ZAPU nationalists and granted the opportunity by the void in political activism in the area to position themselves as equal partners and useful ethnic others in the nationalist struggle. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, in his analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, concludes that ethnicity would retard and at times sustain nationalism,¹³⁵ but looking at it from the other end we say that nationalism did not retard but sustained Hlengwe ethnicity. In fact, it is more prudent to say that in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas the two identities co-existed as Msindo observed elsewhere and sustained each other. The next chapter examines the transformation in Hlengwe identity triggered by the interaction of the Hlengwe and ZANLA guerrillas and the Rhodesian government's security forces.

¹³⁵ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Do 'Zimbabweans Exist' Exist?* 93.

CHAPTER 7

REVOLUTIONARY ARMED STRUGGLE AND THE HLENGWE IDENTITY, 1975-1980

Introduction

As the nationalist struggle entered its militant phase and spread to Matibi 2 and Sengwe which lay in ZANU's military Gaza Province from 1975 the Hlengwe began to interact with ZANU and predominantly Shona-speaking guerrillas and the Guard Forces unit of the Rhodesian Security Forces between 1975 and 1979. ZANU was different from ZAPU in its political programme and in its ways of mobilising for popular support. ZANU was formed after its split from the banned ZAPU in 1963. The split mirrored regional ethnic loyalties which increasingly ethnicised the nationalist movements into Ndebele and Shona.¹ But this widely publicised perspective of ethnic differentiation in Zimbabwe along Ndebele-Shona ethnic schism was not played in Matibi 2 and Sengwe because the Hlengwe were neither Karanga nor Ndebele. However, there was a separate process of identity transformation taking place in the area during the liberation struggle. We therefore argue that the liberation struggle was a phase in the broader process of the transformation of Hlengwe identity which witnessed two complex changes in Hlengwe identities. First, there was a shift in Hlengwe identity to a more radical and militant nationalism, as the Hlengwe began to support the ZANLA liberation fighters. Secondly, there existed a parallel process of identity transformation which saw the salient hardening of Hlengwe ethnicity. The hardening of Hlengwe ethnicity was a commoner response to the wayward behaviour of the majority of Shona-speaking ZANLA guerrillas and Rhodesian Guard Forces. In addition, the congealing of Hlengwe ethnicity was also a result of the deliberate social engineering work of the Rhodesian security forces through creating an

¹ Luise White, *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo: Texts and Politics in Zimbabwe*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 16; Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 179-180; Nkomo, *The Story of My Life*, 162.

ethnic Hlengwe military force, the Shangaan Army, with the help of pro-government *tihosi*. However, though the Hlengwe commoners played a noticeable role in the social and political transformation in Matibi 2 and Sengwe, agency weighed more in favour of the gun-wielding men who had the power to command everyone else to do as they pleased.

Early Interaction between ZANLA Guerrillas and the Hlengwe

Following the ZAPU split which resulted in the formation of ZANU, the identity based politics where ethnicity was used by the Shona-dominated ZANU and Ndebele-dominated ZAPU to mobilise support was even manifested in the battlefields. There was a territorialisation of areas of guerrilla operations throughout Zimbabwe into ZANLA and ZIPRA areas, which were ZANU and ZAPU military wings respectively. From the mid-1970s to 1979 Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas became ZANLA military domains. ZAPU was supplanted from the area and as Hove says, Matibi 2 and Sengwe areas became deeply contested territories between ZANLA and anti-insurgency units of the Rhodesian security forces.² Therefore, whilst the ZANU-ZAPU schism was very influential in creating a new environment for the reworking of ethnic and nationalist identities in urban areas and on the Highveld of Zimbabwe, among the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe, it was the interaction between the Hlengwe community and Shona ZANLA guerrillas and the Rhodesian Guard Forces military wing that brought about social and political change which resulted in the hardening of Hlengwe ethnic identity.

As observed by Pius Nyambara in Gokwe, in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas during the liberation war, most government officials left or were killed, while those who were a part of the local educated and economic elite were perceived by guerrillas as ‘collaborators’ or sell-

² Medial Hove, “War Legacy: A reflection on the Effects of Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF) in South Eastern Zimbabwe during Zimbabwe’s War of Liberation 1976-1980,” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 4 no.8 (2012): 193.

outs.³ The role and influence of chiefs and headmen was also severely limited as they were generally being viewed by the guerrillas and locals as puppets of the state.⁴ Winnie Paradza from Chivi District, in an interview with Julie Frederikse, stated that “Before the war the chief was respected but during the war he had no power. During the war people had more power than the chief.”⁵ This position should, however, not be misconstrued to mean that there were no powerful chiefs that openly supported the liberation struggle as there are many chiefs elsewhere recorded to have played a key role in the liberation struggle. One notable case is Rekayi Tangwena, who besides resisting eviction helped nationalists Edgar Tekere and Robert G. Mugabe the President of Zimbabwe to cross the border into Mozambique.⁶ In the Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas most of the *tihosi* were quickly driven into the protected villages with their people, hence were denied space to be very active living under the watchful eye of Rhodesian security forces. However, some *tihosi* in their individual capacities did not cooperate with the colonial regime during the war such that their whereabouts were unknown like *Hosi* Hlengani Mpapa,⁷ *Hosi* Risimati Sengwe⁸ and *Hosi* Mukumba Jackson Masivamele who also damaged the Headman’s badge that it had to be replaced.⁹ *Hosi* Risimati Samu, feigned illness and his people lied that he was admitted at Morgenster Memorial Hospital.¹⁰ One *hosi* is also known to have committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree and the Rhodesian Government police made the following statement; “Unknown reason for suicide other than the

³ Nyambara, “Madheruka and Shangwe,” 304.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 304-5.

⁵ Julie Frederikse, *None But Ourselves, Masses vs Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982), 82.

⁶ Edgar Z. Tekere, *A Lifetime of Struggle* (Harare: Sapes Books, 2007), 73-75.

⁷ PER5/MPAPA/78 Minute on Mpapa Headmanship by R.M. Warren (Assistant DC, Chiredzi) 19/4/1978;

⁸ PER5/CHIEF SENGWE/78 R.M. Waren (Assistant DC, Chiredzi) in a letter to the Secretary for Internal Affairs, 18 August, 1978; PER5/SENGWE/10 J.B.W. Anderson (Secretary for Internal Affairs) in a letter to DC, Chiredzi, 21 July, 1978.

⁹ PER5/HM/CHD/10A and 11 J.B.W. Anderson (Secretary for Internal Affairs) in a letter to Provincial Commissioner (Victoria Province), 23 February, 1979.

¹⁰ PER5/14/6//77, G.D.K. Barlow (DC, Chiredzi) in a letter to the Doctor-in-Charge of Morgenster Mission Hospital 8 June, 1977; PER5/14/6//77, Dr. D.M. du Toit (Medical Superintendent, Morgenster Memorial Hospital, in a letter to DC, Chiredzi, 16 June, 1977.

possibility that the deceased had been involved with terrorists.”¹¹ One can therefore infer that chances are high that, he heard rumours of police investigations about his involvement with liberation forces and fearing the worst decided to hang himself. Therefore, in the period of the liberation struggle voices of the *tihosi*, educated elite, businessmen, government workers and other professionals were silenced, leaving the Hlengwe commoners as key players in identity formation as they interacted with the gun-carrying Shona males. However, their space was constricted since the gun changed the power politics in favour of the ZANLA guerrillas and Rhodesian security forces.

Gilbert Tarugarira’s observations in his recently completed doctoral thesis are important in understanding the nature of interaction between guerrillas and the masses. Tarugarira notes that the fear factor was quite critical in guiding relations between guerrillas and masses during the militant phase of the nationalist struggle in that “Peasants stood in fear particularly after witnessing the deaths of the alleged sell-outs and witches by guerrillas...”¹² In Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas some of the two earliest victims of the guerrilla cleansing operations were highly esteemed men in the Hlengwe society; a Hlengwe schools inspector and Reverend and Principal of the Lundi Bible College both of whom were killed for reasons not clear to most Hlengwe except that the guerrillas accused the deceased of being “sell-outs.” One Hlengwe interviewee also talked of witnessing guerrillas killing a village-head by crushing his skull for being a sell-out.¹³ Thus, it is clear that power relations between the Hlengwe commoners and guerrillas were unequal with the latter being the more powerful due to their ability to instil fear from the barrel of the gun. As will be discussed below, it was the fear and resentment of some guerrilla tactics and actions which saw the deepening of Hlengwe ethnic

¹¹ PER5/ HEADMAN CHILONGA, B.S.A.P. Form 43: Summary of Sudden Death Docket, S.D.D No.17/76 (undated).

¹² Gilbert Tarugarira, “A Historical Study of Zimbabwe’s African Elite: Configurations, Networks and Transitions c.1900-2013,” Unpublished PhD Thesis, Midlands State University, (2015), 183.

¹³ Interview with Chikahura Makiri, Chilonga, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014.

consciousness as they saw themselves as victims of the gun-wielding Shona ZANLA guerrillas. So whilst on the surface nationalist ideals were advanced by the guerrillas there was a salient hardening of Hlengwe ethnic feeling against the perceived evils committed by guerrillas against them. Therefore, whilst this was a second phase of the growth of Hlengwe nationalist consciousness, there was a hardening of Hlengwe ethnic feelings against Shona-speaking guerrillas who were perceived to be architects of socio-cultural disruption.

Taking advantage of the initial work done by the Gonakudzingwa restrictees, ZANLA guerrillas found it easier to spread their nationalist ideology among the Hlengwe. In some way, ZANLA activities tended to promote certain forms of nationalism among the Hlengwe from 1975. Cilliers states that ZANLA, unlike ZIPRA, placed greater emphasis on the political education of the Zimbabwe workers and peasants so as to elicit support from the masses and recruit more people for guerrilla warfare training.¹⁴ ZANLA brought in strong Marxist ideas that resonated with local grievances. Moorcraft and McLaughlin say that,

But if the Marxist basis of the guerrillas' struggle was more than skin-deep, nationalist objectives tended to dominate all political thinking. ZANLA recruits were educated in the "National Grievances". Issues such as land alienation, education, health and welfare discrimination, political oppression, low wages and social inequalities were the staples of recruits' political diet.¹⁵

The guerrillas articulated issues that were the source of Hlengwe resentment toward colonial rule. One interviewee notes that though people in the Chibwedziva area of Matibi 2 had not lost land, the ZANLA guerrillas had convinced them about the evils of colonialism, especially the issue of cattle tax where they were being forced to pay 30 cents per beast.¹⁶ Most interviewees admitted that they supported the struggle because they wanted national independence, "*chucheko*". A businessman in the Malapati area, Mavundla Chiseko, states that he did not join any political party but supported the war. Not supporting any political party was impossible in a ZANLA governed territory, unless he meant that he feigned supporting ZANU

¹⁴ Cilliers, *Counter-Insurgency*, 10-11.

¹⁵ Paul L. Moorcraft and Peter McLaughlin, *The Rhodesian War: A Military History* (Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2010), 75.

¹⁶ Interview with Titos Musengi, Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, July 05, 2014.

or the guerrillas. In an interview with staff of the NAZ, Chiseko stated that “The guerrillas were fighting for our independence and needed assistance. So we assisted by donating money and clothing items.”¹⁷ Chauke admits that the guerrillas’ demands were at times outrageous as at one time in 1978 he was part of a group of teachers from whom the guerrillas demanded goods in excess of \$10 000 Rhodesian dollars. The list of goods included items such as “...pairs of boots, denim trousers, khaki or denim shirts, denim jackets, heavy duty socks, packets of sweets, biscuits, pain-killing medicine, Dettol, bandages, methylated spirits, liquor, spirits and brandy.”¹⁸ Chiseko notes in an interview that although the demands were at times outrageous, there was a close relationship and a deep understanding between the guerrillas and the people “...because we knew they were fighting for independence and we would also benefit. We had to be on their side to get independence.”¹⁹

Most of the Hlengwe people supported the guerrilla war effort by whatever means possible in order to free themselves from colonial oppression. *Hosi* Sengwe claimed to be the first person to cook for guerrillas in the Sengwe communal area, and that the largest number of guerrilla recruits in Matibi 2 and Sengwe came from his own area.²⁰ Eric Gezani, the son of *Hosi* Gezani, said that the late *Hosi* Dumezulu Gezani had also suffered at the hands of the Rhodesian soldiers for supporting guerrillas. In addition, Hosi Gezani’s five sons joined the liberation struggle and only three came back from the war.²¹ Many young Hlengwe men together with the Karanga joined the struggle on the side of ZANU. However, Retired Brigadier Calisto Gwanetsa, one of the first guerrilla recruits from Matibi 2 said that in general there were more Shona or Karanga than Hlengwe who joined the liberation struggle from Matibi 2 and

¹⁷ NAZ, AOH448/ Oral History Working Papers H1/1, Interview between W. Mavundla Chiseko and Mr Patrick Ngulube of the NAZ-Masvingo Records Centre, October 5, 1990.

¹⁸ H.W.M Chauke, “The Miracle of Lundi Mission...Lest We Forget,” *The Unpublished Works of Happyson Matsilele Chauke*: Compiled by Tillman Houser, (2009), 47-52.

¹⁹ NAZ, AOH448/ Oral History Working Papers H1/1, Interview between W. Mavundla Chiseko and Mr Patrick Ngulube of the NAZ-Masvingo Records Centre, October 5, 1990.

²⁰ Interview with *Hosi* Makoti Sengwe, Sengwe Communal area, July 11, 2014.

²¹ Interview with Eric Gezani, (Son of *Hosi* Gezani), Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

Sengwe.²² Thus, considering that the Hlengwe were the majority in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas it shows that more Karanga identified with the ZANLA guerrillas than the Hlengwe.

It was not solely the growth of Hlengwe nationalist consciousness which saw many Hlengwe supporting or joining the guerrillas. Some supported the guerrilla war involuntarily out of coercion and fear of guerrillas or fear of torture by Rhodesian soldiers. Tarugarira says that both coercive methods and persuasion were used during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle.²³ There are many whose evidence proves that they found themselves between a rock and a hard surface. Chisandako Pikanisi, a Hlengwe ex-ZANLA guerrilla, stated that he went to Mozambique to join the liberation fighters because the Rhodesian soldiers were looking for him after fresh prints of his shoes were seen very close to a point where a Rhodesian military vehicle was hit by a landmine in the Masivamele area in Matibi 2.²⁴ Masenyani Machuvukele, another Hlengwe ex-guerrilla, also said that he went to join ZANLA following the torture of people by Rhodesian soldiers after a major battle in the Chibwedziva area.²⁵ Willis Chauke revealed that some young men from Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas who joined the liberation struggle were cattle herders force-marched by the ZANLA guerrillas to Mozambique. Chauke stated that when he was still a *mujibha* (meaning guerrilla collaborators or young men who carried guerrilla baggage), whenever they encountered herd-boys they force-marched them to Mozambique on suspicion or fear that if they were left alone they would report the guerrillas to the Rhodesian soldiers.²⁶ This justifies Jim Parker's assertion that at

²² Interview with Calisto K. Gwanetsa (Retired Brigadier General and ex-ZANLA guerrilla from Matibi 2) Old Mill, Hippo Valley Estates, Chiredzi, July 13, 2013.

²³ Tarugarira, "A Historical Study of Zimbabwe's African Elite," 188.

²⁴ Interview with Chisandako Pikanisi, Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 05, 2014

²⁵ Interview with Masenyani Machuvukele, (Elder and ex-ZANLA guerrilla) Chibwedziva area, Matibi 2, on July 04, 2014; Interview with Chisandako Pikanisi, Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 05, 2014.

²⁶ Interview with Willis Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

times the guerrillas “press-ganged” their recruits.²⁷ Therefore, a militant nationalist identity was not merely voluntary as some were forced by circumstances to support the guerrilla cause.

A militant nationalist identity, whether adopted voluntarily or involuntarily therefore became a lived identity among the Hlengwe. Through it the Hlengwe saw the hope of regaining their independence, their lost lands and the right to hunt animals freely. They believed in a new free nation called Zimbabwe, to which they would belong together with fellow ethnic others under a black ruler. However, the ‘national’ unity that the guerrillas were advocating for did not wipe away the Hlengwe ethnic identity. Instead, there were some negative aspects of the guerrilla war to do with the behaviour of the guerrillas which deepened ethnic boundaries between the Hlengwe and Shona-speaking guerrillas. This is discussed in detail in the section below.

Phase of Hostile Relations and the Hardening of Hlengwe Ethnicity

Although the guerrilla war in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas helped in the heightening of Hlengwe nationalist consciousness, it also provided opportunities for an assertion of Hlengwe identity. There developed some salient struggles within the struggle between the Shona-speaking ZANLA guerrillas and sections of the Hlengwe population, especially the older generations. The despicable behaviour of Shona guerrillas and Rhodesian Guard Forces threatened the survival of imagined key pillars of being Hlengwe, especially the language and culture. This left many Hlengwe with little choice except to reorganise and find salient ways of retaining them. Many Hlengwe interviewees expressed bitterness about how their language and culture were disrespected by the armed men especially the ZANLA guerrillas. Using the words of McGregor, language also operated as a “site’ in the Hlengwe resistance to guerrilla over-exertion in the sense that it “...was reified, rendered static, tied to a singular notion of

²⁷ Parker, *Assignment Selous Scout*, 70.

culture, cast as threatened and in need of rescue.”²⁸ Thus, there was a move to save Hlengwe culture and identity.

Whilst in the early years of the war there were cordial relations between the Hlengwe and the Shona guerrillas, differences over cultural issues began to emerge as the war progressed. Many interviewees admitted that in the early years the guerrillas were friendly people who observed Hlengwe culture and “*nawu*” (the law) but with time their behaviour changed for the worse.²⁹ This agrees with observations made by David Maxwell in his study of the liberation war in Katerere Chiefdom in north-east Zimbabwe where he found out that as the war progressed relations between the guerrillas and the people became strained because the guerrillas “became more willing to break taboos.”³⁰ Key areas of conflict were over guerrilla sexual relationships with *vanhwanyana* (young Hlengwe women), the language of communication and general interaction with villagers. These differences were expressed in ethnic terms by the Hlengwe. Hlengwe resentment of Shona guerrillas was therefore centred on the latter’s perceived desecration of Hlengwe cultural symbols which resulted in a hardening of feelings toward the guerrillas. A salient political tribalism was created out of a perception of abuse of the Hlengwe ethnic group by the Shona gun-wielding others.

Hosi Gezani remembered that in the early days, of guerrilla infiltration into Hlengwe areas, “*Hambu kuxuxa nava nhwanyana avanga mahi. Avaku ahikeseliwi*,” translated, “The guerrillas did not even hold casual conversations with young women. They said that it was against their rules of engagement with the masses.”³¹ This was in keeping with Hlengwe customs. However, when the guerrillas became more familiar with the territory, they began flirting with the young

²⁸ McGregor, *Crossing the Zambezi*, 130.

²⁹ Interview with Hosi Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014; Interview with Tolola, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

³⁰ David, J Maxwell, “Local Politics and the War of Liberation in North-east Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 3, (1993): 379.

³¹ Interview with Hosi Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

women even in the presence of adults. It was this behaviour of some ZANLA guerrillas which heightened Hlengwe ethnic consciousness as they watched the abuse of their young women by a predominantly Shona gun-totting guerrillas. Such feelings were still being expressed during the time of my field research. One source summarised it all well when he said that, “*Loyo anghakoma chibhamu unafreedom yokuendla leswo aswilavako kelayo anghakomangi nchumu*” translated, “A man with a gun has the freedom to do as he pleases to one who is unarmed.”³² By this he was expressing the perceived vulnerability of the Hlengwe to the Shona-speaking gun-wielding guerrillas during the time of the armed struggle.

One old man claimed that the guerrillas would “capture” young girls and take them to the guerrilla bases, “*sviya sviyativa hanyo leiya itivikana navakulukumba* (where they would learn about those things only known by the adults).³³ What the old man implied is that young women, even those below the age of consenting to sex, engaged in sexual activities with the guerrillas. This confirms Ranger’s claims that in the last years of Zimbabwe’s guerrilla warfare, from 1978 to 1979 there was a “crisis of guerrilla legitimacy,” due to deterioration in behaviour.³⁴ However, the misbehaviour started much earlier than 1978. Tarugarira succinctly describes the strained relations between guerrillas and the commoners during the war when he states that:

The armed “sons” and “daughters” could by-pass traditional myths and taboos with impunity... The “fathers” and “mothers” had to bow to the prescriptions of the “son” who learnt to kill and maim them. The father was emasculated since his authority was undermined and the mother was de-womanised since the myths, that shrouded motherhood in a traditional setting were deconstructed.³⁵

Thus, as Tolola noted, many young women lost their virginity and ended up with “fatherless” children in the sense that the children’s biological fathers were not known, a thing which

³² Interview with Willis Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

³³ Interview with Ndavani Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 10, 2014.

³⁴ Terence Ranger, “Bandits and Guerillas: The Case of Zimbabwe,” in *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, ed. D. Crummey (London: James Currey, 1986), 381.

³⁵ Tarugarira, “A Historical Study of Zimbabwe’s African Elite,” 182-183.

disappointed the Hlengwe elders who could only watch helplessly as their daughters struggled to raise their “*bastard* children of war.”³⁶ Although former male guerrillas have since independence maintained their silence about cases of sexual abuse of young women during the war of liberation, a 2016 dispute between factions of Zimbabwean veterans of the liberation struggle which spilled to the press revealed that there was sexual abuse of women by the same ‘liberators.’ One bitter male ex-guerrilla is quoted in one online paper as saying:

We also want this government (ZANU (PF) to tell us if the children from the war that we have were a result of consensual sex... Turning to...³⁷ the man who recently tore into Mujuru³⁸ and accused her of having caused the death of some combatants during the war, he said those with logs in their eyes should not lose sleep about the speck in other people’s eyes. Can he tell us how many people he abused during the liberation struggle? We have five female comrades who are telling us that he sexually abused them.³⁹

In yet another online paper’s opinion column, one Benjamin Paradza an exiled ex-guerrilla, former Zimbabwe High Court judge and President of ZUNDE says, “*chimbwidos* were just vulnerable girls who were invariably raped against their will by the comrades without recourse.”⁴⁰ One can therefore infer that to the Hlengwe who had been schooled on chastity and morality during initiation, this was an abomination. If the Hlengwe were not happy to have their daughters legally marrying a *xuvuri* (uncircumcised Karanga/Shona) as discussed in Chapter 4, it was now worse because their *vanhwanyana* were being sexually abused by the same in their sight. One source said that even young married women whose husbands were in South Africa and failed to prove that they were married would also have sex with guerrillas.

³⁶ Interview with Tolola, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

³⁷ *Name of the person has been deleted because he is a powerful politician in the ZANU (PF) party.

³⁸ *Mujuru (Joice) is Zimbabwe’s first female vice-president who was fired from ZANU (PF) party by Robert Mugabe and is founder President of the Zimbabwe People First Party (ZPF).

³⁹ “War vets issue statement, warn of more turmoil,” on <http://iharare.co.zw/war-vets-issue-statementwarn-ofmore-turmoil/> accessed on 03/09/2016.

⁴⁰ “George Rutanhire’s Unnecessary attack on Joice Mujuru”, at, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/columns-30883-Rutanhire%E2%80%99s+pointless+attack+on+Mujuru/columns.aspx>, accessed on 10/09/2016.

He, however, noted that he was not sure whether they were being forced or that since they were sexually starved would not disclose their marital status to the guerrillas and took advantage of the war. Whatever the case might be the teachings of *tikhomba* about chastity till or in marriage were being undermined by the Shona guerrillas who were virtually a law unto themselves. The misbehaviour was interpreted in ethnic terms as the *vaNyai* were doing as they pleased with Hlengwe young women. Just as Maxwell observed in Katerere chiefdom, among the Hlengwe of Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas, “The breaking of taboos on sex caused widespread resentment.”⁴¹ Although a majority of the Hlengwe commoners believed in early marriages, during the war, in response to guerrilla misbehaviour most parents chose to marry their daughters much earlier, whilst some sent their daughters away to live with relatives in urban areas.⁴²

Whilst the Hlengwe resented the relations between the guerrillas and *vanhwanyana*, they also clashed with Shona-speaking guerrillas over the language of communication in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal area. Most Hlengwe interviewees said they were barred from speaking in their own language by the guerrillas who insisted that everyone spoke in Shona in their presence or at *pungwes* (night gatherings of commoners or *povo* and guerrillas). This was interpreted by the resentful Hlengwe radicals as an imposition of a foreign language Shona/Karanga or *Xinyai* on them. One informant said that guerrillas wanted everyone to speak in a language that they understood, so that they would follow every conversation. The guerrillas would always say to most Hlengwe who were not fluent in Karanga/Shona, “*Taura zvatinozwa tose iwe mudhara*,” translated, “speak in a language that we all understand old man,” each time a Hlengwe man tried to speak in Xihlengwe. What was most frustrating to the Hlengwe was that the guerrillas did not care whether the Hlengwe understood Shona or not.⁴³ Mrs

⁴¹ Maxwell, “Local Politics and the War of Liberation,” 379.

⁴² Interview with Tolola, (not real name), Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

⁴³ Interview with Willis Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

Mukungulushi said that the Hlengwe were not allowed to speak in “Shangaan” (Xihlengwe) at all.⁴⁴ The Hlengwe were also addressed in Shona by guerrillas without any interpreters. Therefore, there was a battle for languages between the guerrillas and the Hlengwe. Thus, Willis Chauke felt that Hlengwe language was looked upon as an inferior language by the *Nyai* guerrillas, “*Se asvimaha ku lirhimi levan ’wani litsikeleleka hasi.*”⁴⁵ The forced use of *Xinyai* created in the Hlengwe a hatred of *Chikaranga*/Shona. In response the Hlengwe would always speak in their language in the absence of the guerrillas or in low tones at gatherings insulting or deriding the guerrilla addressing them. Thus, Joyce Chadya argues that language became one of the realms in which the Hlengwe contested efforts by guerrillas to *Shona-ise* or *Karanga-ise* them.⁴⁶ The guerrillas’ actions deepened the ethnic boundaries between the Shona guerrillas and most Hlengwe. Consequently, as the guerrillas spoke of national unity some of the Hlengwe simply feigned oneness and national unity. Therefore, there was a parallel process of the growth of Hlengwe tribalism alongside the growth of Hlengwe nationalist consciousness as the guerrillas threatened to destroy Xihlengwe, one of the strong pillars of Hlengwe identity.

As ethnic differences between Hlengwe and guerrillas were widened by the guerrilla relations with *vanhwanyana* and the forced use of Shona, in the forests of Matibi 2 and Sengwe where there lived bush communities hiding from Rhodesian soldiers the guerrilla behaviour also magnified the Hlengwe-Shona differences. The “bush communities” emerged as the war intensified and the Rhodesian government drove villagers to the protected villages. These communities were mainly composed of some Hlengwe who remained outside as a result of successfully evading the Rhodesian soldiers or as a result of being driven out of the protected

⁴⁴ Interview with Mrs Mukungulushi, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

⁴⁵ Interview with Willis Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014.

⁴⁶ Joyce, M. Chadya, “Book Review: Ethnicity in Zimbabwe: Transformations in Kalanga and Ndebele Societies, 1860-1990”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (2016), 2.

villages by guerrillas who at times cut the security fence and ‘freed’ the people.⁴⁷ Most of these people lived in small communities in the forests of Matibi 2 and Sengwe. However, it was the treatment of these commoners by the guerrillas in the bush that created further ill-feelings as one female citizen of these “bush communities” narrated. She stated that in their bush community, which lived across the Mwenezi River from Chikomedzi Mission, relations became strained over food distribution which was a responsibility of the guerrillas. She said that this was because, after preparing mealie-meal the traditional way, which involved pounding the maize grain in mortars using pestles, the guerrillas would then instruct the civilians, “*imi vabereki munodya guva isu tisu tinodya upfu* (you the fathers and mothers or parents, meaning the civilians, will eat the husks while we eat the fine meal).”⁴⁸ Thus, it was this unfairness in food redistribution which initiated a process of reviewing the new relationship and created a negative attitude toward the guerrilla among the Hlengwe who were the majority. It should not be forgotten that only a few years earlier, when the Karanga had been resettled among the Hlengwe they had seen the latter as uncivilised or backward and inferior people. The Shona guerrillas, by telling the Hlengwe to eat husks, revived these old bitter memories. Even today there is a strong feeling among the Hlengwe that the Shona/Karanga are arrogant and despise the Hlengwe.

Another aspect of the liberation struggle which strained relations between ZANLA guerrillas and the Hlengwe was the callous murders of key Hlengwe civilians by the guerrillas under the pretext of eliminating the sell-outs. This compares markedly with Gokwe where Pius Nyambara sees the guerrilla war in Gokwe as a virtual attack on modernity.⁴⁹ He notes that successful farmers were killed simply because they were better off than most of the people and

⁴⁷ Interview with Mrs Mukungulushi, (wife of the late Titos Mukungulushi), Chikomedzi area, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014; Interview with Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mrs Mukungulushi, Chikomedzi, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

⁴⁹ Nyambara, “Madheruka and Shangwe”, 303-306.

to this end were seen as government collaborators.⁵⁰ Norma Kriger also observed that in general Zimbabwe's liberation war heightened tensions within rural communities and that the ZANU (PF) organisations set up by the guerrillas required guerrilla violence and force to function.⁵¹ The two murders which shocked the Hlengwe community fit these descriptions in that they were murders of two Hlengwe leading personalities, Joseph Muzamani Chauke a Hlengwe schools' inspector and Reverend Naison Chipetani Chauke, the Principal of Lundi Bible College. Very few people were willing to talk about this incident but they insisted that the murders were unjustified. As for Joseph Muzamani Chauke, who was murdered at Chikombedzi Mission in August 1976, a friend of his widow intimated to me that Muzamani's wife revealed to her that at the time that the guerrillas killed him, accusing him of being a sell-out, he was eagerly waiting to meet them so that he could persuade them to use their influence to convince more Hlengwe young men and women to go to school.⁵² News of his murder shocked the Hlengwe community and stirred immense Hlengwe anger against the guerrillas. The manner in which he was killed was sickening and testimony of the cruelty of Shona guerrillas against the Hlengwe. Chauke describes it as "brutal murder" of Muzamani.⁵³ The brutality was in that Muzamani was burnt to death using old newspapers and plastic bags whilst he was tied to a tree. He pleaded innocent and instead of being subjected to this horrendous torture, he requested that he be shot so that he could die quickly. These pleas were ignored. As he was being killed, his wife, who was one of the first nurses in the area, was made to watch this horror. She was also stripped naked and beaten all over, and at the same time forced to serve tea to her husband's murderers.⁵⁴ This gruesome act initiated the Hlengwe to the ZANLA

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁵¹ Norma Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 177-211; Norma Kriger, "The Zimbabwean War of Liberation: Struggles Within the Struggle", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 2, *Special Issue on Culture and Consciousness in Southern Africa*, (1988): 306.

⁵² Interview with Friend of Mrs B. Muzamani Chauke, Masvingo, August 06, 2016.

⁵³ Chauke, "The Miracle of Lundi Mission, Lest We Forget," 176.

⁵⁴ Interview with Anonymous B, in the Chikombedzi area, Matibi 2, July 13, 2014.

liberation struggle. This callous murder of the husband and the torture of the wife psychologically ripped the community apart, yet at the same time, as the Hlengwe sought to deal with this trauma, their feelings towards ZANLA guerrillas were hardened. One oral source told me that since the day when Chauke was murdered, most Hlengwe interacted with guerrillas with a great deal of fear, suspicion and hatred.⁵⁵

In 1978, the guerrillas shook the Hlengwe community once again with the abduction and murder of another high profile Hlengwe Church leader and Principal of the Lundi Bible College, Naison Chipetani Chauke for yet again unclear reasons, besides calling him a sell-out. What the Hlengwe community thought of Naison Chipetani Chauke is aptly captured in the writings of Chauke who states that:

All those who knew Reverend Naison Chauke would not hesitate to confirm that he was a pious Christian. He was a devoted and dedicated Christian and preacher. He was a believer in high morality and good discipline.⁵⁶

Such happenings generated Hlengwe discourses of unfair treatment by Shona guerrillas. However, even though this was the feeling among the generality of the Hlengwe population, Gwanetsa said that the Hlengwe remained ardent supporters of the ZANLA guerrillas throughout the war.⁵⁷ However, what cannot be established is whether the support was genuine or feigned out of fear.

Although Norma Kriger has written extensively, arguing that Africans were mainly coerced into supporting the war effort by guerrillas, the issue of popular support for guerrillas remains highly debatable as there are established scholars who argue that the Africans supported the war because of the accumulated grievances against the colonial regime.⁵⁸ It is, therefore, very

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Chauke, "The Miracle of Lundi Mission, Lest We Forget," 148.

⁵⁷ Interview with, Calisto, K. Gwanetsa (Retired Brigadier General and ex-ZANLA guerrilla from Matibi 2) Old Mill, Hippo Valley Estates, Chiredzi, July 13, 2013.

⁵⁸ Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War*, 101-135; Julie Frederikse, *None But Ourselves, Masses vs, Media in the Making of Zimbabwe*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 66-67, 72.

difficult to separate feigned and genuine support for the struggle. However, this study has revealed that the armed struggle created a new opportunity, though in a very constricted space, for the re-assertion of a hardened Hlengwe identity where a salient political tribalism co-existed with militant nationalism.

The Rhodesian Security Forces and the Creation of a Hlengwe Ethnic Army

It was not only the Shona-speaking guerrillas who were responsible for the growth of a salient Hlengwe political tribalism as the Hlengwe reacted to the perceived abuse by gun-carrying men. The Rhodesian government's Shona-speaking Guard Forces, whose main duty was to guard the protected villages in Matibi 2 and Sengwe, also practised selective treatment of the Hlengwe and Karanga and always subjected the Hlengwe to various forms of abuse. One Karanga interviewee stated that the high rate of illiteracy among the Hlengwe resulted in severe beatings of the Hlengwe for failing to memorise their national identity numbers which was a requirement by the Guard Forces to prove that the identity card that one carried belonged to him or her.⁵⁹ Two women who claimed to have lived at Chibwedziva protected village in Matibi 2, also said that the Guard Forces had a low opinion of Hlengwe women and would always abuse the young women. This abuse was mainly attributed to the fact that the Guard Forces knew that, unlike the literate Shona women, the Hlengwe women, most of who were illiterate, would not report them to the authorities. The abuse also included sexual abuse.⁶⁰ This behaviour was again cast in ethnic terms where the Hlengwe were seen as victims of gun-carrying Guard Forces. To try and regain the support of the local Hlengwe population, the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia government formed an ethnic Hlengwe army called Shangaan Army in 1979 to protect the local population.⁶¹ However, one former member of the Shangaan Army

⁵⁹ Interview with Mr Ndirowei, (Headmaster Malisanga School), Malisanga School, Matibi 2, July 17, 2014.

⁶⁰ Interview with S. Mushavi, Mucheke Township, Masvingo, August 06, 2016; Interview with Tinyiko Sibanda, Runyararo Township, Masvingo, August 6, 2016.

⁶¹ Interview with Willis Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

said that this special unit was formed by the Rhodesian government as an instrument for penetrating the secretive Hlengwe community which was not prepared to give out information about guerrilla activities and movements and to win the hearts of the Hlengwe against their guerrilla competitors.⁶²

The militant phase of the liberation struggle saw a serious attempt to recreate the “Shangaan” identity through the agency of Rhodesian military forces who had noticed a widening rift between government and liberation forces and the generality of the Hlengwe or Shangaan population. This was mainly part of the Rhodesian government’s strategy to win the hearts of the Hlengwe in their strong competition for Hlengwe loyalty with the ZANLA guerrillas. One former member of the Shangaan Army also said that this army was formed because Rhodesian security agents were failing to penetrate and win the support of the Hlengwe. Some Hlengwe interviewees expressed an appreciation of the work of this force, emphasising the abuse of Hlengwe by Shona guerrillas and Guard Forces. Whatever the case might be, an ethnic unit which imagined a Shangaan (Hlengwe) identity was created. What the government succeeded in doing was to reinforce the imagining of a Hlengwe identity but did not create it because the Hlengwe were already an ethnic-conscious community who were aware of their differences with the ethnic others.

The Shangaan Army was a true reflection of Cynthia Enloe’s “ethnic soldiers”. Enloe notes that ethnic soldiers are geographically distinct and usually occupy territories on the regional peripheries of the state.⁶³ This was the case with Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas in the eastern margins of Zimbabwe. Enloe also states that ethnic soldiers share certain intra-communal characteristics in that they are categorised as ‘tribes’, meaning that they are

⁶² Interview with Anonymous D, a former member of the Shangaan Army, Hillside, Masvingo, 22 December, 2015.

⁶³ Cynthia Enloe, “Ethnic Soldiers,” in *Ethnicity*, eds. J. Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 282.

“...societies with rather confined societal boundaries in which bonds of personal allegiance and reciprocity play basic roles in locating authority and distributing power,” and they are culturally distinct.⁶⁴ Even though these ethnic soldiers are part of the bigger army, they are typically organised in units of their own, with insignia and uniforms highlighting the distinction of the unit and the regiments of these armies are kept by the military elite explicitly communal. Thus, ethnicity tends to be explicitly reinforced with the intention to “...bolster morale among the recruits who would presumably fight not just to defend the state but to uphold communal pride.”⁶⁵ The Shangaan Army, as organised by the Rhodesian military strategists, was one such unit.

Jim Parker, who claims to be the author of the idea of a Shangaan Army, reasoned that if ZANLA guerrillas had controlled the people by default through fear and intimidation, then a workable counter operation had to carry a respected identity that the Hlengwe (Shangaan) would associate with. Parker says that:

The local Shangaans had been subverted by the guerrillas and I decided on a personal venture in an attempt to win back their support. I founded the Shangaan Army. My thinking based on the objectives...win the hearts and minds of the people, deprive communist guerrillas of support from an intimidated populace and deny them access to food and shelter.⁶⁶

This was a serious attempt to tribalise Hlengwe ethnic identity by creating a military unit with pride in its identity meant to protect its people against what were assumed to be Shona ZANLA guerrilla and Guard Forces’ atrocities. There were, however, conflicting statements about how this force was created. Jim Parker says that “Members of my army were not recruited. I went out and press-ganged them in the same way that guerrillas got their recruits.”⁶⁷ This was confirmed by two former ex-Shangaan Army men in separate interviews. Parker also notes that

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 284-285.

⁶⁶ Jim Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts, Inside Story of a Rhodesian Special Branch Officer*, (Alberton: Galago Publishing, 2006), 70.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

all recruits had to have “...extended families or businesses that connected them to a large audience in the area,” and this was achieved by abducting teachers, headmen, tailors, herdsmen, storekeepers and other respected members of the community as a way of making the abductees’ relatives quickly support their own husbands, fathers or relatives at large.⁶⁸ The idea was that the local Hlengwe would not turn against their relatives and spouses who, after all, had been forced to join the Shangaan Army.

But one Hlengwe interviewee, who was a Commander of the 400 men Shangaan (Hlengwe) Army said the army was formed after two Hlengwe headmen had made strong representations to the government officials about how “*ma*Guard Force *echiNyai*” (Guard Forces with emphasis on their Karanga/Shona ethnicity) were abusing the Hlengwe each time the latter left or entered the protected villages.⁶⁹ Following the Hlengwe headmen’s move, the government engaged Hlengwe military men or government soldiers, already in the army to approach the Hlengwe traditional leaders with the intention to convince them to send Hlengwe children to be trained as soldiers so that they would protect their parents and relatives. Following successful meetings with the traditional leaders, the leaders helped with the recruitment of the first group of young men who were ready to be part of the Shangaan army.⁷⁰

According to the commander, it was these young men who were also used to lure fellow Hlengwe to join the force, since they were now earning Rhodesian \$20.00, the equivalent of £20,00 British Sterling as a salary and had a grey uniform which became associated with the Hlengwe military unit of the Rhodesian security forces where the rest of the forces wore green camouflage uniforms. Therefore, the grey uniform became a symbol of Hlengweness in the army and among commoners in protected villages. The parents of the recruits also received

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁹ Interview with Anonymous E, (Hlengwe former Commander of the Shangaan Army), Gweru, September 6, 2016.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

some money from government as a token of appreciation. This was followed by a Shangaan Army demonstration of its newly acquired military skills and ability to use fire-arms to fellow Hlengwe young men in the protected villages, a move which saw a sizeable number of Hlengwe young men joining the force.⁷¹ Some sources confirmed that they joined the force voluntarily.⁷² By the time that the force was disbanded just before independence to cover their identity the force stood at about 400 men.⁷³ Therefore both coercion and enticement were used to recruit members of the Shangaan Army.

The Hlengwe ethnic feeling in this force was reinforced through giving the unit a respectable mandate, which was to protect their parents, their sisters and brothers from the Karanga other who was abusing them. They were ascribed an ethnic “Shangaan” identity, and as such the Shangaan-ness of the Hlengwe was reinforced, just like the ZAPU nationalists and ZANLA guerrillas had done. All training was conducted in Xihlengwe (Shangaan) language so as to give the unit its ethnic identity. The language was the Shangaan Army’s *lingua-franca*. Xihlengwe-speaking regular black policemen were also used as trainers. The Shangaan Army ex-Commander also said that they were all to use Hlengwe pseudonyms such as “Khomanani, Hangalakani, Ahichavi Nchumu and many others”.⁷⁴ Their grey overall uniforms which were different from the green camouflage uniform of other military units gave them a distinct Hlengwe/Shangaan identity in the eyes of ethnic others. Their training was, besides producing a Hlengwe soldier, also meant to inculcate Hlengwe values in them. Shangani-speaking whites who were said to have knowledge of Hlengwe customs and history of the Shangani tribes in

⁷¹ Interview with Anonymous E, (former Commander of the Shangaan Army), Gweru, September 6, 2016.

⁷² Interview with Anonymous D, (a former member of the Shangaan Army), Hillside, Masvingo, 22 December, 2015.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Interview with Anonymous E, (former Commander of the Shangaan Army), Gweru, September 06, 2016.

both Rhodesia and South Africa such as the Sparrow family and the brothers John and Peter Henning were used in this project. Parker describes the recruits' daily programme as follows,

The day started with physical training, followed by good breakfast. Lectures, weapons management, training, and drill took up the rest of the morning. Afternoons were spent with political indoctrination classes which were the responsibility of John Henning.⁷⁵

The training is said to have produced people who were identity conscious, proud of it and felt that they had a noble duty to protect their own people. After training they were deployed to their home areas where they worked amongst their own people. The rationale behind this deployment of forces was that the Hlengwe would support and associate with a military unit composed of men of their own ethnicity. The Hlengwe commoners were also made to believe that it was their own army and the force was made to believe that it had a duty to defend the locals, who were their own sisters, fathers and mothers. Pachipo said "*Shangaan army yaiva army yaMachangana*".⁷⁶ (The Shangaan army was an army of Machangana). This ascription continued even among the local communities.

The project was well thought out as a project of social engineering. However, the boundaries of the emergent Shangaan identity were not rigid as informants indicated that though the majority in the Shangaan Army was of Hlengwe origin there were some few Karanga and Ndebele elements in the army proving the fluidity of the Shangaan (Hlengwe) ethnic identity created by the colonial regime. There were some people who feigned a Hlengwe identity so that they would get the benefits associated with it. Therefore Sharp and Bonzaier's view that identities are role played can be justified in this case.⁷⁷

Many oral sources confirmed that the treatment of *vanhwanyana* and Hlengwe population in general improved after the coming of the Shangaan Army, reflecting a general Hlengwe

⁷⁵ Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts*, p.71.

⁷⁶ Interview with Pachipo Manhumba, Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 17, 2014.

⁷⁷ John Sharp and Emile Bonzaier, "Ethnic Identity as Performance: Lessons from Namaqualand", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20.3, (1994), 405.

commoners' appreciation of the army's role which helped solidify the ethnic unity between commoners and the new force.⁷⁸ However, the ethnic army was disbanded soon after the war and records of names destroyed as the leaders feared victimisation by the new government. Some even said that guerrilla attacks on protected villages in Matibi 2 and Sengwe were drastically reduced, reflecting the effectiveness of the force in deterring guerrilla attacks.⁷⁹ Jim Parker says that ZANLA guerrillas were even kept out of some areas in Chiredzi district "...because the local Shangaan chased them away".⁸⁰ He says, "...it seemed they (Hlengwe) had developed a feeling of pride in their community and homeland and didn't want ZANLA around". The local populace is also reported to have arrested two guerrillas and handed them over to the security forces.⁸¹ The Shangaan Army is also said to have made it difficult to use ZANLA's pipeline from the Matibi II TTL to other parts of the Gaza military province.⁸² This is however still very hard to justify and sounds like propaganda as the guerrillas continued to operate in Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas right up to the end of the war.

We have established that the militant phase of the nationalist struggle, besides deepening Hlengwe nationalist consciousness, offered opportunities for the congealing of Hlengwe ethnicity as the Hlengwe responded to perceived abuse by gun-wielding Shona guerrillas and Guard Forces. The behaviour of the forces played a critical role in hardening the ethnic boundaries between Karanga and Hlengwe. Through the agency of military men, Shangaan (Hlengwe) ethnicity was re-created and re-cast, through the creation of an ethnic army, the Shangaan Army, as a form of counter-insurgency and an attempt to win the hearts of the Hlengwe. Sources claimed that the image of the Hlengwe in their own imagination improved

⁷⁸ Interview with Willis Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014; Interview with *Hosi* Amos Gezani, July 08, 2014.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts*, 71.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 72-73.

and most were proud of it as they felt that they were doing an honourable service to their own ethnic group.

Conclusion

The period of militant nationalism 1975-1979 created a new window for the hardening of Hlengwe identity, as the Hlengwe commoners interacted with ZANLA guerrillas and Rhodesian security forces. This happened in the rural villages at *pungwes* (night vigils), in the protected villages and the forests of Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas where “forest communities” emerged. Whilst the commoners were generally in support of the guerrilla war, hoping to rid themselves of colonial oppression, they generally adopted, and others feigned a militant nationalist identity. However, socially a *Nyai* guerrilla and Rhodesian security forces attack on Hlengwe traditions, customs or culture and breaking of Hlengwe taboos saw a salient congealing of Hlengwe ethnicity. The crisis of behaviour among the guerrillas and Rhodesian Guard Forces, characterised with gross abuse of the Hlengwe was interpreted by the Hlengwe in ethnic terms. It was, in the Hlengwe thinking, nothing but Karanga/Shona or *Nyai* abuse of Hlengwe ethnic others. In response the Hlengwe commoners tried to re-assert their identity, but had very limited options since the power relations had shifted in favour of the gun-totting Shona men. They kept their language alive by speaking Xihlengwe in the absence of the guerrillas or in low tones at *pungwes*, insulting or deriding the guerrillas addressing them.

This chapter also underscores that creation of ethnicity does not follow rigid trajectories as set in the invention of tribalism thesis as state intervention can take place at any time to create identities of convenience. This is evidenced by the Rhodesian government’s creation of a Hlengwe Army called the “Shangaan Army to address security concerns of the state in the dying phase of the colonial period. However, the Shangaan Army was not purely a Rhodesian military elite construction as some Hlengwe commoners and chiefs were involved in the

project. The project achieved its level of success because some of the Hlengwe *tihosi* and commoners had vested interests in it. They were exasperated by the Shona-speaking Rhodesian Guard Forces and ZANLA guerrillas who were taking liberties with *vanhwanyana*, displaying high levels of arrogance, being high handed, breaking taboos with impunity and disrespecting Hlengwe culture and traditional authority as discussed above. Therefore, identity formation occurs in response to historical events, which configure power relations, and determine terms of group interaction. Hlengwe ethnicity congealed in response to episodes of ill-treatment by gun-totting Shona others, and this ill-treatment added to the accumulating Hlengwe grievances against the Shona-speaking others.

CHAPTER 8

RE-AWAKENING OF HLENGWE ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE POST-COLONIAL ERA.

Introduction

At the start of the 21st century notions of Hlengwe identity had radically changed and continued to change from the way it was perceived in the greater part of the 20th century. This chapter argues that post-independent Hlengwe became more assertive in defending their identity than they had been before independence. Hlengwe ethnicity became a tool for ethnic mobilisation in the Hlengwe struggle for recognition and the re-establishment of Hlengwe hegemony in the face of expanding Karanga influence. The chapter examines the various ways by which the Hlengwe educated elite, commoners and their local traditional leadership fought to promote and protect Hlengwe social, cultural, political and economic interests and shore up their ethnic identity, yet at the same time trying to rid themselves of the Shangaan label in favour of a more regional and cosmopolitan Tsonga identity.

The Politicisation of Hlengwe Ethnicity

From the beginning of the 21st century active Hlengwe ethnicity partly worked as an instrument for negotiating political loyalties in their quest for recognition of both their local traditional and modern political leadership. Wolmer says that:

In post-colonial Zimbabwe Shangaan identity has been politicised. Some Shangaan politicians have increasingly sought to carve out an exclusively Shangaan space, deliberately differentiated from and contrasted with the space of the ... plateau-dwelling Shona.¹

In the 21st century Hlengwe ethnicity increasingly became an important organisational tool to legitimise the historical and contemporary politics of access to land and territorial control. In addition, Hlengwe ethnicity was used for the preservation of their culture, mores and values

¹ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 52.

which the elite, commoners and traditional chiefs felt was being threatened by hegemonic Shona groups. Thus, this section considers the various strategies employed by the Hlengwe in their attempt to protect their political space.

One of the key political issues that ignited Hlengwe anger against the new Shona-dominated post-colonial government was the new government's attempt to re-organise rural administration through establishing rural committees called VIDCOs and WADCOs. This was the new Socialist Government's attempt to replace and modernise traditional jurisdictions, which weakened the power of traditional leaders as *vuhosi* (chieftaincy) remained a titular post devoid of any authority and power.² The move was deemed necessary by the government as it sought:

...to re-orient the political identities of rural communities away from local and traditional forms of authority that challenge the state and to ground a form of political authority that focused ultimately on the modern national state form.³

The VIDCOs and WADCOs gave the ruling ZANU (PF) party a monopoly over the control of the rural population as the two committees were merely "...local ZANU (PF) party committees and cells carried over from the liberation war but whose partisan and authoritarian practices pervaded both popular participation and democratic developmentalism."⁴ This political set up reduced *tihosi*'s power and compromised Hlengwe hegemony because in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas the VIDCOs and WADCOs were dominated by the Shona/Karanga who had been the dominant supporters of ZANLA forces.⁵ To worsen the situation Nelson Mawema, a Karanga ZANU (PF) stalwart, was imposed as the Member of Parliament of the area without consulting the Hlengwe about his appointment.⁶ Thus, the Hlengwe attributed the slow pace of

² Interview with *Hosi* Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014; Interview with *Hosi* Makoti Sengwe, Sengwe Communal Area, July 11, 2014; Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 55.

³ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 55.

⁴ Muzondidya, "From Bouyancy to Crisis," 178.

⁵ Interview with Pachipo Manhumba, Masivamele area, Matibi 2, July 17, 2014.

⁶ Interview with *Hosi* Amos Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 08, 2014.

development of the area to this political set-up and sincerely subscribed to the notion that they lagged behind in development because they were not represented by their people but Karanga outsiders.

The new government also had very little understanding of the identity of the Hlengwe population as reflected by the embarrassing incident where the Minister of Information (Zimbabwe), who was on a tour of the south-east lowveld soon after independence, could not tell the difference between the Hlengwe and the Ndaus of Chipinge, a blunder for which he was not forgiven by most Hlengwe.⁷ The Minister believed that the Hlengwe were the Ndaus, which they are not.⁸ The Hlengwe were to this end convinced that the government did not know who they are and therefore did not consider them as a people, as stated by the late Hlengwe ethnic activist Mukungulushi of Chikombedzi.⁹

The Hlengwe ethnic activists, who still imagine Matibi 2 and Sengwe communal areas as Hlengwe space, refer to Chiredzi district as *Hlengweni tiko ravanhu lavanene* (land of the good people, the Hlengwe). This is how they perceive themselves to be *vis-a-vis* the “outsider” Karanga and Ndebele ethnic others in the area that polluted Hlengwe culture and competed with the Hlengwe for political power, land and other resources. The idea “of land of good people” came from the Portuguese who, having been hosted by a coastal Tsonga-speaking group, described the land of their hosts as “*Terra de boa gente*,” translated, “a country of good people.”¹⁰ Most Hlengwe felt that they had lost their political authority over “this land of good people” because of the coming of the Karanga and Ndebele, but mostly the Karanga who dominated the Hlengwe in *Hlengweni*. Such discourse reinforced the differences in “us” and

⁷ H.W.M. Chauke, “The Origins and Definitions of the Hlengwe,” The Unpublished Works of Happyson Matsilele Chauke: Compiled by Tillman Houser, (2009): 217.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁹ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 52.

¹⁰ Halala and Mtebule, *A History of the Xitsonga-Speaking People*, 8.

“them” between the “good people,” the Hlengwe, and by implication the Karanga, who were the opposite. The late Mukungulushi once said, “...*tiko lahina alahayi tiko, se inyika*.”¹¹ (Our land is no longer *tiko* but *nyika*). In this statement *tiko* and *nyika* are used figuratively. *Tiko* in Xihlengwe means “land” and so is *nyika* in Shona. Mukungulushi’s statement is evocative of the fact that Hlengwe land had lost its “*tikoness*” or good Hlengwe values and had adopted *nyikaness* or bad Karanga values, or that Hlengwe land has now been turned into Karanga land. The Hlengwe activists advocated for *Hlengweni* with less Karanga/Shona influence since the presence of the ethnic other was seen as a threat to Hlengwe hegemony. This is why one of the Hlengwe activists said, “In Chiredzi district, Shangaan (Hlengwe) people should dominate Shona people because this is the place of Shangaan people.”¹²

Hlengwe agitation was also observed to be growing in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas over issues to do with growing Karanga influence in the area which was threatening the authority of *tihosi*. A popularised rumour concerning a Karanga request for a part of Mpapa’s chiefdom which is dominated by the resettled Karanga/Shona, to be excised and be put under an appointed Karanga Headmen who would hear and preside over issues relating to the Shona, stirred immense Hlengwe anger against the move. The Hlengwe interpretation of the move was that it is a ploy by the Karanga/Shona-controlled government to expand Shona hegemony over the Hlengwe. A Karanga village head in the Masivamele area indicated his firm belief in the creation of a Karanga chiefdom in Matibi 2 anytime soon.¹³ But a more pragmatic Karanga village elder in the Malisanga area of Matibi 2 admitted that the idea was mooted in the 1990s but doubted whether it was going to materialise because of Hlengwe resistance.¹⁴ Mr Ailes

¹¹ Interview with Laiza Chauke, a woman from Chikombedzi in Matibi 2, Hlengwe Cultural Festival (Great Limpopo Cultural Festival), Chiredzi, June 22, 2013.

¹² Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 52.

¹³ Interview with Pachipo Manhumba, Masivamele area, Matibi 2, August 11, 2013.

¹⁴ Interview with C.D. Chirove, at Seventh Day Adventist Church Retreat Camp, Malisanga, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

Baloyi, MP for Chiredzi South constituency up to 2013, said that it was true that the Karanga were fighting for the appointment of one of their own as chief or headmen in Mpapa's territory in Matibi 2.¹⁵ The Karanga settlers' demand is a threat to the status quo, where only the Hlengwe are *tihosi*. Secondly, there was great fear among the Hlengwe that if government accedes to the Karanga demands, the Hlengwe would lose their agricultural land, grazing and hunting grounds. In addition, the Hlengwe would have no room for future expansion. Mr A. Ndebele, a councillor in the Chikombedzi area, said that ethnic violence was likely to erupt between the Karanga and Hlengwe in Matibi 2 owing to Hlengwe opposition to the idea of creating a Karanga chiefdom in Hlengwe space.¹⁶ Mr Ndebele further said that the Hlengwe feared that if a Karanga became chief or headman he would invite more Shona people into the area.¹⁷ This fear was also confirmed by a villager in the Gezani area, Chiandlala Baloyi, who said that given a chance, the Karanga want to take power from Hlengwe *tihosi* and village heads.¹⁸

Discourse among the Hlengwe villagers was that the Karanga had no right over land in *Hlengweni* and they referred to their pre-colonial history to justify their claims. Sisel Musengi Kasha, an elder in *Hosi Chilonga's* area, said that the Hlengwe did not recognise any other ethnic groups besides remnants of the Pfumbi as indigenous inhabitants of the area.¹⁹ The Pfumbi autochthons are a negligible minority that to all intents and purposes has been *Hlengwenised* and largely see themselves as Hlengwe hence are not a threat to Hlengwe hegemony. Sisel Kasha said:

¹⁵ Interview with Mr Ailes Baloyi, (Member of Parliament, Chiredzi South Constituency), Tshovani Township, Chiredzi, August 12, 2013; Chisi, "Hlengwe-Karanga Conflict", 32-33.

¹⁶ Interview with Andrew Ndebele, Chiredzi, Matibi 2, December 6, 2013.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Chiandlala Baloyi, a villager, in the Gezani area, in Sengwe Communal Area, interviewed at Hosi Gezani's homestead on 10/07/ 2014.

¹⁹ Interview with Sisel Musengi Kasha Dumela, Chilonga High School, Matibi 2, December 4, 2013.

*Vanhu hivativako vaPfumbi. Valavo loko valava kuvulavula nahina vaku masvitiva ku n'wina mulofika lomu - havatwa. Valavo loko vaku muyohilwisa – havatwa. Lava van'wani lava valofika nokuvona ku kukahle. Ahivativi. MaNdevele - ahivativi. Makalanga - ahivativi. (The people whose claims we recognise [as original inhabitants of the area] are the Pfumbi. These ones even if they call us sojourners who just came and settled in this area - we will listen to them. Even if they say to us you used to fight against us - we will listen to them. However, as for these other groups that were just attracted by our good land – no we do not know them. Mandevele [Ndebeles] - no we do not know them. Makalanga [Karangas] as well - no we do not know them).*²⁰

Hosi Makoti Sengwe also emphasised that the land between Runde and Limpopo Rivers in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas was never at any time ruled by the Karanga. He said in an interview:

*Alingahi lavaKalanga leri. Kuhava muKalanga lomu a afuma lomu. Ava litivi vaKalanga. Loko wotwa muKalanga aku uthlulile Nwanedzi (Mwenezi) hambu ku uthlulile Lunde avuya leno- hayi. Akurhi kavaHlengwe. (This was not Karanga land. There is not even one Karanga who was ruler of this land. They do not know it. If you hear any Karanga claiming that he crossed the Mwenezi River or that he crossed the Runde River coming in this direction - No it never happened. This land belonged to the Hlengwe).*²¹

Philemon Makondo's version of Hlengwe history in which he claims that the 'maGaza', referring to Hlengwe and related groups excluding Shona, were the first people in Zimbabwe is a rejection of Karanga/Shona dominance in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal area at any known time.²² Makondo also implied that Karanga or Shona groups were not ethnic citizens of the area and therefore should not rule over any land in Matibi 2 and Sengwe. The Hlengwe stance on their dominance in the south-east lowveld is also reinforced by the Hlengwe proverb, "*Vuhosi abyu kupuki nambo*". (Chieftainship does not cross rivers).²³ The interpretation is that no chief/hosi can import his authority into another chief/hosi's domain.

The Hlengwe were also incensed by the Zimbabwean Government's promotion of some Shona headmen to Chiefs in 2013 whilst most of the several *tihosi* who were reduced from chiefs to

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Interview with Hosi Makoti Sengwe, Sengwe Communal Area, Matibi 2, July 11, 2014.

²² Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014.

²³ Interview with Sisel Musengi Kasha Dumela, Chilonga High School, Matibi 2, December 4, 2013.

headmen in 1935 and 1951, were overlooked.²⁴ At the time of colonisation all Hlengwe chiefs were at par and none was junior to the other. In a letter to the Superintendent of Natives, the Native Commissioner of Chibi District, Peter Forrestall, indicated that chiefs “Masuamela” (Masivamele), “Tshironga” (Chilonga), “Ngwenyeni”, “Mpapa”, “Tshinana”, “Gezane” and “Samu”, who were earning 5 shillings per month were “...of about the same importance..” as Chitanga, Vurumela (Furumela) and Sengwe who were earning 10 shillings per month.²⁵ The upgrading of headmen in Shona-speaking areas to chiefs by the national President while overlooking Hlengwe headmen has been interpreted from an ethnic perspective by the Hlengwe. Thus, the Hlengwe argue that “...we are not considered as a people like the Shona and Ndebele...”²⁶

The Hlengwe attempt to assert their political authority in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal area is also reflected in their refusal to be represented by non-Hlengwe parliamentary candidates in elections. Having been overlooked in the selection of MPs in Zimbabwe’s first elections in 1980 and 1985, in the following general elections of 1990 and 2000 Hlengwe candidates were fielded. It was, however, not easy to find details about how he was chosen, but the MP for Chiredzi South Constituency from 2013, said that to win an election among the Hlengwe one needs the blessings of all the Hlengwe *tihosi*. Therefore, a Hlengwe candidate comes from the Hlengwe people and is approved by the *tihosi*.²⁷ The Hlengwe informants argue that the first Shona candidate won in 1980 as the people were voting for independence or to end colonial rule but Aaron Baloyi, the MP who won in the 1990 and 2000 elections, represented a Hlengwe aspiration to be represented by one of their own. The Hlengwe remember the first Karanga MP

²⁴ NAZ, S1542/C6/1 Headmen: Nuanetsi Sub-district, Assistant NC Nuanetsi to NC Chibi, 19/7/1935

²⁵ NAZ, N3/4/1-2 NC Chibi to Superintendant of Natives on the subject, Chiefs and Headmen: Chiefs and Order of Importance, 4th January, 1912.

²⁶ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 53.

²⁷ Interview with Callisto K. Gwanetsa, Old Mill, Hippo Valley, Chiredzi, July 13, 2013.

for his failures and neglect of the area. *Hosi* Gezani said that the Karanga, Nelson Mawema, was imposed on them as MP when he knew not their language and during his tenure of office never entered the Hlengwe areas of Matibi 2 and Sengwe. Eric Gezani actually said, “*Uyo rendeleka kwalomu Chiredzi hikuva hambu nokufika angafikangi kwalomu*”. (He [Mawema] just made his rounds in Chiredzi town and never reached this area).²⁸

However, after the death of Aaron Baloyi the position of MP for the constituency became heavily contested between the Hlengwe and Karanga. In a 2007 by-election to fill the position, a Hlengwe ethnic activist writing to the editor of an online newspaper, *The Zimbabwean* said that:

Zanu (PF), in its trademark arrogance, is fielding Callisto Gwanetsa, a known Karanga, in the heart of a Shangaan-speaking people... I was in Chikombedzi in December 2006 when Zanu (PF) was conducting its primaries. As a Shangaan, I was disappointed by Gwanetsa... a stranger, with no assets to talk about in the area, wants to represent a people he is already castigating as tribalists, and whose culture, he neither understands nor respects. What Zanu (PF) is doing in Chiredzi, is like allowing a Ndebele in the heart of Matebeleland... to go and represent a constituency in the heart of Mashonaland. Let me tell, we are disgusted by this... This is arrogance at its worst. Now the Shangaans are completely displaced as leaders in their own and only area. A stranger now will lead them...²⁹

Though Gwanetsa was born in the area, he was called a stranger. After the by-elections, ZESN election observers noted that there was a low voter turn-out for the by-election due to among other things “...disgruntlement over choice of candidate” by ZANU (PF) because “Chiredzi South is a predominantly Shangani (Hlengwe) constituency and the ZANU (PF) candidate is Karanga.”³⁰ Though Gwanetsa won in the by-election, he served the shortest time in parliament as in the late 2007 primary elections to choose a candidate to represent ZANU (PF) in the

²⁸ Interview with Eric Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 08, 2014.

²⁹ <http://thezimbabwean.co/2007/02/letters-22-02-2007/> letters to the Editor, 22/02/2007.

³⁰ ZESN, Chiredzi South Parliamentary By-Election Report: Advance Copy, 18 February 2007.

forthcoming 2008 harmonised elections, Ailes Baloyi (Hlengwe) won. Baloyi proceeded to win the elections and was MP for Chiredzi South until 2013.

According to one informant, who opened up on conflicts within ZANU (PF) in the Chanienga area of Matibi 2, supporters of Gwanetsa and Baloyi were again divided on tribal lines in the selection of a candidate to represent the party in the 2013 Harmonised Election. This informant states that the supporters fought against each other, refused to use each other's language and on the day of the party primary elections made two separate fires, prepared food and ate separately according to their imagined ethnic identities.³¹

After the Karanga candidate won the right to represent ZANU (PF) in the national elections against the MDC-T's Hlengwe candidate Patrick Mapengo, the elite Hlengwe activists turned to cyberspace to influence the voting outcome against the Karanga candidate. What is surprising is the high number of the Hlengwe who appeared to be opposed to the 'popular' Karanga candidate. But it must be understood that analysing voting patterns in Zimbabwe is a very difficult task because political scientists argue that winning or losing an election in Zimbabwe is a function of many variables. John Makumbe, commenting on the electoral processes in Zimbabwe, notes that "Elections are generally not conducted in a manner that can be deemed to be free, fair and transparent. The major electoral malpractices include lack of transparency in the electoral procedures...fraudulent tallying of the votes at counting (and) political violence."³² Makumbe strongly argues that electoral systems are manipulated by the ZANU (PF) government to ensure that its desired candidate wins.³³ Ntsanwisi Hanyani, writing on *Machangana akaGaza* Facebook page, appealed to Hlengwe ethnic emotions by saying, "Let it not be the love or loyalty to the political party but the support of our tribesman. MDC-

³¹ Interview with Anonymous F, Gweru, November 13, 2013.

³² John Makumbe, "Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe: Authoritarianism versus the People," *Africa Development*, 31, 3 *Special Issue: Electoral Politics in Africa* (2006): 45-46.

³³ *Ibid.*, 46.

T learnt from 2008 where they fielded Chirove (Karanga) and lost.”³⁴ The Hlengwe assumption is that the MDC-T lost the 2008 elections because they fielded a Karanga candidate. When a moderate Hlengwe tried to be rational by urging the radical Hlengwe activists to base their choices on merit than ethnicity,³⁵ he was heavily criticised by fellow Hlengwe discussants that showed that they did not like a Karanga/ Shona candidate.

Amukelani Gezani, in response to Clemence Mavasa’s post, said the following:

Loko a kuhihava n’wina masapota avo Gwanetsa nemaxaka akwe vavula aku jangana rakapusa harinetsi rinongoti chahombe hivuswa... (We wish there were no people like you who support people like Gwanetsa and his [Karanaga] relatives who say *jangana* is foolish and easy to rule because all that the Hlengwe want is food) ... Victory 4 (for) Gwanetsa means five steps back for the Gaza people (Hlengwe) in the next 5 years and five steps forward for *vanyayi vatsamako* ka Gaza (Karanga inhabitants of Gaza). *U* (you) will see how they will consolidate their hegemony of cause with the help of people like you – Clemence Mavasa.³⁶

Strong criticism also came from Obert who also said;

Uyo yini wena utwako zvinga ku khumbi eku “majangana kupata anongoti chahombe hivuswa. Phela hizvona uvulako wena eku chahombe hihluvuko hambu norhangeliwa hi mukalanga. Such compromisation yita hetela yimu tekelisa navavasati muka muku haa as long vaka vahisapota. Angalaveki nezvitsanani mahleketete alawo. (What are you saying you who is indifferent when they (Karanga) say *majangana* (Karanga derogatory term for Hlengwe) are foolish because all they want is food. Of course, this is what you mean when you say that what matters is development even if I am being led by a Karanga.] Such compromise will end up with people like you losing their wives (to Karanga) while you believe that they support you. That kind of thinking should not be entertained even a little bit).³⁷

Amukelani Gezani also expressed his deep dislike for Karanga candidates when he said:

Vahemba vabakwakwa hiswa dylopment volava kutumbela hili tiho volava munyai over muchangana. Loko Baloyi ahitsandekile swivula ku hiyena yeche muchangana angatlarihile xana? Mina nitsemba ateled muchangana angina uswikoti mungakota kuva mulavile kupfala yena. Vhoo mahemba u safer frm inferiority complex muhleketeta aku mukalanga uyendla masingita. (They are lying all these good-for-nothing people who are talking about development. They are hiding behind their finger; they just want a

³⁴ Ntsanwisi Hanyani, https://www.facebook.com/groups/machhanganaakagaza/?hc_location=stream, 13/7/13.

³⁵ Clemence Risenga Mavasa, https://www.facebook.com/groups/machhanganaakagaza/?hc_location=stream, 13/7/13.

³⁶ Amukelani Gezani, https://www.facebook.com/groups/machhanganaakagaza/?hc_location=stream, 13/7/13.

³⁷ Obert https://www.facebook.com/groups/machhanganaakagaza/?hc_location=stream, 13/7/13.

munyai (Karanga) over a *muchangana* (Hlengwe). If Baloyi (Hlengwe) has failed us does it mean that he is the only wise Shangaan? I believe that there are many Shangaans endowed with ability who you want to close out. *Vhoo*, you suffer from inferiority complex because you think that a Karanga performs wonders).³⁸

The other Hlengwe, like Kenias Toko Chauke, argued that development for the Hlengwe should come from their people and nowhere else.³⁹ All these contributions indicate an attempt to safeguard Hlengwe political space from the Karanga.

One discussant revealed that there exists in Hlengwe political space an unwritten social pact that only the Hlengwe are to hold political office. He said that:

We once meet together with Chief Sengwe (Paramount Chief), War veterans the late Mukungulushi (councillor) and Aaron Baloyi (MP) and we all agreed on the promotion of Shangaan leadership as well as encouraging Tsonga youth to take up leadership positions. How can Shangaan youth become leaders if we don't elect them?⁴⁰

There was even name calling for the Karanga candidate who the Hlengwe nicknamed, “Charumbira” to show that he is an outsider because his parents who were settled in Matibi 2 hailed from the area under Chief Charumbira in Masvingo district. Even when Gwanetsa won the elections in 2013, with 8 148 votes against his nearest MDC-T rival’s 1 937 votes, only about 100 people attended his victory celebrations, and a national newspaper, the Chronicle carried the headline “ZANU (PF) Supporters Snub Gwanetsa’s Celebrations.”⁴¹ Such complex behaviour from the electorate shows that the majority population, which is Hlengwe, is making a statement that they are unhappy with the “popular” candidate.

In the Hlengwe villages, informants expressed lack of development in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas in terms of lack of representation in parliament by the Hlengwe. Willis

³⁸ Amukelani Gezani, http://www.facebook.com/groups/machhanganaakagaza/?hc_location=stream 13/7/2013.

³⁹ Kenias Toko Chauke, https://www.facebook.com/groups/machhanganaakagaza/?hc_location=stream, 13/7/13.

⁴⁰ Peter Gezani Makondo, http://www.facebook.com/groups/machhanganaakagaza/?hc_location=stream 14/7/13]

⁴¹ George Maponga, “ZANU (PF) Supporters Snub Gwanetsa’s Celebrations,” *Chronicle*, 13 November 2014.

Chauke aptly summarised the cause of lack of development in *Hlengweni* in the eyes of the Hlengwe when he said that, “*Chinyanya ku hidlaya tihofisini hikuva, kuhava vekahina*” (What mostly destroys us in terms of development is that we do not have our own people in the places where decisions are made).⁴² Thus, the office-bearers who are mainly Karanga are portrayed as unconcerned about the welfare of the Hlengwe. This feeling congeals Hlengwe ethnicity and deepens ethnic differences in Matibi 2 and Sengwe.

Hlengwe-Karanga Land Struggles

Hlengwe ethnicity was also mobilised as the Hlengwe fought for land with their Karanga/Shona competitors. In their struggles for land after 2000, the Hlengwe developed an ideology of “ethnic citizenship” as defined by Mahmood Mamdani. Mamdani says that “ethnic citizenship” is a result of membership in a native authority and is a source of some social and economic rights. These rights, which are “customary rights”, can only be claimed or accessed by virtue of being a member of an ethnic group.⁴³ In the competition for land between Hlengwe and Karanga, one’s ethnicity is the central issue and Hlengwe land claims were premised on one’s ethnic citizenship. Wolmer says that whilst the Karanga and Ndebele immigrants to the lowveld tended to be interested in any land, the Hlengwe “...explicitly demanded restitution of ‘their’ ancestral land from which they or their forefathers were alienated.”⁴⁴ By demanding “their ancestral” land the Hlengwe were appealing to pre-colonial history which legitimised their claims to land and automatically excluded the Shona and Ndebele, who were not pre-colonial inhabitants of *Hlengweni*.

⁴² Interview with Willis Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 9, 2014.

⁴³ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2001), 29.

⁴⁴ Wolmer, *From Wilderness Vision*, 199

At the onset of Zimbabwe's FTLRP the Hlengwe were slow to move onto the neighbouring European farms whilst the Shona rushed to grab land for themselves. In response to this Hlengwe apathy, Aaron Baloyi began to address the Hlengwe on numerous occasions at political rallies exhorting them to invade European farms.⁴⁵ At one of the rallies he admonished Hlengwe people for being lethargic in the farm occupation. Wolmer states that:

Addressing a post-election rally he (Baloyi) said: "Please, people of my race, (Hlengwe) let's make sure that we go and occupy the farms which are nearer to us. If we delay, people from faraway places will come and occupy the farms and we will fail to get them."⁴⁶

By "people from far away" he meant the Shona as shown later by Hlengwe violent attacks on the Shona in Matibi 2. In 1999 and 2001 the Hlengwe violently ejected the Karanga from land that they had occupied in Chilonga area. The events of these periods resembled what Msindo calls tribalism, which is "...the mobilisation of ethnically-conscious people to ferment political enmity and disunity against ethnic 'others'..."⁴⁷ In a Zimbabwean daily newspaper it was reported that:

Baloyi (Aaron) incited a group of about 400 people from Jeka village under Chief Chilonga in Chiredzi to assault all Karanga-speaking people in the area, claiming they were settled on grazing land...After the MP's remarks, scores of Shangani people armed with sticks, stones and spears, attacked livestock belonging to Watson Makwara and other Karanga-speaking people. Baloyi ordered the villagers to destroy all property and settlements of Karangas. He allegedly ordered everything belonging to the Karangas razed to the ground. The villagers, acting on his instructions, uprooted newly planted crops and attacked several people and livestock.⁴⁸

A provincial weekly paper, *The Mirror*, attributed the violence to MP Aaron Baloyi's statement that "...too many Shonas were coming into the area and taking the land away from its rightful owners, the Shangaans."⁴⁹ To the Hlengwe elite and commoners the area where the Karanga were encroaching onto was of great cultural significance in that it was an area where Hlengwe

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

⁴⁷ Msindo, "Ethnicity and Nationalism," 268.

⁴⁸ *Herald*, 27 March, (2000); "Baloyi Found Guilty of Inciting Violence," *The Mirror*, 7-13 December (2001).

⁴⁹ "Baloyi Found Guilty of Inciting Violence," *The Mirror*, 7-13 December, (2001).

male initiation ceremonies were conducted and circumcision lodges were located.⁵⁰ So the Karanga were desecrating Hlengwe sacred land. The readiness with which the Hlengwe armed themselves and attacked the Karanga shows that MP Aaron Baloyi capitalised on a commoner discourse of protest prevalent among the Hlengwe in the villages. In this discourse, being Karanga represented hegemonic “ethnic others” and the power to grab Hlengwe land while being Hlengwe was constructed and imagined as synonymous with victimhood at the hands of the Karanga.

In 2012 the Hlengwe also invaded Triangle Sugar Estates. In Hlengwe historical narratives, Triangle is part of *Hlengweni* because *Hosi Mpapa*’s Hlengwe were evicted from this area in 1919 and resettled in Matibi 2. Much to the exasperation of the Hlengwe, most of this land fell into the hands of Karanga/Shona people following the FTLRP. Although it was hard to verify the ethnicity of the over 800 invaders of Triangle Sugar Estates in 2012, the invasion was driven by a Hlengwe feeling of marginalisation in the land redistribution exercise. In a *Daily News* report the group leader of the invaders is quoted as having said:

We now want to claim our stake in the land distribution programme because we have been neglected for over 12 years since the programme started. It is funny that the Shangani [Hlengwe] are the owners of this land in Chiredzi but they did not benefit from the sugar plantations that were grabbed by the Karangas who parcelled the farms among themselves.⁵¹

What is evident here is that the Hlengwe appeal to the emotions of the Hlengwe through narratives of their pre-colonial history. The powerful Shona or ‘Karanga other’ is seen as the problem and the one marginalising the Hlengwe autochthons with regards to land ownership. Therefore, Hlengwe ethnicity was mobilised to reclaim what ‘rightfully’ belongs to the Hlengwe by virtue of being ethnic citizens of *Hlengweni*.

⁵⁰ Interview with Arex Officer, (On condition of anonymity) Masivamele area, Matibi 2, August 11, 2013.

⁵¹ Godfrey Mtimba, “Land Invasions Take Tribal Turn,” *The Daily News*, 20 September, 2012.

The majority of the Hlengwe in Chiredzi district were frustrated by the fact that most of the repossessed land in the sugar estates was allocated to Shona speakers. Only 40 out of the 800 beneficiaries were of Hlengwe origin. However, in pre-colonial times up to the 1940s the Triangle-Hippo Valley Sugar Estates complex was occupied by Hlengwe and ruled by *tihosi*⁵². In the Mateke Hills area under *Hosi* Gezani and *Hosi* Sengwe most of the A2 Farms (large commercial properties) were given to the Shona, totally overlooking the Hlengwe. According to Tolola, there is not even one Hlengwe who got an A2 farm in the area.⁵³ In expression of anger at the loss of land to the *VaNyai* one Hlengwe said, "...we have never been to Mashonaland to grab their (Karanga/Shona) tobacco fields, but they have come here to grab our lands. Our (Hlengwe) land is no longer in the hands of the whites but the Shona."⁵⁴

Promotion and Preservation of Hlengwe Language

Whilst the Hlengwe took aggressive measures from the beginning of the 21st century to 2014 to protect their political space, they also heightened their struggle for the recognition of their culture and language in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas. Hence, the Hlengwe struggle to protect their culture and language is a continuous response to the resettlement of Karanga and Ndebele which started in the 1950s and saw the growth of outsider cultural influences in the imagined Hlengwe space since then. Among the Hlengwe, *ndhavuko/tumbuluko wahina* (our culture or customs) and *lirhimi lahina* (our language) featured most as markers of their identity that they would want to see preserved and promoted in spite of all the unavoidable social change that may take place. The struggle for the recognition of their language and culture was born out of their quest for ethnic revival and a desire to contain an expanding Karanga and Ndebele identity. In addition, this was a struggle between Xihlengwe and the dominant

⁵² Interview with Calisto K. Gwanetsa, Old Mill Hippo Valley, Chiredzi, July 13, 2013.

⁵³ Interview with Tolola (not real name), Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 9, 2014.

⁵⁴ Interview with X Anonymous, Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

language, Shona, as the Hlengwe demanded greater linguistic space “...in their community, schools, offices, at political gatherings and elsewhere, such as buses and... other public places,” as Msindo noted in struggles between dominant languages and minority ones.⁵⁵ However, this struggle is also a Hlengwe cry for the recognition of their culture and their ethnic group in a multi-ethnic Zimbabwe.

Thus, this section examines the Hlengwe struggle to save their spoken language. By the time that schools were established in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas after 1940, Doke had already made recommendations to the colonial government, which had far-reaching consequences for the development of minority languages such as Xihlengwe. Doke, a South African-based professor of Bantu languages, was appointed by the colonial government to study African languages in Southern Rhodesia and advise government on the unification of dialects and standardisation of an official language in areas occupied by Shona-speaking peoples.⁵⁶ He recommended that “...there be two official native languages recognised in Southern Rhodesia, one for the main Shona-speaking area, and one for the Ndebele-speaking area.”⁵⁷ This recommendation negatively affected the development of Xihlengwe in that Doke included “...non-Shona areas south of the Karanga...” in Shona-speaking areas.⁵⁸ Therefore, for purposes of education and administration Shona was used in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas since they were part of non-Shona areas south of the Karanga. This was done to reduce the costs of producing numerous translations of academic books.⁵⁹ Although the FMC missionaries taught *Xitswa* and *Xitsonga* language at lower grades using books from Mozambique and from South Africa respectively, in 1969 the colonial government banned the

⁵⁵ Msindo, “Language and Ethnicity in Matebeleland,” 82.

⁵⁶ C.M. Doke, *Report on the Unification of the Shona Dialects* (Hertford: Government of Southern Rhodesia, 1930), 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁵⁹ Msindo, “Language and Ethnicity in Matebeleland,” 83.

teaching of minority languages, leaving Shona as the dominant language to be taught in all the schools in Hlengweni.⁶⁰

The successive governments did not change this policy until the early years of the 21st century. Ndlovu blames this on the post-colonial government's policies which were "...conveniently tailor-made to serve the interests of 'majority' groups seeking to dominate and control speakers of so-called minority languages."⁶¹ In 2006, the Zimbabwean Government allowed schools in minority communities to teach English and Shona or Ndebele and the minority language spoken in the area.⁶² The Hlengwe, who had been fighting for the teaching of Xihlengwe since 1981, took advantage of the situation and immediately revived the defunct Shangaan Promotion Association under the Chairmanship of Philip J. Chauke. Their major task was to produce school syllabi and Zimbabwean *Xihlengwe* texts. Hlengwe teachers and speakers were mobilised to produce Hlengwe syllabi and write Xihlengwe academic books for Grades 1 to 7 and by 2010 the task was completed.⁶³ The Ministry of Education also approved the importation of secondary school books from South Africa, but the Hlengwe had the content revised to suit Zimbabwean Xihlengwe speakers.⁶⁴ In all this, *tihosi* and their communities mobilised funds to support this grand project and Titus Maluleke who was the Governor of Masvingo Province donated a vehicle for the work. Xihlengwe is now taught from Grade 1 to 7 and the first Grade 7 public examination was written in schools in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas in 2014.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Tillman Houser's Responds to Happyson Chauke's Questionnaire, October 8, 2004.

⁶¹ Finex Ndlovu, "Language Policy, citizenship and Discourses of Exclusion in Zimbabwe," in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and James Muzondidya, *Redemptive and Grotesque Nationalism? Rethinking Contemporary Politics in Zimbabwe*, (Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2011):184.

⁶² Interview with Ottilia Chauke (Education Officer, Chiredzi District), Chiredzi, December 15, 2016; Interview with Philip Chauke, Chirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi, August 9, 2013.

⁶³ Interview with Philip Chauke, Chirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi, August 9, 2013.

⁶⁴ Interview with Ottilia Chauke (Education officer, Chiredzi District), Chiredzi, December 15, 2016.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

However, in spite of all the achievements made in making Xihlengwe a taught subject in schools in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas, the continued teaching of Shona alongside Xihlengwe and hiring of Shona-speaking teachers was strongly condemned by the Hlengwe. Most of the Hlengwe informants, including *tihosi*, gave several reasons why they wanted their children to be taught in their mother tongue and by teachers conversant in Xihlengwe. The Hlengwe blamed the poor performance by Hlengwe pupils in school on the use of Karanga/Shona instead of *Xihlengwe*. The Gaza Trust said the high failure rate in schools in the area was due to:

Teacher-pupil communication breakdown – most of the teachers in Shangani communities are non-Shangani speaking, hence majority of pupils spent the grade 0-3 course learning to master the language of the teacher, five percent of the pupils pull out of school due to this challenge... This severe communication breakdown between the teacher and pupil has diverse psychological effects to the pupils, leading to a number hating the school environment and eventually pulling out of school.⁶⁶

Herbert Phikela, narrating his experiences at primary and secondary school, said that it is “psychological torture” for a Hlengwe student to be taught in Chikaranga/Shona because there is communication breakdown and this affects their learning.⁶⁷ Phikela also said that Hlengwe children were socially discriminated by Shona teachers who tended to relate better and easily with Karanga/Shona pupils. It was for these reasons that most Hlengwe children dropped out of school.⁶⁸ A villager also said that he wanted Hlengwe children to learn their language for the reason that their poor performance or high failure rate was a result of the fact that “... *vana vahina vasungula vadyonda chikalanga*” (our children are first taught in *chikalanga*).⁶⁹ Hosi Chilonga said that his wish was to see Hlengwe children taught in Xihlengwe from Grade 1 to 7 and even up to Form 6 so as to preserve their language.⁷⁰ Masenyani also expressed the

⁶⁶ Gaza Trust Report,

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=278679378914994&set=a.203782196404713.44362.156070247842575&type=1&theater>, 16 April, 2012.

⁶⁷ Interview with Herbert Phikela (Founder and Director, Gaza Trust), Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Interview with Masenyani Machuvukele, Chibwedziva-Masivamele, Matibi 2, July 04, 2014.

⁷⁰ Interview with Hosi Ben Macheme Chilonga, Chilonga, Matibi 2, July 02, 2014.

Hlengwe fear that if the Hlengwe continue to be taught in Karanga or Shona, they will end up being swallowed by the latter.⁷¹ Similarly Phikela stated that allowing the spread of Karanga/Shona influence through the use of Shona teachers made Shona or Karanga people the symbols of success and progress and role models to be emulated. Most young Hlengwe were therefore found to be striving to be like their Karanga role models and this resulted in many young Hlengwe children abandoning their language and identity.⁷²

Some Hlengwe informants also expressed sentiments that most of the Shona teachers deployed in the area were too proud to learn Xihlengwe and as a result could not competently teach the language.⁷³ Chiandlala Baloyi said that having Karanga-speaking teachers in Hlengwe areas destroyed or slowed development in the area by not teaching Hlengwe children properly. He argued that there was no way that Xihlengwe could be taught proficiently when the Shona teachers in the area were not conversant with the language.⁷⁴ Hosi Gezani visited some schools in his area and castigated Shona teachers for not learning Xihlengwe when in the past white missionaries in the area spoke Xihlengwe fluently.⁷⁵

To counter the spreading Karanga influence in parts of Sengwe Communal area some newly appointed Shona teachers were sent back to Chiredzi town where they had come from by a radical Hlengwe villager after they had indicated that they did not understand Xihlengwe.⁷⁶ Thus, the commoners were depicted as central in resisting Karanga influence and this explains the emphasis on speaking in Xihlengwe language in the area. One village head even said that he did not allow his children to speak in “*Chikalanga*” (Karanga) at his home.⁷⁷ Therefore, the Hlengwe children who are taught Shona in the schools continue to speak Xihlengwe in their

⁷¹ Interview with Masenyani Machuvukeke, Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, July 04, 2014.

⁷² Interview with Herbert Phikela, Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

⁷³ Interview with Hosi Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 8, 2014.

⁷⁴ Interview with Chiandlala Baloyi, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 10, 2014.

⁷⁵ Interview with Hosi Amos Gezani, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 08, 2014.

⁷⁶ Interview with A Anonymous, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

⁷⁷ Interview with Hathlani Mboma, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 10, 2014.

homes. The situation was helped by the growth in rural secondary schools which do not have boarding facilities and as a result, up to Ordinary or Advanced Level, the children had a strong touch with their language and culture. A former councillor in the Gezani area also stated that at one time an agreement was struck between the Gezani community and the DA Chiredzi, ZRP and Central Intelligence Services that no Karanga teachers were to be hired to teach in the Gezani Community except those born and bred in the area.⁷⁸ The community was not just worried about protecting their language but also sought to ensure that their children got employed in the area as expressed by strong reservations about the influx of foreigners in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas.

In the villages the Hlengwe commoners also played a part in ensuring that the language was embraced as the medium of communication in day-to-day interaction with almost everyone including “outsiders” or non-Xihlengwe speakers.⁷⁹ It was observed during the field study that in many parts of Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas there exists a Hlengwe unwritten social law which emphasises speaking in Xihlengwe. Many Hlengwe insisted on speaking in Xihlengwe to strangers even if they could communicate fluently in Shona or Ndebele. This observation was confirmed by one Shona teacher in Matibi 2 who narrated an incident where he failed to buy a goat from Hlengwe villagers in the Chikombedzi area simply because he was speaking in Shona.⁸⁰

In 2012, an incident where Shona pupils booed a Hlengwe student who was reciting her poem in Xihlengwe at Chitsanga Hall in Chiredzi stirred great Hlengwe anger against Karanga/Shona speakers. *Hosi* Mundau Tshovani, who was present stood up and protested against the unbecoming behaviour of those who had booed the Hlengwe girl. He expressed his

⁷⁸ Interview with Willis Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal Area, July 09, 2014.

⁷⁹ Interview with Ailes Baloyi, Tshovani Township, Chiredzi, August 12, 2013.

⁸⁰ Interview with Eric Njaravani, a teacher at Alpha Mpapa Secondary School, Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, December 05, 2013.

disappointment to the Ministry of Education (Zimbabwe) officials, the organisers of the event, and all Shona present. Furthermore, he also refused to give the vote of thanks which he was scheduled to do at the end of the programme in protest. By this act the *Hosi* became an instant Hlengwe hero as reflected by chats or mails posted on the Gaza Trust facebook platform. Gaza Trust was the first to react and posted a message which reads:

As Gaza Trust we denounce this animalistic behaviour and thank the Shangani student for clinging tenaciously unto her mother language, undeterred by this inhumane behaviour she soldiered against all odds in her marginalised mother language. Thank you our sister for telling Zimbabwe, the world that Tsonga is a language as effective in communication as English, Shona or any language in the world.⁸¹

The Gaza Trust went on to interpret it as victimisation of the autochthonous Hlengwe in their area as it posted another message reading:

This degree of intolerance, especially in a Tsonga/Shangani district in Zimbabwe, is a cause for concern. It speaks volumes about the level of isolation, discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation of the *Machangana*/Tsonga people in Zimbabwe.⁸²

Lazarus Machele also said that “The chief Tsovani will now become my hero, he and Sengwe are the only real Gaza warriors left, rise the spirit of Mukhungulushi rise.”⁸³ Mukhungulushi is a late Hlengwe councillor, who is perceived by many Hlengwe to have been a champion of Hlengwe rights in the area and always articulated issues of Hlengwe marginalisation vis-à-vis their Shona and Ndebele counterparts. Khesani S. X. Madlome also commented about Chief Tsovani’s reaction saying, “This is what must be done by a chief. *Viva Mhlengwe ndziwena* (*Viva true Hlengwe man*). You are custodian of our language and culture.”⁸⁴ Madlome further pointed out that: “*Swa delela swilo leswi. Swi lava kubhwala Xinyayi swi ya thyakisa tiko leriya. Asee! Awufe mthetho walowo*” (These things [derogatorily referring to Shona/Karanga]

⁸¹ Gaza Trust, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/GazaTrustZimbabwe/156070247842575>, 11 October, 2012.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Lazarus Machele, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/GazaTrustZimbabwe/156070247842575>, 11 October 2012.

⁸⁴ Khesani S. Xikovele Madlome, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/GazaTrustZimbabwe/156070247842575>, 11 October 2012.

have no respect for us [Hlengwe]. They want to plant their *XiNyayi* [Karanga] language and pollute our land. *Asee!* That practice must be stopped). All these statements reflect a great inner anger about the perceived marginalisation of Xihlengwe in favour of Karanga/Shona.⁸⁵

The Hlengwe also lambasted the policy of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, which promoted Shona and Ndebele through its radio and television programmes at the expense of minority languages including Xihlengwe. In the early 1980s, a Government Minister of Information was taken to task on why his Ministry was not promoting radio broadcasting in Xihlengwe.⁸⁶ One university student said, “Here in Zimbabwe, not enough is being done because Tsonga news is read once per day and most people cannot listen to the news because of poor reception.”⁸⁷ Because of the little regard shown by the national broadcaster to the Hlengwe language, most Hlengwe were no longer listening to or were boycotting ZBC radio programmes. This was exacerbated by the fact that the government had done little to improve the broadcasting services in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas.⁸⁸ Most Hlengwe in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas listened to the South African broadcasting radio station, Munghana Lonene of South Africa, which broadcasts in Tsonga.⁸⁹ The South African station was applauded by many Hlengwe for doing a better job in promoting Hlengwe culture and identity than ZBC. Margaret Mawunele commented that Munghana Lonene “promotes our language and all practices of the Tsonga.”⁹⁰ One elderly villager in Sengwe Communal area said that the Hlengwe had lost their culture because they were “being forced” to follow the Karanga and Ndebele cultures by ZBC and have since opted for Munghana Lonene.⁹¹

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Chauke, “The Origins and Definitions of Hlengwe,” 217.

⁸⁷ Interview with Rosemary Chauke, student at Great Zimbabwe University, Mashava campus, June 6, 2014.

⁸⁸ Interview with Works Dzimba Gezani, student at Great Zimbabwe University, Mashava Campus, June 14, 2014.

⁸⁹ Interview with Tolola (Not real name) Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 09, 2014; Interview with Ndavani Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 10, 2014.

⁹⁰ Interview with Margareth Mawunele, student at Great Zimbabwe University, Mashava Campus, June 14, 2014.

⁹¹ Interview with Ndavani Chauke, Gezani, Sengwe Communal area, July 10, 2014.

Munghana Lonene was therefore promoting the imagination among the Hlengwe of a cosmopolitan ethnic identity that transcended national boundaries. But this Hlengwe action was a simple expression of anger at neglect by ZBC, because whilst the Hlengwe imagine a cosmopolitan identity in this regard, their loyalty to Zimbabwean nationality is unquestionable and to borrow Werbner's words, "...secession is not an option for them; they belong to the nation and are determined to be fully included within the nation."⁹² However, Werbner was referring to the Bakalanga of Botswana who also at times imagined international and regional ethnic identities but remained loyal citizens of Botswana.

Protecting the Hlengwe Culture

From the 1990s onwards, the Hlengwe also engaged in a struggle to safeguard their cultural practices especially the male and female initiation ceremonies which were perceived to be the hallmark of Hlengwe identity. In 2010, the Chief Executive Officer of Chiredzi Rural District Council said to a team of NAZ researchers, "We have things we are proud of such as our male and female initiation rites. We want to maintain them as part of our culture. We do not want them to be fused with foreign influences because they might be diluted."⁹³ In 2014, one university student also said, "...*mhaka ya vukomba ni nghoma*" (the issue of female initiation and male circumcision) should be the real markers of Hlengwe identity because they distinguish the Hlengwe from other groups.⁹⁴ Hlengwe women interviewed in the Chilonga area in 2014 also supported the practice and wished it could not be changed because it is a cultural practice passed on to them by their elders. One woman had this to say of the practice, "*Nawo wahina wechiChangana wekuchineliwa a ufanele ku u ala uhi kona. Kevevamuna ku*

⁹² Richard Werbner, "Cosmopolitan Ethnicity, Entrepreneurship and the Nation: Minority Elites in Botswana," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 28, No.4, Special Issue: Minorities and Citizenship in Botswana (Dec., 2002):735.

⁹³ NAZ, OH638 (Audio Tape) Isaac Matsilele, interviewed on 16/3/2010.

⁹⁴ Interview with Works Dzimba Gezani, student at Great Zimbabwe University, Mashava Campus, June 14, 2014.

ala kuhine nghoma.”⁹⁵(Our Changana rite of female initiation should be maintained. The male circumcision rite should also be maintained). Philemon Makondo in the Chikomedzi area also commented that “*Nghoma yamaChangana, yaleyo hambu musvilava mungasvilavi aingatafa,*” (as far as male circumcision of the Shangani is concerned, whether you like it or not, it will not die).⁹⁶ Makondo, commenting on female initiation, also stated that “*Kaka kahungutekana kambe kukomba ku kutateka karhi woleha kava chineliwa*” (About female initiation, a number of things have changed, but it looks like it will be long before female initiation rites are stopped).⁹⁷

The Hlengwe adopted this stance because of the Karanga settler population’s negative attitude towards *nghoma* and *tikomba*.⁹⁸ This was also worsened by the introduction of Ministry of Health (Zimbabwe) sponsored circumcision programmes to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS. The Ministry of Health-driven circumcision programmes were not popular with conservative Hlengwe culturists because the programmes stopped young Hlengwe men from attending *nghoma* lodges where they would be taught about their *nawo* or *tumbuluko/ndhavuko* (customs and culture). Gaza Trust, which since its formation in 2011 has taken the lead in advancing Hlengwe culture, clashed with NGOs promoting male circumcision in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas over what the Trust termed as interference with Hlengwe cultural practices. The Gaza Trust said in a post headlined, *Government of Zimbabwe national Male Circumscision programme versus the Vatsonga cultural initiation programme*:

As a culture-based organisation we urge MC non-governmental organisation to understand the difference between the two as the later (latter) is guided by cultural procedures. We regret to say as Gaza Trust we noticed serious dilution of our culture

⁹⁵ Interview with Mrs Martha Matimise, Chilonga Area, Matibi 2, July 2, 2014.

⁹⁶ Interview with Philemon Makondo, Chikomedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Chaka Chirozva, “Progress Report: Exploring Future Ecosystems Services: A Scenario Planning Approach to Uncertainty in the South east Lowveld of Zimbabwe,” (Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, August, 2009), 5.

in the 2013 MC (Male Circumcision) program hence we urge the responsible organisation to respect our culture as they are causing serious confusion. Thank you⁹⁹

These sentiments were also echoed by *Hosi* Sengwe who indicated that he was happy with a situation where children went into the bush to be taught the real Hlengwe way and not the Ministry of Health's circumcision programme. The Karanga-Hlengwe conflicts over initiation ceremonies saw Hlengwe ethnicity being mobilised in defence of Hlengwe culture. In 1994, 2001 and 2012, Hlengwe villagers forced all males including Karanga and Ndebele, to undergo circumcision arguing that it is the law and order of Hlengweni that all male inhabitants of the area must undergo circumcision. In 1994 two Shona male school teachers were abducted by Hlengwe villagers and circumcised.¹⁰⁰ In 2001 a newspaper report stated that in Matibi 2, Hlengwe elders seeking to wield influence in the area were imposing "...compulsory circumcision upon Karanga children the Shangani (Hlengwe) way..."¹⁰¹ At the same time in 2001, the Hlengwe commoners also challenged the late *Hosi* Jacob Chilonga for marrying his daughter to a *xuvurhi* (uncircumcised Karanga).¹⁰² Tainos Zarira said that in 2010 a Shona Headmaster at Samu Primary School in Sengwe Communal area was force-marched to a circumcision lodge so that he would learn the culture of the people he wanted to teach.¹⁰³ This was more like a protest against appointing non-Hlengwe teachers to teach the Hlengwe. In 2012 in the Chilonga area some Karanga were also abducted and circumcised in Hlengwe circumcision lodges.¹⁰⁴ Such action shows a Hlengwe attempt to reclaim their waning power and authority in the area by bringing the Karanga under Hlengwe cultural authority. Being circumcised the Hlengwe way is rewarded with unrestricted participation in the Hlengwe moral

⁹⁹ Gaza Trust Zimbabwe, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/GazaTrustZimbabwe/156070247842575>. August, 18, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ "Shangaan Elders Agitate for Karanga Circumcision," *The Mirror*, 23-29 November, 2001.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ NAZ, OH622 (Audio-tape) Tainos Zarira (Former headmaster of Samu School) interview with M.Kwesu of the NAZ, Dombo Primary School, Chiredzi, March 15, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ File CHK HDM Chilonga, Report on Issues that need to be addressed in the Chilonga Macheme Area: Wards 6 and 7, 12 May 2010; District Administrator of Chiredzi District, Interviewed at her office in Chiredzi, on 08/08/2013.

economy hence making the circumcised “outsider others” loyal subjects of Hlengwe *tihosi*. One Karanga who was volutarily circumcised was rewarded with the position of village head under *Hosi* Mpapa in the Chikombedzi area.¹⁰⁵ The Hlengwe also insist on this requirement of being circumcised the Hlengwe way because of the gradual increase in cross-cultural or inter-ethnic marriages in the area especially among the young generation.¹⁰⁶ The DA Chiredzi and her assistant admitted that they had received many reports from Shona victims of forced circumcision.¹⁰⁷ It was also established in the field research that the Karanga and Ndebele that married among the Hlengwe, whether male or female, were forced to attend the Hlengwe initiation schools.¹⁰⁸ Some Karanga interviewees confirmed that besides being forced into *ngoma* lodges there is also verbal abuse of uncircumcised Karanga who are called *maxuvurhi* (uncircumcised males) by the Hlengwe.¹⁰⁹ The term *xuvurhi* has derogatory connotations since a *xuvurhi* is a despised person in the community.

However, though the initiation rites were still very important among the Hlengwe, during the time of my field research there were also many modernising influences modifying the Hlengwe initiation rites. The fear of the spread of HIV and AIDS and other infections has seen operations increasingly being carried out in a clean environment by trained medical personnel using sterilised blades and not a single knife. However, the medical practitioners are not given access to the inner court of the *ngoma* lodge where most rituals are performed unless they have undergone the Hlengwe initiation.¹¹⁰ Also, since the practice was associated with early marriages among the Hlengwe communities, measures were being taken to revise upwards the

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Matadi Masiya, (Village head) Chikombedzi, Matibi 2, July 14, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ “Shangaan Elders Agitate for Karanga Circumcision,” *The Mirror*, 23-29 (November, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ Interview with DA Chiredzi District, Chiredzi, August 8, 2013; Interview with Assistant DA Chiredzi District, Chiredzi, August 08, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with woman called Mbuya Midzi, Malisanga, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Sekuru Murehwa, Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, March 17, 2013; Interview with Mbuya Midzi, Malisanga, Matibi 2, August 12, 2013.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

age limit of girls being admitted in the initiation lodges. The initiation season has also been changed so that it does not coincide with the formal school calendar, a situation which in the past forced most Hlengwe children to abscond from school.¹¹¹ *Tihosi* have instituted a common law banning initiation ceremonies during the school term.¹¹² An informant also indicated that instead of using the bush to relieve themselves the males are now encouraged to build pit-latrines.¹¹³

The Hlengwe have also taken their war to spruce up their image, which has been bartered since the 1950s, to the classroom where they are encouraging Hlengwe children to go to school and to value education so that they will compete effectively with the Karanga/Shona and Ndebele “Others” in the socio-economic and political sphere. In 2010, Chairman of the then Shangaan Promotion Association, Philip Chauke appealed to his fellow Hlengwe to go to school saying:

Hana vanhu vechiChangana, hifanele hi famba chikolweni, eku hingasoliwi hivanhu vechi Nyai vaku aidyondangi. Hitaya Joni hi dyondile ...eku hingahluphiwi hivanhu vechikalanga, hitarhangela tindahu tahina. (We the Shangani people should go to school so that the *vaNyai* (Karanga/Shona people) won’t look down upon us, perceiving us as uneducated people. Let’s go to *Joni* (South Africa) after acquiring academic education. This will stop the Karanga people from bothering us, and we will be able to administer our own areas and affairs.¹¹⁴

The *tihosi*, MPs, Hlengwe education officers in the district and activists all fight hard to encourage the Hlengwe to embrace formal education. They visit rural areas and address the Hlengwe at meetings and other gatherings.¹¹⁵ However, it is interesting to note that the Hlengwe perceive the Karanga as their ethnic *nemesis*.

¹¹¹ Interview with Pride Baloyi, student at Great Zimbabwe University, Mashava Campus, June 14, 2014; Interview with Angela Chauke, student at Midlands State University, Gweru, June 07, 2014.

¹¹² Interview with *Hosi* Makoti Sengwe, (Paramount Chief), Sengwe Communal Area, July 11, 2014.

¹¹³ NAZ OH608 (c) (Audio-tape) Philip Chauke, interviewed on 14/3/2010.

¹¹⁴ NAZ OH608 (b) (Audio-tape) Philip Chauke, interviewed on 14/3/2010.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, Interview with Philip Chauke, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi, August 09, 2013.

Hlengwe-Tsonga: Towards a Transnational Identity

The evolution of Hlengwe identity has also brought to the fore a unique feature in the form of their struggle to change their generic name. Emerging debates and contestations about the appropriateness of the Shangaan appellation for the Hlengwe is one major feature indicative of the radicalisation of Hlengwe ethnicity in the 21st century. Shangaan, as stated earlier, is a generic term which has been associated with the Hlengwe since the pre-colonial times and was popularised from the 1950s by colonial administrators, Karanga-Ndebele settlers, the nationalists and the post-colonial government. “Shangaan”, as the official and common term used to refer to the Hlengwe became so loosely used that even the Hlengwe activists used it to name their associations. For example, there was the Shangaan Promotion Society formed as early as 1981, the Gaza Trust, and a Facebook group calling itself *Machangana aka Gaza*. The earnest attempt to stop the use of the term “Shangaan” began around 2013 with the formation of Facebook groups such as *VaTsonga ve le Hlengweni* and also with the Gaza Trust trying to change its name to Centre for Cultural Development Initiatives. This should however, not give the impression that the Hlengwe were happy with this name, as informants indicated that, the elderly always kept reminding them that they were not “Shangaans.” (This is discussed in detail below).

From the Hlengwe perspective there are a number of reasons why they began to reject the term “Shangaan.” These include the increasing knowledge of their history, growth in their ethnic consciousness, pride in their identity, and the search for numbers to boost the size of their ethnic group as they seek visibility in a Shona-Ndebele dominated world. The latter factor saw the Hlengwe participating in the creation of a cosmopolitan Tsonga ethnicity, to include Tsonga-language speakers in Mozambique and South Africa. There is also the issue of external influence. These issues are discussed in detail below. However, one aspect we need to clarify here is that evidence on the ground proves that there is no “Shangaan” threat to Hlengwe

hegemony or legitimacy to chieftaincy and control of land as is the case in South Africa. This is because there is barely any known population that claims Shangaan or biological descent to Soshangane in Hlengweni.

It is not easy to trace when this struggle began but from available evidence and observations made in the field an open rejection of the Shangaan appellation is a recent development. Jephias Chinhavi, the Projects Officer and Coordinator of Gaza Trust, commented that the struggle began around late 2013. This was when Gaza Trust made submissions to the government through the Masvingo Provincial Governor's office for the term "Shangaan" to be replaced by "Tsonga" as the official name of the people of Chiredzi District that the government of Zimbabwe continuously refer to as "Shangaan". This was a resolution of a series of meetings and consultations between Hlengwe stakeholders such as, Gaza Trust, *tihosi and* Hlengwe elders.¹¹⁶ This Hlengwe request was ignored or reached the relevant government offices very late because when copies of the Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) 2013 came out, the Hlengwe language was officially called "Shangani" and their appellation "Shangani" not "Tsonga".¹¹⁷

In the ensuing debates on the subject of dropping the Shangaan appellation, which interestingly has been grasped by many commoners in the rural areas of Matibi 2 and Sengwe, the Hlengwe took to social media, especially Facebook to promote an "anti-Shangaan identity" discourse. Therefore, cyberspace became one of the key arenas in which Hlengwe identity was being remade by Hlengwe activists. Thus, the Hlengwe were by 2014 making a highly self-conscious statement of who they are "...that is being formulated collectively through dialogue and modified according to context."¹¹⁸ In fact they were making a bold statement of rejecting the

¹¹⁶ Interview with Jephias Chinhavi, (Programme Officer/Co-ordinator, Gaza Trust), Chiredzi, August 01, 2015.

¹¹⁷ The Constitution of The Republic of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) (2013)

¹¹⁸ John Sharp and Emile Boonzaier, "Ethnic Identity as Performance: Lessons from Namaqualand," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 3, (1994): 405.

“Shangaans”/“Machangana” appellation. It is a Hlengwe struggle where the Hlengwe elite and the commoners were slowly lobbying for their own visibility by shedding off the “Shangaan” label. What was also clear was that the Hlengwe ethnic identity was being reworked and reimagined in a new way as they were openly stating that they were not descendants of Soshangane. Thus, the Hlengwe action confirms the assertions of Chinua Achebe when he says that:

It is, of course, true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn't a final identity that is African. But at the same time there is an identity coming into existence and it has a certain context and a certain meaning.¹¹⁹

In 2014 the Gaza Trust founder and director, Mr Herbert Phikela, summarised the Hlengwe struggle over the Shangaan appellation when he stated that:

We have no doubt that we are offsprings from a colonial womb, a confused generation suffering severe identity crisis... At one point we regarded ourselves as Shangans what Shangan?...Our neighbours in Africa refer to us as *machangana* from *soshangana* of Gaza state, ooooh what a misconception of the 21st century!!! Calling us *machangana* is like calling an independent Zimbabwe, Rhodesia and its people Rhodesians in the year 2014. Indeed we are offsprings from a colonial womb, perhaps we are now more *shangan* than our real identity. Now that we know...Gaza state and its *Machangana* brand are colonial creations as Rhodesia and its Rhodesians. Now that the *vatsonga* [Tsonga] are independent from the ruthless rule of Soshangana why do we keep the colonial tag? Are we yet not independent? WE ARE NOT MACHANGANA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! A call from little puppy, please heed my bark! Yes I called the first organisation ... Gaza Trust... The name haunted us, it was like carrying a wrong surname... Now that we know...Farewell thee Gaza Trust...Now that we know we are now called CENTRE FOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES. Now that we know I feel it's high time we join hands and promote the *Vatsonga* language and a host of its dialects ...and the correct identity of a people we refer to as *machangana*.¹²⁰

The key issue that he raised here is that the Hlengwe are not Shangaans, an identity which he criticises as a “colonial” identity referring to being colonised by Soshangane and the Gaza. To

¹¹⁹ Kwameh Anthony Appiah, “African Identities,” in Gregory Castle (ed) *Post-Colonial Discourses: An Anthology*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 222.

¹²⁰ Herbert Hasani Phikela, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/nhluvukowavatsonga/> posted 23 June 2014.

the Hlengwe, the term “Shangaan” is an insult. He also advocated for change in the name of the language from “Shangaan” to “Tsonga”. The term “Tsonga” here represents a shift to an imagined regional ethnic identity discussed in detail below. Other Hlengwe elite supported Phikela’s sentiments. Amukelani Adolph Maluleke stated that “...*ku hava ntiyiso wo tlula walowo*” (There is no truth that is greater than that, referring to what Phikela said above).¹²¹ Pat Map (not his/her real name) also responded saying, “I am Hlengwe and proud of being Tsonga,” hence rejecting the Shangaan label.¹²² A student at Great Zimbabwe University described Soshangane as “...just a raider...a Zulu person who came to Mozambique from South Africa to raid the Tsonga people.”¹²³ What this student and Phikela said confirm what was stated by Philip Chauke in 2010, showing that this discourse began among the Hlengwe well before 2013. Philip Chauke stated that the term “*Machangani* (Shangaan)” is an insult to the Hlengwe because Hlengwe are not descendants of Soshangane.¹²⁴ Also in an interview with researchers from the National Archives of Zimbabwe in 2010, the Chief Executive Officer of Chiredzi District Council said in Shona, “*Ndinopokana nenyaya yekuti kunorudzi runonzi Machangani*” (I disagree with the view that there is an ethnic identity called Shangaan).¹²⁵ He further said that the boys of his age in his home area of Matibi 2 grew up being told by their parents and elders that they were of the “Hlengwe tribe and not Shangaan.”¹²⁶ Rosemary Chauke, a student at the Great Zimbabwe University, also said that “I cannot be Shangaan because my ancestors existed before the coming of Soshangane from Zululand.”¹²⁷ This is supported by scholarly evidence as Beach and Bannerman also argue that the so-called *mfecane* migrants or Nguni groups only arrived from South Africa after Hlengwe settlement in the south-east lowveld.¹²⁸ In an interview Philip Chauke said that

¹²¹ Amukelani Adolph Maluleke, <https://www.facebook.com/nhlahluxi/posts/647914131948895> posted 2 April 2014.

¹²² Pat Map, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/GazaTrustZimbabwe/156070247842575>, 14 November 2013.

¹²³ Margareth Mawunele, Hlengwe student at Great Zimbabwe University, interviewed at Mashava Campus on 14/6/2014.

¹²⁴ NAZ, OH608(c), (Audio Tape) Philip Chauke, Chairman of the Shangaan Promotion Association, interview with Michael Kwesu of the NAZ, Chiredzi, March 14, 2010.

¹²⁵ NAZ, OH638 (Audio Tape) Isaac Matsilele, Chief Executive Officer, Chiredzi Rural District Council) interview with Brenda Mamvura, of the NAZ, Chiredzi, March 16, 2010.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Interview with Rosemary Chauke, student at Great Zimbabwe University, Mashava Campus, June 14, 2014.

¹²⁸ D.N. Beach *Zimbabwe before 1900* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2012), 48-49; Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 13-14.

“*zvechiChangana*” (talking in terms of Shangaan) is a thing of the past among the Hlengwe since they now talk about “*zvechiHlengwe*” (in terms of the Hlengwe).¹²⁹ Herbert Phikela during an interview with me in 2013 indicated diplomatically that he would be happier if we stuck to using terms Hlengwe and Tsonga than Shangaan.¹³⁰

Commoners and some elders in the villages showed that they were also aware of these debates about the Shangaan identity. Philip Chikutu from Gwaseche village in Chilonga area adamantly rejected the Shangaan identity and argued that “*Soshangane aahi muZulu mina nimu Hlengwe*” (Soshangane was Zulu, I am Hlengwe).¹³¹ Titus Musengi also said, “*Hina ha hivuliwi va Ngoni. Hina hi vaHlengwe. VaNdau hi vona maChangana*” (We cannot be called Ngoni people [Ngoni in this context means the biological descendants of Soshongane]. We are Hlengwe. The Ndau (found in Chipinge District an area which borders with Mozambique) are the ones who are Shangaan or *MaChangana*).¹³² One of two elderly Hlengwe women interviewed at the Hlengwe cultural gala dubbed Great Limpopo Cultural Fair in Chiredzi in 2015, when asked about their identity, answered without hesitation “*Hi vaHlengwe qcobo qcobo*”. (We are real Hlengwe).¹³³

This magnitude of resentment of Shangaan identity among the Hlengwe was never the case in the 1980s and 1990s when I taught at Alpha Mpapa School in the Chikombedzi area of Matibi 2 in 1984 and at Chiredzi Christian Secondary School in Chiredzi District from 1987 to 1993. Many renowned scholars like Beach, Mazarire and Bannerman have also indicated that it is inappropriate to use the Shangaan appellation to denote the Hlengwe except if it is used as a

¹²⁹ Interview with Philip Chauke, Chizvirizvi Resettlement Scheme, Chiredzi District, August 09, 2013.

¹³⁰ Interview with Herbert Phikela (Founder and Director of Gaza Trust), Chiredzi, August 10, 2013.

¹³¹ Interview with Philip Chikutu, a villager from Chilonga, Great Limpopo Cultural Festival, Chiredzi on June 22, 2013.

¹³² Interview with Titus Musengi, Chibwedziva, Matibi 2, July 05, 2014.

¹³³ Interview with two elderly Hlengwe women, Great Limpopo Cultural Festival, Chiredzi, August 1, 2015.

generic term.¹³⁴ Many informants indicated that they preferred to be called either Hlengwe or Tsonga or both. But whether Tsonga or Hlengwe is used, the bottom line is that most imagine a common ethnic identity which they do not want to be called Shangaan.

In this discourse the commoners' knowledge about their history proved to be a critical component to the reworking of Hlengwe identity. Although the commoners operate mainly off the visible arena they are able to achieve greater "...discursive penetration which affects peasant life,"¹³⁵ because they are the children's first teachers in the homes where children first learn about their identities. Most interviewees stated that it is the Hlengwe *vadhala* (the elderly) or *vabava vahina* (our fathers) who passed on the information that "*hi vaHlengwe*" (we are the Hlengwe) to us.¹³⁶ Phikela and H. W. M. Chauke concur that the elderly Hlengwe in the villages always knew that they were Hlengwe even when they were labelled "Shangaan" and they passed this information to the next generations.¹³⁷ This makes a lot of sense because if the Hlengwe elders who learnt from earlier generations that they are the Hlengwe had abandoned this identity or had not passed this idea to their children the Hlengwe identity would have sunk into oblivion a long time ago. Losing the Hlengwe identity would have meant losing the Tsonga identity as well because they are Tsonga by virtue of being Hlengwe, which is why scholars like A.N. Beach talk of Tsonga Hlengwe.¹³⁸ It is in this role of transmitting information about their identity that the Hlengwe grandparents, fathers and mothers are involved in debates about their ethnic identity.

¹³⁴ Bannerman, "Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe," 13; Mazarire, "Reflections on Pre-Colonial," 31; Beach, *Zimbabwe Before 1900*, 57.; Halala and Mtebule, *A History of the Xitsonga-Speaking People*, 245-246.

¹³⁵ Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals, Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 18.

¹³⁶ Interview with Philip Chikutu, Great Limpopo Cultural Festival, Chiredzi, June 22, 2014.

¹³⁷ Interview with Herbert Phikela (Founder and Director, Gaza Trust), Chiredzi, August 10, 2013; H.W.M. Chauke, "The Origins and Definitions of Hlengwe," 217.

¹³⁸ Beach, *War and Politics*, 20, 31, 33, 51.

However, the newly developing trend where elite Hlengwe reject the Shangaan identity in preference of another generic term, “Tsonga”, has presented one of the complex dimensions of the transformation of Hlengwe identity. In this regard Mazarire’s claims about the significance of “feedback” in identity construction partially answers the question. Feedback is a process where the history learned in the schools finds its way back into identity formation and as Mazarire elaborates it is when:

...the printed or published materials find their way back into oral traditions to emerge as common sense historical facts and these common sense views come to shape both history and identity both in the sense of what it is as well as what it ought to be.¹³⁹

This is an acceptable view because in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas there has emerged Hlengwe educated elites and commoners eagerly seeking information about their past. So whatever positive things or information they read about the Tsonga, Hlengwe or Shangaan, they include in their reconstruction of the Hlengwe history as ‘common sense historical facts’. In the Gezani area, one elderly man produced a neatly kept photocopy of Bannerman’s article,¹⁴⁰ handed it to me and said this is our history. Bannerman, who in the early 1980s observed this tendency to retell what has been read as historical facts from the past, says, “Literate Hlengwe have probably read books ...and passed this information on to others.”¹⁴¹ This information is now shaping the reconstruction of Hlengwe identity.

To this end in the rejection of Shangaan identity, information from books especially Junod’s works¹⁴² has helped in the development of a parallel process of popularising the Tsonga identity. The contemporary trend to promote the growth of a broader Tsonga identity as the popular Hlengwe identity is currently elitist, and can be attributed to the seemingly growing

¹³⁹ Gerald Chikozho Mazarire, “Who are the Ndebele and Kalanga in Zimbabwe,” *A Paper Prepared for Konrad Adenauer Foundation Project on “Ethnicity in Zimbabwe” November (2003)*, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Bannerman, “Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe,” 1-45.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴² Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, 1.

influence of Gaza Trust and the growing number of Hlengwe students from the Great Zimbabwe University who study *Xitsonga* at the institution. A lecturer in the *Xichangana/Xitsonga* Department at the Great Zimbabwe University admitted that the teaching of *Xitsonga* has promoted the development of a Tsonga identity, as it has made people aware of who they “really are”.¹⁴³ The process has also been helped among the Hlengwe elite by the fact that students and lecturers at the said university use Tsonga literature produced in South Africa.

This promotion of a “Tsonga” identity is also associated with the imagination of a cosmopolitan ethnicity by the Hlengwe elites who have been influenced by the writings of South African Tsonga activists Peter Halala and Samuel Moses Mtebule who also had social interactions with some of the Hlengwe activists.¹⁴⁴ Dr. P. Halala admits that on 16 November, 2013, he “...addressed the Xitsonga-speaking activists at Chiredzi in Zimbabwe.”¹⁴⁵ Halala and Mtebule, in a bid to create a cosmopolitan regional Tsonga identity, have revived debates about the unity of the diverse *Xitsonga*-speaking ethnic groups like the Hlengwe, Ronga, Vahlabe, Van’wanati, Tsonga and many others that are said to be “sub-groups” of a broader Tsonga ethnic identity.¹⁴⁶ This contradicts Matebula’s claims that there is a distant link between the Tsonga and Hlengwe and many other groups which claim to be Tsonga. Matebula states that “Quite a number of names have been written purporting to imply the Tsonga people. They include Tonga, Rhonga, Amatonga, Lundis, Botongas, Bitonga, Gazas, Tshwa, Hlengwe, Magwamba...Knobneuzen and Shanganes.”¹⁴⁷ He argues that most of these groups are quite distinct from the Tsonga in terms of language and aspects of their culture.¹⁴⁸ Houser, also treats

¹⁴³ Interview with Khensani Xilovela Madlome, (Lecturer in the Department of African Languages) at Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, December 13, 2016.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Halala and Samuel Moses Mtebule, *A History of the XiTsonga-Speaking People in Southern Africa*, (Giyani-RSA: Lingua Franca Publishers, 2014).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, iv.

¹⁴⁶ Halala and Mtebule, *A History of the Xitsonga-Speaking People*, 34-54.

¹⁴⁷ Matebula, *800 Years of Tsonga History*, 8.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Tsonga and Hlengwe as different cultural groups who speak similar languages.¹⁴⁹ Though Madlome believes that the Tsonga are an ethnic group, he admits that linguistic and cultural differences exist among some of the Tsonga groups. Madlome said that the Hlengwe, for instance, get confused by deep aspects of the Ronga language.¹⁵⁰ Junod also states that amongst the Ba-Ronga circumcision, which today is a key marker of Hlengwe cultural identity, was abandoned over a century before the arrival of Soshangane's Nguni.¹⁵¹ However, Madlome played down the cultural differences within what he terms the Tsonga ethnic group by claiming that differences are only "...due to some traditions which could have sneaked in from neighbouring cultures."¹⁵²

Among the Tsonga of South Africa, the broader Tsonga regional ethnic identity is useful in fighting against the attempts to revive the Gaza-Nguni kingdom at the Tsonga expense which has been initiated by the Nxumalo family which claims descent to Soshangane.¹⁵³ Although there are no known people claiming descent from Soshangane's Nguni in Zimbabwe, members of the Gaza Trust have embraced the ideology of a big "ethnic" Tsonga group as well. The Projects Officer and Coordinator of Gaza Trust said that the construction of this broader regional Tsonga ethnic identity has many advantages in that it portrays the Tsonga as a big regional group and this strengthens their position in their struggle against various forms of marginalisation suffered by the Tsonga.¹⁵⁴ The Hlengwe cite economic and political marginalisation and lack of infrastructural development as exemplified by the poor state of roads and bridges (See Figures D1 and D2 in the Appendices). The Projects Officer also stated that this would make the Hlengwe a bigger group like the Shona with the attendant advantages

¹⁴⁹ Houser, "Let me tell you," 75.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Khensani Xilovela Madlome (Lecturer in the Department of African Languages) Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, December 13, 2016.

¹⁵¹ Junod, *The life of a South African Tribe*, 1, 72.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Halala and Mtebule, *A History of the Xitsonga-Speaking People*, ix, 299-300.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Jephias Chinhavi (Programme Officer/ Co-ordinator, Gaza Trust), Great Limpopo Cultural Festival, Chiredzi, August 1, 2015.

of bigger numbers.¹⁵⁵ He was supported in this claim by Madlome who said that “...a large number (meaning population) is important for recognition.” Madlome also said that if every Tsonga-speaking person was to join the big Tsonga ethnic group, they will not be “neglected” by the governing authorities and would have their grievances attended to urgently like what happens with social, political and economic issues affecting the Shona and Ndebele who are considered to be majoritarian ethnic groups.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the Tsonga “ethnic” identity is being deliberately created for instrumental reasons by the Hlengwe elite. The Hlengwe action justifies the view of Benn Eifert *et al.*, who note that “...ethnic identities matter in Africa for instrumental reasons: because they are useful in the competition for political power,”¹⁵⁷ and of course other socio-economic advantages. What is evident in this Hlengwe effort is that the Hlengwe want to become a bigger group capable of fighting dominance by other hegemonic groups such as the Karanga or Shona. They are also seeking greater visibility in the social ocean dominated by the Shona and Ndebele.

To enhance the visibility of the Hlengwe and make them proud of their identity, the Gaza Trust from 2013 has also been aggressively marketing their culture and identity through organising annual cultural galas where the Hlengwe from different parts of Chiredzi District showcase their cultural artefacts. The popularity of the galas is shown by the attendance of the galas by all sections of Hlengwe community from school children, *tihosi*, commoners and elite, including political figures. The Comarovean view that ethnicity is now increasingly “...becoming more corporate, more commodified, more implicated than ever before in the economics of everyday life,”¹⁵⁸ is reflected by what takes place at annual Hlengwe Cultural

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Khensani Xilovela Madlome (Lecturer in the Department of African Languages) Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, December 13, 2016.

¹⁵⁷ Benn Eifert, Edward Miguel, Daniel N. Posner, “Political Competition and Ethnic identification in Africa”, *American Journal of Political Science*, 54, 2, (2010), 494.

¹⁵⁸ John. L. and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc.*, (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 1.

festivals launched in 2013. At the cultural galas, in 2013 and 2015 there was marketing of works on Tsonga history and other paraphernalia associated with Hlengwe identity, such as traditional baskets, diverse assortment of imagined “traditional” attire and ornaments such as colourful beads, colourful *swibabela*, skins and head-rings (See Figures C1-C5 in the Appendices. Also on display were traditional dishes and various cultural dances. The official languages used were English and Xihlengwe, and in 2013 a Hlengwe guest-speaker read his speech in Xihlengwe.¹⁵⁹ In 2015 the guest speaker was the national Vice-President Phelekezela Mphoko so as to attract national attention to Hlengwe events and this gala made headline news on national television and radio broadcasts. The imagined cosmopolitan ethnicity is also shown by the invitation to these cultural galas of important personalities and performing arts groups from Mozambique and South Africa.

The Hlengwe identity has evolved to become an identity associated with pride and those who claim it and imagine it are willing to fight for its recognition and defend it.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the complex nature of the creation of ethnic identities through an analysis of events in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas in the 21st century which prove that the notions of Hlengwe identity have radically changed from an identity of shame to one of pride and therefore worth defending. We have proven that Hlengwe identity has risen from obscurity to greater visibility in the Zimbabwean socio-political space. By the beginning of the 21st century, growing Hlengwe ethnic consciousness could be seen by the community’s struggle to reclaim their political, socio-cultural and economic space. They clamoured for representation by Hlengwe MPs in the Legislature and sought the upgrading of many of their

¹⁵⁹ Titus Maluleke (Hlengwe and former Provincial Governor of Masvingo) Opening Speech, Gaza-Limpopo Cultural Festival, Chiredzi, June 22, 2013.

tihosi currently treated as headmen to the level of chiefs as was happening elsewhere in Mashonaland. They also engaged in successful struggles to defend their territory which Karanga others sought to turn into Karanga land, and even rejected the appointment of a Karanga chief in what is believed to be Hlengwe space, arguing that the Karanga had no legitimate right to the control of land in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas because Chiredzi District as a whole is a land of the Hlengwe. In the social space they fought for the recognition of their language, Xihlengwe/Xitsonga, to be taught in the schools and to be the language used in the offices and other public places. In the same vein, there has been among the Hlengwe an aggressive move to have their culture recognised especially the practice of *ngoma* and *tikomba* which they argued are their key identity markers since pre-colonial times. Although the term “Shangaan” has been used to a point where it has become entrenched in the Hlengwe social system as an alternative and official name for them, the educated elite and commoners had by 2014 engaged in a drive to rebrand the ethnic community. This shows continuous Hlengwe search for greater visibility and growing pride and confidence in their ethnic identity. It also reveals the complex nature of the development of ethnic identities in remote border areas where minority groups which were historically divided by colonial boundaries seek alliances with nationals of neighbouring countries through imagining a cosmopolitan ethnicity to strengthen themselves in their struggle for recognition by their national political leaders and ethnic others. To this end the Hlengwe advocated for the construction of an international cosmopolitan Tsonga ethnicity, with Tsonga groups of Mozambique and South Africa.

With regards to agency, it is apparent that although the grassroots and the local traditional and modern political leadership may probably have different interests in their dealing with the Hlengwe question, they tend to be united in their search for a stable sense of identity as this identity is of social, political and even economic value to all Hlengwe constituencies. It is also

evident that though the Hlengwe may have many valid social identities, in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas, the ethnic identity has collapsed the boundaries between other classes or social categories to become the main identity. The process of collapsing the boundaries in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas has not been top-down or down-top but reciprocal, making the commoners a key component in ethnic identity formation.

In conclusion, with the Hlengwe treating Shangaan identity as inappropriate, interpreting Karanga-Ndebele presence as expansion of Karanga-Ndebele hegemony into Hlengwe land, feeling that Xihlengwe language and culture are facing extinction and perceiving that Hlengwe areas are totally neglected by the Karanga/Shona dominated government in terms of socio-economic development; it has become necessary for the Hlengwe to lobby for their own visibility in Matibi 2 and Sengwe by asserting their ethnic otherness. This has seen efforts to promote Hlengwe ethnicity in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas, emphasising the dumping of Shangaan identity, use of Xihlengwe in everyday interaction and in schools, protection of cultural practices especially *ngoma* and *tikomba*, and appointment of Hlengwe to head public institutions in all Hlengwe-dominated areas taking centre stage in the Hlengwe struggle for recognition and to protect Hlengwe cultural artefacts. The struggle continues to congeal Hlengwe ethnicity as it is waged in the realm of “us” versus the “hegemonic Karanga/Shona others.”

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

This thesis has examined the broader processes of the transformation of the ethnic identity of the Hlengwe from the pre-colonial times to the year 2014. It has also focused on the issue of agency in the making of Hlengwe identity at different historical periods. We have shown that the Hlengwe communities started as small migratory bands from southern and western Mozambique and settled in the scarcely populated south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe between the Limpopo and Save Rivers, where they established numerous Hlengwe chiefdoms before the colonisation of Zimbabwe in 1890. From the time of settlement the Hlengwe assimilated small, weak, *Nyai* communities especially of the Pfumbi/Lomwe origin and also absorbed individuals and small groups of in-migrants from other Tsonga/Shangaan language speaking groups. The new-comers accepted their position as subjects of the *tihosi* in return for protection and participation in the Hlengwe moral economy. By the time that the Hlengwe communities encountered literate communities, Hlengwe were imagining a common identity and had developed emblematic cultural features which served as Hlengwe identity boundary markers. They had also established chiefly political systems headed by *tihosi* (*chiefs*) who all claimed origin from one common ancestor called Matsena. Some *tihosi* like Mpapa, Chitanga (Tshitanga), Furumele and Mateke were so powerful that they could independently form alliances of convenience with other strong states such as the Shangaan or Gaza-Nguni and Ndebele, though a few of the chiefdoms such as Sengwe and Mahenye are reported to have also paid tribute to the Gaza kings.

However, the interaction of the Gaza-Nguni and the Hlengwe which resulted in the latter being named “Shangaan”, is still murky that thorough research is required as current Hlengwe oral memory on the issue is full of inconsistencies which shows that there are no clear or solid

traditions about the Hlengwe-Gaza Nguni interactions. However, this thesis has succeeded in deconstructing the ‘Shangaan-ness’ of the Hlengwe, and proved that Shangaan was a feigned political identity which was relevant in that it guaranteed the Hlengwe protection from Gaza-Nguni attacks. Although the Hlengwe feigned a Shangaan identity, they maintained their language and culture as they remained *non-vatualizados*. So Shangaan was not their ethnic but generic political identity. In a process which was not helped by colonial administrators and missionaries, the roots of the Hlengwe ethnic identity were established in a hot dry environment, which largely shaped their culture.

However, though the Hlengwe had the capacity to classify themselves as social others, by the time that they entered the south-east lowveld of Zimbabwe and conquered the Nyai groups, their imagination of Hlengwe identity has not remained static, but has kept changing in response to various historical processes. As alluded to above, this study has analysed the broader processes of transformation of the Hlengwe ethnic identity in a chronological sequence from precolonial times, through the colonial era, the nationalist and liberation phase to the postcolonial era. As we argue, it was through these various processes and diverse agency that Hlengwe ethnicity evolved from the simple basic moral ethnicity of the precolonial times to the more complex, active and vocal ethnicity seeking visibility and recognition in the national socio-political and economic space in Zimbabwe. It should, however, be emphasised that the Hlengwe do not seek to secede from the Zimbabwean nation state, but they wish to create a bigger cosmopolitan Tsonga identity, among other things to fight the “Shangaan” appellation which is an insult to them and forge stronger ties with Tsonga in Mozambique and South Africa, with the hope that such a grouping will give them advantages in fighting for Tsonga rights in the region and in Zimbabwe in particular.

Conclusion

We are now able to make a number of concluding remarks about the evolution of Hlengwe ethnicity from pre-colonial times to 2014 in line with the objectives of this study. We have also confirmed and questioned some earlier findings by some academics about the inexhaustible, complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon of African ethnicity. We have demonstrated that the evolution of Hlengwe ethnicity from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era was a product of unpredictable or coincidental events, starting with the arrival of the Gaza Nguni in areas close to them which saw them feigning a Shangaan identity for survival and included periods of interaction with colonialists, Free Methodist Missionaries, Karanga and Ndebele settlers of the 1950s to the 1960s, ZAPU nationalists, ZANLA guerrillas and from 1980, policies of the post-colonial government. These interactions saw Hlengwe ethnicity becoming at times passive, active or agitated, being shunned or suppressed or weakening and hardening, through various historical phases. Though the manifestation of Hlengwe ethnicity varied from time to time what is important to note is that there was an active process of reimagining their identity since precolonial times.

From the 1950s, following the continuous naming and stereotyping by the 'literate' and 'modernised' Karanga and Ndebele, two diametrically opposed processes of the imagination of Hlengwe identity emerged. Some Hlengwe began to shun their Hlengwe identity as it represented ignorance, illiteracy, backwardness, dirtiness, lack of modernity, making it a period of the weakening of Hlengwe ethnicity. However, the negativity also saw the radical Hlengwe becoming hardened by the attack from the new comers. The detention of ZAPU nationalists at Gonakudzingwa saw nationalism and ethnicity co-existing and sustaining each other. The Hlengwe also began to cast off the peaceful, submissive, inward looking nature they had always been identified with as they joined the nationalist struggle. But the liberation struggle phase saw the congealing of Hlengwe ethnicity and entrenchment of ethnic boundaries between the Hlengwe and the Shona-speaking ethnic others. The 21st century witnessed the transformation

of the once shunned Hlengwe identity to become an identity of pride, more assertive and making demands on the political establishment and Karanga/Shona ‘others’ for recognition. This has proven that the evolution of ethnicity is episodic as each phase hardens or weakens ethnicity. Msindo is therefore right when he says that ethnic identities rise and fall in importance in response to both internal and external stimuli in a manner that historians and others can never predict.¹

The revisionist scholars of the 1980s explained the rise of ethnic identities from the perspective of being inventions of the colonial administrators, missionaries and ethnographers for purposes of divide and rule which is why Niehaus says it is now conventional wisdom to describe ethnic communities as “invented” or “imagined.”² In this thesis we have proven that among the Hlengwe, ethnic concepts, processes and social organisation pre-dated the imposition of colonial rule and the advent of missionaries. There is evidence that Hlengwe were an ethnic-conscious community well before colonial rule. This is so because the Hlengwe satisfied the basic criteria of what constitutes an ethnic community identified by historians and anthropologists such as Nash, Mare, Hutchinson and Smith, Msindo and many others.³ Early literate groups to encounter the Hlengwe in the pre-colonial and very early colonial period discovered that the Hlengwe had a group name – “Hlengwe,” which the travellers, explorers and early colonial administrators stated/spelt in various fashions, “Bahloekwa,” “Vashlengwe,” “Hlengwi,” “moHlengwe,” “Bahlengwe,” “Bashlungwe,” “Bashlangwe,” but denoting the same people. The Hlengwe had mental maps of their imagined homeland or Hlengwe territory they referred to as *Hlengweni*, which was divided among various Hlengwe *tihosi*. They also had a common story about their origin in which the core-Chauke group claim they were

¹ Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, 233.

² Niehaus, “Ethnicity and the Boundaries of Belonging,” 582

³ Nash, “The Core Elements of Ethnicity,” 25; Mare, *Ethnicity and Politics in South Africa*, 23; Hutchinson and Smith, “Introduction,” 6; Msindo, “*Ethnicity and Nationalism*,” 269

descendants of the legendary Hlengwe ancestor called Matsena. The Hlengwe had emblematic cultural symbols which marked group boundaries and determined group membership. These included the initiation rituals, especially male circumcision, which neighbouring *Nyai*/Shona groups and the Gaza-Shangaan did not practise and they ate foods shunned by non-Hlengwe others. The Hlengwe also practised unique facial scarification for women; had unique architecture and female attire and were identifiable by their dispersed settlement pattern. Their cultural practices also included endogamous marriages and burial practices where non-members were not allowed to attend. Therefore the Hlengwe had the capacity to classify themselves as different social “others” and had had unique cultural artefacts and traditions which they “imagined as the stuff from which their group was made”.⁴ This confirms earlier studies by Msindo, MacGonagle, Spear who have all indicated that notions of African ethnicity had a pre-colonial currency and ethnic groups were in existence even in pre-colonial times.

The invention of ethnicity theorists also portray the elite colonial agents and missionaries as people who were so powerful in ethnic identity creation especially in the early colonial encounter with others like Vail arguing that, where there were no elite cultural brokers like the missionaries the development of ethnic ideologies was either stalled or never occurred.⁵ This thesis has proven that it was African agency which produced Hlengwe ethnicity in the pre-colonial period and played a major part in its early transformation up to the 1940s. There were several challenges that effectively slowed if not hindered the elitist agents’ work among the Hlengwe up to the 1950s as discussed in Chapter 3. We have shown that from the early years of colonial rule in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas there was little contact between European administrators, missionaries and the Hlengwe because of several reasons. Matibi 2 and Sengwe failed to attract European settlement because of natural and climatic constraints,

⁴ Msindo, “*Ethnicity and Nationalism*,” 269.

⁵ Vail, “Introduction,” 12.

diseases (especially malaria), tsetse flies, remoteness from emerging towns and lack of mineral resources. The colonial administrative offices at Fort Victoria (Masvingo) and Chibi, which were far-placed from the Hlengwe “natives” also, faced crippling staff shortages. The communication networks, roads and railways were non-existent or poorly developed to enable effective penetration and implementation of colonial policies. Under such conditions dissemination of new ideas was almost impossible. There were no missionaries and schools in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas until the 1940s so there were no people to provide cultural symbols such as the written language and written history and to codify customs around which a common imagination of Hlengwe identity would be built. Some of the early Europeans to enter the area from the 1890s to about 1910 were not interested in social engineering among the Hlengwe as they were pursuing illegal activities as poachers, gun-runners and labour recruiters and some of them were running from the law enforcement agents. To make matters worse, in the study area the Hlengwe were not a security risk in the eyes of colonial administrators compared with their Shona and Ndebele counterparts who had taken part in the uprisings of 1896-97. For these reasons the government did not invest much in social, political and economic development of the area. Also the colonial state officials were divided on how to implement certain colonial laws and customary laws pertaining to lobola, polygamy and child pledging among the Africans. This was also coupled by African resistance to the feeble colonial and missionary attempts at social engineering through implementation of government policy. It required super-magical power for the colonial officials and missionaries to influence ethnic identities; the power which this research has proved they did not have. We therefore conclude that under such circumstances where the colonial state displayed such weaknesses the social and political affairs of most Hlengwe chiefdoms were conducted on a closed shop basis by *tihosi*, local traditional leaders and Hlengwe continued the old practices of child-pledging, lobola payment and early marriages and many other cultural practices.

Whilst the proponents of the invention of tribalism thesis also believe that migrant worker agency was quite significant in the creation of ethnicity, we conclude that, there is need to examine the kind of work they did and the kind of social engineering skills it exposed them to. The Hlengwe migrant workers' role in influencing social transformation towards an increased ethnic identity consciousness is not clear. They failed to influence Hlengwe social transformation in a noticeable way. The migrant workers were largely simple uneducated men who were scattered throughout South Africa and mainly working on the farms than the Rand mines. We therefore infer that the grossly limited level of literacy among them limited their circle of social interaction to less influential Africans than mingling with leaders of trade unions such as the ICU of South Africa which was so feared in Southern Rhodesia. The Hlengwe migrant workers from South Africa did not undergo any political education and did not bring any radical ideas in line with the Rangerian thinking.⁶ There is evidence in government documents of only one semi-literate migrant worker Mikia or Michael Foromela, who wrote letters from South Africa trying to incite the Hlengwe to agitate for the formation of Bahlengwe "Hlengaland and Gazaland Protectorate" stretching from Hlengwe territory in Zimbabwe to Mozambique.⁷ But lack of the requisite skills to beat the colonial security system saw him failing as his letters were intercepted and never reached the intended Hlengwe *tihosi*. Also, the fact that the migrant workers were scattered on the farms throughout South Africa, meant that it was difficult to establish large Hlengwe societies which could have coined powerful ethnic ideologies. The conditions that they worked under in South Africa failed to create a sense of oneness or equip them with socio-political organisational skills. Back home, they neither engaged in any form of activism nor try to influence the formation of Hlengwe councils or welfare associations to fight for Hlengwe rights. They also had no links with the Rhodesian

⁶ Ranger, *Voices*, 143.

⁷ NAZ, A3/18/5 Michael (Mikia) Foromele in a letter to Mr J. Mbumeni (most probably J. Mboweni), 21 January, 1912; NAZ, A3/18/5, Mikia Foromela (aka Michael, Mikia Chahoka) in a letter to Mr Isaac Khumalo, 22 January, 1912.

ICU though they had worked in South Africa where the ICU was powerful. Maybe since missionaries had not standardised the Hlengwe language, the migrant workers had no language to defend. Therefore the Hlengwe case does not justify Ranger's view about the role of migrant workers in identity formation. This brings us to the conclusion that migrant workers had a very insignificant role in the creation of Hlengwe identity formation and transformation.

By focusing on the broader processes of evolving Hlengwe ethnicity since the precolonial period, this study has gone beyond most of the existing theories on the formation of ethnicity by analysing the processes that took place in the later colonial period through to the post-colonial period. This has shown that the transformation in African ethnic identities became an increasingly complex affair after the early colonial encounter, due to unpredictably changing historical developments which provided varied opportunities for the reworking of identities as agency in identity formation became diversified. We conclude that the complex transformation in Hlengwe ethnic identity in the later colonial period from 1940 was influenced by the Hlengwe society's interaction with various players such as the missionaries of the Free Methodist Church, who entered the study area from late 1939, and colonial state officials as there was heightened implementation of colonial policy in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas than before as from the 1950s. The new players in identity formation also included the resettled Karanga and Ndebele ethnic others; ZAPU nationalists, ZANLA guerrillas and the Guard Force unit of the Rhodesian security forces and the Hlengwe commoners. Thus it is safe to talk of multiple agency in the evolution of Hlengwe identity and cultural practices in this phase. In some arenas of interaction and under certain conditions of interaction Hlengwe ethnicity was hardened, while in some it was weakened and forced to be dormant or suppressed, while in some it was activated as agitated ethnicity or political tribalism. Msindo and MacGonagle are therefore justified when they make observations about such changes, with Msindo talking of ethnicity, as appearing and disappearing at times, while MacGonagle says ethnic identities can

be strong, or hard or weak at different times. It was not only the imagination of ethnic identities which was affected but also many previous Hlengwe ethnic identity boundary markers or the unique cultural artefacts, and traditions which the Hlengwe “imagined as the stuff from which their group was made,” were also modified or abandoned as a result of the complex interactions that ensued.

However, the process of transformation was not top-down or singly elite-driven but dynamic because the Hlengwe commoners were not passive or gullible imbibers or consumers of ideas or traditions from external sources or the new groups they were interacting with. We have shown that whilst missionary and state agency influenced African attitudes towards each other, for example, by missionary preferential treatment of Hlengwe than Karanga and Ndebele, or colonial administrators sowing seeds of division between Hlengwe and newcomers by slandering the newcomers when with the Hlengwe and vice-versa, the virtual mapping of the fields and terms of interaction lay with the Africans in rural Matibi 2 and Sengwe. It has also been proven that in Matibi 2 and Sengwe from the 1940s missionaries and state agents were not always successful in inventing or influencing emblematic cultural practices of Africans because of African resistance as Africans did not sever ties with their imagined cultural past and traditions. Many Hlengwe traditions such as early marriages, payment of lobola, initiation ceremonies and consulting n’angas continued unabated.

The Hlengwe commoners defended their land and water resources, and made it difficult for government Agricultural officers to operate. However, Hlengwe interaction with Ndebele and Karanga commoners produced two diametrically opposed reactions. The labelling of Hlengwe as “illiterate,” “dirty” and “uncivilised” by Karanga and Ndebele resulted in some Hlengwe shunning and suppressing their identity and a few extreme cases choosing to be called by Karanga and Ndebele names. The change of names by some Hlengwe proves the fluidity of the Hlengwe ethnic identity boundaries even by the 1950s and 1960s. Many Hlengwe even abandoned some cultural practices which they then saw as shameful, such as cutting of

earlobes; eating bull-frogs and monitor-lizards, facial scarification – *tihlanga*. However, others became hardened and counter-named the Karanga, calling them *vaNyai*, witches, lawless and arrogant people. They even fought hard to defend their language. However, it was also then that even the “Shangaan” appellation to denote the Hlengwe was popularised by the Ndebele and Karanga commoners in their day today interaction in the villages. So commoners were also active participants in the ongoing formation and recreation of Hlengwe identity.

Two other unpredictable historical developments showing the complex nature of the transformation of Hlengwe ethnic identity in the later colonial period were the detention of ZAPU nationalists at Gonakudzingwa between 1964 and 1974 and the outbreak of the armed liberation struggle from about 1975. We saw that in the period 1964 to 1975 ZAPU nationalist agency helped restore an element of respectability to, and sustained Hlengwe ethnicity after a period of battering by the Karanga and Ndebele settlers. The Hlengwe also cast off the submissive, peaceful and inward looking nature which Hlengwe ethnic identity had previously been associated with and engaged in the violent search for liberation. However, this was to quickly change after the start of the liberation struggle following the Hlengwe interaction with Shona-speaking gun-totting ZANLA guerrillas and the Guard Forces unit of the Rhodesian security army. The unsavoury relations as a result of the way-ward behaviour of these forces which tended to be high-handed, arrogant, to abuse the Hlengwe physically and *vanhwanyana* sexually and to show little respect to Hlengwe culture, also resulted in a hardening of feelings and congealing of Hlengwe ethnicity.

Judging from the unfolding of events in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas in the broader processes of transformation of Hlengwe identity we can also conclude that the transformation of ethnic identities is a complex and messy affair where the role of any agency whether state, missionary, commoner or educated elite cannot be limited to certain specific periods. In the transformation of Hlengwe ethnic identity it is apparent that state, missionaries and educated

elite became only very active in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas after the 1940s and not during the early colonial encounter. We also see the colonial state, which throughout the colonial period had never tried to create a Hlengwe identity of convenience, trying to do so only as late as 1979 by creating an ethnic Shangaan Army in the last year of colonial rule to address a security concern. But again it was not an imposition from above as some Hlengwe *tihosi* were involved and young unemployed and employed Hlengwe men joined the force, which was a force of Hlengwe-speaking people.

This thesis has also revealed that in the transformation of ethnicity, in a given community, there is also a salient process of the creation of “ethnic community rivals”. A study of the transformation of Hlengwe ethnicity proved that episodes of negative interaction between the Karanga and the Hlengwe initiated a salient process of the creation of their ethnic rivalry. Negative interaction is when group contact is generally associated with competition and hostile interaction. We have observed that though Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas are multi-ethnic areas inhabited by the Hlengwe, Karanga, Ndebele, Venda and remnants of the Pfumbi, imaginary lines of subtle hatred have been drawn between the Hlengwe and Karanga. This is irrespective of the fact that they co-exist and there are intermarriages among them. This rivalry is not as primordialists would say, “...results from antipathies and antagonisms that are enduring properties of ethnic groups.”⁸ It is not from inherent or in-born ethnic hatred because Mtetwa has proven that the Hlengwe had sound trade relations with many Shona groups in precolonial times.⁹ It is actually a result of an accumulation of grievances against the Karanga/Shona other by the Hlengwe during moments of negative interaction.

⁸ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” *International Organization*, Vol. 54, no. 4 (2000): 849.

⁹ Mtetwa, “The Political and Economic,” 263-265.

This was because from the 1950s, when the Karanga were settled, they took Hlengwe land and generally looked down upon the Hlengwe in the process of ethnic labelling discussed in Chapter 4. With most of the Hlengwe being illiterate, Karanga or Shona-speaking people occupied administrative posts and other positions in the civil service as teachers, headmasters and policemen in Matibi 2 and Sengwe. The war exposed the Hlengwe to a Shona-speaking guerrilla force and Rhodesian Guard Force whose behaviour and relations with the Hlengwe as discussed in Chapter 7 were unsavoury. After independence, the Hlengwe were still overlooked in resource distribution, infrastructural development and were politically marginalised as Karanga influences spread more into Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal areas. Following the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme, most Hlengwe were overlooked, or were given small A1 one farms by a domineering Shona government. The *tihosi*, who were downgraded to headmen in the colonial period, were not up-graded, like was happening in Karanga country. In the eyes of the Hlengwe, all this was interpreted in ethnic terms. Therefore, general Hlengwe discourse treats the Karanga as rivals of the Hlengwe and radical Hlengwe ethnic activists reject Shona leadership over them in Chiredzi District.

As revealed by this study, there are ethnic communities in the margins of national states where they have remained as ‘obscure’ or ‘invisible’ ethnic communities, because their identities have been wrongly conflated with those of bigger known communities by the colonial regime and neighbouring majority ethnic communities. However, this study has revealed that these communities like the Hlengwe have been fighting their wars to defend their identities silently and have succeeded because the radical commoner and chiefly elite have remained resolute in defence of their cultural symbols, traditions and identity. At the beginning of the 20th century the Hlengwe community was little known and *Hlengweni* was an area of little interest to anyone but its inhabitants. However, by the 21st century Hlengwe ethnicity had become active as they sought to re-assert it in Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas of the south-east lowveld of

Zimbabwe. The ethnic identity of the Hlengwe which was once little known and associated with shame had become an identity of pride by 2014. Solaway and Sharp and Bonzaier have observed similar transformations of ethnic identities among the Kgalagadi of Botswana and the Nama of Western Cape in South Africa.¹⁰ It is no surprise if more little-known ethnic communities are to arise seeking greater visibility in different border areas of Zimbabwe and other African countries. Most of these communities claim their origin in the distant past and have stories of origin linking them with ancient legendary ancestral figures from an undateable distant past like Matsena of the Hlengwe. This is done to legitimise their identities; existence as autochthons and claims to rights over land and chiefly authority. By 2014, Hlengwe ethnic consciousness had grown to a point where, Hlengwe activism for redress of perceived past injustices was expressed politically, socially and economically as revealed in Chapter 8. Politically, the Hlengwe fought hard for the recognition of their modern and traditional leaders, Members of Parliament and *tihosi* respectively. They rejected the establishment of a Karanga Chieftainship or Headmanship to cater for the Karangas resettled in Matibi 2. Socially, they fought for the recognition of their culture especially initiation ceremonies and language in a struggle characterised by forcing those who want to remain in *Hlengweni* to undergo circumcision or *tikhomba* and to speak in Xihlengwe/Tsonga. They also rejected ‘outsider’ teachers in their schools demanding the recruitment of their own children. Economically, they engaged in the struggle to stop land grabbing by the Karanga.

One other striking feature of the broader processes of evolving Hlengwe ethnicity, which this study has confirmed, is that the reworking of Hlengwe identity in the 21st century became increasingly a conscious and deliberate process of social engineering which was influenced by increased access to information and knowledge about construction of identities. This is very closely related to what Mazarire called “feedback,” where historical facts from books are being

¹⁰ Solway, “From Shame to Pride,” 254-274; Sharp and Boonzaier, “Ethnic Identity as Performance,” 405-415.

consciously narrated as the authentic history of a people. We argue that by 2014 there was an aggressive attempt at constructing a Hlengwe (Tsonga) identity through the agency of the new Hlengwe elite (which prefers to be called Tsonga) including university graduates, university lecturers, teachers and students, commoners, *tihosi*, and politicians. The attempts at conscientising the Hlengwe about their identity is characterised by many publicised activities such as cultural galas, use of the press and electronic media to advertise Hlengwe functions, role-playing imagined Hlengwe identities through traditional dances, wearing and selling Hlengwe attire such as *swibabela* and animal skins. Also on sale at galas is an assortment of saleable goods imagined or purported to be Hlengwe traditional goods. Though the commercialisation of Hlengwe identity is in its infancy, it justifies the Comarovean view that ethnicity is now "...becoming more corporate, more commodified, more implicated than ever before in the economics of everyday life."¹¹ There is also a drive towards Hlengwe self-improvement through acquiring higher educational and professional qualifications so that they can compete effectively with other ethnic communities, especially the Karanga. More striking in the reconstruction process as discussed in Chapter 8, is the fight to totally dissociate themselves with the appellation "Shangaan" in preference for "Tsonga". The move has instrumentalist motivations as the idea is to create a bigger Tsonga group which straddles the international boundaries into Mozambique and South Africa to help each other in lobbying for Tsonga/Hlengwe rights, which the Tsonga-speaking groups in the three countries feel they have been suppressed for a long time by both colonial and postcolonial governments. However, the results of this latest development are yet to be studied.

Looking at the evolution of Hlengwe ethnic identity, it is clear that the processes in the formation and transformation of African ethnic identities are not cast in stone and do not follow a prescribed or straight-jacket trajectory. Each ethnic community had its own long and unique

¹¹ John, L. and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc.*, (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 1.

historical experiences which shaped it. Hlengwe ethnic identity was neither primordial nor a product of elitist formations in the colonial period but was created through African agency in the precolonial period and evolved over a long period of time through changing historical periods which exposed the Hlengwe to various forces which transformed their ethnic identity, cultural symbols and traditions. The evolution was episodic, but becoming more complex as time progressed with the commoners being key players alongside the multiple-elitist agency including, colonial officials, missionaries, Karanga and Ndebele ethnic others, ZAPU nationalists, ZANLA guerrillas, the Guard Force unit of the Rhodesian Army, the post-colonial Government, *tihosi* and Hlengwe educated elite. We therefore end here by saying, Hlengwe ethnicity is an imagined reality, perpetually being transformed, but anchoring its existence on primordial ideas to justify its existence and claims. Therefore, the imagined Hlengwe ethnic identity and cultural practices have endured for many years, with modifications of course, because they are embedded in the people's popular consciousness, informing them of who they are and how they should act as the Hlengwe or the now preferred appellation "Tsonga".

APPENDICES

MAP 4: SHOWING THE GENERAL LOCATION OF HLENGWENI AND THE MAJOR RIVERS



Source: J. Bannerman, 'Hlengweni: The History of the Hlengwe of the Lower Save and Luni Rivers, from the Late-Eighteenth to the mid-Twentieth Century,' *Zimbabwean History*, 12 (1981):

FIGURE A1



Hosi Ben Macheme Chilonga (Showing the simplicity of Hlengwe tihosi. In the background is the homestead showing huts with the Hlengwe veranda). (Photo by Researcher 02/07/2014).

FIGURE A1 (a)



Hosi Ben Macheme and three Women Village Heads. (Pictured by the researcher 02/07/2014).

FIGURE A1 (b)



A court in session at Hosi Ben Chilonga's Court. Standing in yellow is the *Hosi*. (Picture by researcher).

FIGURE A2



From left Willis Chauke, unidentified Village Head, Dhumazi Mbokota (Elder) and to the far right is *Hosi* Amos Gezani. (Photo taken by researcher on 09/07/2014).

NB. The *tihosi* have no special ‘traditional chiefly attire and the office of *Hosi* is not a direct ticket to amassing wealth as happens in other ethnic communities.

FIGURE A2 (a)



A meeting at *Hosi* Amos Gezani's Homestead. *Hosi* Gezani (third from the left) is holding a walking-stick. Hlengwe *tihosi* do not have any special traditional attire of authority.

(Source: Chaka Chirozva, *Progress Report: Exploring Future Ecosystem Services: A Scenario Planning Approach to Uncertainty in the South East Lowveld of Zimbabwe* (Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, 2009), 28.

FIGURE A2 (b)



A court in session at *Hosi Gezani's Court*. Eric Gezani (second left), the son of Hosi Amos Gezani, is recording the proceedings. (Picture taken by the researcher, 10/07/2014).

FIGURE A3



Hosi Makoti Sengwe; The Paramount Chief, Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas (Picture by the researcher, 11/7/2017).

FIGURE B1



A nkhula, or Hlengwe granary at Titos Musengi's Place, Matibi 2. (Photo by the Researcher: 05/07/2014)

FIGURE B2



A ng'hula in the Sengwe Communal Area. (Picture by researcher, 10/7/2014)

FIGURE C1



Modern Trends in Hlengwe fashion, the new-look *ceka* and *xibabela*. Picture of a Hlengwe woman wearing symbols of her identity at a Chiredzi Hlengwe cultural gala *aka* Great Limpopo Cultural Festival (Picture taken by the researcher on 22/06/2013).

FIGUREC2



Two Hlengwe women in the Chikombedzi Area, adorning the *ceka*. (Picture taken by the researcher 04/12/2013).

FIGURE C3



Women at a meeting in Ward 13 Sengwe Communal Area. See the *ceka* and *doekes* adorned by the women which remain key markers of Hlengwe (Tsonga) identity.

(Source of picture: Chaka Chirozva, *Progress Report: Exploring Future Ecosystem Services: A Scenario Planning Approach to Uncertainty in the South East Lowveld of Zimbabwe* (Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, 2009), 27.

FIGURE C4



Hlengwe women from Mahenye wearing their *ceka* at the Hlengwe cultural gala in Chiredzi. The young man (right) is adorning what is believed to be the old ‘traditional’ xibabela. NB. In Hlengwe culture men do not wear the swibabela but this was a Hlengwe performing arts group. (Picture taken by researcher, 22/06/2013).

FIGURE C5



Catch them young!! Young children from a primary school in Hlengweni, performing Hlengwe cultural dances at the Hlengwe cultural gala in Chiredzi, 22/06/2013. The young girls are adorning the traditional *xibabela*. (Picture taken by the researcher).

FIGURE D1



The Chilonga low-level bridge on the Runde River. It is the gate-way to Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas or the only bridge that links the two areas to the rest of Zimbabwe. This is one key example of neglect and underdevelopment cited by the Hlengwe when they argue that the postcolonial government does not care about development in Hlengweni. The town of Chiredzi is only about 20 kilometres from this bridge which is impassable when the Runde River is in flood. (Picture by researcher on 12/08/2013).

FIGURE D2



The Mwenezi River low-level bridge. The link between Matibi 2 and Sengwe Communal Areas. Most parts of Sengwe and Matibi 2 are inaccessible during the rainy season. (Picture by researcher 07/07/2014).

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