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Our Hands, Our Minds, Our Destiny

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

THE PLIGHT OF INMATES AT WHA WHA DETENTION CAMP

(1960 - 1980)

By

ROLAND MARTIN BOPOTO

REG NUMBER: R10686V

SUPERVISOR: MR MAZAMBANI I

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DEDICATION

For my late mum, I am finally realising the vision that you always had for me mummy, may your dear soul rest in eternal peace.

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Lastly I would like to thank all the former political detainees whose oral testimonies made this study a possibility. Opening up old wounds was not an easy task, but you relived the horrid memories for me. One day you shall get the recognition that you deserve. *Aluta continua, vincere caritate* comrades!

LIST OF ACRONYMS

LOMA Law and Order Maintenance Act (1960, amended 1963)

U.D.I. Unilateral Declaration of Independence

NAZ National Archives of Zimbabwe

NDP National Democratic Party

RF Rhodesia Front

ZAPU Zimbabwe African People's Union

ZANU Zimbabwe People's African National Union

ABSTRACT

The period between 1960 and 1980 saw the rise of militant nationalism against the colonial government in Rhodesia. The colonial regime responded by detaining thousands of nationalists

and activists. The plight of inmates in these detention centers has largely been ignored by post-colonial historians. In this study I focus primarily on the experiences of African political detainees at Wha Wha Detention camp. Generally this study argues that instead of being places of places of political rehabilitation and political reorientation, detention camps in particular Wha Wha were places of brutality, violence and ill treatment guided by racial abuse. The study seeks to establish that political detainees were exposed to deplorable conditions and were worse off than convicted prisoners. The study also argues that life in detention was harsher for women than it was for male detainees. Methodologically this study depends mainly on oral testimonies of former detainees. The study also refers to documentary evidence such as parliamentary debates, court records and pictures.

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Introduction

The study wishes to explore the plight of inmates at Wha Wha restriction camp which was located near the Salisbury- Gwelo road in the Midlands Province. Restriction camps in Southern Rhodesia were designed to isolate nationalists from the general public for political reasons. They were meant to limit the influence poised by the nationalists on the masses. The study therefore wishes to look at the problems faced by “restrictees” who were held at Wha Wha restriction camp from 1965 to 1980.

The history of detention camps has largely been neglected in Zimbabwean history. The experiences of the inmates in the detention camps have not been well documented as if they are not an important part of our national history. Very little has been done in trying to reconstruct the day to day lives of people in penal institutions during the colonial period. Zimbabwe will probably never know the total number of her sons and daughters who died while in the grasp of the Rhodesian government. The study attempts to provide a view of war and political repression endured by restrictees while in detention in Southern Rhodesia¹. Some scholars such as Munochiveyi and Hill have even gone as far as suggesting that the hardships faced by nationalists while in detention camps hardened their resolve to gain full independence and sowed a deep hatred for the Smith regime which in turn intensified their struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe². Writing about the experiences of colonial political restrictees and prisoners is important as it unpacks a large chunk of historical subjects.

In Zimbabwe, the history of political detention has largely escaped the attention of historians. Prisoners and detainees of the Rhodesian regime have suffered this fate both in Zimbabwe’s liberation war historiography and in the public memories of the liberation war in post-colonial Zimbabwe³. This is perhaps because it has been difficult thus far to ascertain political prisoners’

contribution to the liberation struggle because as imprisoned people, they were supposedly “cut off “from the struggle for liberation⁴. As such the study will demonstrate that detention involved abuse of law, manufacturing of laws meant to arrest and kill African nationalism⁵. Life in these restriction camps has also not been fully documented and this is an aspect that the study wishes to address with specific reference to Wha Wha Detention camp.

The study will also explore the hardships faced by detainees while in restriction at Wha Wha. It will be demonstrated that detention camps were man- made hells on earth as restrictees faced many challenges.⁶ Detainees faced many problems such as physical harassment by security forces. Alexander quotes a former detainee who says about the white security detail...”They would bring those they knew were anti-us to work here”, a view echoed by the Red Cross representative G. C. Senn who described the white policemen in charge of Gonakudzingwa and Sikombela as narrow-minded, racist, and unable to conceive of detainees as other than ”bandits“ and criminals⁷. Detainees would be beaten for breaking the simplest of laws. Since detention was imposed on an individual without trial, it was a violation of their right to freedom and as such restrictees suffered psychologically from uncertainty on when if ever they would be released. These are just a few of the problems detainees faced while in detention as this study will expose.

The problems faced by inmates at Wha Wha restriction camp were also gender specific and the study also wishes to explore these. Women faced various challenges and these included sexual harassment, rape, and physical abuse. Life in detention was worse for women than it was for men. Women have largely played second fiddle to men in the political history of Zimbabwe. Mazambani acknowledges this and says, “Most historical studies on Zimbabwe have remained

andocentric as gender has not been incorporated into the historical analysis”⁸. The study wishes to show that although female detainees faced similar challenges as those of their male counterparts, there were however some problems peculiar to women. Detention conditions and prison conditions were gender specific and as such, political incarceration was wrecking trauma on most detainees and political prisoners.⁹

The study is confined to the period 1960 to 1980 for various reasons. The year 1959 saw an upsurge in the radicalization of nationalism. Laws were manufactured that facilitated the detention of nationalists without trial. Nationalist movements were banned and this marked the end of the so-called “open” mass nationalist period. The scope of the study will focus up to 1980 as it was the year that Restriction camps were closed due to the attainment of independence.

The study focuses on Wha Wha Detention camp as it was not shut down like the other restriction camps after Zimbabwe attained independence, rather it was converted into a prison. The government has also failed to historically maintain Wha Wha as a monumental site despite the importance the site poses to the history of Zimbabwe. Wha Wha was also the place where some of the major players in the liberation of Zimbabwe were detained. These include Joshua Nkomo, Leopold Takawira, Edgar Tekere and Cephas Msipa.

The study is divided into three distinct but interconnected chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the nature of political confinement in Southern Rhodesia. The chapter also provides a background to political detention and restriction in colonial Zimbabwe. It traces the legal framework that was established by the colonial government to facilitate the detention of thousands of Africans. The

chapter concludes by tracing the establishment of the 3 main detention camps namely Wha Wha, Gonakudzingwa and Sikombela.

Chapter 2 documents the plight of inmates at Wha Wha detention camp. Having been identified as enemies of the state, this chapter documents the brutality and violence that inmates at Wha Wha were exposed to. It argues that despite claims by the Rhodesian government that detention was meant to rehabilitate “terrorists”, “saboteurs” and “thugs”, the detention camp was a nightmare for detainees and they went through untold suffering in their day to day lives.

Chapter 3 explores the gender specific problems faced by inmates at Wha Wha Detention camp. The chapter argues that women suffered more at the hands of Rhodesian security agents than their male counterparts. Wha Wha did not have the facilities to cater for the female inmates, thus women suffered extensively. Sanitary material, pre- natal and ante- natal care was not provided for female inmates. The chapter thus exposes the vulnerability of women at Wha Wha.

Literature review

The study acknowledges the contribution made by various scholars on the topic of detention in Southern Rhodesia. Mazambani focuses primarily on the problems faced by women in detention in colonial Zimbabwe from 1959-1980. Mazambani’s article however concentrates on women as if they were the only inmates of detention camps. His research is based on the problems faced by women in all the detention centers in Southern Rhodesia thereby making his scope wider than that of my study. Mazambani also demonstrated that restriction and detention were used differently in Southern Rhodesia ¹⁰. This has been overlooked by earlier scholars such as Alexander who assumed that detention and restriction were theoretically the same¹¹. The study differs from Mazambani’s work as it will also explore the plight of male detainees in restriction,

however the study will make constant reference to Mazambani on the gender specific problems faced by inmates at Wha Wha restriction camp.

Jocelyn Alexander's study centers on nationalism and self-government in Rhodesian detention with particular emphasis on Gonakudzingwa restriction camp from 1964 -1974 ¹². Alexander's study explores the effects of particular confinement on nationalism and the agitation for self-government in Rhodesia. Alexander briefly examines the day to day life of detainees at Gonakudzingwa and brings out the challenges that they faced which this study also seeks to do, with Wha Wha being the focal point ¹³. Alexander and Mazambani both concede that life in detention was indeed a veritable nightmare for detainees and this study seeks to expose this.

Maurice Nyagumbo also wrote of his experiences in detention in Southern Rhodesia. He focuses his study on his involvement in nationalist politics during a turbulent time in the struggle for independence¹⁴. His work is more of an autobiography, however he makes significant contributions on the topic of detention as he documents his life in detention in prisons and restriction camps, the conditions in which they lived, the treatment they received and also the response to their plight in detention¹⁵. Nyagumbos' work differs from the study in that it depicts his experiences in different institutions of detention while the study focuses primarily on the plight of inmates in restriction at Wha Wha. Nyagumbo however also documents the problems faced while in restriction at Wha Wha and the study makes constant reference to his work. His work is however limited in comparison to the study as he confines his study to his own experiences and does not document the plight of fellow inmates such as women.

Florence Bernault in her works traces the development of political repression in colonial Africa and captures the African experience in confinement in different colonial contexts¹⁶. Bernault however does not include Rhodesia in her research but her work is nevertheless important as it can be used for comparative purposes when seeking to compare the ordeals political prisoners in Southern Rhodesia went through with political prisoners from other countries in colonial Africa. Bernault goes on to suggest that in colonial Africa colonial authorities introduced the prison as a technique of domination and political subjugation a notion that is challenged by scholars like Munochiveyi who argue that this formulation does not apply to Rhodesia's practice of political imprisonment during the liberation struggle and suggest that in their challenging, subversion, and negotiation of political imprisonment, political prisoners undermined the prison as a technology of control, and hence challenged state hegemony¹⁷.

Munyaradzi Munochiveyi has to date arguably made the biggest contribution to the subject of political detention in Southern Rhodesia. Munochiveyi studies the lived experiences of African political detainees and prisoners¹⁸. His main argument is that although political imprisonment in this period was an extreme version of the colonial experience that combined spatial confinement with curtailed freedoms, racialized abuse, racial segregation, and heightened repression, the prison was also a terrain of struggle¹⁹. The study confers with Munochiveyi as it will also look at the problems faced by inmates though the study will focus specifically on Wha Wha restriction camp while Munochiveyi focuses on all the restriction camps and prisons throughout Southern Rhodesia. The study will however go a step further and look at the gender specific problems faced by inmates at Wha Wha. The study will however constantly refer to Munochiveyi.

Methodology and Sources

Primary and secondary sources were used in carrying out the study. The informants were drawn from various stakeholders who were part of the penal system in colonial Zimbabwe from 1960. Fieldwork is imperative for anyone who tries to be credible historian thus, giving history a human face, as argued by Vansina²⁰.

In conducting the research primary sources were used to provide data on the topic in question. This involved the use of documents which were produced at the time of study that is eyewitnesses' accounts of former detainees not only from Wha Wha but from other restriction camps. Amongst those are records by personnel who worked in the penal system in Southern Rhodesia. These sources were very useful in providing an insight into the various problems faced by detainees while in restriction. Eye witness accounts were also helpful in acquiring a more vivid picture of the day to day life in restriction.

However primary sources on the restriction camps have been largely produced by former detainees and this might be a challenge as they can exaggerate their plight while in restriction. Primary sources can have some bias as they are subject to the opinion of an individual who might be emotionally attached to one side in regards to the topical issue. They are produced in accordance with one's personal understanding of the topical issue.

The study also used secondary sources in acquiring the necessary information. These are documents that relate or discuss information originally presented elsewhere. Secondary sources involve generalization, analysis, synthesis, interpretations and evaluation of the original sources.

They are usually books or scholarly journals. They also include social documents which have been produced by various organizations involved in the documentation of the liberation struggle. These organizations included Museums and National Archives. Secondary sources provided second opinion and further analysis to the topical issue. This helped in improving the understanding of the situation that existed for detainees in detention. Secondary sources also provided the basis for comparison when trying to check the gender specific problems faced by inmates at Wha Wha. They were useful in the identification of gaps left out by the primary sources.

The study also made use of personal interviews. The former detainees were useful in assessing the problems faced at Wha Wha. Generally personal interviews provided first hand opinion of the various groups targeted by the research thus providing the study with the necessary data that was used in solving the problem in question. The use of oral testimonies for this study built upon social historians' productive usage of this kind of historical evidence which, for the purposes of this study, provided a view of the lived experiences of political detainees often absent from official written sources²¹.

Photographs and other visual instruments helped to document the situation and circumstances that are difficult to describe or that are better described through these tools. For instance to explain the brutality that the political prisoners were subjected to, photographs help explain their physical scars revealing all signs of abuse. However there are challenges in using photographs as a source material. At times the dates when the photographs were taken are not shown and even the names of the photographers are also not shown.

The study also made use of little used sources during research. These mostly include prison autobiographies by people like Joshua Nkomo, Mordekai Hamutyinei and Didymus Mutasa. It should be noted however that these were produced by the educated elite, who were mostly political activists. The elite preferred to write about their contribution to the liberation struggle rather than focus on their experiences while in detention.

Court cases, records and government policies concerning political incarceration were also consulted during the research. Colonial state officials often discussed the efficiency and implementation of political incarceration during their parliamentary gatherings. Court records also provided an insight into the usage of racial legislation. These were important as they showed how the colonial regime justified the colonial penal system. The records complement the oral testimonies provided by interviews.

CHAPTER 1

ESTABLISHMENT OF RESTRICTION CAMPS IN SOUTHERN RHODESIA

Introduction

This chapter is going to be centred around the formation of Restriction camps in Southern Rhodesia with specific emphasis on the establishment of Sikombela Restriction camp. The chapter will also seek to provide a background to political confinement in Rhodesia which culminated in the establishment of detention centers and restriction centers. The chapter concludes by tracing the formation of Sikombela Restriction camp in Gokwe which lies in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe.

1.0 Background to political confinement in Southern Rhodesia

Colonial Repression to African nationalism in Southern Rhodesia began well before the 1960s'. Confinement and imprisonment had existed on a small scale. Forced evictions and land dispossessions, intimidation and harassment all complimented the use of confinement and imprisonment to arrest African Nationalism²². African defiance to colonial rule began in the late 19th century when the Rhodesian colony was opened. The settlers responded to this early

resistance by use of military force and bundled scores of Africans into makeshift jails as punishment for partaking in these anti-colonial up risings between 1896 and 1897. This early insurgency which was popularly known as “Chimurenga” came just six years after the opening up of the Rhodesian colony. Religious leaders were at the forefront of political defiance as they led the African peasantry in the violence resistance of settler rule. Their inferior weapons however meant that their revolts were brutally crushed by the British settlers. During these insurrections several political leaders such as Nehanda Nyakasikana, Kaguvi and chief Maondera were arrested, detained, summarily executed and hanged by the British South African Police²³.

The early years of the 20th century Rhodesia was portrayed as a colony of racial harmony where the Africans had embraced their servile position and were the happiest anywhere in Africa. This colonial discourse of peaceful racial co- existence in the colony was designed to mask the policies of a highly coercive regime and the growth of African opposition both in the towns and in the countryside²⁴. From the 1920s onwards trade unions emerged especially in the two largest towns, Salisbury and Bulawayo. The labour protests of the 1940s threatened the image of racial harmony and stability propagated by the colonial officials. Organized under African trade unions such as the Southern Rhodesian African Union Congress and the Industrial and Commercial Union, urban Africans challenged the Rhodesian authorities’ apartheid style segregationist legislation and the poor living conditions that obtained in Rhodesia towns²⁵. Labour- based opposition in the late 1940s and 1950s reached its climax as characterized by the work riots and boycotts.

Episodes such as the 1945 Railway workers strike, the 1948 general strikes and the 1956 bus boycotts marked the beginning of mass based opposition to the oppressive Rhodesian colonial policies. However reactionary policies were enacted to deal with this new wave of African nationalism. The Subversive Activities Act of 1950 was passed in response to the 1948 general strike. This Act gave the government power to ban “the propaganda or dissemination or inculcation or advocacy of all or any of the following ideas ... [including]...undermining or destroying constitutional democratic government...maintaining control over the people through fear, terrorism or brutality, or ...passive resistance to any law²⁶. This was followed up by the 1955 Public Order Act, which reserved the governments’ right to detain or restrict people without charge or trial²⁷. By this Act during the 1956 bus boycotts the Rhodesian government detained 200 Africans and banned all open meetings and processions.²⁸ Such forms of political repression occurred before the 1960s despite the fact that most African-led labour unions and voices of dissent shied away from overtly nationalist politics and that, when they did, their politics and that, when they did their politics were predominantly non-confrontational, labour based and reformist in character.²⁹

This reformist stance changed in the mid-1950s when a small group of the educated Africans began pondering the possibilities of overthrowing the colonial institution itself rather than agitating for reforms or inclusion in the colonial government. This brand of African became the epitome of African nationalist movements in Southern Rhodesia and was behind the formation of political parties.

African criticism of the Rhodesian settler rule was not necessarily guided by the lofty goals of the African elite but rather by personal assessment of colonial rule. The rise of militant nationalism was countered by reactionary policies in Southern Rhodesia. In 1959 the preventive detention Act and the Unlawful Organisations Act were passed. Under the Unlawful Organisations Act the minister of Law and Order could declare any organization unlawful if it appeared that its activities endangered public order by appearing to “raise disaffection” or promote feelings of “ill will or hostility” within Rhodesia.³⁰ 1610 Africans were prosecuted between 1960 and 1965 under the provisions of the Acts and 1002 convicted.³¹ The Preventive Detention Act only provided for the temporary detention of individuals who were “likely to endanger public safety..... to raise discontent or disaffection among the inhabitants of the Colony”, and the detention of individuals who were “office-bearers, officers or members of an unlawful organization”.³² As such the policies above mentioned set up the legal framework that facilitated the detention of political prisoners by the Rhodesian settler government. The coming into power of the Rhodesian Front led by Ian Smith and the consequent Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain meant that the Smith regime could establish repressive police- state tactics without fear of British intervention. The shifting politics on both sides of the political divide in Rhodesia explain the unprecedented intensification of state repression through political confinement.³³

1.1 Establishment of Detention Camps in Southern Rhodesia

In the mid-1960s, Rhodesian authorities unveiled three areas that were specially established to restrict and detain persons who, in the opinion of the Rhodesian Minister of Law and Order, presented a threat to the maintenance of law and order or whose activities were considered “subversive”³⁴. The several pieces of legislation that were enacted to detain African political activists ensured that hundreds of Africans were arrested hence new detention areas had to be opened up so to cater for new detainees. In 1966 the Emergency powers regulation were passed and these also facilitated the arrest of hundreds of Africans. The reason for detention according to the Smith government was to keep “insurgents out of circulation in the society.”³⁵ In the same year the Rhodesian Minister of Law and Order Mr Lardner Burke remarked that:

Without the new emergency laws I can do nothing except restrict him

(Meaning political activists) to an area, but with the emergency I can put

him in detention to keep him away and out of circulation.³⁶

It should be noted however that prior to the establishment of these major detention centers, some smaller detention camps were already in operation and these included Khami and Gwanda camps.



Map 1: Rhodesian map showing the locations of the 3 major detention centers: Sikombela, Wha Wha, and Gonakudzingwa [Source: Amnesty International, Prison Conditions in Rhodesia: Conditions for Political Prisoners and Restricttees, August 1966]

The length of time an “insurgent could be kept in detention was “indefinite”. As such the prisons where political prisoners where held quickly filled up prompting the government to establish

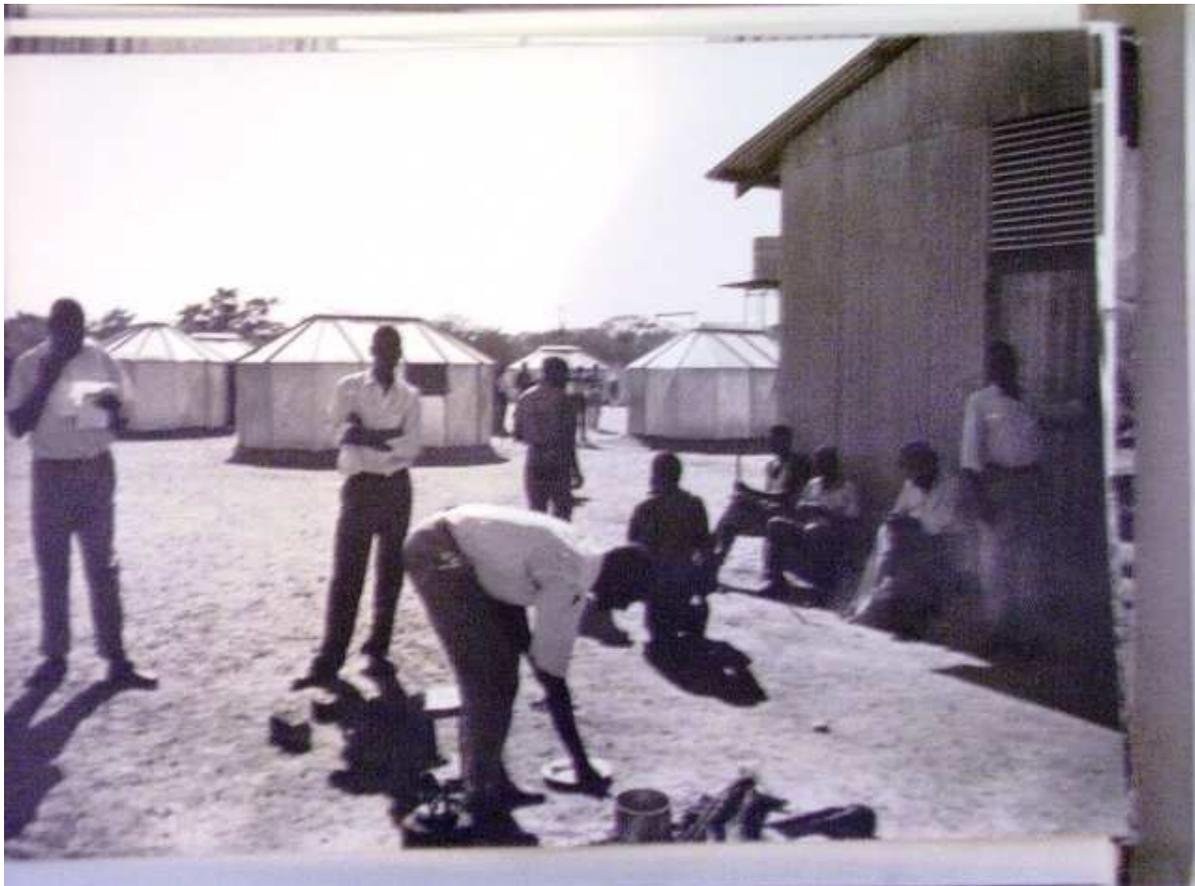
three major detention centers namely Wha Wha Detention Center in February 1964, Gonakudzingwa Restriction Camp in April of the same year and Sikombela Restriction Camp in June 1965. The Restriction camps were located in remote areas which were inaccessible by foot and detainees had to be driven to these areas or dropped off by plane. This literally “cut off” the detainees from the outside world.

1.2 Establishment of Wha Wha Detention Camp

Wha Wha Detention Center was located in the bush like Sikombela and Gonakudzingwa. The center which was established in February 1964 had formerly been a rehabilitation camp. As in all the detention centers Wha Wha camp was furnished with barracks and huts to house the detainees. Munochiveyi says that at Wha Wha there were two types of accommodation; barracks which measured 60 x 15 x 10 for the accommodation of sixteen people and huts that measured 14 x 11 x 5,6 which accommodated two to three people.³⁷ Edgar Tekere who was detained at Wha Wha had this to say:

At Wha Wha, the detention camps were unlike conventional prisons, they
Had no walls, no bars but were located right in the bush. We knew that
Everyone who tried to walk away would not survive the journey. We
Named the place “Snake Park” because of the number of snakes infesting the camp.³⁸

The barracks at Wha Wha were made out of galvanized iron sheets which were unfit for human habitation as they trapped heat during summer and the cold in winter. Another former detainee Mathew Mukarati recalled that, "During very hot summers it was better to sleep outside than in those "ovens" as we called them".³⁹



Picture 1: Picture showing the living quarters at Wha Wha. In the pictures showing the huts and barracks, were made of galvanized iron. [Source: NAZ MS 625/4-5, “Political Prisoners and Armed Struggle’]

1.3 Establishment of Gonakudzingwa Detention Camp

Gonakudzingwa Restriction Camp was located in the southeastern parts of Rhodesia near the Mozambican border. It was situated inside the Gonarezhou Game Reserve an area teeming with wildlife such as lions, leopards, buffalo. This area selected as a restriction center because of its apparent remoteness and inaccessibility. The area was also malaria infested, hot and dry, temperatures could rise to up to 32 degrees Celsius and the average annual rainfall was 18ml. Gonakudzingwa was officially established into a detention center in April 1964. The camp was specifically meant for ZAPU detainees. The restriction area was run by police rather than the prison service and it held the largest number of detainees by a considerable margin, with over 3000 residents at some points and some of the most senior of ZAPU politicians, including ZAPU president Joshua Nkomo.⁴⁰ The only police supervision at Gonakudzingwa was from a little frontier police post on the Rhodesia/Mozambique railwayline called Villa Salazar and another Portuguese- Mozambique police outpost called Malvernia⁴¹. With little official supervision, the wild animals in the area ensured that no- one would escape. Victor Kuretu a political activist who had been detained at Gonakudzingwa recalled that:

When I first got to Gonakudzingwa, I remember wondering whether we were still in the same country or not. The place was unbearably hot and we used to pass blackish sweat during the first days. The water there was not good- when we boiled the water, we would remove some whitish residue which looked like lime mineral...we had problems

with wild animals at Gonakudzingwa because it was located within Gonarezhou Wildlife Reserve. At night and early morning, lions would roar very loudly. We also saw elephants roaming very near to our camp.⁴²

Oliver Muvirimi Dizha also detained at Gonakudzingwa had this to say :

That place was very hot to the extent that you could easily add tea to the tap water and drink hot tea. The water there had what we thought to be lime- mineral because after bathing, your whole body became whitish. So you could have taken a bath but you ended up looking worse off. Gonakudzingwa also had all sorts of wild animals such as lions and we could hear lions roaring. So if one thought of going out alone most certainly the lions were going to eat you. Perhaps the Smith regime put us there because there lions in that area, which also acted as our “guards”. If the lions had eaten us we would certainly be absolved and say maybe we were trying to escape.⁴³

Several reports from organisations such as Amnesty International appealed to the government to change the location of Gonakudzingwa as the area that surrounded the detention camp was unfit for human habitation. It should be noted however that Gonakudzingwa was the main detention camp in Southern Rhodesia and conditions at this camp were slightly better than at the other detention camps in the country. Inmates at the camp enjoyed a certain amount of liberty as they were under minimal supervision, this however changed with the declaration of a state of Emergence when the security regulations tightened across all the detention camps.



Picture 2: Rhodesian Security Force truck dropping detainees at Gonakudzingwa Restriction Camp. The bush can be seen in the background. [Source: NAZ MS 625/4-5, ‘Political Prisoners and Armed Struggle’]

Establishment of Sikombela Detention Camp

Sikombela detention camp like Gonakudzingwa was also situated in a remote and bushy area in the Gokwe District, 85 km northwest of Kwekwe town. The area fell under natural region 4 and besides being dry and hot, it was also malaria infested. Rainfall was also very low and this was exacerbated by the camp having only one borehole. Mordekai Hamutyineyi recalled that on his

arrival at Sikombela the area was very hot and there was nothing but thick bush. He also recalled that there were only 3 barracks and one borehole which contained salty water which” tasted like sea water”.⁴⁴ One of the first detainees at Sikombela described the place thus:

The nearest road ... about six miles away from the camp, is the road from Que Que to the Gokwe District Commissioner’s office.... Most visitors get lost. Those who come by bus are dropped off seven miles away. When they arrive, some have had to spend the night in the bush. Others have given up before getting here.... It is hot; the vegetation is dominated by that sign of dryness, the Mopani tree. The eastern side teams with zebra; a lion roared near us the other day and elephants ... visit occasionally. The nearest house is five miles away and outside the detention area.⁴⁵

The camp was reserved for ZANU activists. Some scholars have even suggested that the formation of Sikombela was a blessing in disguise as it assembled some of the sharpest minds in the liberation struggle, from where the strategies of war were firmly laid out. This includes the famous “Sikombela Declaration”. Initially about 60 inmates were detained there and they were mostly intellectuals,” Sithole s’ Crowd”.⁴⁶

Conditions across all the detention centers changed with the imposition of a state of emergence which came just before the Unilateral Detention of Independence. High security fences and security barriers where enacted to ensure no detainee “wandered” or “strayed” out of the camp. Heavily armed police personnel with security dogs became a feature of all detention centers.

Strict censorship of all material going inside and outside the detention camps was practised. Michael Mawema who was detained at Sikombela recalled that after 1965, Sikombela was now under patrol; the police and dogs patrolled the area and ensured the detainees had non-communication with the outside world⁴⁷. It is rather curious to note that after the state of Emergency was imposed detention camps were guarded by the police rather than personnel from the Rhodesian Prison Service. This probably accounted for the harsher treatment the detainees as compared to regular prisoners.

Conclusion

The chapter traced the establishment of detention camps in Southern Rhodesia. The chapter also explored the legal framework that ensured the detention of thousands of Africans. It was shown that detention camps were meant to isolate the African Nationalists hence where located in remote and inaccessible areas deep in the bush. The early 1960s saw the enactment of laws designed to restrict political activists and thus arrest African Nationalism. The living conditions in these detention centers were appalling as this study seeks to expose in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE PLIGHT OF INMATES AT WHA WHA DETENTION CAMP

Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore the problems faced by inmates at Wha Wha Detention Camp. Detention camps were isolating and harsh and were regarded as spaces of social, political and intellectual death. Cut off from the outside world inmates at Wha Wha faced many problems some of which were designs of the Rhodesian regime. The chapter will contain many testimonies from former detainees as they retell the story of the horrors that they faced while in the isolation of the Midlands bush.

2.0 Uncertainty and anxiety

Wha Wha Detention camp lacked the basic conditions for social reproduction and daily survival. The camp did not have the material provisions important for the maintenance of daily life. With no access to outside help, detainees lives bordered on deprivation and impoverishment.⁴⁸ This was mainly because the camp was set up in ad hoc fashion. For first time detainees, the experience of being dumped at this isolated and remote center was a disconcerting experience. Most of the detainees had not been charged of any crime and had been tried or charged in court, found not guilty, but had still been sent to detention. In Wha Wha as in the other detention camps the detainees were held indefinitely and therefore were haunted by an element of uncertainty. Many of them did not understand why there were there and for how long. This weighed

mentally on them and this was the first problem that the inmates encountered on arrival at Wha Wha. Alexander quotes a former detainee who recalled that:

Detention does things to you. Whatever time you lose in prison, not just the emotional effect that it has on you. You begin to wonder, to be unsure of yourself. Was it right to do what I did? Maybe I wouldn't have ended up here. Some people in detention gave up the struggle. [They] couldn't take it anymore. I can understand why you need all these support mechanisms in detention, more than in the armed struggle.⁴⁹

Mordikai Hamutyinei also recalled in his book that:

I was welcomed with loud whistles and honorary clapping of hands as if I was a hero coming back from a victorious battle. I was taken aback with such a welcome and I wondered why these comrades were happy that I had been detained. Leopold Takawira (a leading ZANU nationalist) immediately took me on the side and started talking to me about the political activities of those outside detention.... No one pitied me for having been detained. Ndabaningi Sithole (ZANU President) even said to me "You have joined other real men. Everything will be fine."⁵⁰

This uncertainty lingered on the back of their minds and was ever present everyday of their lives. The declaration of the state of Emergency that paved way for the UDI, tightened conditions across all the detention centers. As this happened, it increased the anxiety of the detainees as they lost hope of ever being released.

Security fences were erected and Rhodesia forces began guarding the detainees on a 24 hour basis, therefore the anxiety the detainees faced was justified. The high security that they found themselves under erased all hope of release. The U.D.I also increased the mental stress that the detainees were going through. To understand this, one needs to revisit the factors that culminated in the breaking up of the federation of Central Africa which included Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. One of the reasons that encouraged Britain to dissolve the federation was the rise of African nationalism in the 3 territories hence Britain decided to break up the federation and grant independence to the 3 African countries. Britain proceeded to disband the federation and granted independence to Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia however

the Rhodesian Front then declared independence from Britain. This affected the detainees as the Smith regime imposed strict policies that violated their human rights without fear of British intervention. The detainees did not know what would happen to them. CephasMsipa a former detainee recalled that:

After the U.D.I we were so afraid because no one would be certain about what would happen tomorrow. We were very insecure at that time as some of our compatriots who had been “released” or transferred to another place of detention just disappeared, and we never heard from them again. Rumours sometimes trickled into the camp that something bad had happened to them. Therefore we were always insecure and anxious and always thinking what if I am ordered to “transfer” and then I disappear as well.⁵¹

Therefore the inmates at Wha Wha always suffered from anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty. They were physically restricted in the camp and mentally bonded because they did not know when they would be released, why they were even detained in the first place and lastly what tomorrow would bring for them. Therefore besides the physical problems, detainees in Wha Wha also faced psychological challenges as reflected above.

2.1 The effects of isolation

Inmates that were detained at Wha Wha also suffered from the effects of isolation. This problem was specifically created by the Smith regime by locating the detention camps deep in the bush and Wha Wha was no exception. Inmates worried about their families as they did not know how they were faring. They were generally “cut off” from the outside world and did not know what was going on and this affected them mentally. New inmates were welcomed warmly then pestered for information from “outside” that had anything to do with the struggle. This was confirmed by CephasMsipa who recalled that, “The other detainees were very interested to know what was going on across the country, was the war being won?”⁵² Some revisionist scholars have argued that post liberation historians have ignored detainees and their experiences in detention

because they were isolated from the liberation struggle and hence did not contribute to the liberation of the country.

The problem of isolation intensified in the years after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) as security intensified across all the detention camps. You could see a man really weeping, missing his children⁵³. Whereas before the detainees could write letters freely to their families and also keep radios while in their camps the declaration of a state of emergency saw the liberties taken away. Radios were confiscated while letters could not move as freely as they used to and relatives could also not visit the detainees as often as they used to. This further separated the detainees from the rest of the country. The intensification of the conditions across the detention centers after the UDI was so drastic that prisoners held at the Salisbury Prison wrote a letter of Protest to Desmond Lardner- Burke who was the Rhodesian Minister of Law and Order demanding their letters back and making it clear that their detention was both illegal and illegitimate. In an insurgent tone the prisoners wrote,

We the undersigned, being person indefinitely detained under your orders, feel constrained to address you in this our joint letter, protesting in the strongest of terms against your recent high-handed, arbitrary, inhuman, and cruel decision denying us the right to contact our wives, relatives, benevolent friends and charitable organizations for such material help we require for our personal maintenance. We similarly protest against the fact that this your evil and unwarranted action denies us the right to contact friendly organizations and individuals to raise funds for our families and dependents', who have been rendered destitute by the action of your regime in keeping us in perpetual detention. ... May we remind you and your regime that we are not incarcerated here by our own volition. Spurning legality and resorting to the law of the jungle, your regime has adopted as its sacred policy the practice of rule by a perpetual state of emergency under which to date you have thrown thousands of persons into detention...⁵⁴

The confiscation of radios was particularly disastrous for the inmates at Wha Wha as radios provided the most important outlet to the world outside. One former detainee outlined this and said, "Radios were our lifeline and listening to the news on the radio was like looking through a

telescope at a planet far beyond our reach, the radios were especially indispensable to detainees efforts to keep in touch with the outside world since the Rhodesian government made efforts to instill a news- blackout for the detainees.⁵⁵



Picture 3: Detainees listening to a radio at Wha Wha, before U.D.I. [Source NAZ MS 625/4-5, “Political Prisoners and Armed Struggle”]

Radios were considered contraband and being caught with one at Wha Wha would invite heavy punishment. Although detainees were entitled to newspapers, most of the copies that they received were censored. The urge to know what was going on outside the detention camp was overwhelming for the detainees. The Rhodesian government had designed this problem by

locating in a remote and inaccessible area therefore literally off the detainees from society. Isolation contributed in making life unbearable for the detainees that were held at Wha Wha detention camp.

2.2 Dietary Crisis

The UDI also created food problems for the inmates. In Wha Wha the declaration of a state of Emergency led to food shortages for the detainees. The former detainees recalled that prior to November 1965; Rhodesian forces visited the camp once or twice a week to deliver food rations.⁵⁶ Since the Rhodesian governments' penal personnel was spread thin across the colony's many prisons, detainees had to organize themselves to cook their own food.⁵⁷ The authorities just delivered food at Wha Wha in bulk once every week or few days.⁵⁸ The official daily food ration for detainees at Wha Wha was:

14 oz maize flour plus 7 oz rice or 21 oz maize flour
11 & half oz green vegetables or 1 oz dried beans
2 oz shelled ground nuts
4 oz fresh vegetables
5 oz fresh meat; 1 Oz powdered skimmed milk; 1 oz margarine/dripping;
three quarter oz salt; 2 oz sugar; and a quarter oz coffee or tea.⁵⁹

However this official daily food allocation was rarely adhered to. In order to prevent perishables from rotting detainees resorted to sun-drying food items such as meat and vegetables.⁶⁰ The detainees diet was largely monotonous due to the fact that they consumed limited quantities and their lacked some critical nutrients. Malnutrition was evident as detainees suffered from deficiency diseases such as beriberi, scurvy and pellagra.

Before the UDI, the inmates at Wha Wha had countered the food problem by growing vegetables such as covo, cabbages and rape however, the period after the UDI saw the enactment of security fences and the creation of specific borders which then excluded the land that the detainees had

used for agriculture, therefore the problems of food became more pronounced after 1965 at Wha Wha restriction camp.

2.3 Accommodation Crisis

Inmates at Wha Wha also had to make do with the poor shelter that they were provided by the Rhodesian authorities. Initially there were just 3 barracks at Wha Wha.⁶¹ The Rhodesian authorities had built makeshift huts and barracks with minimal amenities for survival.⁶² Both the huts and barracks were made up of galvanized iron sheets which were a poor building material in that the material would trap heat in hot weather and cold in chilly weather. Michael Mawema who was detained at Wha Wha in 1965 stressed that;

“Wha Wha was a very poorly organized place in terms of facilities for detainees. There were three corrugated iron blocks and about half a dozen rondavels (huts) made out of corrugated iron with dust floors, barely enough to accommodate us....⁶³

The barracks acquired the nickname of ovens from the detainees because Wha Wha lies in a very hot part of the country where temperatures can get very high hence the barracks would become unbearable. Francis Gunda former detainee of Wha Wha recalled that in the summer it was better to sleep outside than sleep in the ovens however the mosquitoes would feast on you so you had to choose, whether to be cooked alive in the oven or to be fed on by the mosquitoes.⁶⁴ Many however chose to sleep outside.

The poor accommodation was made worse by the overcrowding that soon followed as more and more people were detained at the camp. Detainees at Wha Wha as Mordakai Hamutyinei noted, included boys who had received training as saboteurs in China, there were also elderly peasants who had influenced other peasants not to take their livestock to the government dip tanks.⁶⁵ There were also others that had been caught vandalizing the government dip tanks.⁶⁶ There were

also top ZANU leaders⁶⁷. Barracks that were initially meant to house sixteen people ended up accommodating up to 25 inmates. Detainees tried to solve the accommodation problems by building their own pole and dagga huts which had an advantage of being insulated against the cold and the heat and also of providing privacy for those who did not prefer to sleep in the barracks.



Picture 4: Detainees at Wha Wha sitting outside pole and dagga huts. [Source: NAZ MS 625/4-5, “Political Prisoners and Armed Struggle”]

However once again after the UDI with the security intensified around Wha Wha detainees could not leave the restriction camp to find the building material that they needed to construct their pole and dagga huts.

Again this problem of poor and inadequate accommodation was a creation of the Smith Regime as they continue to dump more and more inmates at Wha Wha. This all contributed to making life unsustainable for the detainee especially when one considers that they did not even understand why they were even detained in the first place.

2.4 Clothing Crisis

The Rhodesian authorities also failed to provide any clothing for the detainees. The Rhodesian Penitentiary system racially classified and divided the prisoners into 3 distinct groups: “Class 1” for the Europeans or whites, “Class 2” for Coloreds and Asians and finally there was “Class 3” for Africans. Belonging to a particular class inside Rhodesian Penitentiary centers affected every aspect of the inmates’ daily lives such as their food and diet, the clothes they wore, the cells they occupied and even the beds that they slept in.⁶⁸ As such the Rhodesian government denied any responsibility to provide the detainees with clothing. It was curious that the Rhodesian government made no provision for clothing in its detention centers considering that for many detainees the only clothes that they had were the clothes that they were arrested wearing.⁶⁹ The detainees that were lucky had their families make it to remote Wha Wha and replace the old worn out clothing, other than that they had no prospect for any other supply.

Attempts by Human Rights groups to send parcels of clothes to inmates at Wha Wha were frustrated by the Rhodesian Authorities and this gave rise to speculation that the Rhodesian government intended that the detainees lead lives of deprivation and impoverishment.⁷⁰ The

extreme heat at Wha Wha made the clothing and garments to wear out more quickly.

Munochiveyi notes that:

In 1966 Christian care approached Government officials demanding that the state provide the detainees with clothes but the governments' reply was that only approved voluntary organisations could meet this need. One such approved organization was a white women's organization called the Guild of Loyal Women, which was known for providing clothes for prisoners. However when Christian Care approached the this organization, its officials said that, "they could supply second hand clothing to whites and Asians in prisons only and would not consider extending their help to "Kaffirs"(meaning Africans in Detention).⁷¹

CephasMsipa recalled that, "Most of our clothes were in tatters such that when the Rhodesian authorities told the peasants that we were madmen, they initially believed them."⁷² Blankets were also in short supply at Wha Wha. The official bedding allowance for the detainees was four blankets per person but this allocation was rarely adhered to particularly when Wha Wha began overcrowding. Inmates also did not have beds but rather slept on the hard dusty concrete floors in the sub- standard barracks. The lack of blankets coupled with the tendency by the galvanized iron barracks to trap the cold in chilly weather made winter a nightmare for the detainees. Therefore being held in a detention camp was a painful experience. Munochiveyi quotes a former detainee who had this to say about the bedding situation

...the old and dirty blankets, torn in most cases, and fur-like [sleeping]mat we use as the bed are far from being a normal bed.... The bedding is so hard that our bodies are painful. Most of us are not accustomed to such type of bedding. The floors are of brick covered by a layer of dusting smelting so that in addition to poor blankets, lack of sheets, etc. we breathe dust right through. The floors are not smooth and that makes it more painful to sleep on such a floor.... In asking for beds, sheets, etc. we are not asking for a privilege. We are asking for normal sleeping conditions, which we have at our homes. They may not be as decent, but they must be tolerable.⁷³

The suffering of the detainees was ignored by the Rhodesian authorities who turned a blind eye. The lack of blankets coupled with the tendency by the galvanized iron barracks to trap the cold in chilly weather made winter a nightmare for the detainees.



Picture 5: Picture shows the sleeping mats in a barrack at Wha Wha [Source: NAZ MS 625/4-5, “Political Prisoners and Armed Struggle”]

The blankets were also old and torn and no sheets were provided. Therefore being held in a detention camp was a painful experience. The suffering of the detainees was ignored by the Rhodesian authorities who turned a blind eye.

2.5 Identity Crisis

Detainees that were held at Wha Wha also struggled to maintain their political identity and activism in detention in order to shape politics inside and beyond the detention center.⁷⁴

This was the main reason why the Rhodesian authorities had established the detention centers. As noted in this study earlier, letters were inspected by the Rhodesian authorities thus the detainees could not conduct their political activism while in detention at Wha Wha as letters were the only way they could do this. Detainees were limited to politicizing the peasants who lived in and around Wha Wha and even this was eliminated after the UDI when security fences were constructed and no one could go in or out without authorization. Therefore detainees at Wha Wha were literally cut off from the “outside world”. It can be concluded therefore that the Rhodesian government designed the detention camps to limit the political activities of the detainees. However the detainees at Wha Wha improvised ways to continue to affect the politics that occurred outside the detention camp as they smuggled out letters to their fellow detainees.

2.6 Health Crisis

The detainees at Wha Wha also did not have any medical doctor prescribed by the Rhodesian authorities to take care of their medical needs on a daily basis. The poor diet awarded to the class 3 prisoners and the long exposure to the cold weather coupled with the cold hard concrete floors all contributed to the ill health of the detainees. Wha Wha was also located in an area that was susceptible to malaria therefore detainees constantly fell ill. The common illnesses that affected the detainees included various stomach complaints that were caused by the borehole water, a variety of ulcers and malaria related symptoms. New detainees also usually arrived with injuries

that they sustained during the process of their arrest or interrogation. Cephas Msipa a former Wha Wha detainee noted that:

Medical doctors rarely attended to the detainees at Wha Wha. The Rhodesian government wanted us to suffer and die that is why they did not provide us with any doctors. We received medication from the International organisations that also gave us books and study material. It was through Gods' grace that we did not die at that place. Those that fell seriously ill were taken away by the Rhodesians when they brought our food rations and some never came back.⁷⁵

Those detainees who knew something about medication administered it to the other detainees. They received medication from organisations such as Christian Care and Amnesty International.

Detainees at Wha Wha thus lived in constant fear of falling sick because they did not have any medical facilities. It can be seen therefore that the Rhodesian government aimed not to politically rehabilitate the detainees but rather to make them suffer in detention until they lost all hope of ever getting out alive.

2.7 Violence against Inmates

Wha Wha detention camp was also characterized by violence against the inmates. Physical altercations between the inmates and the guards usually rose over the issue of boundaries. An incident at the detention camp went as follows

A few days after being fenced, Leonard Nyemba, a detainee at Wha Wha, got into trouble after mocking the Rhodesian police guarding detainees. In an attempt to mock the guards, Nyemba went to a part of the fence surrounding Wha Wha, let stuck his leg outside the fence, and shouted, "Hey you police officers, since you are so fond of arresting people, come and arrest my leg that is out of the fence and take it toojail!" A white detention guard immediately confronted Nyemba and beat him severely.⁷⁶

Violence against inmates however was not widespread at Wha Wha because prior to 1965 the detainees were not guarded therefore there was minimal contact between the detainees and the Rhodesian forces.

Conclusion

In conclusion inmates at Wha Wha faced many problems some of which were machinations of the Rhodesian authorities. Wha Wha Detention camp was not ideal for human habitation as life inside the camp was a disconcerting experience. Some former detainees have even gone as far as claiming that the Rhodesian authorities would not have felt any remorse if all the detainees had died at Wha Wha. The camp was isolating and harsh and was characterized by gross human rights violations as noted in the chapter however there were also some gender specific problems that inmates faced at Wha Wha and these will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE GENDER SPECIFIC PROBLEMS AT WHA WHA DETENTION CAMP

Introduction

The chapter wishes to explore the problems faced by women at Wha Wha Detention Center. The chapter will expose the vulnerability of female inmates at the Detention camp. It will be demonstrated that women at Wha Wha were most affected by detention as compared to men. The problems they encountered included sexual violence and harassment, malnutrition due to food shortages and inadequate diet, a lack of health facilities and also a lack of pre-natal care. The chapter wishes to show that although the female detainees at Wha Wha faced the same problems as their male counterparts, there were some problems that were specific to them.

3.0 Sexual Violence, Abuse and Harassment

Wha Wha detention camp was characterized by several cases of sexual harassment towards the female detainees. In the detention environment that was highly patriarchal and where women were considered as submissive to the men, the women largely suffered in silence. In the detention camp there was no differentiation between married and unmarried women as the women had left their husbands at home thus it meant little that a woman was married. This also applied to the male detainees; therefore the women had to deal with the sexual advances of the male detainees daily. Mazambani notes that male detainees feasted on defenseless female detainees⁷⁷. The female detainees at Wha Wha also had to resist the sexual advances of the security forces that

guarded them. These guards had not taken their wives with them on their deployment at Wha Wha thus they resorted to soliciting for sexual favours from the female inmates. In most cases the inmates had no option but to comply as they risked victimization by the guards if they did not. The female inmates at Wha Wha suffered from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies as a result. Life at Wha Wha was even worse for the “bastard” children. J. Chadya notes that women had their daughters impregnated by the government forces without the intention of marrying them⁷⁸. Humanitarian organizations that sent agents to Wha Wha to examine the situation of inmates at the detention camp constantly noted the issue of sexual violence against the female inmates but no action was ever taken by the Rhodesian authorities against the prison personnel.

Besides the sexual violence, some inmates even consented to relationships with the security personnel at Wha Wha as a ploy to obtain scarce resources and certain favours from them. This led to family disintegration. J. Alexander notes that for women detainees, threats to marriage came in different forms⁷⁹. Following her first stint in prison, Jane Ngwenya’s husband and in-laws demanded to know “what kind of woman is this?” her husband responded to her frequent absences with beatings, and eventually divorced her⁸⁰. Moral values were ignored as inmates did what they had to do in order to survive. A relationship with a prison guard at Wha Wha meant that the female inmate had access to what was considered as contraband and would not face harassment from the other prison guards and male detainees. This however shows that the female inmates had lost hope of ever being released as they engaged in activities that had long term repercussions on them.

3.1 Abuse of Law

Female inmates at Wha Wha also suffered from the abuse of law by the security forces. Harsh punishments were meted out to the detainees for simple misdemeanours. Thorough beatings were the usual punishment at Wha Wha however other dehumanizing forms of punishment included solitary confinement and starvation. The female political prisoners at Wha Wha were treated like rubbish as they were viewed in the same light as children. The main problem that led to the abuse the women in detention faced was that the Rhodesian government refused to acknowledge that they existed. The government always tried to conceal the number of political detainees that were incarcerated in the country more so the female inmates. During Rhodesian colonial rule gathering or divulging any information about the nature of Rhodesian prisons and conditions of inmates was itself against Rhodesian Law.⁸¹ By denying their existence the government thus failed to protect the female inmates from the human rights abuses that they suffered at the hands of the prison personnel. However in 1965 Amnesty International estimated that there were 84 people at Wha Wha (71 men, 10 women- one aged over 70- and 3 children)⁸².

Solitary confinement was the most dreaded form of punishment at Wha Wha by the female inmates. Regulations stated that solitary confinement could not exceed 25 days and the prisoner be granted 1 hour exercise daily and bedding be also provided⁸³. These regulations were however rarely adhered to. The inmates were not granted any time for exercise and the bedding stipulated was rarely provided. Female inmates also dreaded solitary confinement at Wha Wha because it provided the security personnel an ideal opportunity to sexually harass, violate and abuse the inmates. The law was manipulated for personal gain and was used to make life

unbearable for the female inmates at Wha Wha as the officers could do anything with impunity.

Grace Moyo recalled that:

The usual punishment was beatings and these were given for minor offences such as slowness and disobedience. Beatings were delivered under the feet with a baton and one could not walk for days following such a beating. What we feared most however was solitary confinement which was given to those who committed more serious crimes such as smuggling out political letters. Solitary confinement meant that one was locked up at the solitary quarters for up to 10 days without any contact with the other inmates. In confinement diet was reduced and just one blanket was provided. Rumours of sexual abuse were rampant however no one ever openly spoke about it for fear of victimization. Those who returned from confinement were usually too weak to talk and when they recovered they fell into long lapses of silence.⁸⁴

Women suffered the most at the hands of the Rhodesian forces at Wha Wha because the male detainees did not tolerate any rough treatment and could challenge the guards. An example is Maurice Nyagumbo who was notorious for assaulting prison guards who disrespected him⁸⁵. Therefore life in detention was more tolerable for male detainees as they could challenge the conditions of their incarceration unlike the female inmates who were violently suppressed.

3.2 Overcrowding

Female detainees at Wha Wha were also subjected to overcrowded conditions. Wha Wha was characterized by two basic types of accommodation for inmates, barracks that were meant to accommodate sixteen people and huts that were meant to house two to three people. Wha Wha was however overcrowded such that the barracks that were meant for sixteen people ended up having more than 25 inmates while the huts housed over six people. Overcrowding also limited privacy for inmates as it led to the spread of diseases such as T.B, measles and dysentery. The overcrowded barracks limited privacy for inmates at the detention camp. The ventilation was also very poor in the barracks and fainting was common while horrible stench and putrid odours enveloped the inmates. Life was a living hell for the female inmates at Wha Wha.

These barracks were made out of galvanized iron and were very hot during the summer and coupled with the overcrowded conditions made life unbearable for the female detainees. The barracks were also dark and did not have any lighting. At night inmates often stepped on each other. Lice, bed bugs and mosquitoes were all prevalent in the barracks and they terrorized the inmates at night. The inmates lived like pigs and the Rhodesian government simply turned a blind eye.

3.3 Health Crisis In Wha Wha

Medical provisions were also denied the female inmates at Wha Wha. The prison regulations stipulated that the prisons be visited by a Medical officer “not less than once a week”, he was responsible not only for the health of the prisoners but also inspecting the prison to ascertain that the sanitation, washing and cooking facilities were not in a condition which could be “injurious or dangerous to the health of the prisoners”⁸⁶. However these visits were not taking place. Mazambani notes that, “Health personnel such as nurses and doctors in Southern Rhodesia abandoned the suffering patients in many detention camps across Southern Rhodesia and Wha Wha was no exception”⁸⁷. Mazambani goes on to say that;

Life in Southern Rhodesian camps was a nightmare and unbearable for the detainees. Medical doctors at Wha Wha had no respect for human life and the health of detainees. A number of political detainees languished in detention with poor health. Quite a number even perished. Mrs. Miriam Mushambi died at Wha Wha detention camp in 1964. Miss Sesulelo also died in detention shortly after being arrested from gunshot injuries. Many such cases were not reported and many lives were lost in these detention camps. To ensure that detainees perished undetected and unnoticed, the colonial authorities went on to make detention camps “no-go areas” for social welfare organisations⁸⁸.

Falling sick was the equivalent of a death sentence at Wha Wha detention camp because there was little hope of recovery. The inmates even believed that the Rhodesian government deliberately failed to medically provide for the inmates so that they would fall sick and die and

the government would have less responsibility of feeding and accommodating them⁸⁹. However it was very easy to fall sick at Wha Wha due to the pathetic living conditions. Life for female inmates at Wha Wha was characterized by suffering and desperation.

3.4 Sanitary Crisis at Wha Wha Detention Camp

Sanitary conditions at Wha Wha detention camp were unfit for human use. The bucket toilet was used in the camp. A bucket was simply placed in the cell for the detainees to use. Alexander notes that;

For those held in Wha Wha, where detainees shared cramped rooms at night with just a bucket as a toilet, rules also applied to bodily functions: there was....a rule that you could pee in the bucket but you couldn't relieve yourself- you had to be disciplined. If by some misfortune you had a runny tummy you had to cover the bucket with your blanket to stop the smell⁹⁰.

This was very unhygienic and promoted the spread of diseases. There were plenty of flies and other insects in the detainees' barracks at Wha Wha due to this. The inmates had to face the urine and human waste and this was a dehumanizing experience. Mazambani says that this was not only inhuman; it was mental torture at its peak⁹¹. Food was also served in those same cells that contained human excrete. After excreting in the buckets at night the inmates had to cover the bucket with their blankets meaning that the inmate would have to sleep without a blanket. The emptying of the buckets was also not systematic and was entirely up to the discretion of the prison guards. As such inmates could go for days without the buckets being emptied up to the point that they would overflow. The inmates had to brave these intolerable conditions as they had no one to report to. This shows therefore that life in detention was harsh and deplorable for female inmates at Wha Wha detention camp.

The situation at Wha Wha was worsened by the fact that the female inmates were not provided with toiletries and sanitary material. The Rhodesian government had denied any responsibility of clothing the detainees and therefore sanitary material was also not provided for female inmates. Only those detained under the Class 1 and Class 2 racial classes enjoyed such benefits. Mazambani notes that the female inmates in detention were not provided with any panties, bras and sanitary towels when on their cycle and this was dehumanizing and humiliating for the inmates⁹². Grass and pieces of cloth had to be used during their periods⁹³. Some detainees just let the blood drip to the floor while others resorted to smearing it on their bodies as if it were a lotion. Those who managed to obtain sanitary pads from their dealings with the security guards were forced by the situation to wear the same pad for long periods of time. Detainees were also not given ample time and resources to properly bath themselves. By regulations detainees were allowed to bath themselves on admission to Wha Wha and thereafter as often as the Officer in Charge may deem necessary⁹⁴. Showers at Wha Wha only lasted 5 minutes and were irregular during the week; however on Saturday there were allowed to spend some time in the ablution blocks.

Therefore the inmates at Wha Wha detention camp suffered from poor hygiene. This compounded to their psychological torture as they always felt unclean and inhuman. Soap was also not provided for the inmates, hence bathing was largely rudimentary and inmates did not really feel refreshed afterwards. Lotion and petroleum jelly were unheard of at Wha Wha as were bras and panties for the female inmates. The Rhodesian government viewed women as people with no rights and treated them as such.

3.5 Effects of Isolation

Female inmates at Wha Wha also suffered from the effects of isolation. Being cut off from their families had a psychological impact on them. The women restricted at the detention camp worried about their families; especially their children. Detention led to family disintegration and this affected the female detainees more than the males because the men who had their wives in detention often remarried as they did not know when their wives would be released. After a divorce it was difficult for the female inmates to get remarried after their release because most of them would have been sexually violated while in prison while some were even impregnated, even just to mention that they had once been incarcerated was enough to scare away any potential suitors. Thus the female inmates spent their days worrying about the fidelity of their husbands. This situation was worsened by the declaration of a state of Emergency by the Rhodesian Front. Visits to Wha Wha were declared illegal and to be granted permission to visit the camp, one had to apply to the Rhodesian government. This made life unbearable for the female inmates as they worried over the welfare of their families. Most of the female inmates at Wha Wha were illiterate and thus unlike their male counterparts who spent their days reading books, they would spend their days doing nothing. It was then that they would begin to worry about their families. Most of the women at Wha Wha suffered from depression and they received no medical attention for it.

3.6 Dietary Crisis

Female inmates also suffered from the poor diet served at Wha Wha restriction camp. Being classified under the class 3 racial class meant that the diet they received barely nourished them. The government regulations stipulated that the prison meals begin with breakfast which was

sadza and a cup of black tea, lunch which was sadza and beans and finally supper which was composed of sadza and meat and sometimes a vegetable⁹⁵. Despite these stipulations, the situation at Wha Wha was very different from what the regulations pronounced. Only two meals were provided namely breakfast and supper. Meat was a rare luxury that the inmates saw once in a blue moon. The food that they received was often sub-standard and unfit for human consumption. Beans were just boiled and served without adding any gravy, onions or tomatoes. Vomiting was common and this added to the filth that already existed within the inmates' barracks and cells. Mazambani notes that, "At times they were given horse meat or rotten meat. The mealie-meal was sometimes mixed with stones and dirt. They were forced to eat the food and if they refused food was withdrawn for days"⁹⁶.

Those inmates who had special dietary needs were worse off as no special food was provided and they had to make do with what was available. By virtue of being class 3 prisoners, cutlery such as knives, forks and spoons were unheard of and their plates were made of tin which rusted easily. Malnutrition was rife at Wha Wha and despite several complaints and appeals by humanitarian organisations to alter the detainees' diet; no action was taken by the government other than to ban the organisations from visiting the detention camp. The inmates that had small children in the detention camp suffered the horror of watching their children suffer from deficiency diseases such as kwashiorkor. No extra food was given to these inmates that had children. The class three diet contained only 6 different foods, beans, maize meal, vegetables, karpenta, meat and fats⁹⁷. Therefore it was no surprise that the inmates suffered from dietary deficiencies.

3.7 Lack of pre- natal and ante- natal facilities

Women at Wha Wha were also not provided with any pre- natal and ante- natal facilities. The security personnel at Wha Wha made no exception, those who were detained while pregnant and those who were impregnated while in incarceration, were all not given any medical care. This gave the new born babies low chances of survival. The children were born under harsh conditions and were introduced to a deplorable and bitter world inside the detention camp. Child mortality rates in Wha Wha were very high. Mazambani notes that:

The detention of pregnant women had deep rooted effects on women. Pregnant women were not provided with pre-natal and ante- natal facilities. Pregnant women were interrogated, tortured, beaten and scolded. Consequently miscarriages were common. Those who had miscarriage were not given any medical attention and that ruined their lives. Some died and some contracted diseases that made them sterile⁹⁸.

Pregnancy in Wha Wha was a nightmare. There was a higher chance of death for both the mother and the infant during childbirth than of survival. Napkins were also not provided for the infants. Those who were lucky and still maintained contact with their relatives could handover their babies to them. Mazambani goes on further to say:

Young women who had their first experience of childbirth in detention found the situation unbearable as they were without the support of their husbands, sisters, mothers and friends. Some of these pregnancies were out of the rapes by enemy soldiers. These young mothers had to share blankets, sleep on the floor, live with the smell of napkins and poor diet with their children. Thus detention camps jeopardised the health of young innocent souls and their mothers⁹⁹.

Life was dreadful for female inmates at Wha Wha, however it was appalling for pregnant detainees as they were not subjected to any medical care. Women became victims of their sexuality while pregnant women were harassed simply because they were women.

Conclusion

The chapter managed to expose the problems that women faced at Wha Wha detention camp. The chapter also showed that male detainees were better off than their female counterparts. Detention was very harsh on the female inmates at Wha Wha. It was not easy living under such filthy conditions, away from your family and watching fellow inmates sexually harassed and some falling sick and dying. The women were driven to near madness as the Rhodesian government sought to curb their nationalist mentality but also to break them and kill their spirits. Mazambani summarily explains this and says, “While detention, theoretically had an intention of punishing the victim but merely preventing them from committing political offences, detainees were to be kept in prison like conditions and they were not given any chances of leading normal lives”¹⁰⁰. Most of the women became socially withdrawn and fell into long lapses of silence and their experiences left lifelong psychological scars on them.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the study demonstrated how political prisoners at Wha Wha suffered at the hands of the Rhodesian security agents. Detention camps in Rhodesia were established as a means of arresting African nationalism. The three main detention camps were set up in the early 1960s, a period characterized by an upsurge in African militant nationalism. The concept of detaining political prisoners was not peculiar to Rhodesia as it had been practiced extensively across Africa by colonial governments.

Detention camps were characterized by gross human rights violations and severe political repression. Critics of the government were viewed as state enemies and the colonial governments treated them as such. It is important to note that political prisoners ranged from African political activists to old chiefs who refused to enforce colonial legislation and policies. Other people were detained simply because they were suspected of opposing the settler government and in the process a lot of innocent people were detained.

Life in detention was harsh and unforgiving for political prisoners. Instead of being a haven for political reorientation and rehabilitation, the detention camp was a brutal, violent and severe place. This was by design rather than by default, as the Rhodesian government enforced inhuman conditions in the detention camps. Detainees at Wha Wha were exposed to poor diet, poor accommodation and a lack of medical facilities. Detention also posed a psychological problem for the inmates as they suffered from uncertainty on when if ever they would ever be released. Detention was indefinite and unlike convicted prisoners, detainees did not have a release date. It

is thus hoped that the study has exposed the problems that inmates faced at Wha wha detention camp.

While it is true that detention was a nightmare for inmates, it is also true that detention was a living hell for female inmates as they were viewed as right less beings. Unlike their male counterparts who formulated survival strategies from their intellectual abilities, female inmates were largely illiterate and were thus defenseless against the Rhodesian security agents. It has been demonstrated that women suffered more in the detention arena than male inmates. What made the incarceration experience more sinister for female inmates was that the Rhodesian government refused to acknowledge that they existed. Detention camps also did not have the facilities to cater for female inmates. They slept in filthy overcrowded cells that had no lighting and poor ventilation. Personal hygiene was also not considered in the detention camp for the women because sanitary material was not provided and as such female inmates had to improvise by using grass and pieces of cloth. The Rhodesian penal system was crueler on the female inmates than the males and this also exposed the patriarchal nature of colonization.

For former detainees reliving their experiences of violence and brutality was a difficult process as old wounds were opened up. No rehabilitation was offered to them therefore the mental torture still haunts them up to today. The study endeavored to tell the detention story, exposing what went on inside the fences and barracks. It also sought to demystify the claim that the guerilla war was the only recognizable historical event in the liberation of Zimbabwe by showing that there were also people who advocated for the independence of Zimbabwe but were rounded up and locked up in the sinister detention camps.

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MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

My name is Roland Bopoto. I am a fourth year student currently studying History and International Studies at Midlands States University. I am carrying out a research based on the plight of inmates at Wha Wha Detention Camp from 1960 to 1980. You are kindly asked to assist by filling in the provided space. Your responses will be used for academic purposes only.

INSTRUCTION: PLEASE FILL IN THE SPACES WHERE APPROPRIATE.

PERSONAL PROFILE

Age.....

Sex.....

VIEWS ON RESPONDENTS

1. Why do you think detention camps were created?
2. Can you tell me about the living conditions that were in detention camps?
3. How did the Rhodesian Security Forces and the insurgents ill-treat inmates in detention camps?
4. What effect did detention have on women?
5. What problems did female inmates face in detention?

Thank you

ENDNOTES

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