Guerrilla Snuff

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Baobab Books, Harare, Zimbabwe

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/8948

Boston University
Guerrilla Snuff

Mafuranhunzi Gumbo
GUERRILLA SNUFF

PR
9390.9
G94-G94
1995
Acknowledgements

The material for this book was collected during the late 1980s, when I managed to spend several months each year in the field in Zimbabwe. This was thanks to the support of the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa, which helped fund an extensive research programme, and the University of South Africa, Pretoria, which granted me paid leave for regular visits to Zimbabwe.

Apart from these institutions, I owe a debt of thanks to the characters of this book, who shared with me their experiences, visions, dreams. Some of them are lifelong friends; others I met in the course of this research. To each and every one of them I offer Guerrilla Snuff as a tribute.

Throughout the research period I relied, as always, on our team of stalwarts - field research assistants, mentors, sounding boards, companions in the search. In particular, Clever Gwizhu who runs the home base in Masvingo; Daniel Zvanaka, Tarisai Zvokuomba and Bishop Reuben Marinda; and, unforgettably, Leonard Gono, adopted son over more than 20 years; during this time he became an invaluable fieldworker whose quick eyes and intuition found us gold. His recent death has left our lives emptier, yet filled Endai zvakanaka, shamwari!

Back in Pretoria, Marietjie Willemse and Michelle Ducci typed the text, while André Goetz provided immaculate printouts. Roger Stringer in Harare was responsible for the final format of the book; and Irene Staunton of Baobab Books arranged for its publication. My thanks to all of them.

Marcelle Manley gave me the benefit of her linguistic talent, her staunch support and critical comments. Her confidence in this book encouraged me on my venture into popular writing, which at times seemed daunting after the more formal academic works I have produced hitherto.

Finally the companionship and care of Moyochena, she of the white heart, made it possible to bear with the frustration of seemingly endless delays as Guerrilla Snuff ran the gauntlet of readers and publishers' agents prior to its actual publication.

Mafuranhunzi
Masvingo, Zimbabwe
August 1994
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*Guerrilla Snuff,* Daneel's first attempt at popular writing, is a fictionalized version of *chimurenga* history. It is also the first publication in ZIRRCON's monographic series, “Religion and Liberation in Africa”
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Preface

What I was hearing seemed incongruous in the plain white interior of the small Gutu district council house. The deep voice felt its way through the now distant passage of chimurenga. Eyes that for a moment would burn with idealism, could suddenly turn inward to mask the raw emotion of war. The hint of a smile which occasionally lit the prematurely aged face never quite hid the ruthless independent spirit.

Those were my initial impressions of Cosmas Gonese, one-time ZANLA detachment commander, Weeds Chakarakata, when we first discussed his war experiences, and in particular, the guerrillas' reliance on ancestral guidance: ways in which the ancestors had communicated their battle directives to the fighters through spirit mediums, birds and animals; and how, throughout the war, the guerrillas had taken snuff in recognition of the protective powers of the spirit world.

I was fascinated. The beginnings of a story were unfolding. I could see the flight of the majestic bateleur eagle, feel the grip of apprehension when its warning call declared an unseen enemy presence.

Spoilt as I was by the convenience of a tape-recorder, I simply listened. Now and then I checked the machine to reassure myself that the tape was recording. A black snuff-horn stood upright against the machine. I was intensely aware that to Chakarakata the horn and deft finger movement between snuff container and nostrils, spelled spirit presence. The ancestors were being summoned. They would judge the hidden motives of this writer of chimurenga stories: they would determine if he was genuine and well intentioned, or a calculating and intrusive presence. This was the horn which had represented life, hope and freedom during many battles.

As I listened my thoughts returned to the days when I had lived amongst the Gumbo people of Gutu and my adoption by the tribal elders. I was proud of being a Gumbo Madyirapazhe, a "man of the leg who eats outside": an initiate, who could trace his descent through the famous house of Rutsate to Mabwazhe Chinamukutu, the common ancestor of our people in Gutu.
It was as if Mabwazhe was dreaming me, dreaming the ageless dream of the haunted hunter. I was out there in the valley with the magnificent beast, a rhino, waiting. I shared the communion and, after the kill, found I had slain a brother.

As Mafuranhunzi, the sharp-shooter, the black hands of destiny uncannily wove my own story into the still pending *chimurenga* history of Gutu and its environs. I was being shown just enough to make me want to record the wisdom of the Rufura, the spirit of Africa, which was strengthening the resolution of black men and women to take up arms.

Click! went the recorder button, jolting me out of my reverie. Gonese’s amusement told me that he had noticed my mind wandering. I rewound the tape to check the quality of the recording. Silence! I tried again. Nothing! The tape was blank. I was embarrassed. This had not happened to me before. But never before had a *chimurenga* horn full of ancestral snuff been leaning against my recorder.

I made a joke about the censorship of our Gumbo ancestors. Chakarakata laughed. But later, when I found that the wire leading to the magnetic recording head had melted, I sobered up. Perhaps this was an ancestral warning, one given to a somewhat pragmatic man, which meant that he should not trifle with unseen powers. Perhaps Mabwazhe was sending his white kinsmen the message: “Tread carefully with respect, Mafuranhunzi. For our *chimurenga* ground on which you are standing is holy.”

And this is what I have attempted to do in these *chimurenga* stories. I have tried to tread carefully and respectfully through the terrain of different experiences and beliefs. I travelled with former guerrillas, spirit mediums, Mwari cultists and independent church prophets to the battlefields, the caves where they had lain hidden, the land-mine and ambush sites, the places of worship in an attempt to see through their eyes and recapture the feel of events. I had to relive the hardships, the resolve, the pain and elation of the fighters, and the people, to set me free for story-telling.

My roots in Gumbo territory led me to choose the Gutu re-burial ceremony and the speech made by our President, former commander-in-chief of the ZANLA forces, as a focus around which to weave some of the stories that I have collected.

I have tried to exemplify the religion of liberation; to portray how the struggle revitalized many African, mainly ancestral, beliefs and rituals; and to give a glimpse of the role of the prophets and African independent church communities. The picture I have painted is incomplete. Nevertheless, I hope I have managed to convey, if only partially, some of the religious forces which were at work during the *chimurenga*.

This book is neither conventional history nor fiction. It is more of an attempt to popularize history and myth for the benefit of our modern world,
as well as for rural men and women sitting in the shade of a muchakata tree, far from the madding academic crowd.

The stories of historic events are the fruits of intensive field research, and I have tried to describe the main actors. But the dialogue is imaginary, although drawn from the endless stream of stories I was told.

If you ask me whether what I have written is true, I must answer “yes”: yes, with a touch of fantasy! What then is truth? Guerrilla Snuff is not a textbook, it has no footnotes, no source references to bolster the concept of objectivity. But this book represents the truth, as I saw and heard it; the merger of historical fact with myth – the myths people create about themselves and the “facts” they use to convey this truth. The truth, in this case meaning, as I understand it, what people believe about themselves, perceived and projected through the subjective grid of my own experience.

In Mabwazhe’s dream, high on the cliffs of Mount Rasa, on the rock face of Matonjeni, the story of liberation was writing me. At times it cast me out to suffer despair on the margin of both black and white worlds. Nomadic wandering without relief was part of the story, my story, until the book was complete.

I offer Guerrilla Snuff as a tribute to all fallen freedom fighters of Zimbabwe and to all the people of our country – black and white – who suffered in the struggle, until peace came and with it the opportunity for reconciliation. This is a story which belongs to Mwari who has made our country beautiful and who has written into our hearts our love of it.
Map 1: Gutu District: Territorial divisions during the *chimurenga* period.
Key:

🌟 Battles, skirmishes or guerrilla attacks (convoys/industrial sites)
1. Mukaro Mission
2. RAR camp – Mupindimbi Dam
3. Massacre of civilians at Chinongoma farm
4. Bikita Minerals
5. Guerrilla attack on main road near Pamushana Mission
6. Musukutwa battle
7. Contact at Gokomere Mission
8. Guerrilla attack on fuel installations/Masvingo industrial area
9. Camp at Devure Bridge/Binya Road – attacked by guerrillas

♂️ Traditionalists
1. Spirit medium MuDende
2. Spirit medium Tazivei
3. Spirit medium Pfupajena
4. Mwari cult messenger – Vondo Mukozho
5. Spirit medium John Chiwara

🎵 African independent church leaders involved in chimurenga
1. Prophet Elison Mutingwende
2. Apostolic Baptist – Sauro Garanuako
3. Bishop Matteo Forridge (ZCC)
4. Bishop Nyasha – African Pentecostal Church
5. Zionist Prophet Mashereketo
6. Prophet Musariri Dhliwayo’s Zion in Patmos
7. Revd. Muteru of Chibarirwe
8. Prophet Musariri’s home village: Chikukutu

⛰️ Mountains
1. Rasa
2. Chivasa
3. Yunjere
4. Vinga
5. Vumba
6. Musukutwa

📍 Roman Catholic Mission Station
△ RCZ Mission Station
☐ Liberated zone
Map 2: Zimbabwe and Mozambique: ZANLA infiltration routes and war zones

Key:
- 1 Mwari cult shrines
- 2 Great Zimbabwe ruins
- 3 Gutu District headquarters: Heroes re-burial ceremony
- 4 Chimoio Camp: ZANLA chimurenga headquarters
PART I

GUTU'S FALLEN HEROES
SATURDAY, 19 August 1989. The early morning skies are clear as we drive to Gutu. Skosana, an ex-guerrilla fighter, sits next to me. His khaki suit is neatly pressed, his features are clean-shaven. We hardly talk. Chimurenga memories crowd out conversation. Nearly a decade of peace later we are still reburying our fallen fighters.

On this day the convenient cushion of forgetfulness is discarded. The prospect of the commemoration ceremony strips the customary face off everyday life. Landscape turns to battle zone, recollection comes to life. As we passed through the Masvingo industrial area I saw again the night sky turned crimson by the conflagration of a sabotaged fuel dump. Beyond the darkness and flame stretches an endless landscape of war: the dull thud of land-mines in the lowveld; the barricaded homesteads of beleaguered white farmers; the grief-stricken relatives of a black friend killed by a hand grenade.

Ahead of us appears the kopje of Gokomere mission. The little cross askew on the barren granite boulder symbolizes the good news brought here by Catholic missionaries. Good news proclaimed with good intent, but slanted to one side by Western culture and imperial ambition. News yet to be fulfilled in liberated Zimbabwe and in every corner of this divided continent.

To this mission, one fateful evening, detachment commander Weeds Chakarakata had led his guerrilla unit. A punjwe meeting was held in the church and dormitories. The pupils ran about excitedly, shouting war slogans and hugging the comrade fighters, responding to the message of their liberators with exuberant chimurenga songs. Loud and clear their voices rang into the night, until a staccato beat of FN rifles abruptly ended the celebration. There were shouts of abuse, fire and counter fire, shrieks of fear; in the end the stench of cordite and death hung heavily in uncertain silence. Outside, the motionless form of a comrade fighter starkly stated the blunt fact of war.

Early dawn saw the deployment of security forces in the area. Commander
Chakarakata was cut off from his men, virtually trapped, a stone's throw from where we are travelling comfortably on the tar. Which would be a safe route back to base camp in Zimuto? A wrong choice, surrounded by the enemy as he was, would spell certain death. Compelled by crisis, he reached for the snuff horn. Slowly the fear-dispelling ritual unfolded. Tremulous fingers relaxed at the sight of the ancestral snuff in the palm of his hand, the flow of potent spirit power. Taking an urgent sniff he uttered a soft-spoken plea: “You, Gonese of my father’s house; you Rutsate, defender of our land; you, Mabwazhe, great hunter father of us Gumbo people; you, Chaminuka, Nehanda and Kaguwi, guardians of Zimbabwe: show me the way”

The duiker stood motionless, only ten yards away. When Chakarakata looked up their eyes met, held. Both knew, took off, became one in flight. The little antelope headed straight for the vast open plain, the one place Chakarakata would have avoided. Once in the open there was no time to backtrack. Leg muscles unwound, found the rhythm of bounding stride, cleared the same obstacles as did the duiker, then broke into a headlong sprint to the safety of beckoning trees. Chakarakata ran for his life as fast as only Mabwazhe, hero ancestor of Gutu, could have done.

The duiker was messenger, brother, ancestor, all in one. Its spirit carried Chakarakata, filled him with elation at eluding the enemy. Crossing the plain Chakarakata was duiker, duiker was Chakarakata. It was the way of our ancestors, the way the war was fought. A way of doing beyond explanation.

Only when he had reached safe cover did Chakarakata look back. The choppers were coming down, swooping from the skies like birds of prey. They were putting their fighters to ground where he had just crossed. Duiker had sprung the trap only just in time. His antelope guide had vanished from sight but its little hoofprints were etched deep into the soul of Chakarakata. The detachment commander felt for his snuff horn. Tremors of delayed shock, he knew, would follow later.

I point at a large muchakata tree next to the road. “During the war I once saw the corpse of a black man lying under that tree.”

“Did you stop to investigate?” Skosana inquires.

“No. The guerrillas may have been lying in ambush. Or the corpse could have been booby-trapped with a grenade.”

“That is so,” he conceded.

“In the war years,” I reminisce, “I drove up and down this road every so often. It was always risky. You never knew when you’d drive into an ambush; whether you’d survive.”

“Did you drive in the convoys?” Skosana asked. A loaded question.

“Mostly when I had passengers, yes. But often I drove alone. Once I had a flat tyre at the Sashe bridge where the fighters were known to operate. To them I would have been just another white passing; easy target. It wasn’t
much fun changing tyres alone, out there in the open. No-one to cover my
back."

"In the villages the people were even less protected than in the towns." Skosana's words rang like a reprimand, reminding me of the varying degrees
of risk experienced by black and white Zimbabweans during the war. The
villagers were exposed to both the Rhodesian army and the guerrilla fighters;
the latter, in turn, to betrayal by villagers whose relatives were serving in the
army. Many were the guerrilla fighters poisoned by opposing civilians. Many
the collaborators who, in retaliation, were either shot or, with their kinsfolk,
herded into huts, to be burnt to death by the bush fighters or the youth
league.

By comparison the plight of white urbanites, travelling around in armed
convoys, and that of white farmers barricaded behind sandbags in their
houses, appeared less desperate. Not that the lower white casualty rate
mitigated the fear and apprehension flimsily masked by smiles and small
talk. Complacency was continually being shattered by trauma. The face of
Masvingo's mayor, ashen after his car, travelling immediately behind mine,
had come under fire. My sister Charlotte limp from loss of blood after seven
AK bullets had shattered her legs in an ambush near Chipinge. Two days later
her neighbour's wife was decapitated by a rocket. André and Binneke Brand
were returning from a communion service André had just conducted in
Gokwe when a hail of AK bullets through the windscreen ended conversation,
committed ministry, life itself.

What brings a white African with such memories to a chimurenga heroes'
reburial? What brings the hunter and the hunted of yesteryear to travel
together amicably to a ceremony of such stark black–white contrasts? A
diplomatic show of white right-mindedness in order to secure a good future
in independent Zimbabwe? A sense of history? Or the mystery which
transforms yesterday's animosities into tomorrow's common venture?

A straight answer eludes me. Perhaps it will unravel itself in the course of
the ceremony, or in the toil and celebration of life that awaits us in this
absorbing country. For the moment, as we near Mupandawana growth point,
I revel in a sense of lightness – half anticipation, half challenge – ousting the
weight of conflict.

Right now it is a lightness of liberation: a shift of the narrow focus on my
own misgivings and those of other white Zimbabweans as they reach the end
of an era; the breaking of a new dawn of freedom and hope. Not that the
lightness wipes out suffering. The symbols of chimurenga's tragedy and despair
stand on my writing desk at home. They capture my soul, submerging its
individuality into a common awareness, beyond self, of what the revolution
had cost Zimbabwe.

The symbols were fashioned during the war. As if in response to the
urgings of the agonized collective unconscious of his country, Hatugari, the sculptor, carved the despairing outstretched hands of a beggar out of jacaranda wood. Disproportionately large, the hands depict the struggle for survival of rural refugees who fled deprivation in their home districts to eke out a beggar's existence in pole-and-plastic shanties. Abstracted shape in dark soapstone: a mourning woman, legs folded, hands clasped behind her head, mouth twisted in grief, embodying the sorrow of the lost on the sculptor's very doorstep.

Over the years I have internalized the symbolism of Hatugari's wood and stone creations on my desk. They have become the sombre guardians of the passage back to the inscape of my own being where the war lives on. As such they no longer evoke the intensity of the original suffering that engendered them. This in itself is a sign, not of indifference or forgetfulness, but of healing. Today the mourning of begging hands and twisted mouth turns into pulsating rhythms of life.

Lightness of being in commemorating the dead; symptom of wholeness and healing. The movement is from darkness to light. It comprehends both individuality in all its uniqueness and the collective of a new nation born of suffering on the face of Africa.

II

THOUSANDS of people are gathered on both sides of the fence round Gutu's Heroes' Acre. The atmosphere is one of expectancy and celebration. A murmur of voices forms a background to the master-of-ceremony's booming announcements from the loudspeakers. He occupies a commanding position on the elevated rostrum, below the Zimbabwean flag. Behind him provincial dignitaries in black suits, brightly coloured robes and vivid dresses take their seats on the granite pavilion.

The presidential chair in the middle of the rostrum is empty, awaiting the arrival of Zimbabwe's first black head of state since the demise of the last Rozvi dynasty. When comrade President Robert Mugabe and his consort take their seats they will be surrounded by senior party officials, provincial administrators, local government officials and ex-combatants. Beyond the rows of some forty open graves, each with a black coffin next to it, they will see the nation in thousands of Gutu faces. To their left and right will be Gutu’s rural councillors, headmasters and school teachers. Among these are the chiefs, still wearing the white helmets and bronze insignia, symbols of their authority under colonial rule. The spirit mediums are resplendent in traditional attire: plumed headgear, black and white drapes, ancestral beads, staffs, and a variety of leopard, cheetah and other skins.

Further over to the right sits a group of some hundred and fifty chiefs and
spirit mediums. They come from all over Masvingo Province. Although I am one of the Gumbo people of Gutu, I also belong to this group. We call ourselves the Association of Zimbabwe Spirit Mediums. We have just held a week-long conference in Masvingo on tree planting and game conservation. Our presence here is no coincidence. Many of the key figures in our movement are war heroes in their own right: spirit mediums and erstwhile guerrillas with illustrious chimurenga records. Our constitution states that we propose extending the struggle to the field of environmental reform in order to liberate the ecologically still lost lands of Zimbabwe. We have come in support of our Association's executive which was a major force behind this ceremony in Gutu. We have come to honour the fallen fighters, from whose histories we draw inspiration for our extended chimurenga.

As I move over to observe the row of coffins the choir of the Gutu United School starts singing:

Those born in Zimbabwe
sacrificed themselves for the land
The country in which we lived as guests
was reclaimed through the shedding of their blood.
Let us grieve for them, let us honour them,
the children of the soil, of the black people;
the children of the soil we honour.
The parents of these children
do not know where they are.
We, today, are happy to perform the task
of burying the fighters.

Who are these children of the soil being returned to the soil today? Each coffin, painted mat black, holds its own partly secret, history. Only the chimurenga name of the fighter appears casually chalked on the coffin. Not even the living ex-combatants who fought alongside these fallen comrades can place them in terms of home district, family name, clan or totem. Anonymity was part of guerrilla tactics. It was a means of protecting relatives back home from harassment or retaliation in the event of a fighter's death or capture at the front. Yet the chimurenga names bear their own testimony. They tell how the men saw themselves in relation to the enemy. How they or their fellow fighters evaluated their military feats.

At my feet lies the coffin of Shamhu the whip, scourge of the enemy, poisoned in 1977 at Masango farm in the Bikita B war zone. Shingirirai - be courageous - persisted valorously in an offensive in the Buhera A zone, until a bomb at Matizha Gwiranenzara township put an end to his war. On
scouting missions Gondo (the eagle) Maxwell had the keen eye of a bird of prey for the slightest enemy movement; he drowned in the Mtirikwi river in the Bikita B zone in 1978. James Lancer, the rifle grenade, used that weapon with deadly accuracy. Alex Hondo was named for what he was: a man of war. Mavapenzi (you’re fools) was forever foxing the enemy and making them look foolish; in contact situations he used to taunt them with loud and lusty swearing. Shumba, the lion, was fearless in battle. Tichabayana – we stab each other – was a demon with a bayonet. Dhi-dhi-dhi the machine-gunner was named for his rapid, accurate fire. Gondoharishayi was the eagle who never missed when he swooped down on his quarry. Black Zimbabwe was named for the ultimate goal of the struggle: an independent African state. Dhambi (garbage dump) envisaged a war which would reduce the Rhodesian army to a pile of rubble. Sam Kufa’s very name spelt death to the enemy. And Satan – Devol Devosa – believed the oppressor deserved nothing less than hell.

Moving between the coffins, I enter another world. Background voices fade into the stutter of AK rifles. The dreaded Vampires shriek away into the skies, spitting fire from their rounded bellies as their acid bombs hurtle down at the caves of Musukutwa. Helicopter rotors throb in the mountain air as grown men and youngsters die in the caves below.

I become aware of two figures in black suits checking the positions of the coffins. Gonese and Mberi. They too used to have different names, reflecting successive stages of chimurenga. Former detachment commander Cosmas Gonese called himself Pfumoreropa, the spear of blood, when he first arrived at Nyadzonya camp in Mozambique in 1975. He trained at Tembwe under the name of Batai Magidi – hold the firearms – and first operated in Chipinge as Mabwazhe the warrior. In the Bikita war zone he became Chakarakata, that which is difficult to swallow, because his daring tactics in convoy attacks and ambushes were considered by the guerrillas to be an unbeatable obstacle to the enemy. In Gutu South and in Zimuto he became known as Weeds or Weeds Chakarakata, for despite the enemy’s best efforts to outwit and capture him, he remained as indestructible as weeds in a maize patch.

His companion, Davison Mberi, was a section commander who, since the war, has become the most influential ex-combatant – after Weeds – in the Gutu district. When he came to the Buhera A war zone as a political commissar he was known as Santana, after some revolutionary fighting in a distant chimurenga. But once they had hit the army camp at Mutiusinezita (the tree without a name) and his prowess as a machine-gunner became known, he was renamed Subcheka, the sub-machine-gun which mows down the enemy. His friends still call him Sub.

These two men are the kingpins of today’s ceremony. They, both veteran commanders, mobilized their fellow survivors to help retrieve the bodies of the fallen comrades and give them an honourable send-off at the heroes’
acre. Through their determination and loyalty the particulars of the war history and deaths of the fallen fighters will be preserved.

As I scrutinize the succinct comments on thirty-two of the forty odd heroes to be buried, I notice with surprise that less than half of them died in battle: eight in air raids, seven in direct skirmishes with Rhodesian soldiers. At least a third – eleven – died of food poisoning. The majority of these poisonings took place in the Vunjere farming district where the fighters had their operational base. Ironically, this is the area in Gutu South which, towards the end of the struggle, came to be known as a liberated zone. The poisonings illustrate the divided loyalties of the rural population, at least during the first phase of guerrilla penetration into this area. Despite massive popular support, the guerrillas' dependence on locally prepared food made them vulnerable to retaliation from those who did not agree with their cause or their conduct. The actions of guerrilla fighters under the stress of war were sometimes coercive and discriminatory. In their turn they had to face the strain of continual exposure to the enemy without and within.

My reverie about the now distant killing fields is broken by the Gova school choir's song:

Today we grieve for the fighters of Zimbabwe
Grieve, you brothers and sisters
Grieve for the fighters of Zimbabwe.
The fighters were stricken, they were killed
by the mabhunu
We conquered, we shot
the mabhunu.

The fighters were bombed
they were killed by the mabhunu
We conquered, we shot
the mabhunu.

It is a song of defiance! Mabhunu literally means “boers”, Afrikaans for farmers. The song generalizes the term to include the entire colonial establishment and all the forces it unleashed on the bush fighters. Yet first and foremost it isolates the white farmers as the real enemy, the ones who grabbed and exploited the fertile soil at the expense of their black brothers. Hence the guerrilla tactics against the white farming community and the ideological conception of the struggle as the liberation and restoration of the lost lands.

Apart from its negative connotations of encroachment and exploitation, the term bhunu also has a different, almost mystical meaning to black people.
Deep down, the white farmer's - and particularly the Afrikaner boer's - religious love of the land, his Calvinist work ethic and resilience when the rains stay away and crops fail, are understood and, albeit grudgingly, honoured. He, too, is a child of the soil, in his own way confessing dependence on Mwari, the ultimate guardian of the land. He has abused the code of fairness in his use of the land; but he too belongs to creation's peasantry, a brotherhood in which nature itself heals the sickness of racial prejudice.

As the last notes of the song die away, the master-of-ceremonies glances at the three mabhunu among the sea of black faces. Ironically, all three of them are in one way or another involved in land reform. Bara-bada (the one who flits around, the omnipresent overseer) is the district's leading game conservationist. An Afrikaner patriarch if ever there was one, he still rules his farm with an iron rod. Yet he is an open-minded and fair man, who publicly and unflinchingly supports the President's policy of reconciliation. Next to him sits his English counterpart, whose farm in Felixburg is adorned with the most beautiful copses of muchakata trees I have ever seen. This man farms with Shona cattle and is chairman of Zimbabwe's Natural Resources Board. The third is me, Mafuranhunzi, whose wilderness experience and religious identification with the people of the land finally translate into nature conservation.

What does our master-of-ceremonies make of us? Awkward visitors? As if embarrassed by the flagrant irony of chimurenga victory songs in the presence of these mabhunu, he mutters almost apologetically into the microphone: "We must remember that there are also some good mabhunu."

A ripple of laughter passes through the crowd. But there is no derision in the friendly faces around me. Perhaps I have inherited from my adopted Shona forebears the very lightness of being I feel at this moment. Whether it springs from instinct, intuition or awareness of God's pervasive Spirit presence I do not know. But I am convinced that without their banter and fun my black compatriots could never have survived the crucible of colonialism and have retained such manifest goodwill to all the people of the land.
COMMANDER WEEDS CHAKARAKATA

COSMAS Gonese leans against a tree next to the coffins of his dead friends. Most of them operated with him during the war, either in his section or in a detachment under his command. He witnessed the deaths of several of them and was present at the hurried, unceremonious burials in shallow graves or granite crevices. All this took place more than a decade ago. There is something legendary about this long delayed day when the valiant are finally to be laid to rest with full honours as heroes of independent Zimbabwe in the presence of the first president of the country.

Up to now the spirits of these fighters have been roaming like outcasts in the bush. They appeared to hover near the villages where they were killed. Ghostlike sentries, their AKs still at the ready at the poshitos - lookout posts - where they were fed by the villagers, in the mountains where they lay in ambush positions waiting for the enemy, or sitting in a circle under the trees where they used to commune with the ancestors.

Because they had not been brought home with the traditional kugadzira rituals, they were not yet true midzimu, ancestors entrusted with the protection of their living relatives; nor were they venerated spirits, participating fully in the affairs of their families. Sometimes they haunted their commander's dreams. Gonese would find himself back in the Vunjere base camp, arguing offensive strategy urging vigilance against poisoned food and reliving the helpless horror of restraining a poison victim in his last convulsions. Or he would be back in the harsh, cold nights at the front, in faded denims, long plaited hair down to his shoulders, wearing his famous broad red headband.

He smiles wryly at the contrast with his appearance today: close-cropped hair, shoes polished for the ceremony, black jacket draped over broad, muscular shoulders. At thirty-five the ex-combatant commander's athletic frame still calls to mind the dashing young soccer star of the Dynamos under-eighteen.
team in Harare. Seemingly lazy eyes unobtrusively scanning the proceedings conceal an ambitious, intelligent mind. Those eyes which have observed death at close quarters can outstare the gaze of any opponent with unflinching intensity. They are eyes that rarely show humour. Warmth and unguarded softness are reserved for his gentle young wife and baby son. Today there are traces of fatigue from the long weeks of work and organization that went into stage-managing this epic event.

He observes Subcheka, his alter ego during the war years, checking the coffins against a list of names in his hand. A smile curls his lips. He thinks: “Yes, Sub, we’ve made it after all. The day has come. All those blasted years in prison were not for nothing. Look at you, fusspot of a radio technician. Still checking every detail. Come on, relax! Today our dream visitors are satisfied. They’ll rest after this. Our prison vows are fulfilled. Our dead comrades come home today to the soil of Mabwazhe, to the salute of Zimbabwe’s supreme ruler.”

Subcheka, always meticulous, continues to check and recheck the burial site. As when he is repairing a radio, his face is intent. Underneath, however, his mind is seething. The expectant crowd, the triumph of this occasion, contrasts with bleak memories of years in prison. And before that, the deed which, for him and Weeds Chakarakata, had ended the war.

That fateful day soon after the cease-fire people were trying to find their feet, only half believing that hostilities were really over. The new state was vulnerable, in the throes of birth. Far away from the conference tables a few spirit mediums still conveyed military directives from the spirit council-of-war to a sceptical peasant audience. A few of the most hated personifications of oppression, who had managed to get through the war unscathed, still had to be eliminated.

Some guerrilla fighters who had hidden their weapons and failed to report to the UNO-monitored checkpoints were ready to obey the ancestral commands. In this last hour of retribution the voice of Nehanda was said to have ordered that the Great Zimbabwe area be cleared of foreign intruders. Hit squads converged on white farms near Lake Kyle, leaving behind the lifeless bodies of Abe and Magriet Roux and a few others.

Weeds remembers the midnight ceremony at the ruins of Great Zimbabwe quite clearly. In the moonlight Nehanda the medium, in a simple black robe, stood out dramatically against the pale grey granite walls behind her. She was recounting the glories of the Mutapa rulers of centuries ago to her audience of ZANLA fighters. Then she spoke about the first chimurenga and the feats of the two spirit mediums representing the national ancestors Kaguvi and Nehanda. Their death-defying stand against overwhelming odds remained an example to the guerrillas, strengthening their resolve not to lay down their arms.
“Who of you are prepared to follow in our footsteps? Who of you are prepared to perform brave deeds to cleanse the land—even if it means facing the gallows?” Nehanda’s piercing eyes shifted from one guerrilla to the other, letting her challenge sink in. In her state of possession she was the epitome of proud black dynasties.

Weeds saw in a flash the disfigured face of his father. His resolve hardened. Mazhindu, the quick-tempered, the white Gutu farmer responsible for that scar, still had to be punished. As if pushed by fate, he rose and walked slowly towards the medium. In front of her he sank to his knees, clasped the knobs of the two ebony staffs she held in her hands firmly in his own. Then he rested his forehead against his knuckles and repeated the vow he had made as a boy to avenge the humiliation of his father. Still kneeling, he heard the steady voice of Nehanda above him commending his plan of action to the guardian ancestors of Zimbabwe. With a sense of quiet elation he realized that his own destiny was being ritually fused with the history of Zimbabwean heroes who had risen against their oppressors in the name of freedom and justice. This was not make-believe. There was purpose in his stride when he left the gathering and walked off into the night.

A few weeks later Weeds and Subcheka were commissioned to travel from Mupandawana to Vunjere to retrieve the weapons still hidden at their former rear base. Thomas had volunteered to go with them. He sat in the back of the car, brooding about the plan to abduct or eliminate Mazhindu on the way back. Thomas knew about his friend’s oath to avenge himself on the murungu who had scarred his father. Now the day of reckoning had come. He felt sure that if the three of them could lure the farmer away from his house they could overpower him and tie him up. What happened then was for Chakaraka to decide. He fingered the handcuffs and strong nylon cord in the duffel bag on the seat beside him.

“Are we turning in those weapons today without firing a shot?” Weeds asked.

Subcheka did not answer at once, concentrating on his driving. “Perhaps it would be best,” he ventured at last. “Those who have obeyed Nehanda’s orders are going to hang. How does that help Zimbabwe?”

“Mazhindu is still alive,” Weeds remonstrated, irritation in his voice. “He has trampled on our people. He should be dealt with.”

“I know you tried to ambush him many times during the war. If only Jesus hadn’t fired that shot before you had Mazhindu in the killing bag the score would have been settled that day.” Sub shrugged his shoulders. “I know how you feel,” he said. “Maybe this is the last sacrifice required by our ancestors. And maybe Mazhindu’s maimed corpse will be a warning to the bloody mabhunu that they cannot exploit our land forever. After all, we were ready to die for the cause all along.”
"You know what that white bastard did to my father," Weeds erupted. "He branded him like one brands cattle. I stood trembling next to my father's bed at the clinic. I swore I would one day avenge what Mazhindu had done to him. I was only a kid, but I never forgot. My father was marked for life. Every time he came down the stands at the Rufaro stadium, after a soccer match, I would see the scar on his forehead and remember my vow. He'd talk soccer, praise me if I had played well. I'd be thinking death for the one who had crushed his dignity."

"I know." Sub had listened to this story many times. He understood. Weed's scar-faced father stood for all black fathers who were beaten, humiliated by their white bosses in front of their sons. Execution would be just. Nothing less would quench the rage of the downtrodden.

Sub's mind raced, searching for another solution. There was no getting away from it: the times were different. The white farmer was no longer a war target; in a court of law the ultimate retribution would be interpreted as murder. He knew that Weeds, for all his anger, was not a murderer; he too would like to avoid disaster. Yet chimurenga's battle code had hardened them over the years. It still claimed their obedience; kept them from sharing their innermost feelings; prevented them as commanding officers from exercising a soft option. Sub felt himself propelled by forces beyond his control. Only supernatural intervention could sway them.

"I am ready," he said at last almost tonelessly.

"So am I," Thomas chimed in. But the edge of uncertainty in his voice did not escape his friends.

Weeds half turned in his seat, scrutinized Thomas's face, then smiled reassuringly.

"I knew you two would be game for this last mission. We go into battle one more time, for Zimbabwe, for Nehanda. I gave my promise. The ancestors will guide us. After this mission our chimurenga weapons go in for keeps." Weeds had difficulty controlling his voice. His words rang ominously.

For a while there was only the drone of the car's engine. Then Sub broke the silence: "There is one thing we must do before we attack, Weeds."

"And that is?"

"Check if the birds or animals have a message for us from the ancestors. The way we used to set up our attacks at the front."

"That's true." But Chakarakata's hunter's mind had already taken over. His words lacked conviction.

Once in the Chivasa mountain range, the border between Chingombe South and Vunjere, the three men quickly dug up the plastic-covered and well-oiled arsenal: AKs, RPG machine-gun, bazooka launcher and magazines of ammo. All intact. It was like preparing for battle. Hell! These were the tools
of their trade. For several moments they just stood there, ready for the enemy. The hunt was on.

Weeds saw the fleeting shadow first. He looked up and, sure enough, in the blue sky overhead soared a majestic male bateleur eagle.

"There's our messenger," he said matter-of-factly.

The three men stopped in their tracks, straining their eyes to read the bird's flight. There was no wing-flap, no sudden swerve, no call. Not a murmur from the ancestors as the bird sailed off into the distance.

"Our forefathers may be resting after the war. Or perhaps they are signalling that there is no enemy to be attacked," Sub ventured. No message could be an omen, they knew. For an attack you needed affirmation. This was no good. But none of them spoke about the apprehension with which the eagle had left them.

As they approached the car a tortoise appeared, leisurely crossing the footpath. Again they froze. Sub carefully measured out the dark ancestral snuff into the palm of his hand. He reached out and gently deposited it on to the moving tortoise shell. The reaction was instant. Head and legs withdrew. All motion stopped as if life had ceased utterly within the patterned dome.

Minutes passed. The message read clearly: "Cancel mission. Cancel attack. Do not proceed along the planned route!" But resolve can bring blindness. Rage can make a man defy the ancestors.

There was no more talk. The die was cast. As if in a dream Weeds and Subcheka unwrapped two of the AKs. They slipped home fully loaded magazines, checked the bolt actions. Raincoats were donned so that the rifles would be hidden. Thomas would carry the duffel bag so that they could handcuff the white farmer if the opportunity presented itself. The death squad set off.

As in any guerrilla operation, a trance-like state prevailed. Concentration on the task in hand drove out all irrelevant thoughts and feelings. By the time the car stopped at Mazhindu's farm gate, not far from the Catholic mission at Mukaro, robot-like movements were the only indication of the strain underlying their calm exteriors. Action itself was a relief. They proceeded on foot, according to plan, towards the distant farmhouse to request Mazhindu's assistance with their broken-down car.

They walked in silence. Would their prey fall for the story? Would Mazhindu allow himself to be lured away from his house unarmed? They would find out soon enough. As they approached the security fence surrounding the homestead, Sub wondered where the shadowy gloom had suddenly come from. Even the cicadas paused. Behind them the breeze dropped as the trees held their breath.

From one of the sheds a farm-hand who had noticed them came walking towards the fence.
“Can I help you?” he enquired.

“Yes. We want to speak to your master,” Weeds said. “We have a problem with our car.”

The young man ignored Weeds. He gazed intently at Thomas, then turned and walked to the house without saying a word.

“Shit!” Thomas muttered under his breath. “That guy recognized me. We once raided cattle here. He’ll tell Mazhindu. We’d better get out!”

“Shut up. And stay where you are!” Weeds snarled. His eyes were riveted on the farmhouse. Nothing would stop him now.

The door opened. Unsuspectingly, the big hulk of a man came down the driveway towards the security gate. Red-complexioned, the former rugby front-ranker hummed a tune as he approached the three strangers.

“Kwaziwai, what can I do for you?” he called from a few yards’ distance.

It was then that Thomas’s nerve gave. From the corner of his eye Weeds saw the movement. Instinctively he lunged into action. A few bounds and he was on top of Thomas. He threw the terrified man to the ground. Wresting the duffel bag from Thomas’s grip, he shouted hoarsely: “You yellow bastard. A bhunu merely looks at you and you cringe like a dog! You

At Subcheka’s warning shout he swivelled round. Mazhindu stood dumbstruck, watching the AK muzzle rear up from beneath Sub’s raincoat. It was spitting fire.

The red face blanched. Then the huge man dashed off, frantic with terror.

Sub was directly in Weeds’ line of fire. Helplessly, duffel bag in hand, Weeds shouted after the fleeing Mazhindu: “Run, you bastard! Run, you white bhunu swine!” The invective poured out of him like thunder as the festering sore of hatred ruptured. Sub kept firing. His AK kicked up puffs of dust to Mazhindu’s right. Seeing it all happen in front of him, Weeds suddenly knew: this was the unforeseen. A hidden force was diverting Sub’s aim; was preventing him, Weeds, from using his weapon. Instead of moving his line of fire across the path of the fleeing figure to ensure a kill, Sub was veering steadily away from him.

When Sub’s magazine had run out they stared at each other in bewilderment. Without saying a word they knew they had been overruled. The ancestors had stayed the execution. Abruptly, the war was over. Watching Mazhindu run, half crazed, for his life was enough. Deliverance, contrary to their plan, lay in not exacting vengeance. They had stood on the precipice and had been pulled back in time. Weeds knew that Mazhindu would never again haunt his dreams.

As they bolted for safety, Mazhindu’s FN started to stutter from the farmhouse. It was an empty gesture of defiance, provoking derisive laughter from behind the cover of trees.
Back at the car the cicadas had resumed their screeching song. Thomas was nowhere to be seen.

"That yellow dog must still be running," Weeds commented dryly. They laughed, relieved. For the moment there was light and life.

"Why was Chakarakata's AK silent today while mine was talking?" Sub teased.

"Because you stood right in my way, damn you. If I'd fired you would not be standing here now, you rotten terrorist." Sub shook his head in mock reproof. "Besides," Weeds parried, "how come the great machine-gunner could not cut down the enemy today?"

Still chuckling, they started the engine and sped on their way.

"You realize, of course, that we are deep in the shit." Weeds' voice was calm, as if nothing could touch them.

"Not the worst shit, mind you." Sub sounded equally relaxed. "They can lock us up, but they can't hang us for shooting at Mazhindu."

"Do you think it was the spirit war council that vetoed our mission?" Weeds asked.

"More than that, I'd say. Chaminuka, Kaguvi and the others came to protect us when we ignored their two messages at Vunjere. Why else do you think Mazhindu is still alive? You don't really believe I am such a bad shot, do you?"

Weeds heard the strain in his friend's voice. He had sorely tried him and very nearly driven them both into the abyss. Not given to apology, he tried another angle. "Indeed, we were prevented from killing. Still, I am sure as I sit here that Mabwazhe, our hunter ancestor, allowed things to develop as they did."

"Are you saying we did right to ignore the ancestors' directives?" Sub was still edgy.

"Not really. But what happened back there at the farm was right. Only at the very last minute did Mabwazhe call off the hunt. He saved all of us from destruction. You'll see, Mazhindu will leave our district soon. And he will never again lay a finger on the kinsmen of Rutsate or Mabwazhe."

The explanation satisfied Sub. Weeds Chakarakata lived by a logic of his own. Difficult to swallow sometimes, but tremendously persuasive. A friendship like theirs knew no betrayal. He settled back in his seat and contemplated the ordeal ahead of them.

II

To stand accused in the high court dock breaks a man down. The proceedings follow their own course, determined by considerations beyond your control. You are reduced from honoured commander of the liberation forces to a criminal suspect.
To make matters worse, the Gutu incident is placed in the context of the Kyle killings and acquires more sinister overtones. From the outset it is clear that the sentence will be harsh, that it comes at a time when law and order are in jeopardy. Deterrents, they say, are required to stamp out lawlessness. Obliterate the twilight of arbitrary retribution by revolutionaries who will not accept that the war is over. After all, the rights of a beleaguered white farming community have to be protected if peace is to prevail.

How do you explain to a white judge what it feels like to be trodden on by a white landlord? How do you explain your cold anger at the scar on your father's forehead? All the evidence is against you. To top it all, Thomas has turned crown witness and has revealed the entire plot. There is no denying the shots fired with a weapon of war at an unarmed Zimbabwean citizen. What does this ignorant judge know about ancestral intervention? Only Sub understands the grip of Mabwazhe. Together they experienced the last-minute stay of execution by the ancestral spirit war council. It might have been an act of Mwari himself to snatch the two of them from the gallows. Only now does it register that that firing without killing was the dawn of light, exorcism of the madness of war. These things cannot be said in words. Not to the alien white mind underneath the judge's wig, anyway. And a plea for mercy is unthinkable.

Weeds stared stonily at the judge as he read out the sentence: "I sentence the three of you: Thomas Marara to ten years, Cosmas Gonese to fifteen years and Mberi Daveson to twenty years imprisonment for attempted murder. The first year to be spent in solitary confinement."

"To hell with you," he thought. "To hell with you and your twenty years."

Sub turned to him, smiled. Their hands shot up, fists clenched, as they saluted each other: "Pamberi neZANU! Forward ZANU! Pamberi neZimbabwe!"

Then they were whisked off to prison.

The year in Chikurubi's maximum security cells was a strange ordeal. Communication was kept to a bare minimum. Only when they were let out for their daily shower Weeds and Sub spoke briefly to each other. When the isolation became unbearable they shouted through the cell walls, to the chagrin of the less sympathetic warders. The distorted, rebellious sounds of life raised their spirits to face the deadly monotony of cell existence.

The hard pillowless bed left Weeds just enough floor space to do press-ups and stationary jogging. You could exercise any time of the extended day; for there was no night. The bare bulb glowed and glowed, second after eternal second, holding you captive in an artificial, heartless day of one-dimensional existence. Until you wanted to howl at it to grant you the peace of darkness and rest.

You created your own days and nights, coming away from and building
up to the next shower, the ritual cleansing. A span of twenty-four hours intervened between their daily meetings. His friend's water-streaked face and varying moods – anger, anguish, laughter. Reliving the chimurenga past was one way of surviving the shower-demarcated days. Any other stimulation had to be invented. Such as divining what kind of crap would be dished up on the next plate shoved into your cell.

Trading boredom for fantasy and warmth, his thoughts would turn to Elizabeth: her finely chiselled face, jutting breasts, slow sway of hips. Theirs had been just a brief encounter. For a few days war had turned its back on them. They were left alone to explore an intimacy thrust upon them unexpectedly and generously by circumstances. It was sheer celebration of life – a gift from the ancestors themselves, revitalizing them and their resolution to continue the struggle.

Her face beckoned him from the backdrop of that first afternoon of horror. The enemy had crept up on them where they were resting in a Chikwanda village. The first burst of FN fire came unexpectedly, like a thunderclap, leaving inert and groaning figures in the dust behind a stampeding mass rushing for the cover of trees and boulders. Numbed, he just lay for a while, hugging the ground behind one of the huts. Then cold anger gripped him and he started returning fire and shouting instructions to his men.

Above the din he heard the anguished shrieks of a woman. Elizabeth's. He had never heard the voice before. Movement in the courtyard, where bullets were raising puffs of dust, at once explained her hysteria. There, a toddler – oblivious of the danger – was crawling in search of a lost toy.

There was no time to calculate the risk. His stomach a knot of apprehension, he dashed to snatch the child to safety. Death raged in the bullets and sand flying around him. The crazed seconds of exposure stretched endlessly. Then suddenly he found himself back behind the hut, lying half on top of the bawling infant. The rousing cheers of villagers and the sobs of a woman in distress came from a great distance.

Later, when the RAR soldiers had dispersed, he handed the child to the young woman. She was still trembling with shock, but the eyes above tear-streaked cheeks spoke courage and gratitude. There was a fathomless grace about her, a suggestion of maturity beyond her years.

"Yours?" he had asked wonderingly.

"No, Netti is my sister, the child of my aunt. She has gone to town and she asked me to look after Netti while she's away. I was so scared for her. How can I thank you for what you did?" Again her eyes brimmed with tears.

"Tell your father to thank the ancestors," he had said gruffly, hiding his emotion. That was Elizabeth. Dear Elizabeth.

That night she came to him. She awoke in him a dream of fertile pastures, a broad expanse of land where he would watch the maize ripening in the sun
and hear the voices of his sons bringing the cattle in at sunset Elizabeth. A fleeting glimpse of sanity and hope in the crazed world at the front. Now, in his lonely cell, she came back with her carefree laughter. Comforting him, enabling him to endure.

That year of protracted soul-searching was a preparation for civilian life in the aftermath of war. As the events of the past filtered through his mind, a sense of destiny possessed him. Excitement stirred at the prospect of working towards the development of the new state, Zimbabwe. It had to be contained, lest impatience for action devoured him. Physically, there was nowhere to go yet. Mentally, there were no bounds to his roamings into the experiences of the past and the ideals of the future. Yet there had to be discipline, a deliberate schooling of the mind if he was to remain sane with this inner build-up of resolve through the endless drudgery of confinement.

In the cells there were two touchstones for an inner road of disciplined thought: a Bible and a snuff-horn. The former was imposed by the prison authorities on dangerous inmates, an orthodox corrective to the warped minds of criminals. They were not allowed any other literature. It was also a useful substitute for a pillow when your tired head needed sleep. The snuff-horn, by contrast, was smuggled into the cells by warders who took pity on the plight of the isolated men of war. Sniffing its contents - genuine snuff - provided powerful affirmation of the ancestral protection which had carried the two friends through years of combat.

Sub studied the Bible methodically. One day he would earn Bible certificates for his prison studies, if that he was sure. Weeds read and reread the entire story of God’s people, from Genesis to Revelation. His reference for interpretation was not his boyhood Catholic catechist, Tungamirai, whom he had met again in later years as his political instructor at the Tembwe camp in Mozambique. No, he read the Bible against the backdrop of Shona mythology. The traditional stories of Mwari’s creative work and the tales of the great Shona heroes told by his late grandfather, Nzvanzvike, came alive in numerous Old Testament parallels.

The exodus of the Israelites echoed the hardships of his own people, the Shona, on their way to liberation. The strife of Moses and Joshua was that of Mugabe, Tongogara and other top figures in the ZANLA war council. Chaminuka, the great Shona prophet, was the counterpart of the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah. Was Chaminuka not a seer, a mystic, simply found by Nehanda and not born like other men? Was he not the one who had warned the Shona against moral decay and disunity that would expose them to Ndebele onslaught and, worse still, white invasion? Above all, was Chaminuka not the supreme commander of the ancestral war council, operating under the direct guidance of Mwari? Was he not, for the Shona, comparable to Jesus?
The Bible reading brought back his school days at Mutero and Mukaro. Innocent, carefree years. Choir singing, conversion, attending mass. Living with devout Catholic parents, it was easy to accept the pale white Christ on the cross as the saviour of all mankind. Even now that held true, notwithstanding the guerrilla war cry, “Pasi nafesu! Down with Jesus!” Should he have opposed them? No! Chimurenga was the ancestral dawn, the birth of a new black identity built on familiar foundations which the white man had branded evil.

Pasi nafesu, Weeds thought to himself, was not a betrayal of the man of Nazareth. He could still be saviour. In their secret hearts many of the fighters had still appealed to Jesus in hours of need. Their anger was against the injustice perpetrated by white people against blacks in the name of Christ. They were shouting against churches who used Christ as an excuse for exclusiveness, privilege and safe withdrawal from the all-demanding revolution. They were shouting defiantly. Fearful at times; courageous, mad at times; men obsessed with a passion for freedom.

In his quiet cell Weeds realized the difference the war had made. Grandfather Nzvanzvike's stories were prophecies come true. The old man had said: "Chaminuka is the black man's way to God. Kaguvi and Nehanda are our national ancestors. Their mediums were the martyrs of the first chimurenga against the whites." Weeds thought: “Their prophecies about their bones that would rise victoriously against the oppressor came true in the flesh and blood of our spirit mediums. The spirit mediums were the ancients come to life, to inspire and direct us at the battle front.”

Nzvanzvike had always honoured the regional varidzi venyika, the custodians of the land. To the Ndau people of Chipinge it was Musikavanhu, to the Duma of Bikita it was Pfupajena; Nyashanu to the Hera of Buhera; and Mabwazhe to the Gumbo-Rufura of Gutu. These guardian spirits gave a special quality to the national cause. To the fighters, they represented home, the original territory as it was before the white invaders cut it up into a checkerboard of black and white. Their spirit presence could be felt in the kopjes and mountains where you had played as a child, the place of your roots which had to be wrenched from the hands of the foreign interlopers.

Weeds recalled Nzvanzvike's tales about Mabwazhe, the great Gumbo hunter. Sitting under the muchakata tree after school, the old man's stories were much more vivid than the teacher's colourless narration of kings, nations and events in distant countries. Mabwazhe, Nzvanzvike said, was not only the most famous hunter in the Rozvi kingdom. He was also a fearless warrior and an intelligent ruler. In his own territory he negotiated and enforced treaties with the Ngara of Zimuto, with the Duma in the south and with the Hera in the east. To the Shiri people under the leadership of Chasura he was Chakarakata the conqueror; the one who was difficult to swallow. He
had cunningly poisoned their mashuku fruit. When the warriors were incapable of fighting, he overpowered them and drove them off towards the west. "This is my story" Weeds had thought. "One day I'll be Chakarakata to the white thieves of our land, the one they won't be able to swallow." It was the right chimurenga name for a man from Gutu.

Like Chaminuka, Mabwazhe had called upon his people to honour and worship Mwari, their creator. In the eighteenth century Mabwazhe had killed the rogue rhino near the Rozvi capital in the Matopo hills. There he had learned about the shrines of Mwari where, under Rozvi tutelage, the Mbire Shoko priests received supplicants for fertility and rain from all over the Rozvi kingdom. Mwari's voice could be heard from his sacred caves as he responded to the cries of his people. From then on Mabwazhe had sent his messengers annually with sacrificial grain or beasts to worship at the shrines. And when the rains came Mwari's praise names were shouted all over Mabwazhe's territory.

Weeds carefully shook some snuff into his palm. A quick sniff and a whiff of dark powder drifting to the cell floor, and he would be conversing with the ancestors. In between Bible reading these conversations gave him a grip on reality. "Nzvanzvike," he would say, "I thank you for your stories. They guided me at the front. Your dream visits kept me vigilant, alive. Tell Mabwazhe that his courage still carries me. Tell him that I wish to be free soon. I need to serve the people of the land of Gutu of which he is still the guardian. Tell Chaminuka that I confess my fault. It was wrong to seek revenge; revenge belongs to Mwari. Tell them both that I acknowledge their ruling. They turned the bullets of vengeance away from Mazhindu. You, Chaminuka, wise one of our people, speak to God on our behalf. For we are unworthy fighters with blood on our hands."

The bulb maintained its relentless glare. The cell remained bare. But the man from Gutu felt quiet and refreshed. He had taken the ancient route, the one his forebears had trodden long before the arrival of the whites. It was a route Nzvanzvike had lighted for him. There was no doubt in his mind that the Mwari of Chaminuka, Mabwazhe and Nzvanzvike was identical with the God of all creation, the Jewish God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was the God of the Israelite exodus, the just one in heaven, forever intent on liberating and saving his people.

As the weeks and months passed Nzvanzvike appeared more frequently in his grandson's dreams. Weeds noticed that his tateguru increasingly came in the company of his fallen comrades, the restless ones who had not yet been settled as ancestors. Certainly the old man had a chimurenga message for him. But what was it?

The dreams took him back to the front. He could not escape the horrors that crowded his mind. Nightmares tore at the fringes of sanity; he would
wake in a cold sweat. But, as at the front, Nzvanzvike’s presence brought reassurance and relief. He remembered the old man’s first dream visitation in the early days of the war.

It was after the trauma of Nyadzonya. On that morning he had seen the massacre of hundreds of people, many of them his friends, as the Selous Scouts opened fire into a milling crowd from their Frelimo-coloured trucks. Blood was spurting from bodies around him, intestines burst from others, dull thuds signified crushed skulls. Dying people, wounded people, lifeless bodies. He wandered around the bush for three days, dazed and shocked. Back at the camp the stench of dead bodies, bulldozed into a mass grave, made him vomit, then weep.

It was a crushing experience. Gone were the youthful expectations of a speedy victory over the enemy. At Tembwe the survivors of Nyadzonya trained mechanically as if in a stupor. They were despondent. This was when the old man from beyond the grave first entered the disturbed sleep of his grandson. Nzvanzvike, the story-teller, sat under the muchakata tree as if he had never left. He talked to his grandson about the brave warriors of Gutu, about trees and animals. He laughed with him and sent him to fetch a calabash of beer. He came again and again, warm, normal, unperturbed. Behind him, at times, appeared the shadowy figure of a hunter with quiver and bow, equally relaxed and self-assured. Their dream presence brought relief. And when the balance had been restored, the young man had shed his teens. More determined than ever, Weeds was ready for war.

But now in this prison cell, his dream visitor seemed to be urging him to look beyond himself and his own needs. The old story-teller’s eyes were averted from his grandson as he spoke to Jimmy Jambaya and the other fallen comrades. It was as if Nzvanzvike was challenging Weeds to heed the pain of the fighters, half forgotten in their shallow graves. Only thus could he retain the good will and protection of his Gumbo forebears. Nzvanzvike’s averted eyes said: “You, son of Gonese, bring the forgotten fighters in from the wards without water. Have them join in the feast for the liberated land. Honour them before the nation of Zimbabwe.”

In his dream Jimmy Jambaya’s face was still contorted with pain. In the waking hours that followed, the entire episode burned in the prisoner’s mind.

In Chiwara chiefdom on that day the skies had been hot and cloudless. The fourteen young fighters had left base camp in Vunjere before dawn. Weeds was proud of these two sections of his Gutu South detachment. Nevertheless he had driven them relentlessly on the march to Mukaro. The first stop was at the homestead of an old man in Chiwara where they had been given good food on previous missions. All was quiet as the tired guerrillas walked into the welcoming shade of muchakata trees. To their left the grasslands sloped away towards the river. Ahead of them were thatched
roofs shaded by *mutondo* trees. A distant murmur of voices and laughter told them that the old one's family was at home.

"Jimmy station the men in three *poshitos*, fifty yards apart," Weeds commanded.

"Yes, comrade Chakarakata," Jambaya replied and moved off at once. He was used to his detachment commander's insistence on vigilance at all times. So he organized the *poshitos* and placed sentries before he stretched out full length to rest. Weeds and one of the security officers meanwhile went off to request that food be prepared.

"The food will be here just now." Weeds' voice came from far away as Jambaya surfaced from deep slumber. He felt as if he had slept for hours.

"Ah, good!" he mumbled. Once fully awake, he sat up. One could not lie down with that brooding face, the red headband above long plaited hair, right next to one. "The sadza of these people is always fresh and white. They prepare it the same way my mother used to," he observed.

"I just hope they kill younger chickens today," came the dry reply. "That cock we ate last time must have been twice your age, Jimmy."

"Hell, yes, I remember." Jambaya laughed.

Weeds looked at his young section commander. "You're a glutton for good food," he thought, "but you don't scare easy. I've never seen you run under heavy fire, like some of the others. With you on the bazooka and Shorty on the mortar 80 we'll shoot the shit out of any enemy."

Jimmy sensed the approval in his commander's gaze. He leaned back, content. In silence they watched the girls shyly distributing plates at the three *poshitos*. Admiring eyes followed the graceful movements of the oldest girl. There was a hint of womanhood in the sway of hip and the bounce of pointed breasts under thin cloth. One of the comrades teased her: "When the war is over I'll send a go-between to negotiate your bride price, little woman."

She shrugged: "My father loves cattle. Your go-between will have to raid many cattle kraals to satisfy him."

The comrades laughed outright. This one had pluck and spirit, they could see. Their eyes kept following her.

In the distance the old man appeared, carrying the heavy pots. Why would he do that? Weeds wondered. He appeared to be in a hurry, nervous. Was he trying to appease his wife back in the cooking hut?

Suddenly there was a rumbling sound accompanied by a high-pitched whine. It was the call of the whirlwind. Only this one sounded more ominous than any the people of Chiwara had ever heard. In the river-bed trees were snapping and branches were stripped from tree trunks like leaves from a maize cob. Everybody stood frozen as they watched the destructive spiral come up the river. The sound was deafening. The *njuzu* water spirits must be
very angry to churn up the river like this, Weeds thought. But they'll stick to 
the river and leave us alone.

Just as they started to relax the howling spiral swerved and headed 
straight for the poshitos. “Hang on to the trees,” Weeds shouted. There were 
cries of fear as the killer cyclone roared in on them. People scrambled in 
panic to get a grip on a tree trunk. Their shouts to Mwari and Chaminuka 
were swept away in the vicious whine of the wind.

“Dammit! No! Not like this” Weeds muttered. He tightened his grip on 
the rough bark of the muchakata trunk, bracing his body for the shock.

It never came. The wind just grazed the cluster of muchakata trees. Only a 
few branches were sheared off, then it veered off once again and blew itself 
out as abruptly as it had come.

Something was very wrong. In the sudden hush all nature seemed to hold 
its breath, waiting for the unusual to happen. But what? Puzzled and worried, 
Weeds watched his fellow fighters. In the settling dust they were happily 
letting go of the trees they had hugged so tightly.

“Kho! Kho!” From way above the trees came the familiar cry. There was no 
mistaking the call of the bateleur, the ancestral messenger.

“Shorty,” Weeds shouted, “come with me! You others stay here under the 
trees.”

The two of them ran some distance before they were clear of the wooded 
area. Looking through cupped hands Weeds immediately picked up the flight 
of the magnificent bird. Its black and white feathers, contrasting with its red 
beak and claws, were etched against the blue sky as it circled above the poshitos.

Tense minutes passed before the eagle abruptly swerved sideways off its 
gliding course. Its claws stretched wide as if to snatch up an invisible enemy.

Then a series of powerful wing-flaps set it back on its original course.

“Kho! Kho!” the bird warned, and repeated the manoeuvre.

“Ah-ah! That’s a clear warning from Chaminuka,” Shorty said urgently.

“First the whirlwind, now the chapungu. Today we are walking into an 
ambush. Perhaps we are already surrounded by soldiers.”

“Or else the enemy is attacking from inside,” Weeds spoke out loud. The 
old man with the food pots! The thought flitted into his mind like a portent 
of death. He shivered. Why would a man with so many daughters come out 
to dish up the food himself? That’s it! God forbid. You idiot, call yourself a 
commander! How could you overlook such odd behaviour?

“The food, Shorty. It must be the food. Come, we must stop them.” The 
words were like a whiplash. Two figures turned to shadows as they raced 
through the woods.

At the poshitos the comrades were just washing their hands. They were 
ravenously hungry after the long march. The smell and sight of chicken and 
sadza were mouth-watering. It was feasting time. Jimmy Jambaya, the gourmet,
leaned over to smell the gravy. “I must test it,” he thought. He tilted the little bowl and sucked hungrily at the brown liquid. “Good, very good,” he said out loud, then picked a chicken leg and started eating.

Some of the others were fingerling the steaming sadza. “Do we wait for Chakarakata and Shorty?” one asked. In the uneasy quiet there were whispers from the woods. No! They were distant shouts, coming closer. AKs rose to the ready, bolts snapped shut as they waited as they always waited for the enemy. Then Weeds’ voice carried clearly on the wind: “Don’t touch the food! Don’t eat! A message from the ancestors” Even from a distance there was no mistaking the urgency in Chakarakata’s voice.

Jimmy froze. Terror gripped him. “Please Mwari, don’t let it be true,” he prayed desperately. He looked at the girls standing innocently under the trees. They made no attempt to run. The food could not contain poison. Unless

Behind the girls the old man was walking slowly towards the homestead.

Weeds and Shorty broke in on the scene, breathing hard. They cursed and shouted as they kicked plate after plate of food into the dust. To their hungry comrades it seemed like sacrilege. But nobody said a word. The ancestors had spoken.

Jimmy’s laughter sounded hollow. “Look, you guys, there is nothing wrong with the food. The chicken is tender the gravy delicious.” He held out the bare chicken bone. His voice was a nervous croak.

“You impatient glutton! You blind fool!” Weeds stormed at him. He was really shouting at himself, enraged by his own impotence to avert disaster.

“Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy sorry, man.” Weeds thrust his fingers deep into his friend’s throat as Shorty pinned down his arms from behind. Convulsions tore at Jimmy’s stomach. Then he vomited, again and again.

Weeds moved over to one of the pots of meat. He inspected the contents. “Since when are chicken heads and giblets dished up for fighters?” he asked.

“We only prepared the sadza,” the older girl said defensively.

He could see she was telling the truth. Unable to contain his anger, Weeds shouted: “If anything happens to my section commander, I’ll smother that old man in his mother’s afterbirth!” At this terrible threat the girls panicked and fled. Without hesitation Weeds ordered his men to head for the safety of the mountains.

On the way there Jimmy started vomiting blood.

That evening, at the foot of the mountains, an elderly woman walked into the fighters’ camp. She arrived unannounced and spirit-possessed. From her frail body boomed the voice of Dumbukunyuka, famous Duma prophet of a century ago. And Dumbukunyuka had no hesitation in berating the fighters for their negligence.

26
"Are you boys blind? Will you, who live with me in the bush, still not heed the signs I send you? Did you not hear my warning in the branches torn from the trees, in the call of my *chapungu*?"

The fighters were crouching respectfully, clapping their hands rhythmically in recognition of the prophet's spirit presence.

"Father," Weeds said, "we see you and welcome you. Your guidance is indispensable to us. Today you have saved us."

At this point Jambaya pitched forward in agony as another spasm clutched at his bowels. He writhed on the ground, the shock of such ferocious pain clearly written in his bulging eyes. "My father, my father help me burn"

"That one," Dumbukunyuka said, pointing at Jambaya, "is already dead. Many more of you will die before the end of this war if you do not heed my instructions."

Jambaya moaned, his features ashen. "We heard your warning, father, but we failed to respond in time," Weeds said.

"Yes, I know. I see your plight, my children." The medium's frail fingers were stretched in a gesture of compassion, tears coursing down her dust-stained cheeks. Her scrawny chest with withered breasts was wracked by the deep sobs of a man in anguish. Then, as unexpectedly as she had come, Dumbukunyuka's medium vanished into the night.

Towards midnight the two medical officers who were nursing Jambaya called Weeds. The end was near. Internal bleeding had dissipated Jimmy's strength so he could no longer speak coherently. In the moonlight Weeds saw the grotesque mask of an alien, not his section commander's face, peering up at him. He bent over his stricken friend to pick up the whisper from moving lips. "Sorry, for the trouble *pamberi chimurenga* I wanted so much the return of lost lands." Before Weeds could reply, his friend had slipped into a coma, breathing unevenly.

The moonlight was timeless. Weeds just sat there, his left hand on Jimmy's brow. The camp was quiet, turned in on itself. There was a sharing of the weight of pain. There was also bitterness at such betrayal. Life appeared abysmally cheap when the enemy struck from inside.

With the early rays of dawn Jambaya's breathing stopped. In death the ashen face still bore a grimace of pain. Without much ceremony the slain comrade was laid to rest. The grave was shallow. Circumstances did not permit a period of mourning. *Chimurenga* prescribed its own therapy for the bereaved: action! The struggle itself - herein lay consolation, cushioning the stark inescapability of death. Yet the shattering experience of betrayal, the contorted face of their friend, lived on in the minds of the survivors.

The execution took place a few weeks later. Many of Chiwara's headmen attended the *pungwe* meeting high up in the Vinga mountains. Again it was a moonlit night: the same shadows, twin deaths. Scores of villagers were
jammed into a small clearing. There was no escape. They had to sit through the entire inquest, participate in the execution of justice. Weeds had learnt that arbitrary killing of *chimurenga* opponents always provoked further bloodshed. Society itself had to judge the traitors and the opponents of *chimurenga* in its midst. This was the only way the fighters could retain the villagers' support.

Defiant at first, the old man denied the serious allegation of food poisoning. When the issue of the possible complicity of his wife and daughters arose, he wavered, then confessed. “No, I did it alone,” he said. “My wife had left the hut when I put the poison into the meat pots. I had received the poison from my two cousins. They are both in the RAR and they convinced me that the *magandanga* – the bush-fighters – are evil, the true enemies of our country.”

Apprehension hung heavily among the dark mass of bodies as the elders pronounced their verdict. There was no place in society, they said, for a *mutengesi*, a sell-out. Once an enemy, always an enemy! In the circumstances you either kill him or run the risk of being killed. And the decision had to be prompt. *Chimurenga* painted stark scenarios of allies versus enemies. There was no time for merciful afterthoughts.

As the two security officers led the old man off into the night, his wife started to moan softly. The pistol shot was final. There was nothing more to be said. Weeds saw the tears on the downcast face of the old man’s eldest daughter. Unseeing, she stumbled off, carrying her grief into the darkness. Instead of relief at the death of an enemy, weariness weighed down the young commander. For the moment he was cut off from his fellow fighters. The malady of fighting for and taking life was eating into his guts.

The clearing had emptied. But a putrid odour of sweat and urine still told of the fear of men, women and children in the moonlit court.

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Eventually the glaring bulb in the solitary cell became his ally and friend. It no longer threatened Weeds’ peace of mind. He simply lived and relived his nights and days out at the front. There he would speak with dead and still living comrades, tell them his plans. He would sit once again with them under the trees, communing with the ancestors in preparation for battle.

At times, when the desolation of so many deaths overcame him, he looked at the light bulb above him as a symbol of life and consolation. Then he would read the wisdom literature of the Bible and literally experience God’s word as a lamp to guide his feet on the way ahead. He resolved repeatedly that at some stage that way would lead to the proper reburial and national home-bringing of his dead friends. Only such a home-coming would put an end to the restless oblivion imposed on them. It would fulfil his own celebration of *chimurenga* victory. It was also the only honourable
response to grandfather Nzvanzvike's call for justice on behalf of Jimmy Jambaya, James Lancer, Devol Devosa and the other fallen fighters.

With resolve came inner quiet and the need to plan the future. Weeds was no longer haunted by nightmares. Gone was the threatening dream syndrome of a shrieking whirlwind snatching at his back, leaving him drenched with sweat, arms locked in self-protection under his bed. Towards the end of the year of solitary confinement both Weeds and Sub were ready for the world of books and study they had promised themselves.

Another three years of prison life followed. A strict regimen of study and teaching fellow inmates in a variety of subjects gave meaning and structure to each day. Weeds and Sub also kept up their spirits by writing petition after petition to the party, to the central committee, to comrade Zvobgo, then Minister of Justice, and to the President.

Their appeals were heard. In 1985, four years after the cell doors had shut behind them, the two friends were released. They were free; free to start life in independent Zimbabwe; free to bring home their fallen friends to rest as heroes in the liberated lands of their forefathers.

III

Weeds is still looking at the coffins. Much has happened in the four years since his and Sub's release from prison. Sub has opened a radio-repair shop. Weeds has set himself up as accountant of the district's rural council. He is provincial chairman of the war veteran's association and of both the district council and the local ex-combatant development association. On top of that he has recently been elected chairman of the district's powerful branch of ZANU(PF). The people of Gutu have recognized the natural leadership qualities of the former guerrilla commander and his commitment to the development of rural society.

Conscious of his solidarity with the crowd beyond the coffins, Weeds leans against the tree. His mind is not on party politics today. He is still seeing the newly opened graves, hearing the thud of hammers these past weeks as the remains of the fallen comrades were sealed into their black boxes. Behind the hooded, impassive eyes he proceeds to address his dead friends.

"At last, Jimmy, Shorty, Devol, all of you are back with us. This is your day! You will be honoured by the President, by Gutu, by the nation. You are no longer alone outside, in the mountains and the valleys. You are coming to rest here in the soil of Mabwazhe. Be vigilant in your new poshito, this heroes' acre. The battle continues. Nowadays you will see us fighting for funds, for new projects, for industries, more schools. The chimurenga days of guns and mortars are over. But chimurenga goes on. Our people still suffer. In trade the rich countries still strangle us. Be with us in the struggle ahead. Forward!"
Amid a sea of faces, Jambaya and Shorty and Devol and the others nod assent. Alive at the heart of the nation, they celebrate yesterday’s victory. Home now, they prepare for tomorrow’s struggle. The black boxes are mere husks of that old sorrow.

Preparations for the heroes’ reburial have taken two years of dogged perseverance. There were many setbacks. Promises of lavish financial support by a high-ranking government official remained unfulfilled. This caused disillusionment and cynicism. Where were the funds to come from? There were plenty of sceptics who said the ceremony would never take place. Then, in the end, the headmasters of Gutu schools rallied round and helped the reburial committee collect the grand sum of $17 500. And the senior Rufura ancestors settled the controversial issue of the location of the site. Once Tazivei, senior spirit medium of the land, had revealed the wishes of the ancestors, fencing, grave digging, terracing and building at the heroes’ acre could commence.

Many people helped. Some kept aloof. The bulk of the responsibility, however, rested on the shoulders of Weeds and Sub. They could count on the support of comrade Tembo, the district administrator, and chief Gutu. But the driving force, the one who refused to accept defeat, whatever the odds, was Weeds Chakarakata, the man from prison. The vision and resolve born in solitary confinement could not be quenched. All the time Nzvanzvike, the old story-teller, was sitting under his muchakata tree, observing with watchful eyes his grandson’s preparations for the return of the fallen heroes. His presence kept Weeds going. Behind him loomed the shadowy figures of fighters in their scattered poshitos.

They had long been ready to regroup in their new poshito, at the heart of the nation. They could not be denied.

Reading their chalked names on the coffins, Weeds thinks about the lost heroes. Killed in battle or in enemy custody, their corpses were disposed of without burial rites. Their names appear nowhere. Yet in memory and in dreams they keep emerging, vividly, alive.

“Are you aware what is happening? Are you with us today? Are you watching from the crowd?” Weeds asks his dead friends. “The other day when I passed through Mukaro I was talking to you, Peter, and to you, Jesus. Do you remember? All the fun we used to have in the classrooms, on the football field at the mission school. Strange that the war took you both at the very place where our friendship started.

“Jesus, you were always compassionate, almost too soft-hearted for war. Perhaps from your studies at the seminary to become a priest Yet you were a demon to the enemy, a dead shot with that AK of yours. I’ll never forget how you shot those two men in the Land Rover leading the convoy.”

“But to us you were a priest, our black Jesus of chimurenga. You always
stalled at the *pungwe* hearings. You wanted more evidence for nearly every conviction. You hated the killing in the villages, so you tried to prevent the execution of sell-outs. Your stalling held us up. You knew it was dangerous for us to stay too long in one place at the front. But you cared more for the accused and for fairness than for safety. It made you fearless. At the same time it made us vulnerable.

“All that compassion was your undoing, Jesus. You remember that girlfriend of the Gutu policeman whom we convicted at the *pungwe* meeting for spying? We all knew she was too dangerous to go free. She had to be shot, man. You knew that. But you insisted we keep her a few more days so you could interrogate her. You wanted to save her. What happened that night up in the mountains? How did she manage to escape? Did you look the other way? Did you let her go, Jesus?

“Later we learnt that she was the one who led the choppers in while we were moving the wounded near Mukaro. It was only two days after her escape. Why did you not run for cover when the choppers came? You were out in the open, helping that comrade with the blown-off knee cap; the one Dr Mazorodze had treated in the cave. Did you not hear me shout? We needed you, man. You were the best MO in our entire detachment. But you thought only of the wounded.

“I was within range. When the choppers landed I could have fired. But I was afraid of hitting you and the wounded ones. I just sat there and watched. Hell, man, I could do nothing. Through the glasses I saw your face clearly. You were calm. Those bastards pushed you around, trying to break you down. But you were more of a man than they. You were Jesus, the liberated. You made me proud to be a freedom fighter.

“When the choppers lifted off, I sat there for a long time, alone. The enemy had snatched the soul from our unit. But your capture only made us more determined. And, Jesus, your spirit never left our *pungwe* meetings. Because of you we resisted the harshness, the desire for vengeance. As time went by the villagers in Gutu realized that we were trying to judge in fairness. You gave our struggle a face worth remembering.

“Months later we heard that the enemy had failed to convert you. They say you exploded a hand-grenade and took your two guards with you into death. That was a good one, Jesus. Just like in the Bible, your kind die in threes. What did they do with your body? Did they burn it in their anger, or did they just throw what was left of you down a mine shaft? To them you were just another terrorist.”

Moving on to another coffin, Weeds recalls another one of the unburied. “Peter Chimurenga That night at Mukaro behind those contour ridges we were dug in only a few miles from our old school. Did you sense then that your life had come full circle? I remember you came to warn me that our
movements may have been reported to the enemy. You urged that we post sentries throughout the night. Then we talked for the last time about school days and football.

"We laughed about that first fight we had. You had climbed into me because your girlfriend fancied me. I refused to back down. It was a good fight. You were taller and stronger than me then. You really hurt me, but I returned blow for blow. And I was proud to close up your one eye. That was how we became friends.

"You and I did not score the highest marks in class, but between us we certainly chalked up the most goals for our football team. You were playing centre forward, I was on right wing. You remember how well our combination worked? You were always ready for the header at goal when I passed the defence on the deep right. Eventually I felt I was placing the ball right on to your head every time I aimed that cross-kick.

"Our combination worked just as well later, when we played for Dynamos in Harare! My father always timed his bus driving so that he could come and watch us play. You were like a son to him. You never remarked on that scar on his forehead; the one Mazhindu had given him. When he laughed about the way we ran circles around those white boys of Callies, you made him feel you had put up the show specially for him.

"How strange life was those days. All those rallies and stone-throwing when the Pearce Commission visited town. Then we got the money from Botswana. We started recruiting volunteers for training in Zambia and Tanzania. We were excited about our adventure. The football coaches couldn't understand why our team was losing so many players. Once you had crossed the border, Peter, the team was never the same. I knew then that it was only a matter of time before I also left the country. Somehow it seemed silly to be shooting goals to cheering crowds while your team mates were training for war."

When Weeds got to the training camp at Tembwe in Mozambique, after the Nyadzonya debacle, Peter Chimurenga was back from Tanzania. At that time he was an instructor in the use of military weapons. Totally dedicated to his task, Peter set about teaching his old school friend. Weeds could see that his instructor had changed. During the day, and especially at target practice, Peter was curt and formal. Only at night did they discard their new roles and talk as friends.

Years later, when Weeds was an experienced detachment commander in the Musikavanhu sector, Peter joined the fighting cadres at the front. In combat he proved himself as a superb marksman. Long after the rookies had emptied their magazines and evacuated their positions, you could still hear the intermittent economical twin-shot firing of Peter Chimurenga. Like Weeds, he only moved out of the fighting zone when it was absolutely necessary.
Respected for his efficiency and dedication, Peter was soon promoted to section commander in the Gutu South detachment.

Weeds has vivid recollections of that last night behind the contour ridges. Peter had moved back to his position fifty yards away, on the left flank of his own section of fighters. They were uneasy. Peter had a premonition. Weeds could not sleep. As the skies paled before sunrise the FNs of RAR soldiers and a few PATU sticks suddenly opened fire. During the night the enemy had moved in for a surprise attack.

"Hold your fire!" Weeds shouted above the din. But it was useless. The young ZANLA fighters were returning fire with long bursts from their AKs. Their only thought was to repel the enemy. Soon they were switching to their second magazines. None of them had enough ammo for a drawn-out battle. Some were visibly shaken by the FN fire from as close as eighty yards. Peter Chimurenga's crisp commands were punctuated by sparse twin-shot bursts. But the young ones paid no heed. Their magazines empty, they retreated like phantoms through the morning mist into the thick cover of the hill behind them.

As the sun rose, Weeds saw only Peter Chimurenga and two limp bodies to his left. Peter was still firing the ammo he had retrieved from his dead comrades. There were only two men left on Weeds' right, the one firing a bazooka, the other rifle grenades. A few direct hits on RAR positions had brought a lull in the fighting. Opposite Peter's position, however, taunting shouts and bursts of fire indicated an enemy advance. Both the bazooka launcher and the trigger bullets of the rifle grenades were malfunctioning. There was little chance of neutralizing the enemy opposite Peter in time. The men worked frantically to improvise trigger bullets for the rifle grenades.

Just then Peter shouted to Weeds: "My ammo's run out. I need more ammo!" Instead of crawling he came running, ducking and weaving behind the contour ridge. The enemy must have spotted him, because he immediately drew fire. Puffs of dust burst from the ridge around him. Weeds held his breath as he watched Peter run. When he got within ten yards of Weeds, he suddenly crumpled and fell. There was no mistaking the piece of skull protruding from the side of Peter's head where the bullet had ripped through. Oblivious of his condition, Peter kept crawling, still shouting: "Bara! Bara! Give me ammo."

Jubilantly the RAR gunner taunted: "One down! One down! Come on, you gutless terrorist vermin. Show yourselves so we can fight it out!"

"You shameless sell-out cowards! You traitors of Zimbabwe! Stand up, you whore-son servants of Smith! We'll teach you" Weeds was beside himself. His voice rumbled like thunder, echoing back at him from afar. Still shouting he stood up recklessly behind the ridge and fired a long final burst at the enemy position to the left. His two comrades followed suit. A bazooka shell and a rifle grenade exploded on target.
There were cries and groans. Then all went quiet.

Breathing heavily, eyes closed, Weeds slid back behind the ridge. He lay inert for minutes as if to shut out reality to make himself believe that Peter had not really been hit.

There was a feeble tug at his leg. Peter’s face was covered in blood. He was willing himself to live, but he was fading fast. With a raw cry Weeds embraced his dying friend and drew him close. “Pamberi nechimurenga! Forward with the liberation struggle!” Peter whispered. Then the breathing stopped. The two remaining comrades stood by respectfully while their detachment commander sat holding the body of his friend. Weeds’ clothes were soaked in blood.

A low whine of jets signalled the approach of Vampires. It was time to go. But not until the bombs started exploding on the far side of the hill could Weeds bring himself to abandon Peter’s body. As the Vampires climbed away into the skies for the next attack, their flame-spitting jet furnaces sent their message of death. Weeds looked up and condemned the winged enemy to hell.

“Peter, friend, I hated leaving you all alone out there. After the ball games you and I always went home together. This time I had no choice. We wanted to hide you for a proper burial, but the bombers were right on top of us. We had to run for cover. Then we moved on to the regrouping point.

“They told us later that the enemy paraded your body in the villages, with those of the others. It was their warning to the povo not to collaborate with the terrorists. Bloody fools, to think that they could intimidate our people.

“Stand beside me today, Peter. Be proud of our country. You helped us score the winning goal. And Peter ”

The chopper overhead breaks in on Weeds’ reverie. For a moment his war instinct flares up. “Gunships ” it flashes through his mind.

But up there, in the bright sky above him, vivid white and blue proclaim a distinguished visitor. The Gutu crowd cheers and ululates.

Slowly, deliberately, ex-commander Weeds Chakarakata measures an ample portion of ancestral snuff into his palm.

“My friends,” he says through barely moving lips, “the President is here.”
C HIEF Gutu ascends the rostrum with dignity. His splendid red toga plays in the breeze. The sun reflects on the bronze crescent moon hanging from a chain around his neck. An impressive black beard contrasts with his white helmet, relic of British colonial rule.

The atmosphere is solemn yet charged with expectancy. It is not often that the President visits our district. Spontaneous cheering greets the arrival of comrade Mugabe and comrade Sally. The band plays, the soldiers march, but all eyes are riveted on the trim figure in the dark suit and his consort in her colourful, elegant gown. Flanked by security officers, ministers and other dignitaries, the President and his entourage take their seats on the newly constructed pavilion behind the rostrum.

The crowd takes some time to quieten down. Seeing that face in the newspapers or on TV is as much part of daily life as cooking sadza. To be in the physical presence of Zimbabwe’s magnetic leader is to sense the destiny of our liberated nation. The people of Gutu are not to be denied the opportunity of welcoming the President in style.

Chief Gutu, undaunted by the impatience of the crowd and the powerful presence behind him on the pavilion, raises his right hand for silence. His is the honour of committing the proceedings, in customary fashion, into the hands of the ancestral guardians of the land. Where death is concerned, the equilibrium between the living and the living dead must be ritually affirmed.

“I ask all the Rufura people – you, your wives and relatives – to remove your shoes.”

The booming voice invokes the authority of generations of rulers and tribesmen. It declares location and occasion sacred. The simple act of removing shoes signals a mood shift from jubilation to veneration; it strips away all human pretence, class and pomp. As an adopted member of Rutsate Chingombe’s house I, too, respond to my kinsman’s command. Baring my
feet is an act of humility before the mystery of life. Muted silence settles on
the assembly.

Chief Gutu continues: “We are gathered today for a joyful purpose. We have
come here in the name of our ancestor, Mabwazhe, founder of our dynasty. I
am the chief, representative of Mabwazhe. I am Mabwazhe! We came from
Musana in the north: I, Munyikwa, Nendanga and Nemashakwe. We, the
ancestors, have come to perform what is needful for our children who fought
chimurenga for the liberation of our lands. We too once fought for this land of
Gutu, but this time our youths fought for the entire country of Zimbabwe.

“We now inform all of you gathered here, you and your ancestors, that we
are burying these deceased fighters in this place today. We do not want to be
shamed.

“We thank you, grandmothers, for having cooked food: sadza, fowls and
everything the fighters needed so they could win back the land. And you, the
aunts, sisters and wives of Mabwazhe who suffered to bring forth our lives,
we present you with our grief. But no, this is not a day for sorrow. The
occasion today is one of joy, because we have fetched the fallen fighters and
they have come home.

“Mabwazhe, we commit these men to your soil for safe-keeping. You, our
ancestors, see us placing our children here. Look on, our ancestors, because
you are us. Without you we do not exist.”

The audience hums assent. The chief is touching the heart of the matter.
Speaking as Mabwazhe, he transcended the passage of time, telescoping the
course of Gutu history: the eighteenth-century migration of the Rufura
ancestors from Musana in the north to the southern region of Great Zimbabwe;
their conquest of the Gutu territory and the bygone glories of Rufura rulers.
This whole heritage he—red-robed, the twentieth-century Mabwazhe—
deposited in the midst of his people, the women who had put themselves at
risk no less than the fighters themselves.

Through his direct identification of the living with the living dead, Gutu
recaptures the religion of chimurenga, the spirit of Africa. Always, in the heat
of crisis, Africa renews its bonds with its forebears. Without them there is no
uniqueness, no history, no identity:

“Without you we do not exist!”

Silence falls. The chief continues: “I want all of you chiefs to know that in
fetching these boys’ bodies we did not encounter any problems. The vehicles
we used got through without a single puncture. I am extremely proud of our
ancestors in this district. They did not put us to shame in any way. We also
thank our spirit medium of Gutu, comrade Tazivei, for giving us this burial
site where we can keep our children. After some differences of opinion, he,
the svikiro, told us that this is the right place.”

Turning to the President, Chief Gutu says: “I am also honoured today to
welcome in our midst the leader of our country the honourable comrade Mugabe. Herewith I hand you, comrade Mugabe, our misfortune. Observe, you being a good muKorekore, that we are obeying the customs of the land, as we did when the land had to be liberated. The land was given to all of us by Mwari. Let us not boast about this, but let others sing praises to Mwari and a liberated land.

“In conclusion, Mugabe, at this place I do not address you by your title. Let us do away with presidency and chieftainship for now and speak in kinship terms. Yes! Mugabe, as a good muKorekore, you have come to us today as our muzukuru, our sister’s son. Thus I speak as your uncle. We have prepared for your arrival. You can see for yourself what we, in collaboration with you, have achieved here at Gutu.”

President Mugabe smiles at the ritual reversal of roles. For the moment he is Mabwazhe’s sister’s son, subject to the spirit authority of the famous hunter of the ancient Rozvi kingdom. The muzukuru occupies a position of relative equality with his sekuru. This is the playful relationship, least dominated by the customary strictures of super- and subordination. As long as he respects the ultimate authority of his sekuru, the muzukuru enjoys special privileges in his uncle’s family. The way the wily Chief Gutu, on behalf of our forefathers and with the most respectful of kinship manners, could thus turn the tables for a brief while on the country’s most powerful leader shows audacity and humour. And the obvious pleasure with which the President responds indicates flexibility and warmth underlying his austere, disciplined exterior.

Now the ancient hunter – incarnated in his twentieth-century descendant, still adorned in the colourful robes and insignia of the colonial power he helped to overthrow – leads his muzukuru, head of the new dispensation in Zimbabwe, to the nearest grave. Chief Gutu’s bearing conveys beyond all doubt that he is in command, the ritual officiant of the beer libation. Comrade Mugabe, equally convincingly, plays the role of the honoured muzukuru, ritual recipient of ancestral benevolence. There is a twinkle in the eyes of both men. The humour of the situation unites ritual actors and the mass of spectators.

With the unconcern that behoves a trusting sekuru in the presence of his loyal muzukuru, Chief Gutu turns to the pot of ancestral beer standing next to the first grave. Facing east, he kneels beside the mound of fresh soil. In a measured movement the calabash is dipped deep into the pot. Beer is shared with the ancestors by pouring it over the grave mound. The act symbolizes union between past and present, between forebears and still living descendants, between the fallen and surviving heroes of chimurenga.

Solemnly the chief rises. He drinks deeply from the calabash, then hands it to his muzukuru. Composed, at ease, the honorary kinsman of Gutu drinks,
then pours the remaining beer on to the grave mound. Thus, bound by ritual, President and chief venerate the ancient guardians of the land: for their inspiring guidance in war, for their safe custody of the fallen heroes in the womb of their land.

Chief Gutu concludes the act with a final splash of beer. “See, great one,” he tells Mabwazhe, “the work which this multitude of people has gathered to witness. I hand this ceremony to you. May Mwari bless us. Go well, wherever you dwell, so that all of us will prosper.”

Head bowed, hands clasped together in reverence, the chief’s muzukuru listens.

II

Alongside the traditional religion, Christianity played a considerable role in chimurenga. Many of the fighters were fervent believers and active church members. Amongst the fallen, some would certainly have preferred a Christian burial. Others combined Christian and ancestral beliefs. In the absence of church services at the front, these fighters communed regularly with the regional and national ancestors, and with their own. To many of them liberation included liberation from the white man’s religion. Hence a renaissance of African religion and customary values was at the very heart of black nationalism in the armed struggle.

Yet the churches on the whole were supportive of the fighters. In Gutu political pungwe meetings were conducted at both Catholic and Reformed mission stations. On these occasions school teachers contributed part of their salaries to help finance the struggle. The guerrilla MOs replenished their medical supplies at mission hospitals and clinics. Independent church prophets, for their part, provided a faith-healing service to the wounded and men suffering from battle fatigue. They inspired the guerrillas with their prophecies. In some instances prophets, like the spirit mediums, accompanied and advised the fighters at the front. Thus they exercised some influence on combat strategy.

In Gutu district the Catholic Order of the Bethlehem Fathers at Mukaro and Mutero were the missionaries that were most directly involved in the struggle. To a few courageous individuals among them their priesthood did not preclude ritually blessing and repairing the arms of war, nor the risky business of running an intelligence service for the guerrillas. Thus the struggle produced war heroes also within the church.

These thoughts pass through my mind as I watch Father Joseph Wyss mount the rostrum. He is to lead the crowd in prayer, to request intercession between the living and the living dead in the name of Christ and commit the proceedings into God’s hands. Neither the reverend father’s ruddy complexion,
suggestive of the bracing climate of the Swiss Alps, nor the Swiss lilt in his Shona speech detracts from the conviction of his supplication and praise:

"God, eternal father, we thank you, creator of humankind, the one in heaven. You have given the youth strength to fight for the land, these youths who died for the country and whom we are burying today. Take care of them and give them peace. Today we hand them to you. Have mercy on them and forgive them all their offences against you. Take them from the bush where they have been up to now and place them in your abode of joy and peace, so that they can be with you and with those who have gone before.

“Our father Jesus! Let us ask Jesus to go with our youth to Mwari. You, Jesus, take our children over there. Go with them to Mwari.

There are our children
Go with them to Mwari
You, patriarchs who are our keepers,
There are the children
Go with them to Mwari
You, our own fathers, all of you who have gone ahead,
There are your children
Go with them to Mwari
And you, matriarchs, there are your children who have died
Go with them to Mwari
You, grandfathers and grandmothers, see your children
Go with them to Mwari
All of you who have died, who have gone ahead to Mwari, here are your kindred
Go with them to Mwari

You, Mwari Baba, we ask you to forgive all these youths their sins. Open your heaven to them so they may enter and live with the saints and all those who have gone before. Christ, our king, place our prayer with God the Father. Amen."

The crowd sighs assent. My Protestant mind registers fleeting protest. In the burial ceremony the deceased are sent off to God. But in addition to Christ, the whole family is invoked, particularly the living dead, to help transfer deceased relatives to their heavenly abode.

My Shona self laughs at its Western shadow: “Stop rationalizing, you would-be theologian, throwing your dogma at mystery. If Christ is king, he is lord of the ancestors also. Let it be. You are a descendant of Mabwazhe, you are in the land of the ancestors, remember. Weeds Chakarakata, your
brother, confesses Christ as his saviour in the Eucharist; and in the same
breath he calls on Chaminuka for the African way to Mwari. Leave the riddles
to God."

My Western shadow won't give up. "I accept mystery, you arch-romantic. But how do you reconcile reliance on the ancestors with the New Testament
message that there is no other name, no author of salvation but Christ?"

Mafuranhunzi, descendant of Mabwazhe, answers: "Trust, and you will
find your answer in living and in celebration, not in formulas and abstractions. Look at this ceremony. The chief has brought the fallen heroes home to the
soil; so the people feel their presence. Now the priest has sent them off to
God in heaven. It seems like a contradiction. But they are still near. God in
heaven is God with us. Christ reigns. So be it."

"That is syncretism, Mafuranhunzi, and you know it," the theologian
carps back.

The argument is cut short by a movement among the coffins which
catches my eye. Weeds and Sub are sharing ancestral snuff. At ease in both
their Christian and their ancestral faith, they are celebrating the home­
coming of their friends. To them Chief Gutu's beer libation and Father
Joseph Wyss's prayer are two sides of the same coin.

In word and deed the ritual is complete.

III

The moment has come for the President's speech. What message will
Gutu's muzukuru bring? How will he relate Gutu's commemoration of
the fallen fighters to the broad stream of chimurenga history? Will there be
any surprise announcements about the redistribution of the still lost lands?
Or will he leave this bone of political contention buried, mentioning it only
in passing? What will be the strategy of the commander-in-chief of the
liberation struggle?

There is a hush as the President ascends the steps of the rostrum. His
dignified presence commands respect from supporters and opponents alike.
Our muzukuru may be austere; he may not always communicate the spon­
taneous warmth associated with a national father figure. Yet his lucid intellect,
command of language and unwavering commitment to a united Zimbabwe
make him stand out as a leader.

The President starts off by placing the Gutu reburial ceremony in the
broad perspective of national liberation. There is an undercurrent of passion
in his voice as he pays tribute to the fallen: "They came from all parts of
Zimbabwe, representing many tribes, the entire country. There is this difference
in our languages, Shona and Ndebele. Yet these men did not fight for their
chieftdoms or for their languages. They fought for one Zimbabwe – not two or
three or four Zimbabweans. They fought in the name of chimurenga. The fighters whom we are burying today are not thought of in terms of whose children they were, where they came from, which tribes they belong to. No, we concentrate on the sacrifice they made, the courage they represented, their dedication to win back the land of their forefathers; this being the cause for which they fought. So the youths we are burying here today the small group of youths we treasure, represent the thousands we have lost, many of whose graves are outside the country.”

Then he turns to war strategy and the major battles that were fought in or near Gutu. The battle zones inside Zimbabwe, the President says, were demarcated to coincide broadly with the three adjacent Mozambican provinces: Tete in the north, Manica in the centre and Gaza in the south. Gutu fell in the Manica war zone. Together with Chipinge, it was included in the Musikavanhu subsector.

In 1976 the first phase of chimurenga in this sector was one of infiltration, orientation and mobilization. The local people were instructed in politics by the comrades at pungwe meetings and a youth brigade was established. This mobilization of the youth entailed comprehensive support for the comrades: intelligence, medical service, supply and preparation of food, and the carrying of weapons.

In 1977 once the comrades were firmly entrenched in this sector and assured of local support, the offensive could be launched. It is the commander-in-chief of the ZANLA forces at the high command’s base camp back in Chimoio who now revives the memories of war:

“We said: let us proceed full throttle with our war! A plan was made to capture the enemy camp at Bikita Minerals. The attack on that camp was entirely successful. Not a single comrade was killed or wounded and the camp was taken with ease.

“Subsequently, in September 1977 in the ward of Musukutwa, near the border of Gutu and Bikita, a fierce battle was fought. There we lost nineteen trained comrades and twenty-eight untrained recruits. It was a great loss, caused by a combined air and ground attack by the enemy. This group of comrades were on their way to Mozambique. Many boers also died. A helicopter was shot down. Nineteen black supporters of the mabhunu died. We lost comrades in numerous battles of this kind, in many different places.”

According to the President, the enemy was superior in the use of sophisticated weaponry and its air force. But the crucial factor which cancelled out their superiority was the overwhelming popular support for the guerrillas. “Our superior numbers,” he says, “was the weapon with which we overcame the enemy.”

The power motivating the masses was their love of the land and of their country. Because of this commitment many villagers – fathers, mothers and
their children – paid the supreme price alongside the fighters. Thus the many civilian dead are commemorated along with the fighters.

In this respect Gutu was no exception. So the nephew thanks his uncles: “Today we give special thanks to the people of Gutu. You served well, my uncles, as I now address you in kinship terms; you gave your full support in the war. These contributions made our war victorious, our striking power to surpass that of the enemy.”

The President proceeds to speak of a united Zimbabwe, against the backdrop of the dynastic unity achieved in past centuries: “Our forefathers somehow had a strategy of uniting people. Regions and chiefdoms were united over vast areas, all the way down to Beitbridge and beyond, as far as the Indian ocean; in the south beyond the Limpopo, in the north beyond the Zambezi. That is our heritage – not a legacy of isolated chiefdoms.”

This unity was disrupted by alien invaders, until now, in the wake of chimurenga, it is being restored in a liberated Zimbabwe. Emphatically the President declares that, despite the diversity of its people, the country belongs to one nation: “You, father, who are here today; you, chief, who are present; you, child attending this ceremony, this is your country, Zimbabwe. You are one nation! That is what these comrades fought for!”

The President then raises the land issue, the most vexing of all Zimbabwean problems. “That is what we fought for,” he says, “the land which provides our food, riches and survival. As yet we do not own the land.”

Flagrant inequalities between black and white landownership are mentioned. On the flight down from Harare the wooded farms of whites stood out in stark contrast to the denuded landscape of the communal lands. This aerial view reminded the President of the fact that the Lancaster House agreement had entrenched disproportionate landownership, leaving nearly half the country’s farmland in the hands of a small minority of whites. To correct the imbalance would require a massive reallocation of white farmland. To the British High Commissioner’s plea for moderation in this regard the President had responded disdainfully: “Supposing you English, when you were defeated by the Romans, had the whole of England invaded by them, would you have allowed them to stay where they were until today? Of course not! Enough is enough.”

What is required now is that the protective clause of “willing buyer, willing seller” that governs land sales should be repealed in a process of constitutional reform. With reference to white landownership, our “nephew” emphatically declares: “Chimurenga is not yet over. Fulfilment has not been achieved: the land we aspired to has not yet come to us.” The crowd stirs. The President’s voice rises to a triumphant shout: “The land must come to the people! The land belongs to the people!”

The response is tumultuous. Clenched fists are raised with shouts of
"Viva! Forward the Party! Pamberi neZimbabwe!" The President has put his finger on the grievance that still irks the subsistence farmers. As the clapping and ululation gradually subside, he spells out how the small-holders will reap hundreds of tons of maize once they receive more land. The land issue, the President assures the audience, will be resolved soon: "We shall give the chiefs and the provincial heads prompt satisfaction, with enough land for the people to live on."

Having warmed the crowd to pressing political issues, the President proceeds to launch an attack on ZUM, Tekere's newly formed opposition party, and on the students. ZUM is nothing but a tiny chizumbu, a fowl run. The President wonders whether it is being built for chickens. The inference is that only ignorant students can be persuaded to join it. To them – presumably those students who have recently criticized government policy and actions – chimurenga means nothing. They want advanced education for purely selfish purposes. In their insolence they have even referred to cabinet ministers who were active in chimurenga as shit.

Comrade Mugabe warns the people that he does not want to hear anything about ZUM, the little fowl run. These upstarts should rather honour both the deceased fighters' contribution to the liberation of Zimbabwe and the historic accounts of the struggle. "Don't let them lead you astray," he tells the Gutu people, "because this place, this region is part of a one-party state. That is what our fighters fought for: a united country with a common purpose." Internal conflicts can arise in the political household, the one party. But such problems are dealt with internally so that the party, the country, can proceed as one, presenting a united front.

Finally, the President thanks everyone for their presence and sekuru Gutu for his adherence to customary law. "I thank you for the way in which you venerated the ancestors. I believe that they have heard you." Veneration and commemoration should take place every year at Gutu's Heroes' Acre, coinciding with the annual ceremonies at the national Heroes' Acre in Harare. The crowd murmurs agreement.

With a flash of inspiration comrade Mugabe concludes his speech with an exposition of the colour symbolism of the Zimbabwean flag. Pointing to the flag playing in the breeze beside the rostrum, he says: "The black represents our people. It did not matter where you came from or where you went; in every region black people's blood was spilt. That is the blood shown on the flag, much blood. Our blood did not flow in vain. We wanted our country.

"See that yellow section, the gold on our flag. That is our riches, the gold we work for. The green represents the wooded land, the riches of the bush, the mupani trees and the fruit trees.

"Some people say that the V-shaped white section, set against the black,
represents the victory sign. Yes, that is a nice interpretation. But the white cloth really shows the whiteness of our hearts. We have pardoned those who oppressed us. We have allowed Smith and company to keep their heads; in other countries they would have been beheaded. That reveals our white hearts. Our war was a just one. It was not aimed at conquering the land of other people, but to win back our own land which foreigners had taken by force.

"When this land was taken from us, that bird" - pointing to the rainbird on the flag - "is said to have been found at Great Zimbabwe. Some of those soapstone birds were taken to South Africa; others to Germany. We, however, have placed that bird on top of the star on our flag. It symbolizes our determination to build our country, to make progress and educate our children.

"This flag of ours communicates the rich history of our revolution

"I thank you."

Amidst enthusiastic applause the President returns to his chair.

All that remains now is the laying of wreaths and a few salvos fired by a military guard of honour to signal the burial of our heroes in Mabwazhe's - no, in Zimbabwe's soil. Then, after the coffins have been lowered into position, the graves will be filled.

I observe some pensive faces: those of chiefs, spirit mediums, politicians and ex-combatants. Amongst them are the still living heroes - some of them recognized, others half forgotten - of yesterday's war. Ceremonial procedure and the President's speech have revived for them the passage of their own lives during the struggle. The elation of victory, anguish at the destruction of life.

Anguish too at the harshness and limitations of human existence. Even our reburial ceremony is imperfect. The real identities of the heroes, for instance, are not known. In terms of interaction between our living and the living dead, what on the face of it is a successful ceremony is but a faint echo of true commemoration.

This limitation is accentuated when a senior provincial official stops Sub from concluding the ceremony by reading out the chimurenga names of the fallen fighters and the circumstances in which they died. No ancestral home-bringing ritual is complete without declaring the identity of the deceased - in this case at least their chimurenga identity. Insensitive to the demands of custom and the need of these men-at-arms to pay proper tribute to their fellow fighters, the official uses his authority to excise a vital part of the ceremony.

Upon the President's departure the crowd disperses. Celebration waits in the beer halls and hotels of Mupandawana. A great thirst has built up during the hot hours under the blazing African sky. That, right now, is the priority. And may the fallen heroes rest in peace!
I can see the anger in Sub's eyes. His carefully prepared document – in a sense, the very faces of the fallen ones – went unheeded. What mockery is this of the planned climax of commemoration? The bonds of loyalty, forged in battle, are mindlessly swept aside, overridden by bureaucratic high-handedness and misguided notions about the importance of people and the power they represent. The unproclaimed heroes of yesterday, whose blood and sweat are talked about, are taken for granted, while their faces, their stories remain hidden in the shadows.

Sub's anger mirrors the hurt of many of us, the faceless commoners in the crowd. Dead or alive, we remain obscure. At public gatherings our toil and suffering that made achievement and change possible are mentioned by those chosen or nominated to represent us. But the heroic spirit and sacrificial deeds of the commoner are not reflected in the fanfare of these ceremonies. That is why our liberation struggle has to be perpetuated in every sphere of life. It is not just oppression or colonialism we are fighting, but the injustice we all suffer and inflict upon each other through abuse of privilege and power, insensitivity, lovelessness.

Weeds has learnt to accept the inconsistencies and slights of life. The look in his eyes scanning the graves is dead-pan, non-committal. Nevertheless, it is an act of understanding when he offers Sub a pinch of snuff.

"We have finished our business, anyway. Our friends can rest in peace now," he says laconically.

Perhaps he is also addressing an ancient story-teller sitting under a muchakata tree. Nzvanzvike, the ancestor, may well be listening and approving, for the tension visibly drains from the faces of the two ex-combatants.

In wordless communion they sniff the snuff.
PART II

CHIMURENGA INSPIRATION
FOUR

Mabwazhe

"I am the chief. I am Mabwazhe. Mabwazhe, now I commit these, our fallen fighters, to your soil for safe-keeping. See, our ancestor, we place our children here. See, our ancestors, because you are us. Without you we do not exist."

Chief Gutu

Yes, uncle, you speak true words: without the ancestors we do not exist. Cosmas Gonese’s mind drifts to Chikonye village where he grew up. Nearby stands the old muchakakata tree. In its shade grandfather Nzvanzvike had given Cosmos and his older brother, Ignatius, their first history lessons about the great Rufura ancestors.

That was in the early sixties. Many of the guerrillas who were to become heroes of chimurenga were still in their early teens. Wandai and Sharai were happy that their sons should have the greatest story-teller in the district as their teacher. The old man was in touch with nationalist leaders such as Simbi, Mandizvidza and Pambai at Basera. From his son, Wandai, he knew what shape the nationalist movement was taking in the cities under men like James Chikerema, George Nyandoro and Edson Sithole. Above all, he was steeped in tradition. He invested the wisdom of a lifetime in his grandsons, teaching them to draw courage and motivation for the coming struggle from the ancestral past.

Cosmas and Ignatius used to hunt with bows and arrows on Mount Rasa. The mountain lies like a giant lion, facing east, overlooking the Chingombe and Munyikwa chiefdoms. On those hunting grounds you had to remember forefather Mabwazhe, for in Gutu he was the hunter of all hunters. Besides, from the mountain you could see grandfather Nzvanzvike’s house in the Devure farmland to the south. Just seeing the old story-teller’s house set one off on legendary adventures, which, sooner or later, would focus on Gutu’s illustrious hunter, warrior and ruler.

Not that there were no other great ancestors in the district. Looking to the southwest from the mountain top you could see Chief Chiwara’s Duma territory. There the Duma ancestors Plopajena, Dumbukunyuka and Mhepo held sway. To the north, in the Chingombe chiefdom, you can see the Hera ward where the senior ancestors
Mheresi and Nyashanu are venerated. But the dominant political power in the region was unquestionably the founder ancestor of Gutu, Mabwazhe. His reign and his continuing presence as guardian of the land provided the frame of reference for resistance to colonial intrusion in the region. His memory mobilized his Rufura descendants and their kinsfolk in the liberation struggle. Through him the national ancestors gained stature in Gutu. Because of him the national ideal of an independent Zimbabwe was embraced.

Cosmas remembers the day when Mabwazhe, the hunter, forcibly entered his young existence. He did not know then that old Nzvanzvike was intuitively stage-managing the birth—many years later—of Commander Weeds Chakarakata, the Mabwazhe of chimurenga

I

Cosmas was in standard three when Nzvanzvike turned up at the Gonese homestead one day with two bows and a fistful of arrows, which he divided equally between the two brothers. The old man showed no favouritism when it came to gifts. His fairness in this respect compensated for the many hours he spent talking to Cosmas while Ignatius was out with his friends.

While the two boys were admiring the old man’s gift, he said: “I had Chimombo at the farm make these bows and arrows according to special prescription. Do you notice anything different?”

“The bows are much longer than the ones we have always used,” said Ignatius.

“Right! What else?”

“Sekuru,” said Cosmas, “these bowstrings are so taut you can hardly draw them. They were made for strong arms.”

“And I have never seen such beautiful bowstrings on any bow,” Ignatius said, fingering his.

“You’re both right,” the benefactor said proudly. “If you look carefully you will see that it is not string that is fitted to those bows but finely braided leather. If you rub it with oil regularly your bows will last a long time. Braided leather is much tougher.”

“The reeds of these arrows are quite a bit longer than those of our old arrows.” Ignatius was very much the expert. “The heads are tied on beautifully.”

“What you can’t see, though, is that those shafts were smoke-dried. They will not crack. Go ahead, smell them.” Seeing Cosmas examining the arrowheads, the old man continued: “Look carefully, the heads are all different. Some are widely flared to do more damage to a large animal’s shoulder. Those with barbs are for smaller animals. The barbs will stop the arrow from falling out. And the assegai points are specially made to penetrate deeply. If Mabwazhe wanted to shoot a dangerous animal like a leopard, he would use one of those.”
“Ah, sekuru, I wish we could hunt leopard. The people say there are still some on the white farms. Can’t we go and poach one?” Cosmas looked around innocently as the others laughed.

“You will get us all into trouble, young man; not just with that leopard but also with the government,” the old man chuckled. Suddenly he flung his arms into the air and struck up an old war dance; the two boys followed suit. Stopping in the position of a conqueror looking down at his victim, he shouted: “Vuya mundione vo; ndauraya chikara! Come and see me, I have killed the predator beast!” The two boys taunted the imaginary victim as if they had just performed some heroic act. When Sharai – Mai Ignatius – rushed out anxiously to see what was happening they choked with laughter.

“We have just killed a leopard, my daughter,” Nzvanzvike explained laconically. The way his daughter-in-law shook her head told him she was doubting his sanity.

When they had quietened down, a shooting competition was arranged.

“If you two want to take me on a leopard hunt, first show me that you can hit something smaller than a house,” said the old man.

“We don’t want to damage these beautiful arrowheads,” Ignatius objected.

“One can see you have never used proper arrows,” said Nzvanzvike. “Those arrowheads were made by my Njanja friend, across the Sote river in Chingombe. They don’t bend as easily as all that. My friend knows more about iron-smelting than all those mechanics at Duly’s garage put together know about motorcars.” His tone forbade any backchat. The boys knew that the name Duly was in reality a reference to the white farmer who also worked at that garage. His nickname was Mazhin.Qy,_.t~pere<lone. He was a huge man, apparently without fear. The elders spoke of him as an enemy, a muvengi, because of his attitude to black people. Somehow the boys knew that the imaginary target their grandfather had in mind for them was not a leopard. It was the muvengi, the one at Duly’s.

That afternoon no further reference was made to the motor repair business. Nzvanzvike’s target was a long piece of cardboard nailed to the muchakata tree at the height of a man’s head, not that of a leopard. And the shooting competition turned into some sort of hondo. For the old man notched up the score in terms of leg shots, gut shots and fatal chest or head shots. To the boys it was a game, with sinister overtones. To the old man it was an outlet for anger and hurt he had lived with for many years. The dull thud of each arrow penetrating cardboard and tree trunk symbolized deliverance he knew he would not live to see. The muchakata bark bled enemy blood.

Mai Ignatius sat knitting, watching from a distance. She saw the game for what it was: military instruction in the idiom of bygone times; an old man’s shout of defiance against oppression. Her menfolk would fight, she knew.
There was nothing she could do to stop it. They would need her support in the struggle for freedom. She could always go to Mwari with her fears.

The three warriors approached her, slightly apprehensive as if anticipating a rebuke for their private hondo. Instead they were welcomed with a warm smile.

"That was good shooting, my sons," she said.

"Mother, we have slain that leopard. It was a real killer," Cosmas declared, relieved.

"Yes, indeed," she said, looking him straight in the eye. "A very big leopard, standing on its hind legs, trying to climb the muchakata tree."

A rumble of mirth came from deep inside Nzvanzvike's chest. His daughter-in-law was forever catching him off guard, walking straight into his heart.

"Your eyes, my daughter, are those of a bateleur eagle," he teased her.

"Now I know why your sons are such good marksmen. Even from a distance they place their arrows right in the leopard's heart."

"Well then, if they have such good eyes I am sure they can see equally well to chop firewood for supper," she replied dryly. And with that command the afternoon's battle was concluded.

After the evening meal Nzvanzvike called for more logs to be placed on the fire. Sharai watched the large measure of snuff being carefully tapped from the snuff-horn. It was a sign that a story was about to be told. Judging by the amount of snuff, it would be a long one. She lit the lantern and drew the bundle of mending towards her. Some of the stories she had heard many times, but they were never boring. They drew the family together during the long nights of Wandai's absence.

"This afternoon I told you boys that those bows and arrows were made to special prescription," Nzvanzvike started. "Of course, we know from Gumbo tradition what a good hunter's bow and arrow should look like. But how many of those are still to be found in Gutu today? Very few, I tell you. The elders no longer tell you youngsters how to make such weapons. Besides, you lads have your heads crammed full of book knowledge. You think of the jobs you will have one day in the city, of the money you will earn, of the cars you will drive. Maybe this is not entirely bad. But if these things divert you from the ancestors, from the customs of your fathers, you will never be happy, however rich you become.

"This being so, the ancestors reminded me of the zviratidzo, the symbols of the past. I saw them in my dreams. So I told your uncle Chimombo to make those bows and arrows according to the tradition of Mabwazhe, the greatest Gumbo hunter of them all. The way you handle those weapons will show your respect for the great tribal spirits. When you admire every detail of these fine weapons you will be reminded of their skill and you will feel their presence. At night when you go to bed the bows and arrows will hang against
your wall. They will reassure you that the ancestors stand guard at your door while you sleep, fending off all evil."

"As long as you don't forget to say your prayers to Mwari of the church," Sharai added quietly.

Both boys searched old Nzvanzvike's face for confirmation. He was nodding wisely at the glowing embers. Behind his enigmatic eyes there could well be some hidden disagreement; but this was not a night for confrontation or argument.

"What I want to tell you boys about is the great hunt which established Mabwazhe's fame throughout the Rozvi kingdom," the old story-teller continued. "First of all, you must know that Mabwazhe had looked into his dreams for ancestral advice before he could make his potent weapons. His bows, as a result, were longer than anybody else's – at least as long, if not longer, than Mabwazhe himself. He knew which saplings to use, how to carve them down and then sweat and cure them over a fire. Then he took bushbuck hide – it makes the toughest leather of all, tanned in sour-plum oil – and braided it into fine twine. This he used on his bows. The three types of heads he favoured are the ones I had fitted to your arrows. They were bigger, though, because Mabwazhe used exceptionally long arrows to match his long bows. You can imagine how fast those arrows must have travelled when Mabwazhe's powerful arms stretched the bow wide enough for the arrowhead to touch it."

"Could he kill big game with such weapons?" Ignatius enquired.

"Of course! Mabwazhe was one of the few hunters of his day whose arrows could pierce the hides of buffalo, elephant and rhino. He favoured the lung shot, just behind the shoulder. Big game he always shot from very close range. To do this he became so good at stalking that it was said that he could nyangarika, actually become invisible. Well, with wounded big game you just have to nyangarika if you want to survive. No man puts a charging buffalo or elephant down with a bow and arrow! Mabwazhe always moved upwind when he stalked and he chose his terrain well. He knew that any big animal with an arrow in its lungs will run for a while, then bleed to death. He knew, too, that buffalo backtrack when wounded. So after a well-placed arrow he would sit and wait until he heard the bellowing of the buffalo which signalled its death. To survive in the bush he had to be both clever and brave."

"Was it not part of his craft to put poison on his arrowheads?" Mai Ignatius asked.

"Ah, my daughter, I see that you listen just as well as you use your eyes," quipped the old story-teller. "Yes, you're quite right. Mabwazhe was one of a handful of hunters who knew how to use poison effectively. Perhaps he learned his skill of poison mixing from the Shiri magicians. I think he also consulted the little yellow hunters, those of mandionerepi, where-did-you-see-
me? He was a nomad hunter – it is not impossible that he made friends with
the little men of the desert. They were not all that far from the Rozvi capital
in the Matopos. His skill as a marksman could have persuaded them to share
their great secret of making arrow poison with him.

"Anyway, that knowledge enabled our great forefather to hunt elephant
single-handed. He did not need to dig elephant pits near the water-holes, as
was the custom. Or lead a team of axe-men at great risk to sever the hind
sinews of an elephant, so that it could be killed. He could track the big
elephant all by himself, knowing that one well-placed poisoned arrow was
enough to secure its ivory. On such hunts he disappeared all on his own for
weeks at a time. Then he would return to collect a team of bearers to retrieve
the ivory from where he had hidden it."

"Sekuru," Cosmas interjected. "Once you told us that Mabwazhe carried
his arrows in a quiver fixed to his head. Why did he do that? I tried to do it
like that the other day, but it was awfully uncomfortable."

Nzvanzvike chuckled. "You noticed that?" he asked. "My grandson is
already trying the tricks of an old warrior."

Sharai tried in vain to hide her amusement behind her hands.

"You mean to say," Ignatius joined in, "that long thing you were carrying
the other day was a quiver? Ah, little brother, I thought you were carrying
firewood." Another ripple of laughter went through the hut.

"Watch it, big brother, you don't even have a quiver," Cosmas countered.

"Nobody knows for sure," Nzvanzvike told them. "My guess is that
Mabwazhe acquired this habit from the kind of combat that required fast
shooting. They say he could shoot arrows as fast as you blink your eyes. Try
and imagine for a moment. Your arrow hand is against your cheek when you
shoot. Now suppose the top of your quiver is hanging right next to your
cheek. If you had the long arms of Mabwazhe, you could flick out the next
arrow before the first one had reached its target. Do you see that? After each
shot, the fingers of the arrow hand are right on the remaining arrows in the
quiver." The logic was simple. Predictably, it went undisputed.

"Now that hunt I was telling you about," said Nzvanzvike, picking up the
thread of his story once more, "that hunt was the test of all tests to Mabwazhe.
Not far from the Rozvi capital in the Matopos many rhino were still to be
found. When left in peace these animals seldom molested people. But one
old bull, a real garakata, moved into a bushy valley surrounded by mountains.
There it drank from a water-hole which the Rozvi villagers used. The water
was so sweet that the old bull decided he was the sole owner of the water-
hole. At first it was a joke. Then a woman and some children were gored to
death by the rhino. The king was informed. He sent out his best hunters to
kill the marauding rhino. They dug pits and they went in with assegais, but
to no avail. This rhino was a sly one. His senses warned him of the pits and he
played havoc with the hunters. He attacked them with such fury that they were powerless. They could not drive their assegais through his hide. Several of them were killed.

"At the royal court a nganga told the king that an enemy of the Rozvi, a wizard, had sent the rhino and that no ordinary man could kill it. When they heard this there were no more volunteers to hunt the wizard's beast. It was then that the councillors told the king that there was only one hunter in his entire kingdom who could lead that hunt. And who is that man?" the king demanded. 'That man is Mabwazhe, the Gumbo hunter,' they replied. Thereupon the king sent out runners to call Mabwazhe.

"When Mabwazhe heard of the king's request, he never hesitated for a moment. He tied his quiver full of arrows to his head, took his bow and followed the runners to the capital at Danangombe. At the royal court everybody warned him about the evil beast which had been sent by a wizard. Some laughed at his bow and arrows. But the king remembered the size of Mabwazhe's past trophies and said: 'Speak up, hunter of Gumbo, and tell me how many of my warriors you will need. Mabwazhe sat quietly before the king, then he said: 'Changamire, you need to send only one warrior and that is me. Like my ancestors from north of the Zambezi, I hunt alone. All I ask is that you will give me a guide to show me where the haunted valley is and instruct all your subjects not to approach that place during the next few days. Some of the councillors laughed at Mabwazhe's request. They thought he must be mad to face the rhino alone. But the king was impressed by the quiet hunter and wished him well. He promised that nobody would venture near the valley.

"So, there you have it " Nzvanzvike's voice trailed away. He enjoyed suspense, captivating his audience with pregnant pauses. His old eyes gazed into the fire as if probing the mystery of past and future. The snuff ritual followed. All the while the story-teller knew that the boys were watching his every movement, that Sharai's hands had stopped their mending that all three of them were following him down into Mabwazhe's haunted valley.

"The Rozvi guide was only too happy to turn back to the capital when they reached the summit of the mountain range that bound the valley," Nzvanzvike continued. "Mabwazhe descended the wooded slopes by himself until he found a good lookout point not too far from the water-hole. There he positioned himself like a sentinel on a safe, high rock and waited.

"All was quiet in the valley. The birds and the crickets must have known something was wrong. They uttered not a sound. The great hunt was going to be a waiting game, a battle of wits. In the immense quiet the two hunters waited. There was garakata, the lone bull, guardian of the water-hole. There was chakarakata, warrior of many battles, whom none of his enemies could swallow. Twice the sun rose and set, but still no movement. At night it was
cold and to Mabwazhe it seemed as if the quiet of the valley rang with the murmuru of the ancestors. Was the valley haunted? Was the wizard behind the rhino, tempting him, Mabwazhe, to dispel the murmuring quiet by making a fire? Mabwazhe sat through those two nights as if he was made of rock. In his mind he was talking to Musana and his ancient hunter ancestors. Had they not protected him, the powerful medicine that was holding the valley would have driven him mad. It felt to him as if the rhino was also hiding, waiting for him to slake his thirst at the water-hole where he could be attacked. Perhaps the rhino was communing with his rhino ancestors.

"On the third morning Mabwazhe was fighting a battle against thirst. He knew he could not stay away from the water-hole much longer. His lips were parched and his throat swollen. If he did not drink water that morning he would lose the strength and concentration he needed for the duel that lay ahead.

"Then, for the first time in three days, a go-away bird broke the silence. Mabwazhe looked up startled and there, at last, he saw the huge beast, walking out of a glade. This was the rhino of all rhinos, the father of all ages of rhino, such as Mabwazhe had never seen before. It was as big as a house. Two horns jutted heavenward from its snout, the front one as tall as a grown man. The legs were as thick as bass drums. From its one side hung the broken shaft of an old assegai. Mabwazhe understood then why this garakata had turned the stomachs of many brave hunters to water.

"The rhino was as thirsty as Mabwazhe. It went straight to the water-hole, drank for a long time and rolled in the dark mud. When it eventually strolled off into the open plain, it was black as night. As it came to a standstill, it swooped its front horn in warning, then held it high and stood motionless, waiting. That was the challenge! Garakata knew it. Chakarakata knew it.

"After all that time in the valley, Mabwazhe felt he was one with the rhino. Sadness came over him. He knew that he was looking at one who was both brother and enemy. His duty to the king made the fight unavoidable. The stars of yesterday had already spoken to the stars of tomorrow. Only one of the hunters would leave the valley alive.

"His thirst forgotten, Mabwazhe plucked some hair from a rabbit skin which was part of his outfit. The drift of the hairs showed him that the breeze towards the rhino was from his right-hand side. Some distance to his right stood a dried out mukute tree. That, he decided, was where he would go to provoke a charge. You see, unlike buffalo, rhinos are half blind. For them to see they have to smell first. But once you're above the wind watch out! He knows exactly where you are.

"With long, easy strides Mabwazhe ran towards the mukute tree. He was calm now that the action had started. Standing beside the tree, he swiftly laid an arrow on the bow, drew it back full length, then shouted: 'Ndinokumorosa,
"Now the rhino snorted, pawed the loose ground into a cloud of dust and sniffed the breeze. Pfrrrr pfrrrr came the warning blasts. Then the mighty animal charged head-on at Mabwazhe. The valley trembled as if shaken by an earthquake. Mabwazhe heard the pounding hooves, saw the massive body hurtling towards him. Then the head came down and the huge horn stormed at him like the mighty thrust of a giant assegai. At the very last moment Mabwazhe jumped behind the tree. In the same movement he let go the arrow as his bow hand all but brushed the black fury sweeping past him. For one moment his breath was the rhino's breath. Then the thunder carried past him. Through the dust he glimpsed a thin shaft sticking from a heaving flank. The beast never swerved. Its great hooves kept pounding the dust as it charged on head down, until it disappeared amongst the trees at the foot of the mountain.

"When the dust had settled, Mabwazhe found himself sitting against the mukute tree. His knees refused to support him; his heart pounded in his chest; his thoughts were not those of a victor. It was a long time before he slaked his thirst at the water-hole. In the trees the sunbirds and bulbuls were flitting and the doves were cooing as if nothing had happened. It was as if the great quiet that had gripped the valley belonged to a dream. Only the deep pockmarks on the edges of the water-hole told of the black guardian who would not return.

"The sun was past its peak when Mabwazhe came upon the dead garakata. It lay on its belly, the huge horn still pointing heavenward, as if it had refused to die. Even in death it looked defiant. But the familiar warning blast would never be heard again in the valley. Part of Mabwazhe lay dead in front of him. Mabwazhe wept. The hurt of all the animals he had ever slain, of all the wars he had fought, was inside him.

"Only when the evening star showed in the pale sky did the lone hunter rise. He walked out of the valley to the nearest village, where he ate and slept. Because of his silence the Rozvi villagers thought that the wizard who had sent the rhino had cast a spell on him. Perhaps the mad hunter had not even seen the rhino, they thought. Yet the strange Gumbo with his magic quiver caused a stir in the village.

"Early the next morning Mabwazhe told the headman to gather all the men and boys and to follow him. They followed at a distance, fearful of the killer rogue in the valley below. At last they came upon the dead beast, the single arrow still buried deep in its chest. Only then did they start shouting and dancing in praise of the Gumbo hunter. The news spread like wildfire in the Rozvi kingdom. 'A single arrow felled the killer beast!' it was said. Many people and all the councillors had gathered at the capital when the procession..."
bearing the massive horned head arrived. Some distance behind the cheering crowds, the dancing women and the foot-stamping warriors trailed the solitary hunter. His thoughts were far away. The quiver of arrows still hung from his head.

“As Mabwazhe approached the royal court the king shouted: ‘Chinamukutu! Chinamukutu! The one with the quiver!’ and raised his right hand in greeting. At that moment the dark mist lifted from Mabwazhe’s mind. He felt life throbbing anew in his veins. He knelt before the king. His strong, lean hands moved out, clapped one two three times, until the noise subsided and the crowd sighed. It became as quiet as the death of the valley had been. The soft voice of the hunter carried loud and clear: ‘See, oh king, I have done battle with your enemy. Out in the valley the two of us waited, until we were one in death. Part of me died in the valley with the mighty chipembere. Such was the price of cleansing the valley Yet today, in your eyes, oh king, I find new life. I thank you!’

“Not accustomed to hearing such wisdom from a hunter, the vaRozvi started singing. First you could hear the soft drip of a small fountain. The women sang: Chi-po-po-po. Then followed the hum of a river running deep. The men replied: Hmmmm-hmmmm-hmmm. Finally, a roaring torrent swept the plains. The whole crowd sang wildly to the beat of the royal drums, saying: Tu-bum! Tu-bum! Tu-bum! It was their way of thanking the hunter. When all was over, the king bestowed the greatest possible honour on the hunter by presenting him with two of his daughters as wives.

“From that day on there were strong ties of friendship between the houses of Gumboremvura, the Rozvi king, and Mabwazhe the Gumbo hunter. Throughout the Rozvi state Mabwazhe became known as Chinamukutu – the one with the quiver, as the king had called him. Mabwazhe’s territory was called the land of Chinamukutu. But the white traders could not pronounce such a name; not even mukutu. So they shortened it to Gutu to suit their tongue. And that is where the present name of our district, Gutu, comes from.”

The old story-teller leaned back, a drowsy smile curling the corners of his mouth. Sharai’s hands started a slow clap. The boys joined in. Dying embers did not betray the moistness of their eyes.

“Thank you, father,” she said simply, “for making alive the days of long ago.”

Outside the silent night murmured.
In the days that followed, Nzvanzvike, as was his habit, kept steering his conversation with his grandsons back to the story of Chinamukutu. He had noticed that Cosmas, young as he was, had been completely fascinated by the story of his famed hunter forebear. So he tried to teach his grandsons about life itself, with Mabwazhe as the personification of Rufura mores always at the core of his teaching. Thus Cosmas was introduced to the deepest values of the religion of his people.

"So what did you make of the story about Chinamukutu slaying the rhino?" Nzvanzvike asked his grandsons in the shade of the muchakata tree. "Why do you think was he not afraid?"

The young ones thought for a while, then Cosmas answered. "I think it is because he looked into his dreams to seek the guidance of his ancestors. Because his plans were slow and correct he stayed calm when the rhino charged."

"Hongo! Yes! The Gumbo hunter was courageous and he depended on his ancestors. About this matter of courage I want to tell you something. I tell you, all people fear death. The difference between the man who faces the charge and the one who runs away is that the one controls his fear while the other is overcome by it."

"Sekuru, do you mean Mabwazhe's belief in the ancestors did not make him fearless?" Cosmas asked.

"Mabwazhe was not given some sort of magic by the ancestors whereby he could overcome fear once and for all," the old man said. "Mabwazhe knew only too well that inside him, like in any man, the fear still existed. Every day you have to believe again and conquer it again. To succeed Mabwazhe had to use all his courage, all his knowledge, all his belief. One must never underrate the enemy: in every battle you have to use all of yourself. Do you think Mabwazhe would have survived if he had arrogantly walked up to the rhino in the open? Ah! Ah! he would have been a very dead man."

"But sekuru, is it only the reckless and the cowards who die?" Ignatius asked.

"No, in war even the best and the bravest men die. But it is better to die in action when you are doing your best than to be destroyed cheaply by the enemy because of your own stupidity."

"We hear you, sekuru," the boys agreed.

"Another thing about Chinamukutu," the old man added, "is that he never shirked responsibility. Throughout his life you see this quality of character. When the ancestors urged him to lead the Gumbo people from Musana, he obeyed. When the time was ripe to expel Chasura's Shiri people from this area, he acted. He knew nobody else would fight his battles for him."
The brothers were impressed by the old man's teaching, and it influenced them over the years. Cosmas, in particular, was eventually to mould his own code of conduct as a bush fighter on the Chinamukutu model.

As a young boy, however, he could not understand why his grandfather had intimated that the great hunter had died himself when he killed the rhino. One day he asked him.

"That, my child," the old man replied, "is a very difficult question to answer. You see, hunting and killing either cause people to become cruel and lose respect for life, or it causes them to respect life more. Mabwazhe was the second kind of man. Inside him lived a gentle heart, in spite of all the blood he had spilt. As he grew older he realized that he loved the animals he was hunting. Like himself, they belonged to Mwari. Whenever he tracked an elephant bull for many days he got to know it as a brother. Killing it made him sad. It hurt, because a bit of him died with the animal.

"When he faced the garakata he no longer wanted to kill it, but he was bound by duty. Afterwards, in his own sadness, he came to understand the beauty and the value of what God had created. Had he rejoiced at the death of the chipembere, it would have showed lack of respect for Mwari. The light of his spirit would have been snuffed out; he would have slain himself utterly."

Cosmas kept quiet. He was not sure that he understood.

"But war is different," the old man continued. "A warrior often has little say about the killing he has to do. Each war has its own madness. But the same law applies. You have to respect Mwari and his creation! That includes the life of your enemy. We will fight the white man because he has stolen our land, because he oppresses us. Our cause is just. That does not mean just killing all whites. Whichever side butchers the other for lust of blood, in defiance of Mwari, is slaying themselves. They snuff out the light of their own spirits."

"Do the whites also know this about Mwari?" Ignatius asked.

"Yes, in their way. All human beings know about Mwari. He made them all. Mwari of the Matopos and Mwari of the Bible are one and the same. People understand him through different customs: we blacks through our ancestors, the whites through their book and the church. Our great mhondoro like Chaminuka and Mabwazhe are near Mwari and tell him of our needs. The mhondoro of the whites is Jesus."

"If Mwari is one, sekuru, why do the blacks and whites fight each other?"

"Because of injustice, Ignatius. To shout, Kristu loves, Kristu saves, does not necessarily make you right. God looks at what you do. He wants to see understanding between his people. Because he sets the scales of justice he is always on the side of the oppressed. We black people in Zimbabwe are beginning to fight for our lost lands and for our rights, so we believe Mwari is on our side. It is Mwari himself who fights injustice."
"How will Mwari and Mabwazhe co-operate in the fight against the varungu?" Ignatius asked.

"He will draw all the greatest ancestors together to fight the oppressors and tell them how to wage war. That is where Mabwazhe with his experience will play a great part. Nobody knows the hiding places in the mountains and in the bush as well as he does. The ancestors will give directions directly to the masvikiro. They are the ones who will tell the fighters how the ancestors want them to wage the war."

"And Christians? Will they listen to masvikiro?" Ignatius asked.

The old man held up his forefinger. "Listen carefully you two," he said sternly. "Churches talk a lot. They don't run wars. Do you think the blacks in the churches have rejected their ancestors? Ah bodo! There is no such thing. I tell you, when the time comes, all of them will follow the ancestors. And those who want to pray - let them pray! Their prayers will serve chimurenga. I have told you, Mwari of Matonjeni and Mwari of the church are one."

So the Gonese boys learnt from their grandfather about the religion of their people. Ancestor veneration, they were taught, was not just a matter of appeasing a body of unknown spirits, beings which vaguely threatened one's existence. The midzimu were the flesh and blood of their history: colourful characters who had travelled, fought wars, hated their enemies, built empires and loved their families and their land. They were still the guardians of the land. They would inspire their descendants to rise against the whites. Nzvanzvike presented them as beings co-operating with Mwari for the good of the country, striving to bring about a state of justice and freedom.

What Ignatius and Cosmas did not know at the time was that their grandfather's preoccupation with the ancestors was part of a country-wide religious renaissance. The rise of nationalism coincided with a resurgence of traditional religion. As the clouds of war gathered, people were returning to their roots for inspiration and for their original identity distinct from that of the white oppressor. Black disunity had caused failure in the first chimurenga at the turn of the century. Now, at the onset of the second chimurenga, black unity was elevated to a national level embodied in an ancestral war council.

Expressed in the early sixties, Nzvanzvike's traditionalist vision was prophetic. In 1965 ZAPU was banned. As a result the key nationalist organizers in Gutu, including Wandai's friends Simbi and Mandizvidza, were imprisoned. In 1966 the battle of Chinhoyi took place in the north – an incident which historians were eventually to record as the start of the second chimurenga.

In Gutu guerrilla combat was still confined to the remote border areas, not to be experienced at first hand for almost a decade. When it eventually did come to the land of Chinamukutu and its neighbouring areas, the Gonese brothers witnessed for themselves the accuracy of their grandfather's intuition.
"The land was given to all of us together, by Mwari. Let us not boast about this, but let others sing praises [to Mwari and to a liberated land]."

Chief Gutu

Tazivei, sitting only a short distance from where Chief Gutu is conducting the beer libation, thinks: Indeed, Mwari created the earth. And at the very beginning he gave us the land of Africa to live on. He was on our side when we fought chimurenga; he gave us back our land of Zimbabwe.

For more than forty years Tazivei has been the most influential svikiro in Gutu. Ever since he became recognized as the medium of Makwanya, a descendant of Mabwazhe, he has been close to the paramount seat of tribal power in the district. Whenever a new Chief Gutu is elected it is through him that the Rufura ancestors place the seal of ritual approval on the house of the new ruler. He is the mouthpiece of ancestral wisdom, the protector of traditional customs, the highest authority on tribal history at the Chief’s court.

A black cape is draped loosely round his skinny shoulders. These are still held remarkably squarely despite the passage of many seasons. A full circle of black ostrich feathers graces his greying head, like a crown on the head of a king. Ornaments and a cheetah skin around the waist affirm his rank and authority. Shrewd old eyes watch the Chief’s every move. Those eyes have observed the doings of many paramount chiefs. In earlier years they used to scrutinize equally carefully the white district commissioners who, under the colonial system, appeared to wield unassailable powers.

Today, however, the old man’s mind is occupied with the reign of Mwari, the creator God whom the Shona people had believed in long before the arrival of the whites. The Chief’s words revive memories of his close friend, Vondo Mukozho, who died four years ago. To Tazivei, and to all the leading houses and chief’s courts in the district, Vondo – until he himself became Chief – had been the trusted messenger to the cult centre of Mwari vaMatonjeni in the distant Matopo hills.

Each year Vondo would criss-cross the district collecting the people’s gifts to
Mwari. In October or November he would report at Chief Gutu's court how much he had collected to take to Matonjeni. Tazivei was more interested in the news about local political developments than in the gifts his friend had collected. In this way there grew a kind of intelligence service which kept the Chief, the ancestors and Mwari informed. Vondo was then sent off by the Chief's court and the senior ancestors to report to Mwari on the situation in the district and to present Gutu's pleas for rain.

Upon his return Vondo had to convey Mwari's oracle to the Chief's court. A good rain message was received with enthusiastic shouts of Mwari's praise names: "Tovera! Shoko! Dziva!" But the Chief and councillors were no less eager to hear what Mwari had to say about local chieftaincy succession issues, customary law and land distribution. Vondo in a sense personified God's reign. His contact with the Mbire priests and priestesses at Matonjeni, as well as with cult messengers from other provinces, made him a mine of information about political developments all over the country.

Tazivei remembers with what authority and air of mystery his late friend used to convey Mwari's messages. His voice would drop almost to a whisper when he reported Mwari's support for his black children's resistance to colonial rule. To avoid suppression of the cult, God's message of liberation had to be passed on in veiled terms. The cult officials had learnt their lesson well during the first chimurenga:

The old medium looks at the jubilant crowd around him. Vondo should have been here today to celebrate our chimurenga victory, Tazivei thinks.

In the mid-fifties, ten years before the first shots of the second chimurenga were fired at Chinhoyi and before age had dimmed their eyes, Vondo and Tazivei had a discussion about Mwari. That morning Vondo had presented the Matonjeni gifts at the Chief's court and Makwanya, the ancestor, had given clear instructions through Tazivei about the forthcoming visit to Mabwedziva, the Rocks of the Pool.

In those days Vondo used to walk many days on foot all the way from Gutu to the mysterious place of Mwari in order to avoid the pollution of travelling by bus, the white man's vehicle. The Matonjeni messenger would be accompanied by the vaHosanna, the district's praise-singers and horn-blowers who would announce the delegation's arrival at each village as the pilgrimage to the distant hills progressed. The ancestors forbade the carrying of provisions. Mwari saw to it that cooked food and millet beer were always placed under trees on the prescribed routes of the rain messengers.

At Vondo's house that day the vaHosanna were preparing for the long journey. This gave the two friends, just back from the send-off at the Chief's court, a chance to relax in the acacia's shade. In his mind's eye Tazivei can still see the British khaki helmet his friend was so fond of wearing. Only at the Chief's court and at Matonjeni did he relinquish it in order to don his
plumed headgear. Today the angle of Vondo's helmet showed that he meant business. The praise-singers were left in no doubt that they were accompanying a man with an important mission. It is a grave matter to confer with Mwari at the dombo on behalf of the entire district.

"Why is it, Mukozho, that you are always so eager to walk all that distance to Matonjeni? Do you not tire of so much travel?" Tazivei asked.

"See those granite outcrops?" Vondo pointed with lower lip and lifted chin. "They are the same granite as the rocks of Matonjeni, made by the same creator. How can I tire of travelling to the place where I can hear our Creator's voice among the rocks which belong to him? Besides, we get our reward when Mwari responds to our gifts by sending good rain. To be drenched by his rain on the way home, to hear the rumble of his thunder in the clouds, that is a privilege. Without this work the land will dry up and wither away."

"Are the messengers from other parts of the country as sure as you are of the powers of Mwari vaMatonjeni?" Tazivei asked.

"Yes, they are. God's presence at Matonjeni is so powerful, you cannot ignore it. Once you have experienced it you always need to go back there."

"You once told me that Mabwazhe's descendants have special status at Matonjeni."

"Yes." Vondo did not try to hide his pride. "You see, the link between the Rozvi king and Mabwazhe was very close. The Rozvi kings controlled the holy caves where Mwari speaks. They insisted that the representatives of all their chiefdoms worship regularly and seek Mwari's support. Ever since he married the daughters of Gumboremvura Mabwazhe always sent messengers to the dombo near the Rozvi capital to ask Mwari for rain. The Mbire Shoko people act as interpreters, up to this day. They are the priests. Some Venda families are keepers of the shrines.

"The officials at the shrines knew about Mabwazhe's fame, of course. After his death our tribe's cult messengers were chosen from the house of Goronga, the great son of one of Mabwazhe's Rozvi wives. So the people at Matonjeni were reminded every year of the link between the Rozvi royal house and the descendants of Mabwazhe. Of course, my own house of Mukozho also traces its origins to Chinamukutu through the lineage."

"Wait a moment, Vondo!" Tazivei interjected. He was leaning forward, mischief in his eyes. "I accept that you are guardian of our tradition, not only at Matonjeni but also here in Gutu. But how does that square with your hanging out at the church of the vaDutchi at Gutu mission? Did the churches not steal the name of Mwari for their Bible? Are they not the ones who turn our people away from trusting in the forefathers?"

Vondo sat quietly for a while. He was not always sure whether his friend was serious or merely enjoying the game of outwitting him in discussion.
Under the scrutiny of Tazivei's shrewd eyes it was always better to pretend unruffled contemplation rather than come up with a quick answer.

"Ah, my brother, you indeed touch on a weighty issue," he said after a while. "For one thing, you must understand that I go to those services because my daughters attend catechism classes at the mission. You know that I am not a baptized member of the church. I merely want to know what they teach our children. The missionaries have no idea that I carry the gifts of the people of Gutu to Mwari vaMatonjeni. I think they are already praying for my soul there at the mission." Both men chuckled at the thought.

"The surprising thing, though, when I listen to those sermons I become quite sure that Mwari of the Bible and Mwari of Matonjeni are not two, but one and the same God. His power is in all of life, he sustains life, he is not far away in heaven. Our people know that. Is our knowledge not the same as the churches' talk about God's Holy Spirit?"

"I hear you. Maybe that is so." Tazivei was not giving up, though. "But what about Jesu Kristu?"

"The missionaries tell us that Mwari drew close to people's lives through his son, Jesu Kristu. They say that only through Jesu can we be saved and reach heaven. Perhaps Jesu is the white man's mhondoro. Maybe he is a special son of God, because he spreads understanding of Mwari throughout the world. But then, Mwari is also close to us because of our ancestors. All these names by which we address him at the dombo show how close Mwari is to our midzimu and to us. In the end, he is the creator of all the world. The only real difference is how we worship God."

Vondo sat back, satisfied with his explanation. Both men drank deeply from the calabash which had rested invitingly on the clay pot of cool beer. The spirit medium wiped the millet froth from his lips with the back of his hand. He was not entirely in agreement and Vondo knew it. When Tazivei rasped his throat for attention, Vondo's eyes were absently measuring the massive granite rock next to his homestead, as if to fathom the mystery of its creation.

"You, son of Mukozho," Tazivei said, "seem to know all one needs to know about religion. I admire your observations. I, too, want to believe that Mwari is one. But the whites make that impossible. The Jesu they preach brings prosperity to the mission stations and the white farms. He is the God of the teachers and the hospitals, not of the reserves. When the drought comes our farmers suffer and go hungry. But the schools and the hospitals stay open. Do you think their God cares about us?"

Vondo nodded, pleased that they had found common ground. "My brother," he said, "what you say is true. It is unfair that the whites prosper while the black farmers suffer. Such injustice makes it difficult for one to believe that it is the same Mwari who cares for all the people in the world."
That is why I keep going to Matonjeni. There Mwari speaks as the owner of the land, the creator of all people. He makes the rain to fall on black farms and white farms."

"Yes! Yes!" Tazivei interjected enthusiastically. "What you say is true, Vondo. It is the whites who have twisted the image of Mwari. They had to get rid of Mwari of Matonjeni so that they could subject us to the rule of their churches. Meanwhile they stole our land. If Kristu was really Mwari's standing amongst the people, he would not have allowed the whites to take so much of our land."

Their discussions always came back to this bitter issue: the ancestral lands that were lost to white exploitation and control. Whenever the Gumbo ancestor, Makwanya, spoke through Tazivei, he would complain about this and urge a redistribution of land in favour of his Rufura descendants. With the passing of the years Makwanya's message was becoming more radical and more militant. So also was the attitude of Tazivei, even when he was not possessed by his Gumbo ancestor. One could not live so close to these Rufura ancestors, who were jealously guarding their land, without sharing their anger.

As the two men sat in silence, old Mukozho, Vondo's father, sauntered across from his hut. He muttered a greeting, then settled on a stool, pulling the grey blanket tight round his shoulders. As if summoned by Mwari, the four vaHosanna men and a mbonga woman, all in traditional dress, walked up one by one and sat down. Only Vondo's senior wife continued to move about, serving beer. In the silence expectation grew. Gravely Vondo got up and proceeded with measured step to his house.

A while later, when the tall figure of the cult messenger reappeared in the courtyard, he was transformed. Black ostrich plumes were kept in place by a broad, red headband with the single word MUNYAI in bold white capitals embroidered on it. Over his right shoulder the dark cape of the Rufura ancestors was draped across his chest and secured neatly around the waist. Over his left shoulder, crossing to the right, was another red munyai's band. Down his back hung a mantle with colourful flower and tree motifs, indicating that Mwari cared about nature as much as he cared about people. Hardened bare feet with cracked soles told their own story of a life of endless travel, carrying Mwari's gifts. Those feet stood squarely in Gumbo tradition: the people who travel on foot and eat outside.

Now Vondo's voice was low and intense. He spoke with the authority of a prophet of Mwari, one steeped in the mystery of centuries of communion between God and his people. He was addressing a trusted inner circle which contained no informers. Yet he kept his voice down to prevent his message from drifting to the inquisitive ears of neighbouring villagers.

"Our friend Tazivei," he said, "has correctly stated just now that the
whites distort the image of Mwari. They preach a Christ who is the saviour of all humankind. But they remain silent about the hardship our people suffer every day and about the land they stole. The missionaries do not tell us what Kristu does about such matters. Why? Because their brothers are the white farmers who thrive on large farms while we starve on our small fields here in the reserves. As a result many of our people now think that there are two Mwaris and that the Mwari of the whites is not really interested in us blacks. The Mwari of the whites will not help us reclaim the lost lands.

"I disagree with the idea of two Gods. Mwari is one! Because of our different customs, the blacks and the whites understand and worship him differently. But he is the same father of all of us. You must also remember there are black churches. The black Zionists and Apostles are already preaching about Jesu with his Holy Spirit who will end the black man's oppression and gives us back our lands. My only quarrel with the vaZioni and vaPostori is that they pretend they are the only people of God, the only ones going to heaven. Ah! What stupid lies. Just like the missionaries they spit on our wisdom of Africa. They even call Mwari vaMatonjeni Satan. Only their Mwari, through their prophets, gives rain. No! No! No! That is not so. Anyone who suggests such rubbish is no better than the hyena on which the witch rides at night."

"Hmmm..." came deep-throated agreement from the small audience. Then clenched fists rose aloft as Tazivei's voice cracked like a whip: "NaMwari! NaMwari! Pasi navadzvinyiriri. With God! With God! Down with the destroyers!"

As quiet settled again, Vondo continued: "Let me tell you why I say that Mwari of Matonjeni and the one of the Bible are one. Just look at the way he rules this world. Mwari punished the bad kings in the Bible by taking their reign from them and blessed the good ones, like king David, who tried to uphold his laws. To the vajudah he was a just God who punished or protected them according to their behaviour. He was their liberator who led them from slavery in Egypt to a new land where they could build their houses and farms.

"Is the relationship between the Rozvi kingdoms of long ago and Mwari not exactly the same? The Rozvi also called themselves the 'people of Mwari'. Like the vajudah priests did for their people, the Rozvi kings allowed the Mbire Shoko priests to be in charge of Mwari's worship at the holy places. They interpreted revelations which taught the Rozvi kings to establish a just rule over the people they conquered. Like the kings of Judah, some heeded his voice. Others didn't.

"Amongst the good Rozvi kings who united many people in Zimbabwe, the greatest were Dyembeu, Chirisamuru and Gumboremvura. Chirisamuru, the one who tends the calves, was given that name because he looked after his subjects when they were in need. What king rules like that unless he is prompted by Mwari? Gumboremvura was the 'rain leg' the messenger of rain
who pleased Mwari so much that he blessed the Rozvi state of that time with many good rainy seasons.

"Rupandamananga, on the other hand, was stubborn and refused to listen to the messages of Mwari. When the vaMhari of Chivi revolted Mwari exposed him, out there on the Turwe plains where the vaMhari butchered him. Some of the other Rozvi mambos had just as little sympathy with their subjects. They only thought of enriching themselves by raiding further and further afield.

"And what do you think happened then? Just as Mwari had allowed alien nations to conquer and destroy the kingdom of Judah, he allowed the Nguni armies from the south to overrun the Rozvi kingdom. The power that had unified the old kingdom was lost. Perhaps this was the heaviest punishment Mwari could have inflicted. I say this because without a powerful military force we were defenceless against the next invaders, the Ndebele."

"Do you really believe that Mwari allowed the Ndebele to settle in our country?" Tazivef interjected testily.

"That, my brother, I do not really know." Vondo’s reply was wary.

"There were many movements in the south. The white boers came to the Transvaal. They were the ones who chased Mzilikazi beyond the Limpopo. To what extent Mwari caused all this to happen we do not know. But I am convinced that every time a new house is established, Mwari upholds it, as long as it is just. He wants people to live in harmony – in Zimbabwe, in South Africa, in all the countries of the world. When kings or governments exploit or enslave their subjects, Mwari sides with the oppressed. He is always the liberator!"

Vondo paused. He was on familiar ground. The signs of black rebellion and liberation were there for those who had the courage to see and interpret. The people wanted to know Mwari’s message about liberation. Increasingly they heard it in Vondo’s accounts of the past. Here they found courage for what they knew lay ahead.

"Let us look at the reign of the Ndebele kings," Vondo continued. "Mzilikazi was a tyrant in many ways. His armies raided our villages. Many were killed. Nevertheless he protected Mwari’s shrines in the Matopos and required the Ndebele to worship there too. He set the example by annually sending a number of black cattle and other gifts with requests for rain and prosperity in his kingdom. In response Mwari seemed to tolerate his rule. Towards the end of his life he even appeared to be heeding Mwari’s call for justice by limiting the raids and proscribing the killings. It is not beyond Mwari’s power to sway the heart of a tyrant. Whether the Ndebele call him Mlirno or we Karanga call him Mwari, it is one and the same God of all people.

"Ah! But Mzilikazi’s successor, this Lobengula, he was a cruel and greedy ruler. He never paid any heed to the revelations of Mlirno. The practice of sending messengers to the shrines was abolished and Lobengula stepped up
the raids throughout the country. Our people were driven into their mountain strongholds. You know the barricaded caves at Rasa and in the surrounding mountains. The maDzviti raiders wantonly killed and mutilated our people. We all know about the women who were left behind, their breasts cut off, in burning villages.

"Mwari was very angry at all this. When one of the Mbire priests told Lobengula that God had ordered an end to the murderous raids, he was immediately put to death by the Ndebele king. From then on there was no pardon for this man who chose to ignore God. Mwari's oracle spoke clear language. 'You, Lobengula, he said, 'are just a fat little man. You are so busy murdering my people that you do not see the white sons of my sister - the ones with shining ears and without knees - approaching from the south. They will break your power and free my people from your tyranny.'

"Do you think Lobengula listened? Of course not! He thought he was invincible. He ignored Mwari's white nephews from the south when they requested that he stop the raids. To punish the Ndebele, Mwari allowed the whites to destroy Lobengula's kingdom during the war of chindunduma, the booming cannon. The king himself fled to the Zambezi, never to be seen again. At Matonjeni Mwari instructed the Shona messengers to go back and tell their chiefs not to support the Ndebele against the whites. That is how Mwari brought about the liberation of his people from a cruel king."

"Mwari be praised!" one of the vaHosanna shouted. There was hand-clapping and ululation.

Old Mukozho cleared his throat, then waited for silence. "Ah, my son!" he said at last, "I find it difficult to believe that Mwari could use the whites to liberate us from Ndebele oppression. They were corrupt invaders from the start. Mwari must have known that allowing these aliens to enter the country would cause even greater trouble."

"Perhaps you are right father," Vondo replied respectfully. "Mwari's ways are not fully known to us. At that time Mwari did approve of the peace established by his white nephews. That was what the old ones at Matonjeni said, anyway. We know that Mwari is the lord of all people, black and white. Besides, Mwari's white nephews did not bring only suffering to our country. They also brought schools and hospitals, from which we benefit."

"When did Mwari start to oppose the white intruders, then?" the old man enquired. He was clearly not happy with his son's answer.

"Soon after the chindunduma war," Vondo replied. "Mwari saw that the intention of his white nephews was to grab as much of the land as they could get and to rule at our expense. Mwari did not tolerate such an abuse of power. So he sent a drought and cattle sickness to make his black sons and daughters think. At Matonjeni the messengers were told to tell their chiefs to rise against the white man. Mwari wanted sharing between black and white. If that was
not possible, the whites had to be driven out. Only then would the rains fall again and the cattle survive. That was the beginning of the first chimurenga."

"That is what I wanted to hear." Old Mukozho nodded his head in satisfaction, as if contemplating an oracular pronouncement of doom on the whites. Tazivei winked mischievously at Vondo. At the hint of a smile on the prophet's face, the entire group burst into laughter.

"How many chiefs rose against the whites during the first chimurenga?" one of the vaHosanna asked.

"Quite a number," Vondo replied. "The chiefs of Belingwe, Charter, Hartley and Mazoe, and also some Ndebele chiefs. At Mashiangombi there was much fighting. There the resistance came mainly from the medium of the mhondoro Kaguvi. The whites had no idea that Mwari could unite his black people in war. They were shaken when many whites were killed all over the country within a few weeks.

"Through the cult messengers the Matonjeni elders, Mabwani and Mkwati, kept in touch with the fighting chiefs and with their leading masvikiro, Nehanda and Kaguvi. Thus the fighters in the field were inspired to keep up the struggle by messages from both Mwari and their mhondoro spirits."

Tazivei held up his hand for attention. When all eyes were on him, he went straight to the point. "My friend," he said, "I do not for a moment doubt Mwari's involvement in our first chimurenga. But if he was on our side and our cause was just, why did we not succeed in driving the intruders out of the country?" His eyes riveted on Vondo's face, the svikiro leaned back. He was convinced that he had the prophet-teacher cornered.

The man of Matonjeni did not waver. He paced up and down the courtyard a few times. "Ah, my brother," he parried, "you like to ask impossible questions. Did the ancestors appoint you as a guard over my thoughts? And if they did, why don't they provide you with the answers you seek? Surely they are closer to Mwari than us common mortals."

A ripple of laughter eased the tension that Tazivei's question had created. The svikiro smiled, thinking, "You cunning devil, you always find a way out. Or can I still pick a hole in your argument?"

Vondo continued unperturbed: "We must remember that the first chimurenga was not a total failure. It was a mighty blow to the whites. Having underestimated the Shona people, they were taken by surprise. Mwari gave clear warning to the whites that he wanted to see fairness and equality in this country. To us black people of Zimbabwe it was just the beginning, the first round of our struggle for freedom. When the white rulers executed the mediums of Kaguvi and Nehanda, it was Mwari's way of giving us the heroes we needed to continue resisting over all these years. These heroes remind us of Chaminuka's prophecy that victory would only come when all our people - Shona and Ndebele - unite against the whites."
"And that, my brother, was the main reason why the first chimurenga failed to drive out the invaders. Our people were not united! Many of our Shona chiefs did not heed Mwari’s message, because they still saw the Ndebele as their enemy and the whites as liberators. It confused them that Ndebele warriors were also involved in the uprising. Even our Gutu chiefs did not fight the whites at that stage."

Tazivei nodded approvingly. "Yes, that sounds right. Perhaps Mwari understood how uncertain many people were about the whites. After all, he himself had warned the Ndebele that he would bring in his white nephews to punish them."

"And what happened at Matonjeni after the failure of the first chimurenga?" old Mukozho asked.

"The worship of Mwari never really stopped. For a time the movement between Matonjeni and the outlying districts was kept very secret. At the shrines the people were greatly disappointed. Some of them felt that Mwari had turned his back on them. They sang laments about their enslavement by the whites. Mwari was blamed. Sometimes you still hear these sad old songs at the Matopos. A lot like the complaints of the people of Judah against Mwari when they suffered oppression. When things go wrong people always blame Mwari, never themselves."

Mukozho appeared puzzled. "Why does Mwari not abandon such troublesome people? Will he again send messages from Matonjeni to the fighters of a second chimurenga?"

Vondo pondered these questions for a while, then said: "A creator never lets his creation go. Mwari stands for justice. He punishes, but he also takes pity. He has never lost sight of our plight. Think! He has never stopped sending us messages of resistance and liberation ever since the first war. By this time all our people know his wishes. We messengers have had to work undercover because we are always watched by the CID. We speak loudly about Mwari’s rain and softly about his liberation when we report to the chiefs’ courts. You all know this."

"Ah yes, that is so," they chorused.

Vondo adjusted his headgear. He was nearing the end of his sermon. The most important part was to negotiate the transition from past to future. As messenger of Mwari it was his prophetic duty to give them a peek into the future. To weave Mwari’s promises and commandments around the hearts of his kinsmen to sustain them in the coming struggle.

"When the second chimurenga comes," he said gravely, "Mwari’s messengers will not be allowed to move as freely between Matonjeni and their districts as in the first war. But that does not matter. Mwari has a new plan to unite the fighters country-wide. Already he has appointed all the founding ancestors to the war council of Zimbabwe. The great mhondoro spirits, Chaminuka, Nehanda..."
and Kaguvi, representing the entire country, will be assisted by the guardians of each district, like our Mabwazhe of Gutu and Pfupajena of Bikita. Mwari, the source of all power and inspiration, heads the council. The council itself will direct the war. Instructions will be given by the ancestral war councillors directly to their mediums in each district.

“You will see, it is going to be a war of the spirit mediums. Through the masvikiro Mwari will make the second chimurenga a people’s war. Then we will regain our lost lands. Already Mwari is saying at the dombo that if his black sons and daughters heed his call to arms and if they obey the directives of the ancestral war council, victory over the oppressor will be theirs. Mwari says: ‘Forward with the struggle! Blood will flow. There will be deliverance from oppression. The land is ours!’”

In his excitement Vondo had forgotten about secrecy. He was shouting Mwari’s message, the war cry from Matonjeni. He was emissary turned prophet. He was man of God, clenched fist held high – an awesome figure etched against the late afternoon sky, his plumes and embroidered mantle playing in the breeze. Standing thus, Vondo shouted Mwari’s challenge to the enemy. His long shadow across the courtyard chilled Tazivei’s heart. Deliverance could not be had without paying the price. It was one thing for a svikiro to act the venerable historian and philosopher at the Chief’s court. It was very different for a svikiro, as mouthpiece of the ancestral war council, to propel people headlong into a war against a formidable enemy.

Concealing his misgivings, Tazivei jumped up with the others. Everyone was shouting Mwari’s praise names: “Tovera! Mbedzi! Dziva! Shoko!” The men clapped their hands, then raised clenched fists. Women ululated. Such powerful words called for celebration.

From the distance came shrill ululations as neighbours responded. They had heard the call of the beer-drink and the dance. Soon they would arrive and join in. More beer pots were carried out into the courtyard. The horn-blowers fetched their kudu horns. Vondo’s wives strapped dancing calabashes to their calves. The feast was on.

Tazivei still remembers. His excuse for an extra pot of beer was the thirst of Makwanya, his forefather, who was never far away. Vondo’s wives knew about svikiro privileges. They obliged him. Sitting under the mutondo tree, the stamping feet and swaying hips enchanted him until his eyes closed in dreamless sleep.

The next morning Vondo and the praise-singers left for Matonjeni.
W

ATCHING the reburial ceremony today, Tazivei marvels at the accuracy of Vondo’s prophecy, uttered some ten years before the second chimurenga started – twenty years before the first shots were fired in Gutu.

As Vondo had predicted, it became a war of the masvikiro. At the height of the struggle Mwari’s messengers could no longer move freely between Matonjeni and their districts. Then the mediums took to the woods to guide and assist the fighters. Some went to Mozambique to reveal the directives of the ancestral war council to the freedom fighters of comrades Mugabe and Tongogara. Others moved round the battle front with the guerrillas, teaching them the secrets and laws of the land. They were the ones who welded the guerrillas and the villagers into a single, formidable fighting force.

In the process the prophecies of Chaminuka and Nehanda that the bleached bones of the fallen martyrs would rise against the enslaving powers in Zimbabwe were fulfilled. Every one knew that the ultimate power unifying the war council was Mwari. Even Makwanya increasingly spoke as an emissary of Mwari whenever he put in an appearance at Chief Gutu’s court through his medium, Tazivei.

Tazivei looks with envy at the delegation of spirit mediums and chiefs sitting on the far side of the pavilion. His old eyes can distinguish the headgear of MuDende and Lydia Chabata. VaZarira is almost completely hidden in her large leopard skin. Some of these mediums operated for years at the war front. They are war heroes in their own right.

Perhaps his own chimurenga role was less heroic than those played by some of the other masvikiro. Nevertheless Tazivei feels proud of his contribution. It was dangerous work providing the fighters with underground intelligence – much of it obtained from the spirit world – right under the noses of the enemy. It was not the kind of work which earned public acclaim. On the contrary, as a double agent serving both the Chief – whom many nationalists considered hopelessly compromised by the white administration – and the guerrillas he was often under suspicion. Life became a gamble. Every move could mean death. He was never free from anxiety. Only Mwari and the ancestors knew the depth of his commitment.

A movement in front of the rostrum catches Tazivei’s eye. It is Mafuranhunzi, the white Gumbo hunter of Gutu, who has moved up with his camera to take pictures of President Mugabe. Tazivei nearly laughs out loud. He has never seen Mafuranhunzi wearing anything except casual khaki clothes and open sandals. Dressed up in a suit, there is no hint of the man’s adopted Gumbo descent.

For this occasion, Tazivei muses, Mafuranhunzi would have been better dressed in Vondo’s Matonjeni apparel than in that stupid murungu outfit.
Look at him! Nobody would recognize him as the first white messenger ever to carry Mwari's message from Matonjeni. He looks like one of those pale envoys of King George directly from London – not even like a proper qhunu.

Tazivei recalls Mafuranhunzi's arrival in Gutu, in the year of the battle of Chinhoyi. Unlike the missionaries living at their mission stations, this one went and built a mud-and-pole house among the people of Chingombe. He said that he was a writer who wanted to record the history of the old religion and the black churches. At first he was suspect, for he hunted information more avidly than the missionaries hunted converts. He could not open his mouth without asking questions. But the suspicions faded as he became part of the community. He danced and preached in the black churches which were opposed and scorned by the missionaries. Then, just when everybody was convinced they had a white Zionist amongst them, he became involved with the ancient rain rituals and the kugadzira ceremonies, all forbidden by the vaZioni.

The Zionist prophets complained that their new member had backslided. Yet Chief Chingombe and the leading houses of Rutsate appreciated the medicines and healing treatment provided at Mafuranhunzi's house and the many baboons shot by this intrepid hunter in their fields. And so he was adopted as a white Gumbo in the house of Rutsate.

It was a joke, of course. Until Mafuranhunzi came with the unheard of request to accompany Vondo to Matonjeni so that he could speak to Mwari. "No! we cannot allow such a thing to happen," Vondo had told Tazivei. "No white man has ever approached and talked to Mwari at Mabweadziva. Besides, we could be accused of allowing a murungu to infiltrate the holy place of our chimurenga council."

Tazivei was in full agreement.

But somehow things change. Tazivei remembers how for two years he and Vondo played cat and mouse with Mafuranhunzi. By means of vague promises and endless procrastination they hoped to dishearten the white man. Tazivei himself told his old friend: "The writer will give up when he realizes that his many visits to Gadzingo yield nothing."

But Mafuranhunzi had remained undaunted. He taught the Chief to shoot with a shotgun and allowed Vondo to use that hunting rifle with the glass on it. No murungu would do such a thing at a time when black and white people were already at war up north.

Mafuranhunzi's loyalty was no longer in doubt. First Chief Munyongwa consented to the Matonjeni trip. Then Vondo himself started showing enthusiasm for the idea. The two of them had struck up such a friendship while hunting that one could have sworn this white man had become the Matonjeni messenger's apprentice. There was no doubt in Tazivei's mind that Mafura-
nhunzi at this stage was already being initiated into the history and secrets of his adopted Gumbo forebears.

In the end Makwanya's spirit spoke through him, Tazivei, at the Chief's court. He said that the Gumbo ancestors had no objection to Mafuranhunzi's visit to Matonjeni as long as he followed the instructions of his older brother, Vondo. He also explained that the final decision about the white man's participation in the ceremony at Mwari's shrine depended entirely on the consent of the Chokoto priests and of Mwari himself.

And that was how it came about that the Chief's court waved off the strangest delegation ever to be sent on its way to Matonjeni. It was in 1967 that the unlikely pair of messengers travelled together on behalf of Gutu to Mabweadziva.

When the delegation eventually returned, many days later than expected, Vondo had an interesting story to tell.

"A! A! my brother," he told Tazivei, "Never before have I had such a trip to Matonjeni. On the way there Mafuranhunzi wanted me to talk about nothing else but Mabwazhe's life and how it had established links between the Gumbo people and the Rozvi. By the time we reached Chokoto's village at Wirirani this murungu was acting as if Mabwazhe the rhino hunter was his own father. We were both delegated directly by Chinamukutu to visit Matonjeni, he said. I suppose he had worked it out that if he played on the Rozvi's debt to Mabwazhe all those many seasons ago, and Mabwazhe's good standing with Mwari's priests ever since, the Chokoto elders might allow him to speak to Mwari.

"But Mwari had a surprise for us. On that first evening a fearful storm blew up. The wind tore Mafuranhunzi's tent. The thatch was blown off one of Adamu Chokoto's houses. Lightning danced on the surrounding mountains and Mwari's voice was loud thunder all around us. The next morning the Wirirani people were withdrawn. Simon and Adamu Chokoto, the two Mbire priest brothers, wondered aloud whether Mwari was angry about the presence of a white man. They were afraid to take any decisions. I told them that Mwari was probably warning us not to take matters lightly. Even my younger brother, this murungu, had to be taught a lesson about Mwari's power, I said. You know, elder brother, how conceited these whites are, as if they can control everything, even Mwari. It was not for nothing that Mafuranhunzi's tent was torn."

"I know, they are incorrigible," Tazivei concurred. "But tell me, how did this white Gumbo respond to this event?"

Vondo smiled wickedly as if he himself had tried to outwit Mwari. "Friend, you should know that, after what we've seen of him here in Gutu. He just laughed as if nothing had happened. To him the storm was Mwari's way of welcoming Mabwazhe's descendants. Does Mwari not address powerful
hunters with forceful words of thunder, he asked. Ah bodo! It was a heavy situation impossible, I tell you! The Chokoto brothers soon saw they were not going to chase away this white muRufura easily. They may have realized he was more stubborn than all the district commissioners they had ever seen. So what did he do? He went to visit Peura, the Venda keeper of the shrine. Then he just sat around talking to Kombo, the priestess sister of the Chokotos, and to the mbonga women and VaHosanna praise-singers living there.

“This carried on,” Vondo said, “until everybody was tense and irritable. The Chokotos were clearly not going to take responsibility for accompanying the murungu to the dombo for fear that Mwari would punish them. They just waited and waited, saying nothing. They were waiting for a sign from heaven. Mafuranhunzi, too, was waiting and waiting.

“At last, on the fifth day, the sign came. Our forefather Mabwazhe decided to take over. It was a miracle!”

“What do you mean, miracle?” Tazivei queried. His voice was indignant. “We are too old for miracles. Tell such stories to children!”

“No, my brother,” Vondo said, “this is no joke. Listen to what happened.” At which Vondo produced his snuff-horn to convince Tazivei that he was serious. The snuff ritual over, Vondo continued: “We were all sitting around doing nothing. Simon and Adamu Chokoto were talking to each other, not knowing what to do. Then suddenly they saw the hawk which had caught all their chickens, perched on a rock nearby. They wanted it killed. Could Mafuranhunzi perhaps get rid of the chicken thief, they wondered.

Mafuranhunzi was sleeping in the shade of his truck. When I called him and showed him the hawk, he quickly pulled that rifle with the glass from behind the seat of his truck. Everybody in the village went silent.

“I tell you, my brother, it was a strange thing. The spirits of Matonjeni were upon us. Suddenly that hawk was as important as Mabwazhe’s rhino. Mafuranhunzi started shivering like one who is spirit-possessed. His aim was hopeless. Worse even than Chief Munyonga with the shotgun. Wham! the rifle spat fire, and the mountains answered. But the hawk just sailed away into the sky.

“Mafuranhunzi just stood there, watching. Then his eyes changed. The hunter’s shavi spirit of Mabwazhe took hold of him. The shivering stopped. He reloaded and pointed the rifle at the hawk, circling way above us in the heavens. When his eye met the glass, the shot went off. A! A! you should have seen it, Tazivei. The hawk just folded its wings, its neck broken, and hurtled down towards us. Tubu! it fell right in front of Simon Chokoto, the senior priest. I think Mafuranhunzi was as surprised as any of us, only he did not show it. Simon just shook his head. He was the one who called it a miracle. I agreed. I know how difficult it is to follow movement with that glass on Mafuranhunzi’s rifle. It was not he who fired that shot. And he knew
It was Mabwazhe who once again spoke clear language in the Matopo mountains. Chinamukutu saw our plight and opened the door for us."

"You were not dreaming, Vondo? How can you be sure of all this?" Tazivei was still sceptical.

Vondo pointed his finger heavenward. "NaMwari! I am telling you the truth," he said solemnly. "We have all heard Mafuranhunzi's jokes about how he has inherited Mabwazhe's hunter's shavi. Well, when that bird fell from the sky, I believed for the first time that there really is something in it. Anyway, everything changed. There was laughter in the Chokoto village. It was a miracle: Mabwazhe's intervention and Mwari's consent. Someone was sent up to the dombo to consult with God about the final arrangements for the ceremony."

"And did Mafuranhunzi speak to Mwari?" Tazivei could no longer withhold the vital question.

"Oh yes!" Vondo seemed as pleased as Mafuranhunzi must have been. He warmed to his story: "The way was now properly cleared in the spirit world. Mwari consented because he had been persuaded by the Gumbo ancestors. Once the Chokoto priests were convinced that they could trust the murungu, they looked upon him as a real messenger who could convey Mwari's warning to the white people. Late that night we sat in front of the cave of Wirirani up in the mountains. From deep inside the belly of the cave came Mwari's voice in the old Rozvi language of the kings. Simon, Adamu and Kombo, their sister, translated into Ndebele and I into Karanga. Mafuranhunzi's voice trembled at first. Then he became inspired and spoke better Karanga than I have ever heard him speak.

"First of all, Mwari made it quite clear that Matonjeni was the holy place of the black people. His eyes did not want to see whites approach the dombo. It was only because of Gutu – Mabwazhe – that Mafuranhunzi was being allowed this privilege. Mafuranhunzi said he respected Mwari's wish. He passed on the gifts he had brought with him: black blankets, snuff and money.

"Only then did the real conversation start. You should have heard it. The two of them talked for a long time. Mwari expressed his displeasure at the breakdown of traditional customs. He criticized the indifference of educated blacks who forgot their ancestors and no longer honoured the rest day of chisi. Chieftaincy succession was no longer arranged in accordance with the old laws of inheritance. In Gutu, Mwari said, both the district commissioner and the ambitious headmen are to blame for such breaches of customary law, which lead to conflict and disorder. Mafuranhunzi told Mwari that he would inform the district commissioner and Chief Gutu of all this.

"The most important subject discussed was the relationship between blacks and whites, and land ownership. Mwari said that the whites are his vazukuru, the children of his sister. As long as they respected their black
uncles, as vazukuru should, they were welcome to live in the country. But through their greed they have abused the kinship authority and land rights of their black uncles. They have grabbed the best land and herded their black kinsmen into overcrowded reserves. This Mwari will not tolerate. He warned: 'If the whites keep oppressing their uncles and enforcing the unfair land apportionment laws, I shall fight them!' I tell you, Tazivei, Mwari spoke out as the God of chimurenga. Mafuranhunzi was told to go back and warn his white kinsmen. There can be no peace before justice is restored, before the authority of the black uncles and their right to rule the country are recognized by the white nephews."

"Now that is good news," Tazivei commented with rare spontaneity. "At last the black lion is baring his teeth. May God be praised!"

Both men burst out laughing at the cynical old svikiro's unguarded display of pleasure and faith in Mwari. Both were relieved that the unusual Matonjeni trip, which could well have misfired, had ended thus. Clenched fists were raised. "By God! Forward with the liberation struggle!" Both voices were strong with emotion.

A few days after their return, Mafuranhunzi and Vondo saw the district commissioner at his office to convey the Matonjeni message to him. Vondo later told Tazivei that a full report had been given. He was impressed by the frankness with which his fellow messenger informed the DC about Mwari's revelations. The DC was happy about Mwari's promise of a good rainy season; but he was irritated by divine criticism of his handling of chieftaincy succession problems, and decidedly unimpressed by Mwari's threat to fight his white nephews over the matter of land distribution.

It was a different matter altogether when the two messengers reported on the outcome of their trip to the Chief's court. Sitting under the shade of the muchakata trees, the Matonjeni story was told and retold. There were roars of laughter when in their enthusiasm the two story-tellers started contradicting each other about what had really happened. Vondo was adamant that no white hunter, unaided, could break the neck of a hawk in flight with a single bullet. Mabwazhe was the one who directed that bullet.

Eventually Makwanya's spirit spoke through Tazivei to confirm Mwari's message from the dombo. The Gumbo forefather emphasized that Mwari had revealed himself as the supreme power behind the struggle for justice and as the God of reconciliation between races. The joint mission of a black and a white messenger to Matonjeni signalled the racial harmony which Mwari would require of a liberated Zimbabwe.

Chief Munyonga Gutu wanted to know how the district commissioner had responded to Mwari's warning that he would fight the whites. With pursed lips and puffed cheeks Mafuranhunzi imitated the DC's facial expression of stubborn disdain. The councillors collapsed with laughter.
"Does that mean that the white government will ignore Mwari's warning about war?" Chief Gutu enquired in a more serious vein.

"We know," Mafuranhunzi replied, "that the whites underrated the ability of Mwari and the ancestors to mobilize and unite people in the first chimurenga. I am afraid the white government today will make the same mistake. To the whites Mwari of Matonjeni is just a primitive rain-god whose promises and warnings they need not take seriously. Some of them do not even take the Mwari of their own Bible seriously any more. Those who do will appeal to him to protect their wealth and their privileges. They do not understand that this is the same Mwari, just speaking in the language of black people. They do not want to know that Mwari sides with the oppressed. If they did, they would seek solutions through discussion, not war."

The councillors shook their heads sadly. They knew that a bloody showdown was inevitable; and the price in lives would be heavy.

Just then the large drops of life itself started to fall from the darkening skies. Mwari was being true to his promise. The voice of Wokumusoro, the one of the skies, rumbled from the rain clouds.

The two messengers were the first to stand up to acknowledge Mwari's gift. Black and white hands reached heavenward. "Tovera! Dziva! Shoko!" Women ululated from a distance at the shouting of Mwari's praise names. At the Chief's court the spirits surged in anticipation of new life.

President Mugabe's voice is still coming across the loudspeakers. Tazivei observes Mafuranhunzi reloading his cameras with film.

"Always those cameras," he muses. "What drives a man to want to make so many pictures?"

At that moment Mafuranhunzi looks up. Their eyes meet, hold in recognition.

"Look around you, Mafuranhunzi," the old svikiro says with his eyes, "Mwari has fulfilled the promises you heard at Matonjeni. He made the land for all of us. As Vondo said all those years ago, Mwari is one!"
PART III

THE BATTLES
“Subsequently, in September 1977 in the ward of Musukutwa, there near the border of Gutu and Bikita, a fierce battle was fought. There we lost nineteen comrades and twenty-eight untrained recruits. It was a great loss, caused by a combined air and ground attack by the enemy. Many mabhunu also died. A helicopter was shot down. Nineteen black supporters of the mabhunu died.”

President Mugabe

As the President speaks, ex-commander Weeds Chakarakata relives the fury of that battle, the heaviest one of the whole war. An afternoon of hell up in the caves of Musukutwa, the enemy unleashing its entire arsenal of weaponry on the granite stronghold. For hours you were sitting, so to speak, on the edge of your grave. In the twilight world among granite boulders the shouting and groans of dying comrades rang in your ears hour after hour. Trapped; entombed in a stench of cordite and napalm as the Vampires shrieked in low to deliver their deadly goods. You felt numb, helpless to do anything about the pain, the dying. All that remained was defiance and anger.

The rains had come early that year. The Devure river was swollen with brown flood water. Dull muddy swirls contrasted with the vivid new leaves of misasa and mitondo trees. Soon the shifting shades of red, yellow and brown would make way for first pale, then lush green.

Weeds had hoped for a good rainy season. To the bush fighters the dense cover of wooded mountains meant survival. There any movement was hidden from enemy eyes. Ambushing was simple. And the Rhodesian soldiers knew that any pursuit of the guerrillas into dense woodland was likely to land them in a treacherous death-trap. So the rainy season brought a change in tactics, a lull in hostilities.

This was the best time to move new recruits to the training camps in
Mozambique. On the way there, clothes and blankets had to be delivered to Zimbabwean refugees across the border. On the return trip supplies of arms and ammunition had to be hauled back to secret hiding places in the operational zone. In Vunjere, the northernmost part of the Bikita B operational zone, the ammunition supply urgently required replenishment for the forthcoming campaign of 1978.

The men gathered at Mbanda to prepare for their journey to the east. There were six guerrilla sections. Kid Nyika, the sectoral political commissar, had moved in from Mozambique with a section of Chipinge fighters under the command of Fox Gava.

Nyika was the most senior commander present. He had been authorized by high command back at Chimoio to bring the fighters at the front up to date on overall chimurenga developments. Despite his high rank he had little battle experience. The other five sections were commanded by Weeds Chakarakata, Jesus, Nhamo Chekeche, Guymore and Stephen. With the fighters was a group of some thirty new recruits who had volunteered for military training in Mozambique. Most of them were from Vunjere and the Gutu South chiefdoms. Some of them were already veterans of the youth brigade and had seen action at the front.

The mission seemed ill-fated from the start. Weeds remembers how the commanders had quarrelled among themselves at Mbanda about lax security during the recruitment exercise. Everybody was on edge. Then came the first omen. During the heated discussions four bateleur eagles flew directly overhead. There they appeared to have a battle of their own, clawing at each other until a few feathers drifted off into the skies. Then they chased each other into the high heavens, only to swoop down again at terrific speed as if vying for air space. By the time they sailed off towards the northwest, as if nothing had happened, a heavy, depressed silence had settled on the commanders. The message from the ancestral world could hardly be misread: "You are heading for disaster if you proceed along the planned route to the east. Turn back to the northwest, follow us higher up into Vunjere, and work out another route for the journey to Mozambique."

But commanders Nyika and Gava were anxious to move eastward and proceed to Mozambique according to plan, via the Devure ranch. Their refusal to consider spirit directives heightened the feelings of doubt in the minds of Weeds and his fellow guerrillas from Gutu South. Nyika's lack of combat experience and ancestral instruction seriously worried his battle-hardened subordinates. The impasse was broken when commander Jesus decided that it would be best to move on rather than follow the bateleur eagles back west. Stephen and his section were sent ahead as a vanguard to Musukutwa.

The second sign of impending catastrophe came soon afterwards. Cephas,
one of the fighters in Stephen's section, started acting out of character at Mhuru. There he broke away from his fellow fighters before they crossed the Devure river into Bikita. Weeds, who was coming up with the rear guard, found Cephas organizing a big party all on his own at night, much to the amusement of the villagers. This was a serious breach of security which could jeopardize the entire mission. Weeds subjected Cephas to a disciplinary session before allowing him to cross the river to join his unit.

The next morning, as Weeds marched his men down to the Devure river, he was deeply perturbed. The two omens were weighing on his mind. A clear bateleur warning from the ancestors, followed by the temporary mental derangement of a fellow fighter, could not be coincidence. Some calamity was about to befall them. The sense of foreboding would not leave him. Yet watching the easy, purposeful stride of his men he felt reassured. Next to him walked Danger the fearless mortarman, Judah Tichatonga the cunning tactician, and Pasurai Chirongoma, a recent recruit of such courage and physical strength that he never flagged under the heavy pack he was carrying. Come what may, Weeds thought, with such men we will give a good account of ourselves. Show yourselves, you bloody land-grabbers! We'll teach you how to fight!

Having crossed into Bikita, the rising flood of the river behind the guerrillas made its way swiftly down to the Sabi. Soon, they knew, the brown water could turn into a raging torrent. Is it carrying an ominous message in its swirls and eddies, Weeds wondered. All of nature spoke to you in wartime. The birds and the animals became allies. Through them the ancestors whispered caution or encouragement. Mwari cloaked you in a sheen of greenery, reminded you of his presence in the rustling leaves. Jutting granite rocks concealing secret caves were signposts of his protection and concern. As the fighters cautiously worked their way upwards from the low lying river plains, the fortressed mountains behind Musukutwa's village could be seen tapering away in the distance to the southeast and west.

Always these mountains, Weeds thought. Through the ages they have been at the centre of our lives. On their slopes we play and gather fruit as children. Here we hunt and hide when we are hunted. In their caves we bury our elders and commune with them in times of drought and war. Here we beat the drums to call the men to battle. The mountains hold the secrets and the history of our people.

Back in Vunjere, his thoughts ran on; the ancient Duma rulers in their granite dwellings in the Vinga mountains were still keeping watch over our hideouts and hidden weapons. Through their mediums, they were now calling for Vunjere to be declared a liberated zone. Theirs was a holy fortress, as yet unassailed by the RAR soldiers. Only the house of Marinda knew the
exact spot where the mummified Duma ancients lay. Part of the secret was the unseen power of Musikavanhu, creator of humankind, which made the woodlands of Vunjere safe against enemy attack.

Vunjere's northern flank was protected by Mount Rasa, the old lion colossus which towers over Basera in Chingombe. It contains the cave fortress where the Rufura people of Rutsate used to hide from the Ndebele invaders in the old days. There Mwari worked a miracle to save his beleaguered people. At the barricaded cave entrance four Ndebele warriors were struck by lightning, whereupon the rest of the impi fled in disarray from the wrath of Mwari.

Weeds looked up at the wooded slopes and granite outcrops of the mountain immediately behind kraalhead Musukutwa's homestead. What would they find there this time, he wondered, safe fortress or death-trap? He could not shake off his forebodings. Besides, Mabwazhe's tradition of solitary hunting always made him wary of moving with a massed body of fighters and newly recruited civilians, however stringent the security. It was too obvious a target for the enemy.

II

For two more days the guerrillas were delayed near Musukutwa village. Scouts were sent out to see if they could find Cephas, who had once again slipped away to roam around the villages. It was feared that in his state of mental confusion he could either open fire on villagers or leak information about guerrilla positions, should he fall into enemy hands. While the scouts were out the main body of fighters and recruits kept shifting camp to avoid detection and betrayal. They were, however, moving around in a radius of only a few kilometres, much less than normal security regulations required. The risk of detection by the enemy was considerable.

Weeds was particularly worried. He realized that it was important to find Cephas and try him in a guerrilla court before moving on. At the same time he felt that it would be safer to break up into smaller units and scatter into the mountains. From there they could follow the spirit-guarded trails to Mozambique, while a small contingent of fighters remained in the area to hunt down and deal with Cephas. Weeds knew that it would be easy for an informer to get word to the soldiers stationed near the Nyika business centre. That could lead to a full-scale air and ground attack by the enemy, a prospect he could not bring himself to contemplate.

On the second day, in the late afternoon, the entire company of fighters and a steadily growing body of inexperienced recruits moved to the foot of the mountain range behind Musukutwa village. Ten sentry posts were set up over a stretch of two kilometres, each close to a village homestead. The poshitos hugged safe terrain, where the wooded slopes shied away from
intruding maize fields. Such positioning allowed for a quick retreat into the dense cover of the mountain in the event of an attack. All that remained now was to conduct Cephas’s trial in the morning. Then the real march could begin. One of the scouts had brought word that the wayward fighter had been apprehended and disarmed; he would be escorted to the camp in the course of the night.

Towards sunset kraalhead Musukutwa, a staunch supporter of the guerrillas, visited the poshitos. He was accompanied by a few village elders, checking whether their people had supplied the comrades with enough food and blankets. The face of one lanky, quiet elder immediately struck Weeds as sinister. Here, he sensed, was the discordant note in the beat of the war drums; the broken drum which could spoil the rhythm of chimurenga. For one moment their eyes met. Weeds had a fleeting glimpse of the malice hidden in the soul of the wizard. The elder attempted a smile but it was a grimace, failing to light up his eyes.

Cold apprehension clutched at Weeds’ heart. He controlled the urge to jump up and confront the elder. “Cool it, man! You can’t go round suspecting everyone,” he argued with himself. “This bloody war is getting on your nerves. Stop brooding and just get your men up into those mountains.”

This was easier said than done. Under the eyes of senior commanders one becomes hypercritical even of one’s own hunches and intuitions. So Weeds brooded on and the comrades remained at their poshitos at the foot of the mountain.

That night the commander could hardly sleep. His mind was in turmoil. The fighting bateleur eagles of Vunjere would allow him no rest. He could hear the wind tearing past their wings as they plummeted to earth. Their calls shrilled like trumpet blasts. It was an ancestral warning of imminent danger, growing in urgency.

Try as he might, Weeds could not fathom the exact meaning of the message. In the deep of night he carefully measured out some snuff, poured a portion on the ground and whispered: “You, Mabwazhe, great hunter, whose signals are written in the black and white feathers of the chapungu; you, grandfather Nzvanzvike, and you, father Wandai of the house of Gonese and Rutsate, enlighten my mind for the day of tomorrow!” Weeds listened and wondered. Only the melancholy call of the little night-owl could be heard above the snoring of his comrades. Were the ancestors angry because the guerrilla forces had failed to heed their command in Vunjere? Were they clouding their minds with mist so that they could be punished for their disobedience?

Dawn failed to chase away the lingering night shadows. Tired from lack of sleep, Weeds barely heard the hearty morning greetings of his friends Danger and Tichatonga. Somewhere out there, he felt, the enemy helicopters and
aeroplanes were preparing for a massive assault. Questions kept racing through his mind: When would it come? Would they be prepared? Would they survive?

It was still early when Guymore, Jesus and the other commanders brought Cephas to trial at Weeds' poshito, the one nearest kraalhead Musukutwa's home. Weeds hardly followed the proceedings. He felt that it was meaningless to berate Cephas for his behaviour. It came as no surprise to him that Cephas was unable to explain his actions. His mental derangement, Weeds was sure, had been caused by the ancestors – yet another mystical warning to persuade the guerrillas to devise an alternative route for the Mozambique march.

The verdict was predictable: Cephas was to be escorted, an unarmed prisoner, to Mozambique where his case would be tried at command headquarters.

Before the commanders dispersed to their poshitos they received word from kraalhead Musukutwa that the last contingent of recruits had arrived. The girl volunteers were preparing a last meal. By midday everybody would be fed and ready to move into the mountains.

The message seemed reasonable. Weeds Chakarakata was the only commander who had misgivings about the schedule for departure. Yet he realized that it could be unwise to hurry the newly arrived recruits into the mountains on empty stomachs. Besides, the senior commanders, Kid Nyika and Fox Gava, were showing signs of irritation at the imposition of mystical directives on their neatly laid plans.

Chakarakata acquiesced. A few hours' delay, he reckoned, would not count as a contravention of ancestral command. Besides, he could do with some sleep before the march. As long as all of them were well away from Musukutwa before nightfall

"We march immediately after the midday meal," he curtly told his fighters and recruits.

Once the decision was made, sleep engulfed the fatigued commander in the shade of a mushuku tree. But instead of rest he had a shattering message of doom as his dream world erupted into a blazing inferno. This time many birds were flying and fighting in a darkened sky. Then the huge arms of a hunter sent a shining arrow soaring into their midst. High up in the skies it turned into a shooting star which set all the villages beneath it ablaze. Etched against the flames was the wizard village elder of the previous day. He was laughing hideously at the burning people and at the village councillors who accused him of causing the fire. The voices of the councillors were those of Wandai and Nzvanzvike, Weeds' late father and grandfather. Their faces were averted from the dreamer as if they blamed him, too, for the fire. There was no mistaking their final warning. Weeds woke up, soaked in sweat.
He told himself to relax; that it was only the dark shadow of the *mushuku* tree playing tricks on his mind. But the agitation of the dream had become a compulsion. Suddenly wide awake, he jumped up.

“Come here immediately, all of you,” he shouted to his fighters. Surprised, they obeyed. For Chakarakata to lose his composure something had to be very wrong. In a few brief sentences Weeds narrated his dream. His agitation masked by a toneless voice, he concluded: “This is the last warning. I know it. We ignored the bateleur message in Vunjere. We have already stayed too long in this exposed position. The ancestors on the war council are shouting at us to move out of here immediately. I tell you, a big *ngozi* is just round the corner. Pack your kit! Get ready to move out!”

Danger lifted his AK in recognition of an ancestral instruction and the authority of his commander. “Forward the struggle of our guardian ancestors!” he shouted in chorus with the other fighters and recruits. Ancestral commands were final. As one man the unit at Chakarakata’s *poshito* readied themselves for departure.

While they were busy, towards one o’clock, singing girls of the youth brigade emerged from the Musukutwa homesteads, carrying food to the different *poshitos*. It was an alluring sight, the pregnant throb of life itself. Delighted with the large number of recruits who had volunteered for training, kraalhead Musukutwa accompanied some of the girls to Weeds’ *poshito*. Excited, out of breath, he did not notice the changed atmosphere among the fighters. “I tell you, Chakarakata,” he said proudly, “all my people want to fight. You just get them safely through to Mozambique. With such fighters victory will soon be ours.”

Chakarakata’s mind was elsewhere, his mood dark as night. This was not the time to trade pleasantries with a stalwart supporter of the cause. “Your contribution to the struggle is well appreciated, great one,” he said, failing to hide his irritation. “But the ancestors are taking issue with one of your village elders. Where is the tall one with the dark face, the one who never speaks?”

“Ah!” The kraalhead seemed surprised. “That one you can trust. He supports chimurenga. He left this morning to fetch supplies at Nyika Halt.”

“What?” Weeds exploded, his face an angry snarl. “How could you allow that bastard to leave the village at such a time? He is a *muroyi*, a traitor! I know it. Let me lay hands on him. By God, I’ll feed his liver to the hyenas.”

The headman shrank back, shaken. His eyes registered disbelief. “No! No! No! There must be a mistake. My villagers have never...”

But he got no further. Weeds had already taken off at a run to warn the fighters at the other *poshitos*. The headman’s words had confirmed his worst fears. The nightmare of his dream message, he sensed, was already taking shape. Musukutwa would soon be under siege. And the enemy would know exactly where to strike. “Stop eating! Take up combat positions!” he shouted...
what was taking place outside. Weeds could distinguish the faces of com­manders Guymore and Nhama Chekeche. Danger and Judah Tichatonga from his own section and a few other fighters were also present. Some had positioned themselves lower down in the cave. Pasurai Chirongoma, the courageous carrier, was among the mijiba; and Cephas, still without his weapon, his eyes now alert and sane, was tucked in tight between two boulders.

The swelling sound of rotors soon announced that the chopper gunners had noticed them, that they were bent on carrying the battle right into the granite fortress. One of the gunships was hovering just above the ground. From there it could direct machine-gun fire and rifle grenades from below, right into the labyrinth of small caves. Below them the occupants of the large cave could hear the beat of the bullets against the cliffs and the occasional thud of grenades. Faint moans and shouts told of suffering and death.

Another gunship approached from the north and edged its way in, close to the main side entrance of the large cave. Danger took a quick look outside.

"Chakarakata," he shouted excitedly, "there is that traitor sitting inside the gunship!"

Without hesitation Weeds ordered: "Get him!" He and Judah lunged at the cave entrance, stung into action by the prospect of eliminating the sell-out who had betrayed them. Burst upon burst of rapid AK fire came from the cave.

"Die, muroyi! Die, you murdering afterbirth of the hyena!" they shouted. But the giant wasp just hung there on its rotating wings, its machine-gun swinging round towards the cave entrance.

Spotting the movement, Weeds shouted a warning and dived behind a boulder. The next moment dust and granite fragments exploded all over the cave as a stream of bullets whistled through the entrance. There was a vicious thunderclap as a rifle grenade exploded against one of the cliff overhangs lower down in the cave. Shrapnel snarled down the narrow passages, ripping through flesh and bone. Then the howling subsided as the chopper soared away to safer heights.

When Weeds looked up he could make out the limp forms of two boys and two girls, both volunteers, on the lower cave floor. They had taken the full blast of the rifle grenade and were still engulfed in a cloud of dust. On the far side of the main entrance, Pasurai Chirongoma the courageous porter was moaning, holding his chest. A ricochet bullet had penetrated just below the collarbone. A medical officer was getting out bandages to try and stop the bleeding. Next to them another guerrilla lay dead, the back of his head a gutted crater.

Outside it was ominously quiet.

"Get ready for the ground troops. They will be coming in to mop up soon," Guymore shouted.
"I'll cover the top left entrance. You take care of the one on the right, Guymore," Weeds called back.

"OK by me," the section commander responded.

Both he and Weeds were well positioned in the dark behind boulders, with a clear view of the openings in the cave roof. It was not their first battle together. Danger, Judah and Nhamo were repositioning themselves to guard the wide side entrance.

"Cephas, can you move back?" Weeds asked. "There's a shaft of light on the boulder next to you giving your position away."

"My back is right up against a rock, Chakarakata. There is nowhere I can move," Cephas replied.

"Sit dead still then," Weeds commanded. There was nothing to be done about the groans coming from the bottom floor of the cave.

"Put down snuff for the elders, all of you! Otherwise none of us will walk away alive from this tomb today." Weeds' voice spoke the eerie command from the world beyond. Soon the muttered names of Chaminuka, Nehanda and Kaguvi, together with those of regional and family ancestors, could be heard. The cave walls echoed reassuring answers from the forebears. Courage pulsed in the heart of their beleaguered world.

Comfort soon gave way to alert tension. Somewhere above them the crackle and hum of a radio could be heard. Then a fleeting shadow passed over the opening above Weeds. A gruff voice shouted down: "Come out, you bloody gook! I'll shoot if you don't move."

Cephas looked up straight into a white face peering at him over the sights of an FN. Shocked hatred broke from inside him as he shouted for all the Musukutwa dead: "Fuck off, you bhunu!"

Instantly a blast of gunfire erupted above the cave, followed by an anguished yell from Cephas. Weeds saw the shadow move above him once again. Then the white face, peering into the darkness, came into his sights. Grimly he squeezed the trigger.

"That's one less," he muttered as the white soldier came hurtling into the cave.

The man was dead before he hit the cave floor, but his ova-ova ("over-over" radio) was very much alive. Strange voices, shouting commands and reporting battle positions, now rang down the cave corridors.

Before anybody could comment there was another blast of AK fire from inside the cave and another figure, this time a black RAR soldier, came crashing through the other roof opening into the cave.

"Two down! Two down!" Guymore shouted.

"Good shooting, Guymore," Weeds cheered him on.

Their excited voices were snuffed out by another horrific thunderclap as a
rifle grenade exploded at Guymore's end of the cave. For a while everybody was blinded and half suffocated by the cloud of dust. Weeds coughed, then listened. Below him Cephas was whimpering with pain; to his left there was a deep groan.

"Oh God, not him!" Hoping against hope, he called: "Guymore, are you OK?"

"My arms are smashed." The section commander's voice was a low croak. "You MOs, get him out of there, quick," Weeds commanded. His friend was still alive.

The two MOs set about their task immediately. When they pulled the half conscious Guymore from behind the boulder, blood was streaming from his arms and chest.

"Try to stop that bleeding," Weeds urged in a low voice, his whole being numbed at the sight of his wounded comrade.

There was too much death and pain in the cave to think coherently. As if entranced Weeds watched the opening above him for more signs of the enemy. Could all this really be happening? Then his mind drifted into blankness.

How long he sat like that he did not know. From afar a voice from another world was trying to get through to him. Suddenly the amplified voice echoing in the cave labyrinth shocked him back to reality. It was a command in clear English transmitted by the dead soldier's ova-ova: "All ground forces retreat to safe positions. On the double! Vampires and hunter hawks ready to strike!"

"Get down among the boulders, all of you," Weeds shouted. "We have another air attack coming. Keep your heads well down. If one of those Vamba rockets hits the cave there will be a lot of shit flying."

"Hey, chief," Danger mocked, "the mabhunu are giving us a running commentary on their battle plans out there. Why couldn't they have brought us a TV along with the ova-ova? Then we could have watched their stupid manoeuvres in the air."

Danger laughed. Judah and Nhamo joined in. Then the entire cave reverberated with laughter. Even the shrill voice of the anguished Cephas joined in. It was not real laughter but more like a shrieking orchestra of madness. Yet Weeds welcomed it and joined in. For it was a healing madness; a venting of fear, tension, hatred. Such laughter rang back through the ages. It made the faded bones rise. The ancestors joined in, laughing their defiance at the feeble might of the whites hurled against their strong rock fortresses. To the wounded and the dying it spoke of courage and life.

Quiet settled abruptly unnaturally. The unseen conductor of the heavens silenced the cave orchestra with a single sweep of his baton. Now they could only wait for the onslaught. Ears strained to pick up the sound of attacking aircraft.
The silence went on and on. Waiting without knowing was always the hardest part of battle. This time it was worse, not seeing the planes coming in. The groans of pain and dying, punctuated by intermittent crackle of static on the radio, sounded like prophecies from the underworld.

In the distance the earth started rumbling as the bombs crashed down on caves further along the mountain range. The shrieking of jet engines as the bomber and fighter aircraft climbed away into the skies brought relief to the fighters and youngsters in the cave. Hope flared as they all thought: "Perhaps this time our cave..." But it was not to be.

An almighty explosion shook the cave as a sixty-pounder Vampire rocket hit the fuel drums higher up on the rocks. With a sighing whoosh huge flames came rushing through the cave. The furnaces of hell itself had opened among the damned. There were shrieks of terror as flames engulfed some of the boys and girls on the bottom floor. From the corner of his eye Weeds could see a couple of human torches bolting from the lower corridor. Their tormented shouts quickly faded downhill as they tried to run away from their burning bodies.

The cave filled with the stench of burning fuel and flesh. The comrades higher up were too busy wetting their handkerchiefs from their water bottles, hiding their faces in the dampness where they could breathe, to heed the victims of the flames. All movement now focused on survival; the senses of the dwindling group of survivors were dulled by the viciousness of the slaughter.

Then a bomb hit the massive granite boulder above their heads. Ear-drums split as the mighty sledgehammer came down on their fortress. For a moment it felt as if the world was caving in. Yet only a few small rocks were dislodged and tumbled down a crevice.

Concussed and shocked, they sat unseeing in a granite world of dust and smoke, too dazed to care. Time had stopped in the belly of the mountain.

Weeds drifted back to consciousness with ringing ears that could hardly hear. His abused senses were warning him. Vaguely he wondered why. Did it matter? Was it not best just to let himself float away into sleep? The weight of fatigue was on him pulling him down. His eyes closed.

Suddenly wide awake, he registered. It was a familiar smell, the creeping death. Napalm! Looking up at the opening above him he saw the killer acid flowing down the rock face like thin porridge boiling over the side of a pot.

"You hell-house butchers," he shouted at the enemy beyond the roof of the cave. Then to his friends: "Get away from the top entrances, all of you!"

Dazedly he came to his feet and staggered to where Cephas was lying completely inert. One of the MOs came stumbling across the uneven cave floor to help him move the wounded fighter. They could not entirely avoid the napalm, now dripping freely into the cave. But after a struggle they managed to pull Cephas in under the granite dome where the napalm could
A motley group of survivors was gathered at the cave entrance. To the wounded the moonlit sky and beckoning stars were a return to life after the tomb-like darkness and odours of death in the cave. One could breathe freely see the expanse of Mwari above an undefined landscape of shadows.

Guymore was still in considerable pain, but the bleeding had stopped. His legs were intact. He would be able to travel. Pasurai Chirongoma was weak from internal bleeding. He was coughing blood and breathing with difficulty. His powerful physique seemed shrivelled and wasted. Weeds doubted whether he could travel far, or even last the night. Cephas had to be carried out and propped up against a rock. Barely conscious, he clearly was not going anywhere. Of the youngsters, one of the girls and two of the boys had severe burns. They were nonetheless eager to make good their escape.

Danger and Joshua were sent back into the cave with a box of matches to collect whatever weapons and ammunition they could find.

"On the ova-ova we heard the mabhunu talk about ambushes," one of the MOs told Weeds.

"You can bet on it. They will try their best to cut us off, so that they can hit us again tomorrow," Weeds replied.

"Do you think we'll manage to break through to the river?" The MO sounded dubious.

Chakarakata patted him on the shoulder. Now that he no longer needed to hide underground like a mole he felt confident. "Do you think we will fail after surviving that hell-hole in the mountain? Have you bandaged the wounded for nothing? Ah no, my friend. Tonight we will outfox the enemy. Every time they see us we will vanish from their sight like midzimudzarzgara. They will be so confused, they’ll think they are seeing messengers of witchcraft. Our ancestors will make them fire at shadows, deflect their aim. Remember, the spirit war council is on our side."

Chakarakata’s bravado drew nervous laughter. The murmur of voices intensified. The moles were coming out of their hiding places. They were shaking off the shackles the day’s siege had forged in their minds. They were taking courage. For a change Chakarakata felt warm inside.

Danger and Joshua brought a bazooka, a few rockets, rifle grenades and one hand grenade from the cave. The plan of action was simple. Weeds, Danger and Joshua were to use the heavy weapons to draw enemy fire while Commander Nhamo and the two MOs led the wounded and the youngsters down the mountain where the firing was least. Cephas was given the hand grenade as the enemy was bound to catch up with him in the morning.

Before they positioned themselves, Chakarakata raised his hand in salute to Guymore. "Go well, my friend," he said softly.
“You too, warrior of the caves,” the wounded man replied.

Then Chakarakata clasped the shaky hand of Chirongoma. “Get well soon,” he said. “We need you, not as a volunteer, but as a fighter.”

For a moment the moonlight showed a brave smile on stricken features. The young man’s lips trembled as he fought back his tears. Both sensed that this was farewell.

Time for action. Still aching inside, Weeds walked away to the cliff edge and fired a random burst into the night. Immediately the FNs opened up. Tongues of flame leapt from two positions at the foot of the mountain: one due north in the direction of the headman’s homestead, the other quite close by on the eastern slope.

“Keep them busy!” Weeds shouted at Danger and Joshua. Then he pulled back and signalled to Nhamo to move his party down the western slope where it was quiet.

They needed no prodding. One by one they faded behind moonlit boulders until only the silhouette of Cephas was left.

A movement caught Weeds’ eye. Someone had stayed and was tending to Cephas. Coming closer, Weeds distinguished the diminutive figure of John, the boy volunteer from Vunjere. “Run, John! Follow the others!” he shouted.

But the youngster stood rooted where he was. “No, comrade,” he said firmly, “I shall only run in your group. I know the mountains of Munyikwa and Chingombe. I’ll show you a safe route back to Vunjere.”

This was no time to argue. “Well then, keep your head down till we go,” Weeds commanded gruffly.

For another twenty minutes they maintained regular fire to give the wounded comrades a fair chance of escape. Then Weeds ordered Danger and Joshua to get the bazooka and the rifle grenades ready. “Put those boozes and grenades right on that spot on the slope where they’re firing from. While they are confused, we get the hell out of here.”

Itching to get away, the two fighters immediately switched to the heavier weapons. Rockets and rifle grenades lit up the night. There were heavy explosions, shouts of anger and obscene taunts from the guerrillas as the besieged on the mountain psyched themselves up for flight.

Weeds signalled. “Only the AKs go with,” he commanded. The next moment he was off, running down the slope close to the position they had just bombarded. He knew that this was the best way of avoiding cross-fire from the ambush position further to the left. They were four fleeting shadows in the moonlight. Out front, Chakarakata side-stepped boulders and jumped bushes, followed by the others like a small herd of impala crossing broken terrain in single file. Behind the three large shadows a smaller one flitted through the night. From their granite fortress the ancestors looked on. To
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them it was not a winged flight of night owls, as the enemy might have thought, but a little black drongo cheekily chasing three huge eagles beyond the danger zone into the open night.

Passing the ambush positions at Musukutwa was by no means the end of the ordeal. The enemy had infiltrated the entire region, determined not to allow any of the guerrillas or their supporters to slip through their lines to the river. Soldiers lay in wait at numerous village homesteads where they expected the tired survivors and wounded to turn up for food and shelter during the night.

It was into just such a trap that Weeds and his party walked a few kilometres away from the mountain range. Enemy soldiers were lying behind the granaries, while some of their captured girl volunteers were made to prepare food in the courtyard. The scene of deception was complete. A fire, cooking food and friendly voices beckoned the hungry fighters to approach.

Unsuspecting, Weeds led the others into the courtyard. He recognized one of the girls of the youth brigade. At last the normality of village life had returned, he thought. Sit down, rest and be at peace, his aching body told him.

But the girl swung her head in warning, not answering his greeting. Behind her someone stumbled in the dark. Instinctively Weeds and his friends dropped to the ground. Around them the silence erupted into shouts and the ugly stutter of FN fire. Deadly little flames leapt at them, showering them with dirt and dust.

"Fire and roll!" Weeds’ voice echoed back at him. Adrenalin pumping, a madness of tumbling, rolling and firing set the starred sky spinning. And above the racket the booming voice of a white soldier: "Shoot the fuckin' magandanga!"

The death sentence registered in Weeds’ mind. Grimly he told himself to live, to vanish as Chakarakata had done. Then he found himself at the hedge. Another burst of fire from his AK, a reckless dive across the hedge, and he bolted away into the night.

It was a headlong sprint eastwards with homesteads, trees and maize fields flitting by. When he could no longer keep up the pace, Weeds slowed down, veered northwards to the river in a jogging stride. Dogs were barking. Then another jarring sound of heavy breathing. Apprehensively Weeds swung round, bringing up his AK.

"Ndini! It's me, John!" the little mujiba shouted. His gasping breath made further speech impossible. Relief flooded the young commander as he lowered the AK. The two of them just stood there in the moonlight, panting, happy to be alive.

"Danger and Josh. Did you see what happened to them?" Weeds asked.
“They must have escaped. I saw them over the hedge near the gate.” John was still breathing hard, too exhausted for speech.

“Ah, young man, you have the eyes of a hawk and you run like a hare in the moonlight.” The youngster’s shoulders came up.

Weeds chuckled. “Come on, let’s go,” he said.

At a deep gully leading to the Devure the two of them stopped. Weeds reached for his snuff horn. “There are crocodiles and whirlpools in the river,” he said casually. “I’ll tell the elders about the crossing. Maybe they’ll instruct the njuzu water spirits to give us safe passage.” Weeds squatted, sniffed a liberal portion of snuff.

But John had looked round. The shadows behind them were changing, moving. “Watch out, mukoma!” he shouted. A frantic wrench at Weeds’ arm and the two of them went tumbling into the gully. Once again the staccato beat of FNs pierced the night. There were running feet above and the thud of bullets against the lip of the gully. The two fugitives ducked and weaved their way round the first bend. From there it was one long dash for the river. Weeds knew that, if the soldiers reached the riverbank first, he and then John would be cut down as they came out of the gully.

Mabwazhe gave them wings. Tired legs skirted obstacles, pumped mechanically as if they had an existence of their own. John’s breathing was like the whistle of a siren. But he came flying behind his elder brother, bent only on outdistancing the running menaces up top with death in their hands.

In front the gully walls suddenly fell away and before them the mass of water flowed quietly, unperturbed by human plight, muddy swirls silver in the moonlight.

Weeds and John rushed straight into the shallows. In the distance there were shouts. A few bullets sent spurts of water flying. But the soldiers were too far away to fire accurately. Then the swift current grabbed the fugitives and swept them mercifully from sight.

John thrashed frantically, coughing water as he tried to swim. Weeds just managed to grab his collar and pull him around. “Lie on your back and keep your head up,” he shouted. Terrified hands grabbed at his jacket, upset his balance. John was past thinking. Down they went into the swirling water, then floated to the starry surface for a gulp of air. Over and over they tumbled like two bodies locked in mortal combat, carried helplessly by the current. The rhythm of the river was imposed on them: darkness of pounding heartbeat and protesting lungs, interspersed with twirling stars and life-giving breath.

It carried on and on; twisting, turning, over and over. Until all strength and feeling had left them. Only the flooding mass of water now kept their bodies together. Weeds’ mind had started to drift. He no longer felt the cold. There was no need to fight for breath any longer. The battle was over. Fatigue was pulling him into the darkness of rest.
Suddenly, at a bend in the river, the current thrust them into the shallows on the far side. Or had the njuzu spirits snatched them from the might of the flood? For some time, their retching and coughing belonged to another world. So too did the harshness of rock and sand pushing at their bodies from below. As the mists cleared from his mind, Weeds found himself on his hands and knees in a few inches of water. He was coughing and spluttering as he fought for breath. John was next to him, dazed, crying and vomiting water. Only half conscious, they dragged themselves up the river bank. There they lay shivering and panting, too numb to care.

"We must get away from the river, John," Weeds said after a while. The plucky little mujiba, barely believing that he had survived the flood, just nodded his head. Together they struggled to their feet and started walking. As they thawed out they became more alert and started feeling better.

"John, can you swim?" Weeds asked. Silence. "John, did you hear me?" "Yes, mukoma." "Well?" "We have no dams at our village, mukoma. I have never tried to swim." "Did you think you’d walk across?"

"No, vaChakarakata. But I was not staying over there with the mabhunu. I believed you when you said the njuzu spirits would carry us across," John whispered, trying to hide his embarrassment.

"I think they pushed us across, yes. You know we nearly drowned." Weeds chuckled. There was no rebuke in his voice.

"Ah, mukoma, I was scared to death by all that water. But the pit of fire in the mountain and the bombs were worse." John’s confidence was returning.

Weeds listened to the voice of a child, matured beyond his years by war. "Little brother," he said, "I am proud of you. Your belief is stronger than mine. Of course it was the njuzu spirits that carried us across. Where have you ever heard of a man with his boots on, carrying a rifle, and a young man from the waterless land swimming across a flood like that?"

"Indeed. It is quite impossible," the youngster agreed.

In the moonlight the two shadows kept moving, separate, yet close. Events had spun a bond between them.

By midnight they had passed several villages in Munyikwa. John was leading the way to the north-west, towards the border of Chingombe. Desperately tired and by now very hungry, the nervous excitement drained from their bodies, they needed to rest. At a rock next to a maize patch Weeds suddenly slid to the ground.

"We’ll sit here for a while," he said. He primed the AK and leaned it against the rock. Then he proceeded to unroll his treasured packet of cigarettes from its plastic wrapping. Before he could smell the tobacco he was fast asleep. His tired mind no longer registered the barking of dogs.
Weeds was dead to the world for over an hour. It felt like only an instant. Deep in the world of rest pain hit him, jerked him wide awake. Red ants! They were crawling under his shirt and pants, feverishly attacking his skin. Red ants! Red alert from the ancestors! “Move out, move out immediately,” rang the command through his wearied being. The dogs were barking close by. Lowered voices in the maize patch whispered menace.

He grabbed the rifle then half dragged his sleep-muddled little friend away from the rock. He was still wondering how the enemy could have traced him in the moonlight when the rifle grenade hit the rock behind him. A couple of FNs spat flames. Bullets whined off the rock-face into the night.

Helpless rage coursed through Chakarakata’s veins. “My own people working for the enemy,” he thought viciously. “Come get me, you gutless bastards! Come on, you sell-outs of Smith. I’ll chop off your balls and feed them to your mothers!” Raging and cursing he emptied his last magazine at the licking flames.

Then, like Mabwazhe the hunter, he vanished amongst the trees, trailed by his little shadow. From their mountains the ancestors watched. The two shadows, they knew, would skirt the moonlit patches into the grey of dawn. Chimurenga knew no respite. They would speed the shadows in flight, to the land of Rutsate. The hurdles of death had been cleared. Now the little shadow-drongo was chasing the tired bateleur eagle out of the danger zone to safety.

And so the weary warriors jogged away the night hours. Flight was their only option. Without ammo they were vulnerable. Sunrise caught them in Chingombe. At Jekera’s village John stole into the homestead of an aunt of his. A leader of the women’s association in the Topia church, she was an expert brewer of millet beer. She was also a trusted supporter of the struggle. Soon she was walking casually down the footpath to the nearest hill, humming to herself, a black pot balanced on her head. Behind the first cluster of trees she changed direction as John had directed her. It did not take her long to find them where the old mupawa fig tree leaned its arms, heavy with foliage, on two granite boulders.

She observed the bleary eyes, drawn faces, the tattered clothes. Used to such inward-looking, expressionless eyes that had seen too much too soon, she pretended not to notice. Without ceremony she placed the dripping calabash of beer into the fighter’s outstretched hands. Behind those eyes, she knew, were pain and loneliness, courage and fear. In this one’s bearing she sensed a ruthless, driving will to carry on.

Weeds drank greedily, several calabashes full before he was satisfied. “Mother, your beer is sweet and refreshing,” he said simply. “We have not eaten for a day. Now I feel much better.”

She looked at him with compassion. “The bombardment was heavy yesterday. We could hear it in the distance.”
"Yes, it was bad. Many people died on the mountain of Musukutwa."

"That is terrible, my son. We heard that you shot down some of the bhunu helicopters."

"Where did you hear that, mother?"

"Some of your comrades have already passed here during the night."

"Well yes, we killed quite a number of enemy soldiers. But not enough. Too many unarmed villagers were massacred at Musukutwa. There were bombs and fire all over the place."

"Maiwe! Maiwe!" She clapped her hands as if to dispel the image his words had called up.

"Don't worry, mother, we shall retaliate soon. When you hear of white farms burning and attacks on convoys, you'll know that we are avenging the blood of Musukutwa."

She looked away as if to avoid the intensity in his eyes. "It is the way of chimurenga," she said quietly.

John belched like a seasoned beer drinker as he dipped the calabash into the beer pot.

"Hey, you!" Weeds remonstrated, grabbing the little mujiba's shoulder. "What must your aunt think of such a young glutton? And where will you lead me on a tummyful of real beer?"

"Ah, mukoma," John mocked, "I am a man of war. When you've heard the bullets and come through the river you must drink the beer of the people. That is what the comrades say." John was visibly proud of his little speech. Noticing the merriment in the eyes of his elders, he took another manful swig of beer for good measure.

"Come now, John," Weeds warned. "Just now you'll run in circles like a blinded springhare."

"You're right, my son," the woman laughed.

She stood up then, sensing that they had to move on and that they could not tell her where they were heading. As she lifted the pot on to her head, she said steadfastly: "Pamberi nechimurenga! May Mwari and the spirits protect you."

Before they could thank her she had gone.

For the rest of the day Weeds and John kept moving west. Weeds was walking barefoot to put off tracker units. He relied completely on little John's knowledge of Chingombe chiefdom to keep to the wooded pasturage and hills between the villages. At times they stood motionless under the trees to avoid detection as helicopters passed overhead. To the south they could hear planes and helicopters in the region of the Devure river. Further east the occasional rumble of thunder told them that the battle of Musukutwa was not yet over.

Towards midday the heat became oppressive. They dared not stop to rest in case they were being followed. But their senses were dulled by lack of sleep.
and the shocking ordeal they had suffered. They were moving like automatons, willing their bodies to continue, their minds withdrawn into the stupor of fatigue.

Noon was the hour of demons. They could mesmerize your mind into sleep to ensure your capture by the enemy. They could trick you into venturing out into the open in the belief that you were safe. With the sun at its zenith, the threat of darkness was at its most acute. The guardian ancestors must have seen the danger, for they showed the fugitives the half-hidden troop carriers at the edge of the woods, made them hear the soldier’s voices in the village nearby. The heat mirage distorted the trucks, blew them up into giant mobile amphibians ready to give chase.

Dazed minds were shocked back to reality, intensifying their urge for survival. Alert and aware, the two figures vanished into the woods, pushing their exhausted bodies once again to a jog. Weeds knew they could not last much longer. If they were spotted, capture or death would be certain.

“Is there no end to the chase? How long must we run like hunted animals?” he thought bitterly.

Questions about loyalty and betrayal milled in his mind.

In the distance Mount Rasa reared its lion’s mane and ahead of them the Chivasa mountains beckoned. “Run, Chakarakata! Run, little one!” the black granite domes seemed to whisper. “We hold the graves of the elders. We protect the woodlands of Vunjere where there is safety. Here is where we call off the enemy’s hunt.”

And the two of them pushed themselves, draining whatever reserves they had left. Stride after stride the little mujiba hung on for dear life. Beneath the white dust caked on his brow, desperate eyes lay deep in their sockets. This was the final leg of the route he had promised Chakarakata. He would not fail his mukoma friend. He would complete his mission. Up in the mountains where the breeze ruffled the trees the ancestors approved.

The black domes of the Chivasa mountains on the border of Vunjere were already casting long shadows on each other when the exhausted pair at last arrived. Half dead, they walked through the first belt of dense forest into a clearing.

Unexpectedly, reassuringly came the reception.

“Kho!” the bateleur messenger called its familiar welcome.

Weeds looked up. John followed his gaze. Never before had a chapungu eagle seemed so close, so beautiful. Serenely, the magnificent bird soared above, circling a thickly wooded hill. There was no wing-flap, no sudden manoeuvres. Just the simple message written against the fading sky in white and black plumage: “Rest here! It is safe.”

Chakarakata kept looking. His eyes had misted over. He could not let John see his relief and gratitude.
Together, they struggled up the hill until they found the overhanging cliff behind dense cover. Rock rabbits sat watching them. Their dark eyes showed peace, not fear. The reception was complete. Never before had the dried dung of rock-rabbits been so comfortable, nor their sulphurous smell so welcoming.

"John," Weeds said, "I'm proud of you." But the inert figure indicated that the little mujiba had already departed the waking world.

Weeds reached for his snuff-horn. "Chaminuka, Mabwazhe" he started. Then his eyelids closed.

IV

The next day all was quiet. No throb of helicopters, no thunder of dropping bombs. For the moment destruction had ceased. The two-day siege of Musukutwa was over.

In Vunjere two gaunt figures moved southward along the slopes of the Chivasa mountains, well hidden by misasa, mishuku and mountain acacias. They were heading for the little farm of prophet Mushereketo, a Zionist of the Holy Cord, one of the most trusted supporters of the guerrillas. Hungry and weak, they needed shelter where they could eat and rest. They also needed warm water and soap; fresh clothes to replace the tatters left by acid burns, fire and ripping thorns.

Above all, they needed to see a caring face, a friend who would give them space and time to recover from the horror of Musukutwa. Who would ease them out of the terror of the chase, the shadow of death. Who would care and celebrate, even in the midst of bitterness. Such a man was Mushereketo.

Weeds and John waited for him at a distance from his house, having sent a mujiba to call him. It was always safer to steer clear of homesteads. The prophet approached them, his green and red vestments draped all the way to his feet. For a middle-aged man he moved lightly and purposefully under those garments. The thickly braided holy cord was draped over his shoulder, crossing his chest and tied at the hip. His holy staff consisted of a polished bronze rod with a shining antique doorknob attached to one end. In his other hand he held a small bucket filled with holy water. In this attire he attended pungwe meetings, moved round the bush with the fighters and conducted church ceremonies.

But on this day he was distraught. "Rugare ruve nemi! Peace be with you!" he greeted them.

"And with you, man of God," they responded.

When he had taken a good look at them, he grabbed their hands, tears coursing down his cheeks. Weeds had never seen him so visibly distressed.

"Aiwa, bodo, bodo! Oh no, no," Mushereketo eventually managed, having regained his composure. "At first, I did not think any of you would survive
the bombing. I am so happy to see you, Chakarakata, and you, young one. We have never seen such a thing. For two days the helicopters kept coming up and down the Devure. The soldiers put down some fuel drums near the river over there. You could see it from the house. They kept coming back in their helicopters to refuel. Overhead the Vampires kept flying with their bombs. And out there in Bikita the cannon and bombs thundered away all the time. Many people here in Vunjere fled to the mountains, not knowing where the enemy would strike next. The young ones were terrified.

"The spirit of Mwari has shown me the face of a wizard informer from Musukutwa," he concluded.

"Yes, father, it was one of the village elders," Weeds said.

"He will be found and punished by the comrades." The prophet's judgment was crisp and final.

"Yes."

"Mwari also revealed to me the flames and the killing, in the mountains and the villages. Many soldiers died; also comrades, and youth volunteers. But Mwari is most disturbed by the blood of so many villagers who do not carry arms. He will punish the whites. I tell you: they will lose the land. Their steel birds will get tired and start falling from the skies."

"More than that, father," Weeds added. "The white farms will burn. Our rockets will tear the convoys apart. Then the varungu can also mourn their youth and their elders."

"True, my son." The prophet hesitated, then added, "As long as we are not consumed by hatred. As long as we leave the last judgment to Mwari."

"How do we do that, father? How do we not hate when our people are butchered?" Weeds could not hide the revulsion he felt as the Musukutwa experience flooded his mind.

"It is a deep matter, my son. I do not know the whole answer. But it must be possible to fight, yet to respect life."

Chakarakata sat brooding for a while. Then he sighed. "You speak the same words, muprofita, as my grandfather used when he told me about Mabwazhe, the great hunter. I suppose Mwari inspired Mabwazhe as he inspires you."

Mushereketo smiled and nodded. He was wise enough not to question the young commander's concession. There was prophetic work to be done. Briskly he got up.

"The food will be coming soon. But first of all I shall cleanse and bless you. We shall not allow any evil or spirits of the battlefield to follow you here, for this is the holy ground of Zion."

"Amen!" came the response. Weeds and John watched the sensitive hands on the water bucket, the greying head bowed solemnly in prayer. The whisper grew louder. The prophet's body started shaking in preparation for the Holy Spirit's presence that enabled him to do battle with evil.
"Hiya! Hiya! Bu-bu-bu-bu  Grrrrrr!"

A high-pitched roar and a low rumble announced the arrival of Mwari's powerful Spirit. Out on the spirit battle front, the prophet now dipped his holy cord in the bucket and lashed the two faces in front of him with sprays of water. His movements were whiplike. "You evil spirits, prowling around us, seeking destruction; you defiers of chimurenga, I chase you from here in the name of the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. Be off!"

For a while the shaking ceased and the two huddled figures received the laying on of hands. Eyes still stinging and water dripping from his face, Weeds could feel firm fingers on his brow, hear snatches of prayer above him: "Mwari, bless these young ones. Thank you for bringing them under the bombs alive. Strengthen, protect the battles ahead. Amen!"

The prophet stepped back a few paces. The violent shaking resumed. Speaking in tongues was a prelude to prophecy: "Arrerujah! Arrerujah! Grittiwindi-ta-kamenda-right! Forrorichen tek for-mindi-ta Mambo Jehovah of centre orindi witti whoza whoza right!"

Shivering and sweating from the exertion, the prophet leaned on his staff and addressed his friends in a subdued voice: "The Holy Spirit says you are safe here. No enemy will track you here. Mwari says you must keep courage. Within a few days you will meet up with most of the fighters with whom you set out from here. He says you must not leave this area soon. Stay near the mountains until you have regrouped. Mwari says his people will feed you here without betrayal."

"Amen! Amen!" came the relieved response.

"And what does Mwari say about the wounded?" Weeds enquired.

Mushereketo closed his eyes. He became rigid. Again there were tears, quivering lips, silence.

"Mwari says," he continued at last, "that there is much suffering. The wounded fighters will walk far and hide in the mountains. But they bleed and die. Only one of them will return to fight. I'm sorry."

"I hear God's message," Weeds muttered. Squatting, he hung his head between his arms. His thoughts were with Guymore, Cephas, Chirongoma.

The spirit was still active, but the prophet resisted speech, sensing the comrade's grief. Later, when the young commander raised his head, Mwari's message once again came through, clear and strong: "Mwari says we, the black people, will win the war. The land will come! Zimbabwe will come! Amen. Hallelujah."

"But long before the final victory, this land of Vunjere will be liberated. It will become the new Jerusalem of chimurenga. From this Jerusalem the fighters will strike the enemy far and wide with increasing success. Here the mijiba will be trained to do combat. Here they and the girl volunteers will sow crops
to feed our army. Mwari says the surrounding mountains will hold the wounded like a hospital, so that they can heal and fight again."

"May God be praised! Viva! Viva! Viva!" In his excitement little John had clean forgotten the amens. He leapt up with both arms raised, stamping the ground with his bare feet, energetically expressing his agreement with the prophecy. He was delighted that God had chosen his home territory to establish a Jerusalem of war. He already had visions of himself as a ZANLA war hero. The other two watched him, smiling. Then all three burst out laughing.

For two days prophet Mushereketo stayed with them, moving every few hours from one position in the bush to another. He watched while they slept, talked and prophesied when it was needed, arranged for them to get food. Through the mijiba information network, arrangements were made for the regrouping of the returning fighters. Requests were also sent to the teachers of neighbouring schools to provide money to buy clothes for the guerrillas.

In all these activities the pattern of a liberated zone was taking shape. And Mushereketo was one of the leading men of God. He generated the reassurance and trust which helped the fighters heal their inner scars before they returned to the front once more.

President Mugabe's voice filters through Chakarakata's memories. His mind slowly drifts back from Musukutwa. It was more than ten years ago, but he still smells the cordite, the napalm, the burning flesh. He again feels the anguish of the wounded; the terror in the stifling mountain fortress as they waited for the bombs to drop. The hell of Musukutwa will never leave him.

He looks across at two black boxes, clearly marked in white chalk: Guymore and Pasurai Chirongoma.

"Executing the informer did not bring you two back, or the others," he thinks with lingering bitterness.

After the war, when he visited Chirongoma's family in their Munyikwa village near the Devure river, they told him how their wounded son had managed to crawl back home. They had hidden and treated him up in the mountain of the black dome.

"For days we fought for his life," the old father said sorrowfully. "We tried to dislodge the bullet in his chest with the spoke of a bicycle wheel. It was impossible. He was brave to the end. Aiwa, aiwa He was clever at his studies, he would have been a good agricultural instructor. He rests near the place in the mountain where we beat the ancestral drums."

Nhamo and the two MOs had brought Guymore back to Vunjere. For six months they had shifted the stricken commander from one cave to another,
treating him as best they could. Hospitalization was out of the question. The prophets prayed and the spirit mediums called on the ancestors, but to no avail. Guymore's time had come. Weeds remembered the agony in the caves, his friend's arms rotting away with gangrene. While the two of them discussed chimurenga, as if death would never come, the rock rabbits with their knowing eyes kept guard on the boulders outside.

Cephas was the only one who survived his wounds. He was captured at the Musukutwa cave and put in hospital. After eight months he escaped and returned to Vunjere to rejoin the guerrillas.

Thus Mushereketo's prophecies came true. Only one of the badly wounded fighters returned to do battle at the front. And Vunjere did become a liberated zone. A black Jerusalem where Mwari's prophets – traditional and Christian – assisted the men and women of war.

Only the other day, Weeds thinks sadly, the Zionist war hero Mushereketo also died.
A plan was made to capture the enemy camp at Bikita Minerals. The attack on that camp was entirely successful. No comrade was killed or wounded and the camp was taken with ease.

President Mugabe

It was late in 1976, Weeds remembers. A contingent of several hundred RAR and RLI soldiers were encamped just north of the Masvingo–Mutare road near Bikita Minerals mine. They were obviously there to stem the wave of guerrilla infiltration into Gutu South, Buhera and Zimuto. For months they kept patrolling the entire area deep into Bikita.

Life had become too hazardous for the guerrilla fighters operating under their section commanders – Chakarakata, Kasikai, Cringo, Stephen Bonga, Eastern Tonderai and Gondoharishayi. Day after day different sections ran into enemy ambushes and air raids. The local population was being beaten into submission and far too much information about guerrilla movements was being leaked to the soldiers. It was just about impossible to conduct a pungwe meeting in reasonable safety. There seemed to be only one solution: total destruction of the enemy camp!

In his mind’s eye Weeds still sees the blazing fuel tanks lighting up the night sky. Towering flames dwarfed the jagged outline of army tents. Shouts of anger and confusion amongst the soldiers filled him with elation. The surprise was complete. In the distance anti-personnel mines detonated as fleeing soldiers ran into their own minefield.

And from his crouched position the svikiro of sekuru Chiwara rose to his feet. Draped in civet skins, his silhouette reared against the crimson sky. He shook his nkonkoni whisk defiantly at the blazing camp. Hoarsely his voice rose above the din of machine-gun fire: “Death to you intruders on my land! We shall harass you until victory is complete. Forward the struggle!”
RAZEN. Unbelievable. Seldom had the element of surprise achieved such dramatic success for a handful of guerrillas against overwhelming odds.

To the Duma people this chivurenga battle was a personal triumph for their chief, Chiwara. The regional ancestors of the Duma chief had taken a direct hand in the attack. Appearing in the form of his plumed and skin-clad medium John, Chiwara himself, ancient forefather of the clan, had led the young fighters into battle. Was he not the one who blinded the enemy to their own weakness? Did he not come on behalf of the ancestral war council to guide and protect the bush fighters?

For months afterwards the story was told and retold in Duma villages. Fireside stories and guerrilla visits hardened the resolve of the povo. They were learning to resist the intimidation tactics of the Rhodesian soldiers. Thus the Bikita Minerals attack paved the way for an extended guerrilla offensive into the heart of Masvingo Province and beyond into the Midlands.

During the weeks preceding the attack the comrades conducted a methodical survey of the army camp. Ticky Dawira and Nhamo Chekeche were chosen by the six section commanders operating in the area to reconnoitre both camp and mine. Dressed like local peasants, the two scouts started selling fruit in the camp. They received valuable information about camp schedules from the mine workers. ZANLA sympathizers at the mine were ordered to mix with the camp's top brass after hours at the local beer hall and at the hotel. So, in bits and pieces, information was filtered from Bikita Minerals through the youth brigade network to the ever-moving sections of guerrilla fighters.

Slowly a strategic picture of the camp unfolded. Ticky and Nhamo had sent word that all the heavy artillery was positioned in sandbag shields facing the north-eastern highlands. A guerrilla attack, if it came at all, was expected only from that side. None of the heavy machine-guns faced the southern entrance opposite the tar road, as it was considered unlikely that an attack could be mounted from a road where armed patrols moved regularly. Armed convoys travelled up and down the tar road during the day. Besides, the bustle of township life next to and on the tar road would uncover any guerrilla military offensive before it could get off the ground. The scouts also learnt about the no-go area to the north of the camp: this was reported to be an anti-personnel minefield.

As time went by strategy for the proposed attack increasingly preoccupied the minds of the fighters. Chakarakata and his men frequently discussed it. One night, relaxing round the fire after a good supper supplied by the locals, Amon Wadukuza, the machine-gunner, and Kris, the dagger expert, made a case for an attack from the north.
“From that side we have all the advantages: good cover and high ground so we can oversee the entire camp,” Wadukuza argued. “I would like to place my RPG on the crest of one of those hills and shoot the hell out of those artillery positions before they know what’s hit them.”

“That is precisely what you’d like,” Chakarakata thought, observing Wadukuza’s heavily muscled arms. This one, he knew, would carry his heavy machine-gun any distance if he believed he could do damage to the enemy. “But what about the minefield at that end?” he queried. “Suppose we step on some of those mines in the dark as we take up positions?”

“Surely if we stick to the hills we would be safe,” Kris suggested. “From there we can pepper the camp with 60 mm and 80 mm mortars and set the whole place alight. What do you say, Shorty?”

Shorty, the diminutive mortar man, was cautious. “We don’t know how far those hills are from the camp,” he said, pensively staring into the coals. “Suppose they’re just within range of the mortars, but too far for our AKs to be effective. Then we lose half our firing power before we start. Besides, we may not have any direct mortar hits on the fuel tanks before the choppers come in.”

“I agree with Shorty.” It was Shakespeare, the orator. “We can’t take a chance on this one. The attack must be a total surprise, from close up. We need the full use of all our weapons. Because if we fail, Smith’s boys will only bring in reinforcements. Then you’ll see the shit fly round these parts.”

The others chuckled. Before the war he must have been the star of some debating society and he still liked to dramatize. It was still early days for the young fighters, fresh from their training camps in Mozambique. They expected that such a sharp intellect would one day play a leading role in the field of education in liberated Zimbabwe. That was before he ran into a hail of FN bullets at Gokomere mission. He was left lying lifeless, just another shattered body for the enemy to put on show as a deterrent against “subversion.”

Guymore, the sharpshooter who was to be fatally wounded at Musukutwa, joined in mockingly: “You know, Mr Speaker, the shit will be flying when we hit that camp anyway.” Shakespeare grinned as everyone joined in the laughter. Guymore continued: “I think you’re right, though. I always prefer a surprise attack from close range. That way you pick your man for each shot and you can hurt them good and hard while they’re confused. The real question is: from which side do we close in? What about the tar road?”

Jesus cleared his throat for attention. He was the gentle soft-spoken MO, eventually captured by the enemy while tending wounded comrades. Utterly fearless in battle, he was an astute tactician, lacking only the ruthless authority of his section commander.

“The surprise will certainly be greatest if we strike from the road,” he said quietly. “The way the enemy artillery is placed shows that nobody expects us
to chance exposure at that end. Those soldiers aren't fools. They've figured out that a large enough strike force can't come from the tar side without being noticed. But if we can find some way of pulling it off, we've got them. There is no way those heavy guns can be turned round in time if we strike full force from the blind side."

"You're dead right, Jesus," Chakarakata commented. His tone was lazy, yet forceful. "But how are we going to conceal six sections of fighters in the full glare of those township lights on the tar? What if some of those gun-toting fuckers who cross the road every night to the beer hall in the township walk right into us? You know what Ticky and Nhamo report about those shebeen flies."

"You're right, chief," said the burly Wadukuza. "The tar road is out! I'd just love to carry my RPG in from that side easy easy like walking into a cattle kraal to kill the bull for the feast. The only problem is this bull breathes fire and death unless you catch him unawares."

"There might be a way to avoid detection on the tar side." Trinity Chikadaya sounded nervous and excited. He always backed his friend Jesus. "Ah, ah! The miracle worker has found his tongue," Shakespeare taunted. "What god are you summoning this time to pick the maize cob from the coals for us, holy one?"

"Oh shut up, you jackal. You're so fond of listening to your own howling, you never hear the music of crickets," Jesus rebuked him. Sweet-tempered as he was, the MO could not stand gibes at the expense of the shy and the vulnerable. "What do you have in mind, Trinity?" he asked gently.

"Well, you see, I was thinking of the way the ancestors can make people nyangarika," the youngster said hesitantly. "We've all heard from the masvikiro that the ancestors can make fighters become invisible to the enemy. Why can't we consult them about this attack? We always watch the flight of the bateleur and the movement of the tortoise for ancestral messages as the masvikiro instructed us. Why can't we put this other thing to the test?"

"You hear that?" Shakespeare retaliated, looking at Jesus. "I told you this kid is looking for miracles."

"That's enough!" Chakarakata's voice was cold and flat. "Trinity has a point. We have not yet consulted the spirit mediums sufficiently about this attack. And nobody will question the powers of our forefathers. Miracles happen. I have heard of individual fighters disappearing from enemy sight; never of a whole company of fighters. But we'll speak to the masvikiro and heed their advice."

An owl hooted. It was getting late. The guerrilla war council was over. In the dim flame-flicker Chakarakata observed a few nods of approval. Shakespeare brooded, noncommittal. Trinity's attempt at nonchalance did not quite hide the youthful glint of satisfaction in his eyes.
SVIKIRO Pfupajena, senior medium of the Duma people, was a small man. His greying hair and wizened features contrasted with keen, alert eyes. Draped in the colourful cloth and animal skins of the great Duma warrior, who centuries ago had left a trail of bleached bones of vanquished enemies behind him, the diminutive figure appeared transformed. The knowing eyes blurred with tears as the spirit presence of the ancient warrior sent pangs of war-inflicted suffering through his body. Invariably tears heralded the arrival of the great conqueror of many seasons ago.

Once the discussion turned to warfare, those eyes would become steely. The ebony staff was brandished deftly, a spear in the clasp of an avenger. The single cowrie shell suspended on the medium's chest glistened like a protective shield.

After escaping from detention at the district commissioner's office at Bikita, Pfupajena had moved to the safety of the Vunjere farms. Here the guerrilla commanders could consult him regularly without fear of betrayal or detection. Up in the densely wooded hills ancestral advice was imparted to the bush fighters in lengthy discussions. During the build-up to the Bikita Minerals camp attack the consultations were mostly about battle tactics. Behind their questions Pfupajena sensed a need for mystical reassurance. What they were contemplating was a daredevil venture against impossible odds. One mistake would cost many lives.

Section commander Chakarakata, with his wide red headband and plaits hanging down to his shoulders, sat facing the possessed medium. Kasikai, the observant one, looked on silently; Gringo, who liked to affect the swagger of a movie cowboy, leaned casually against a tree; true to his name - the eagle which does not miss - Gondoharishayi sat scanning the horizon for any suspect movement. A few fighters were reclining in the shade of a gnarled muchakata tree.

"Sekuru Pfupajena," Chakarakata said reverently as he measured the dark snuff into the palm of his hand, "we were talking the other day about the old tactic of outwitting the enemy by vanishing from his sight. We may need this tactic in the coming battle. But is it possible for fifty fighters to nyangarika all at the same time?"

"Hmmm I hear you, my son," the ancient voice answered from the spirit world. Arthritic fingers moved surprisingly nimbly to snatch up the proffered snuff. Between sniffs there was a measured pause and wiping of snuff dust from nostrils with the back of a hand.

"You know you are speaking of a proven war tactic which we have inherited from our first ancestors. When I led the Duma fighters in battle we used to creep up on the vaHera warriors. This happened especially when we
were outnumbered. The ancestors aided us by disturbing the vision of the enemy. Before they knew, we would overpower them."

"So it is possible for an entire company of fighters to remain unseen by the enemy?" Kasikai leaned forward.

"Of course it is! I saw it happen often. How else would we have managed to invade this territory and scatter the bleaching bones of our opponents on the plains?"

"Yes, sekuru, we know you're right. We know about your fame in battle," Chakarakata replied tactfully. "But how does one control such a tactic?"

"That, my son, is where the snake rears its head." The ancient warrior smiled at the puzzlement of the young guerrilla commanders. By this time everybody, including the fighters under the muchakata tree, were paying close attention. Pfupajena was a military expert. Trinity Chikadaya made sure he did not miss a word. He did not notice Shakespeare smiling to himself.

"You must understand," the old man continued, "the ability to nyangarika is not something you acquire or control. It is a gift from the midzimu. They are the ones who decide when it happens, when it is necessary for a particular battle. That decision is taken in the ancestral war council. As a member of that council I know. Do you think Nehanda, Kaguvi and Chief Mashiangombe would have lasted a day against Rhodes's white soldiers in the first chimurenga if we had not hidden them from the enemy's sight? I was there. I saw it happen."

"Sekuru, how do we ask the ancestors for this gift?" Gringo insisted, impatience in his voice.

"Ha, little warrior, you have a lot to learn." Pfupajena did not hide his irritation. "You are just a little gringo with many thoughts but little knowledge of fighting. You will certainly forfeit our protection if you lead your men, as you did two days ago, straight into an ambush."

"What do you know about that, old man?"

"I was there, little fighter. Only you did not see me. I was watching you from the sky through the eyes of the bateleur. I warned you through the bird's call and wing flap. You simply ignored the signs when your men cautioned you. Would it not be true to say that you were fortunate to escape alive?"

"Yes, father. I was wrong just to follow my own thoughts." Gringo fixed his eyes on the ground in front of him. He could not counter the fierce gaze of the medium.

"Listen to me, all of you." Pfupajena's voice was crisp, commanding. "Gringo is not the only one making mistakes. You all have to heed our signs in the bush more closely. We, your forefathers, are with you at the battle front all the time. In the cooing of the doves we tell you when your camps are
safe. The *mashavi-shavi* birds warn you about the enemy's presence. When the *pfunye* ducks under the branches of a tree in a hurry you can expect enemy fire at any moment. When the cobra raises its head in front of you, it is a warning. Have you not come across many snakes lately?"

"Yes, we have, *sekuru,*" Kasikai affirmed.

"And? Were any of you bitten?"

"No, *sekuru,* nobody was bitten."

"Do you think such things just happen by chance?"

"No, *sekuru.* We know that the ancestors are taking care of us all the time." Kasikai started clapping his hands rhythmically.

"Yes, yes, it is true!" the men chorused, joining in the handclapping.

Pfupajena nodded approvingly. He drank some snuff-laced water, then shook his ebony staff in challenge at an unseen enemy.

"It is a matter of trust," he continued. "As long as you, our sons, trust and honour us, we shall guide you in battle. If you read our signs properly and obey, you will overcome the enemy time and again. Then you will find that the gift of invisibility comes when you really need it."

Pfupajena was warming to his subject. "Take the escape of my medium, the one through whom I am speaking to you. It happened only the other day. He was in a fix in that prison cell in Bikita. The police had beaten him up. See, the wounds are still fresh." At this point the old medium bared his legs for the fighters to see the lacerations. "Ah! This one was in the pit of despair. But he never stopped trusting me. So I made the two guards forget to lock his cell. Then I possessed him and made him walk out past all the guards. They looked at him but could not comprehend what was happening. He walked straight through the gate into the night, a free man. Had it not been for this I would not be talking to you today. But the war council willed that I should be present here. So I am here and my *svikiro* is here."

The sharp eyes withdrew from the listeners, softening as they turned on an inner world. The spell of possession was drawing to a close. Trying to detain the old warrior spirit a little longer, Chakarakata said: "Father, we have heard your words of wisdom. We shall heed your signs. We shall trust you when we attack the Bikita Minerals camp. Tell us, before you leave - is there no message from the war council about the attack?"

It was not clear whether the shrunken figure had heard. Had Pfupajena already gone to another world? The silence was oppressive among the fighters who had hoped for something more definite. They knew: war was a merciless game of chance, risk, possible death. The ancestors wielded mystical power. Yet even they could not direct all events at will. They were not Mwari, the final mysterious power behind all life.

Once again the grey head lifted, eyes now fixed on the ebony staff. "Two things, you brave men of war, before I go. First, the war council supports your
plans. You must go ahead without fear and hit that evil place with all your might. The signs are good. In the second place, you must consult my younger brother, Chiwara. His spirit has recently selected a medium, a certain John who lives in Chiwara. Talk to this svikiro! Chiwara will give you more light about the attack. He has been the guardian of that area for generations. He knows the terrain of that camp like the breasts of his wife."

A tremor passed through the old man’s body. The ancestor Pfupajena had gone. Svikiro Pfupajena stood up and removed his ritual dress and ornaments. He acted as if he had just arrived on the scene. For the moment he paid no attention to the buzz of guerrilla voices around him. Later, he knew, the fighters would inform him what the warrior spirit had told them.

* * * * *

John, the svikiro of Chiwara, was altogether different from Pfupajena. He was called from his village by the mijiba. They treated him with suspicion because he had only six months previously resigned from the Rhodesian police force. Even the guerrilla commanders who were waiting for the medium near the place where Jimmy Jambaya had been poisoned, were wary and ill at ease. Could this man have been planted to set them up for an enemy trap? Might he even have infiltrated the ancestral war council without detection? It seemed impossible that the senior Duma spirits had urged the consultation with Chiwara, could have been fooled by the recently instated svikiro. But chimurenga held many unpleasant surprises.

Chakarakata can still see the procession of the youth brigade nearing their sentry post, escorting the new svikiro. John was tall, well built, in his mid-forties. He must have known that he would be interrogated, perhaps even sentenced to death because of his police background. But he showed no fear; appeared to be oblivious of the atmosphere of hostility surrounding him. He was wearing his ngundu headgear with pride. Civet skins played rhythmically against the cheetah loin-skin as he strode. Confidently he shook the nkonkoni whisk at an unseen enemy, as if he had ruled an empire all his life.

“Either you’re a very good actor, or else you are our man for the coming battle,” Chakarakata thought.

The commanders were in no mood for dramatics. They were living in life and death situations all the time and they had been fooled before. They wanted to make sure. This time the six section commanders were accompanied by the two detachment commanders of the Bikita B battle zone: Shamhu the whip, and Subshumba the lion machine-gunner. Chakarakata still remembers their gruff, merciless voices. They first addressed John as a Rhodesian policeman, not as a distinguished svikiro. They accused him of collaborating with the enemy, threatened him with the ultimate penalty for his treachery.
"You were hard on our man," Chakarakata mutters as he looks at the black coffins on Heroes' Acre holding the remains of commanders Shamhu, Gondoharishayi, Guymore and the others. "There at Gumba farm, when you were all geared up for the Bikita Minerals attack."

John held the eyes of his accusers without blinking once. He was already possessed by Chiwara's spirit when he arrived. Unperturbed by the verbal battering, he measured out his snuff with sure fingers. The ritual sniffing of snuff had a spell-binding effect on the fighters and youth volunteers around him. By the time he was ready to speak the atmosphere had changed subtly from hostility to stilled anticipation.

"I understand your accusations," he said evenly. "War is a serious business and you have to be careful. Nowadays traitors are behind every bush. My svikiro used to be a policeman, yes. But I, Chiwara, ruler and guardian of this territory, have elected him. Now he is loyal to chimurenga. He is part of the struggle to free the land, just as I am part of it. Before you brothers of the cause were born, I was already resisting the white man's siege of our lands. I saw the first whites settle at Fort Victoria.

"I opposed the first Gutu commissioner who wanted to take some of my land for white farmers. Where were you, my sons, when I fought side by side with Kaguvi, Nehanda, Mkwati and the other messengers of Mwari in Mashiangombo's territory? What do you know about the traitors of the first chimurenga? Come now, tell me how we, the ancestors, deal with traitors in the war council."

The svikiro paused. Silence affirmed his authority. The reprimand was unmistakable. But he was not going to rub salt into wounds caused by vigilant concern. He had made his point. He was an ally after all, not an adversary.

Subshumba was the first to show recognition of ancestral authenticity. He carefully measured out an ample portion of snuff into his hand and held it out to the svikiro. "I greet you, grandfather Chiwara. I honour you as a fighter of the first chimurenga. Precautions against treason are necessary, our lives depend on it. We have no quarrel with the war council. They know how to deal with the enemies of the cause."

The snuff was graciously received. Then followed the double handclasp. Frank eyes probed, then held.

"My son, I see you clearly," Chiwara said. "I hear the wisdom of a true commander. Together we shall celebrate victory over the enemy."

In the ensuing greetings and exchange of ancestral snuff, Chakarakata felt the reassuring strength of the medium's handclasp. It was like being in the presence of Mabwazhe, the hunter. This was no play-acting: John, the medium, and Chiwara, the Duma forefather, were one; loyal to the struggle and ready for battle.
Once they had settled down, Chiwara started describing skirmishes he had seen between the guerrillas present and the Rhodesian army. He told commander Chakarakata about the ambush he and his men had walked into the very first day after they had left Mozambique and entered the Chipinge district; about the death of the machine-gunner who had walked right next to Chakarakata. He told Kasikai and Subshumba about their bitter experiences, how they had lost three men in ambushes laid by the soldiers of the Bikita Minerals camp. He knew all about the ancestral messages sent to the fighters through animals and birds, about when they had heeded or ignored these portents. Details about information leaked to the enemy and their subsequent attacks on two *pungwe* meetings were recounted, until there could be no doubt left about Chiwara's spirit presence all along the country's eastern battle front.

Chiwara went on to prophesy future events. He spoke about huge thunderclaps at Huze and at the bridge over the Devure river. These Chakarakata was to identify subsequently as the guerrilla attacks on army camps at the places indicated by the *svikiro* - attacks in which he himself participated. Chiwara also spoke about a new road below the Pamushana mountains, a road to be used by enemy patrols against guerrilla movements. This was the ancient spirit's foreknowledge about the Binya road which was in fact constructed by the Rhodesian army in later years.

Once everybody was convinced by the Duma ancestor's close involvement in the struggle, commander Subshumba introduced the vital topic: "Sekuru Chiwara, what must we do about the camp at Bikita Minerals?"

For a moment the clear eyes clouded and became remote, as if the spirit was withdrawing from a vision of destruction. Then, suddenly, the *svikiro* rose to his full height. He shuddered, raised the *nkonkoni* whisk above his head, dwarfing his audience. From deep inside his chest came an unearthly growl. It grew and grew, swelling to the thundering roar of a lion. It announced more clearly than words could do: "Attack! Attack fearlessly!"

As unexpectedly as it had come, the noise subsided. The medium reclined with dignity, as if nothing extraordinary had happened. Yet the atmosphere was electric. Then he cleared his throat for speech.

"The enemy camp is on my land. It was built there without my permission. There is only one way to get rid of it. I, Chiwara, shall lead the attack. You, warriors of the bush, will know how to use your weapons. I am aware of the battle plans you have already made. With those I do not interfere. You know how to raise the thunder of *chindunduma* cannon better than I do. But you need me to outwit the soldiers, to catch them unawares, like men still savouring the warmth of their wives' blankets."

*Svikiro* Chiwara smiled and a few of the guerrillas burst into laughter.
"But how can you lead us in battle, father, without knowing the full layout of the enemy camp, the placement of their weapons and their fire power?" commander Shamhu enquired.

"Ah, ah, young one! You can crack the whip at your fighters, but don't underrate us, the guardians of the land. Do you think we are blind? For weeks now I have been looking at that camp. I have been inside it more often than your scouts, Ticky and Nhamo."

"Heso!" Shamhu said with a sharp intake of breath. He was noticeably startled at this turn of the conversation.

"It was not difficult," Chiwara continued. "I walk in there often, wearing only a loin-skin, a few tatters and with my hair soiled, like a madman. I shake the rattle of a beggar and ask for food. Some soldiers take pity on me and give me food. Others laugh at the pitiful creature who cannot find his way around. Imagine that! Laughed at by intruders on my land. Little do they know that they are laughing at their own stupidity. They feel so secure amongst their sandbags and guns. But who is really laughing? Me, the madman! Every time I stagger away from that camp I rejoice at the thought of reducing their stronghold to ashes. That is what we'll do to them. Ours will be the laughter of victory!"

The svikiro picked up a stick, trimmed it, then smoothed the sand with his hand to provide a sketchboard.

"Come, let me show you the picture of the camp," he said matter-of-factly. And there in the dust a rough, yet accurate, map of the enemy camp took shape. Stabbing with his stick at several points on the camp's northeastern border, Chiwara said: "There are the heavy guns, facing away from the camp. Here are the tents behind the guns. Over there stands the big tent where they have meetings and meals. This is where the armoured vehicles are parked at night, right next to the fuel tanks. And the entry point from the tar road is right here."

With accurate movements all the strategic positions were pinpointed, as if the svikiro himself had designed the camp. "To the north and east," he concluded with a wide sweep of his hand, "is the trap of death. Here they have planted those bombs with trip-strings and wires; the ones made to rip off your legs and rip out your guts." His eyes fixed on his own masterpiece, mouth set in a grim line, Chiwara, old warrior of many long-ago battles, was every inch the tactician of modern guerrilla warfare.

Slowly, reverently, Subshumba started the handclap of praise. "Ah, changamire," he said, "your information is even more accurate than that of our scouts. We see now that you have been commissioned by the war council to fight alongside us. Forward the struggle of chimurenga!"

Fists shot up in unison to a chorus of "Viva! Pamberi nechimurenga! Pasi navavengi! Down with the enemy!"
As the cheering died down the cardinal question, the one on which their lives depended, was uttered softly: "From which side do we attack?"

There was silence, stirred only by the svikiro’s calm breathing.

Slowly the nkongoni whisk approached the map. It moved inch by inch from west to east behind the camp, conveying the svikiro’s conviction. “We come in along the tar road at night, from the Fort Victoria side. Yes! I shall lead you in from the tar road. Victory to ZANLA!” And the whisk came down with a thud of finality on the sand map.

“I’m not questioning your wisdom, sekuru,” Chakarakata said. “But what about cars or army patrol vehicles on the tar?”

“Have no fear, my son.” The reply was unhesitating. “We shall not encounter any vehicles. I tell you the truth. If a car’s lights expose us, you can shoot me right there on the tar.”

“And the lights of the mine and the township?” asked Kasikai.

“Lights avail nothing,” Chiwara responded, “when the ancestors blind the minds of people. A whole army can march past them. They’ll look but not comprehend what is happening. Did Pfupajena not tell you how he escaped from prison?”

“Yes, he did,” Kasikai replied, “But that was one man walking out of prison, not a company of fighters marching openly on an enemy camp.”

Chiwara chuckled. “Leave that problem to me. I’ll lead you without mishap to the camp entrance, from where you can attack. The little ridge just outside the gate is never manned. It is the ideal position for your heavy guns.”

“And those of us who have not yet seen the camp, how will we distinguish our targets in the dark?” Shamhu persisted.

“That too is a problem which can be solved. When you are ready to strike, the camp will be lighted up. That I promise.”

Shamhu just shook his head in unbelief. But he could not help wondering at the logic and strategic common sense of sekuru Chiwara.

“I hope you are not going to stand out there in the open, sekuru, when the firing starts. Your medium will not be able to divert enemy bullets with that nkongoni tail of his,” Shamhu jested. The svikiro joined in the laughter.

“Don’t worry about me,” he retorted. “Just crack your whip at the enemy with all your strength when the time comes.”

III

In the days that followed the guerrilla commanders repeatedly met the svikiro of Chiwara at various wooded spots in the Vunjere farming area. They rehearsed and refined their plans of action. They devised alternative moves for every phase that could go wrong and worked out routes of retreat,
the date and place of regrouping, and so on. However much they peppered sekuru Chiwara with questions and pointed out the risks of exposure on the tar road, he stuck to his original plan. It was not easy to argue about battle strategies against the mystical authority of the spirit war council. Besides, nobody seemed able to come up with an alternative plan less hazardous than Chiwara's.

To some of the commanders the outcome of the attack hinged too much on chance factors and trust in the ancestors. What they regarded as military imponderables emerged as certainties in the medium's possessed mind. Yet as time went by, their faith in sekuru Chiwara grew. His short-term predictions about enemy action in the Gutu and Bikita districts were too accurate and valuable to the guerrillas for them to continue suspecting him of collaboration with the army. The svikiro's integrity and courage were reflected in his narratives about the heroes of the first chimurenga. Reliving those historic events welded the fighters together, giving them a sense of destiny as they prepared mentally for the climax of assault.

Meanwhile the guerrillas undertook the all-important task of moving their heavy weapons closer to the target area. Several 60 mm and 80 mm mortars and mortar launchers, heavy RPG machine-guns and bazookas together with their rockets — all smuggled in from Mozambique over a period of months — had to be brought from the southern reaches of the Bikita B battle zone to Chiwara and Vunjere. Here they were hidden in secret caves in the Vinga mountains or buried in plastic wrappings at strategic points. Each section had its own network of hiding places and mijiba guards who could warn the fighters if the weapons had to be moved to safer spots.

When the day of the attack finally arrived, the six units of section commanders Chakarakata, Kasikai, Gringo, Stephen Bonga, Tonderai and Gondoharishayi were all at or in the vicinity of Gumba farm. Each section consisted of eight heavily armed fighters. Detachment commanders Shamhu and Subshumba were also present, bringing the total strike force to fifty men — a veritable army in guerrilla terms. Excited mijiba were liaising between the groups of fighters and villagers who were feeding the men. The mijiba, witnessing such a build-up of ZANLA forces, guessed that something important was about to happen. They set about their tasks in tensed anticipation. Even the fighters were showing signs of tension; despite their courage and training.

That morning commander Chakarakata inspected his men. Amon Wadukuza had polished his RPG with care, wearing the distant look of one possessed — a look which Chakarakata knew boded no good for the enemy. Jesus was relaxed, as he always was before going into battle. Shakespeare was still jesting at Trinity's expense about the coming miracle. The youngster carried his AK with purpose and dignity. His name was not Trinity for nothing. For
him the faith of his church blended with ancestral inspiration into powerful conviction, helping to control the fear in the pit of the stomach before the action started. Underlying all fear was the greater purpose, the righteousness of Mwari – Father, Son, Spirit – who was liberating the land from oppression. Trinity, he felt, was a good protective war-name.

"I am glad sekuru Chiwara is accompanying us, comrade Chakarakata," the youngster said naively when his commander paused opposite him. Chakarakata’s seemingly lazy eyes flickered for a moment. "Yes, young brother. And I am glad you reminded us about our dependence on the ancestors." Chakarakata knew, as he saw Trinity's chest rise fractionally, that his remark would heighten the youngster’s self-esteem and strengthen him for battle.

From the corner of his eye he noticed Kris and Shorty adjusting the carrying slings of their mortars and launcher. "Tonight you’ll start a nice little bonfire when you hit those fuel tanks, Shorty," he said. It was a statement of fact, a show of trust; not even a hint that Shorty could miss in the dark. Chakarakata had his own way of building the morale of his fighters. Coming from Mabwazhe’s hunting tradition, he was at home in the bush. His deep trust in the mediums, the guardian ancestors and the war council helped him to push aside the questions which kept nagging on the eve of an offensive.

For the past twenty-four hours the guerrilla commanders had been having intermittent discussions with Chiwara. The spirit of the ancient Chief never seemed to leave the svikiro throughout the long hours of daylight and darkness. Now that the attack was at hand, sekuru Chiwara no longer discussed the coming battle. Instead he was taking his audience back into the past, reviewing the injustice of white land alienation and the bitter glory of black resistance; resistance which had never quite achieved the fulfilment of liberation. Yet the past held the seeds of victory. The bleached bones of black martyrs were rising in the midst of their guerrilla descendants, urging the completion of the struggle. Through the long accounts of bygone events the message reverberated with growing clarity: our attack is another step in the march of generations, a march through the ages towards final victory over the intruders on our land – towards independent Zimbabwe!

And in the message Chakarakata heard the voice of Nzvanzvike, his storytelling grandfather, and of Mabwazhe, the great Gumbo hunter. His fellow commanders became one with yesterday's living and the wishes of their forefathers. That afternoon, as the march to the tar road unfolded, Chakarakata felt at one with Chinamukutu in his descent into the haunted valley near the Rozvi capital of Danangombe. He was going to do battle with the rhino. Instead of the Gumbo hunter’s quiver-strap he wore a red band around his head. In the place of quiver and bow he carried an AK and cartridge belt.
Nevertheless, it was the reincarnated Chakarakata of centuries ago, marching down the path of history to engage the enemy who had trespassed on his land.

Towards sunset the scouts, ammunition bearers and guerrillas started converging beside the Mungezi river. They had taken great care to skirt the villages, moving through wooded areas so as not to attract attention. Enemy spies were numerous. A single misstep could alert the enemy, which would be fatal to the entire venture. Commanders Subshumba and Shamhu required a full report of the afternoon’s march from each section. A detailed assessment of the security situation had to be made before proceeding to the next stage of the operation.

As dusk turned to darkness only a low mutter of voices betrayed the presence of the strike force. Sporadic chuckles and the faint glow of cigarette butts between cupped hands told of mounting tension and strained nerves. Waiting for action, Chakarakata knew, was the worst part. As the hours passed and the river’s chill stiffened his joints, he shared the aloneness of Chinamukutu’s night watch in the haunted rhino valley.

At last Subshumba the lion machine-gunner stood up. He pointed his bazooka heavenward and said in flat, measured tones: “Time to go. When we hit the tar road, sekuru Chiwara will lead the way. We are now in the hands of our spirit war council. Together we shall turn that camp to ashes. Forward the struggle!”

Weapons were raised to a murmured chorus of response. In silhouette next to the plumed head of the svikiro the nkonkoni whisk pointed towards the stars. The hoarse voice of sekuru Chiwara rang confidently: “Come, young warriors! Have no fear. Our presence shall bring blindness and confusion to the enemy. The land of Pfupaja, Dumbukunyuka and Chiwara will be cleansed in the fire that vanquishes darkness.”

In obedience the guerrillas filed into the night.

Three kilometres from Bikita Minerals the strike force reached the tar road. Without hesitation the possessed svikiro took the lead. In the starlight the ostrich plumes of his headdress swayed in the breeze. He looked to neither left nor right, but walked straight down the middle of the road. It was like the final act of a well-rehearsed play. Behind him the guerrillas trailed in single file. They, too, did not look to left or right, lest they break the spell of the night shadows that were shrouding them. A phantom army passed in the night. No dogs barked. No headlights lit up the deserted road.

As they neared the hotel and township, a glimmer of light distorted the shadows of the marching men. It stripped them of the safe cover of darkness, like enemy searchlights setting them up for the kill. Up front sekuru Chiwara never wavered. He marched with his nkonkoni whisk held high, willing blindness and inertia on the enemy. From the corner of his eye Chakarakata
could see movement in the hotel windows. From the beer hall came the voices and laughter of men and women making merry. Pinpricks of apprehension ran up and down his spine. This is madness, impossible, he thought, momentarily wavering. How can an entire company of fighters file unnoticed past the enemy’s stronghold in full view? But the impossible was happening. There was no alarm. No warning shouts disturbed the precarious peace of another night at Bikita Minerals.

Without ceremony sekuru Chiwara turned off the tar and away from the township lights on to the last kilometre of rutted gravel road leading to the camp. Once more the welcome cover of darkness calmed throbbing hearts. Even here in the starlight they encountered no shebeen flies to raise the alarm. The most audacious guerrilla attack ever was proceeding right on schedule.

The Duma ancestor never wavered. The disciplined stride of the svikiro expressed the will of generations to resist and overcome. In the camp complacent soldiers were resting and drinking in barricaded safety. Only the watchful stars and the crickets hesitated as death marched on the unsuspecting camp.

Close to the gates the little ridge which the medium had identified stood out in the starlight. Subshumba immediately waved to the mortar men and RPG gunners to take up position. Wadukuza, Shorty and Kris were amongst those who quietly mounted their tripods, guns, ammunition boxes and mortar launchers on the ridge. Some of the fighters, armed only with AKs and grenades, moved to the opposite side of the road from where they could see the silhouette of Subshumba. The thunder of his bazooka was to be the signal to attack.

From the tar road came the distant hum of an engine. The drone changed as the army truck turned on to the gravel road. Lights licked through the trees, upsetting the night shadows as the truck approached the camp gate. Chakarakata went ice-cold as he saw Guymore and Magidi caught in the beam of headlights for a moment before they ducked into the tall grass. Detection seemed certain.

But once again the enemy was blind. There were no warning shouts, no screeching brakes. The truck simply rolled up to the gate. Next to Chakarakata the ancient voice of Chiwara whispered: "Here are the lights now to show us the camp."

And sure enough, as the truck turned into the camp its headlights swept across gun positions, tents and stationary vehicles. In the distance loomed the huge mess tent which housed the canteen. This was where the hubbub of voices was coming from.

As the truth hit Chakarakata he muttered: “Praise to the war council. The big guns are unmanned. Tonight we puncture beer bellies.” From below the ostrich plumes came a dry chuckle.
The truck rolled to a halt, engine still running, lights on. Then thunder and fire! Subshumba's first "booze" had gone straight into the back of the truck.

The night exploded into red mayhem and chaos swept through the camp. Soldiers came running from the canteen to man the machineguns. But the RPGs on the ridge cut them down and sent them milling and swearing amongst the tents. Shorty's 80 mm mortar found the first fuel tank. A column of flames spouted heavenward, further lighting up the camp. Men were running in all directions to escape the fire and heat. On the far side some of them had cut the fence and were rushing off into the night. In the distance anti-personnel mines were popping like crackers as some of the terrified soldiers hit their own minefield.

Above the din of explosions and rifle fire the fighters were shouting abuse at the enemy. Wadukuza and Shakespeare were eloquent in their derision. Shorty had thrown off some of his clothing as his own ancestor's spirit took hold of him. When he was possessed his aim was deadly. "Hiya! Hiya! Hiya!" the spirit shouted repeatedly at fever pitch as Shorty, unconcerned about his own safety, adjusted his launcher for the next mortar.

Suddenly a chimurenga song mixed with the din of battle. Chakarakata felt goose pimples of elation break out all over his body. He hardly noticed sekuru Chiwara rising next to him, nkonkoni whisk held high. "Death to you intruders on my land!" the hoarse voice shouted. Chakarakata had to pull the elated svikiro down to prevent him from being hit by stray bullets.

The entire camp was alight with raging flames. From one of the tents came terrified cries: "Stop firing! Stop firing! Hey, sons, it is me, Chief Mazungunye. I'm stuck in here with the bhunu. Stop! Save us from death!" From a neighbouring tent the terse voice of a white soldier snapped: "Oh shut up, you old Zionist bastard!"

"Shut up, yourself, white bhunu pig!" Wadukuza taunted. "Show your head so I can rub it in your own afterbirth!"

When all the mortar shells and bazooka rockets had been fired, Subshumba shouted: "Advance! Cut the wire! Hand grenades into the gun positions!"

With a roar the guerrillas responded. Swiftly they descended upon the crippled camp to deal it the final blow. The fence came away like threads of cotton. There was no resistance worth mentioning. Flat detonations of grenades signalled destruction of the already deserted gun pits.

Abruptly it was all over. Writhing figures of the wounded appeared grotesque in the dancing light of the flames. The receding shouts of soldiers in the distance indicated flight, not attack. The camp had died.

A new sound disturbed the night. Wasps were approaching at speed to sting the attackers. The thud of rotor blades grew louder as they neared the
scene of destruction while searchlights pencilled fluorescent-beams in the night sky.

“Our work is done. Zvapera!” Subshumba shouted. “The choppers are coming. Disperse immediately! Disperse!” Shamhu and the other commanders echoed the order to retreat.

For a moment all the fighters froze. Their mission completed, a deep-throated burst of joyous cheers erupted spontaneously. “Viva! Viva! Pamberi nechimurenga! Down with the enemy!” Momentarily the flames lit up saluting fists, raised weapons, lips wide in praise. Then the ancestors drew the curtain. Their fighters disappeared into the shadows.

Sekuru Chiwara led one of the four groups of retreating guerrillas. He jogged mile after mile like a young man, sticking to dense bush whenever the searchlights and flares of the choppers drew near. Again his knowledge of the terrain proved invaluable. Every once in a while the machine-gunners in the gunships fired random bursts of explosive shells. Never once did they hit a guerrilla. The helpless frustration of those wasps in the air amused the svikiro no end. Occasionally he would shake his whisk at the choppers. “Come down here and fight like men, you white vultures,” he shouted. “Look at those imbeciles. They shoot at their own shadow, thinking it is a gandanga.”

Chakarakata and his men could not help laughing, although they were breathing hard from the jogging. The knowledge of their triumph gave them wings. They could have run all night. Chakarakata noticed that fighters of the other sections were running alongside him. There was DhaBi, Sam Kufa and James Lancer – all brave men he had come to respect.

When the morning sun touched the granite kopjes and colourful misasa and mitondo trees high up in the Chiwara chiefdom, the tired men were safe in their hideout. They would not regroup with the other guerrillas until four days later. Sekuru Chiwara, appearing quite fresh still, sat sniffing his snuff. Somehow he had managed to get his ostrich plumes scorched by the heat of the dying camp, although his civet skins and nkonkoni whisk were intact. He looked ready for hand-to-hand combat.

Slowly, meticulously, the svikiro drew another map of the enemy camp, as he had done before. All the details were there: the fence, gun positions, tents, mess, vehicle park and fuel tanks. With rhythmic movements he started flicking his whisk at the map, erasing it bit by bit. Then, in a final swoop, the whisk came down full force, obliterating the entire drawing.

“Zvapera! It is finished. Only ashes are left,” he said with finality. His eyes gleamed with delight. “You shall see, my friends, the enemy will soon close down that place for keeps. The threat here in Chiwara has passed. You will no longer be harassed as you were before. This victory of ours seals the victory of chimurenga. There is no turning back.

“You, comrade Chakarakata, and all you fighters have fought valiantly.
You have seen what is possible if you join forces with us, with the war council. If you keep reading the signs honour our wisdom of many wars, you shall scatter the enemy’s bones like the armies of Pfupajena did long ago in Duma territory. Then at last chimurenga will give us the country."

In the sigh that followed the spirit of Chiwara left John the svikiro.

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His reverie ends. Chakarakata feels for his snuff horn. How many of the people here today know what really happened at Bikita Minerals, he wonders as he listens to President Mugabe’s voice.

The unseen ones of the war council know. Chaminuka, Nehanda and Kaguvi certainly observed the entire attack. The Duma ancestors know. Pfupajena, Dumbukunyuka and Chiwara were right there throughout the operation. They blinded the enemy at the hotel and the beer hall. They directed the flight of the bazooka rockets and mortars, delivered them right on target. They befuddled the minds of those gunners in the night sky. And behind them all hovered Mwari, God of justice and liberation, in his might and mystery.

Looking at the black coffins, Chakarakata muses:

“You, my comrades of Bikita Minerals, have joined sekuru Chiwara and the others over there. You heroes who came through that attack and fell later, I hear you in the voice of the crowd – Shamhu, Guymore, Gondoharishayi, James Lancer. I hear your voices too, Shakespeare and Jesus, and the voices of all of you whose bodies we never found. See, comrades, the snuff of honour I put down here beside me.”
PART IV

SPIRIT MEDIUM AND PROPHET
"This land was not liberated without sacrifice. It took great perseverance and many years for the liberation forces to unite. The powers could not be harnessed without the sacrifices of the comrades. Sacrifice was of the utmost importance; it involved an attitude that death was more acceptable than oppression and suffering at the hands of the foreigners. So the [liberating] power is pointless without dedication unto death."

President Mugabe

Death was always with us in the bush, thinks Lydia Chabata. She is sitting amongst fellow delegates of the Spirit Medium Association, listening to the President’s speech. The sight of those coffins with the remains of comrades whose lives she once shared has been stirring memories. Now the President’s words “dedication unto death” sweep her back into the past.

She is back at the stream, one sultry afternoon late in 1977. She had gone with some comrade fighters to bathe in a pool. They were mostly MOs, tending wounded fighters in the caves of Unjere in the Chivasa and Vinga mountains. Some of the wounded were in the shadow of death. It was Lydia’s task to find medicine for them. Sometimes she would go to the pool alone. Then, possessed by Seri, the njuzu spirit, she would be carried down into the murky depths where the potent njuzu herbs and roots were to be found.

On this afternoon she stood naked in the pool, brown skin glowing in the sun. She was just seventeen. Standing waist-deep in the water, she looked down pensively at the reflection of her breasts. The nipples stood erect from the chill of the water, conveying their promise of motherhood. “Will I be there when this war is over?” she wondered. “Will I know a time of loving? Will Mwari allow me to bear children?” Her rippled image in the water made no reply. The watery brown features merely looked back with girlish desire for life. Beyond her reflection the sun’s rays probed the depths for the secrets of the njuzu spirits.

Lydia did not mind the furtive admiring glances of the fighters, who were washing
themselves a little way downstream. It was a reprieve from war, a reminder of the warmth and laughter of home life; part of what they were fighting for. She knew her nakedness would not be abused. The laws of chimurenga protected her; the ancestors prohibited sex at the war front.

Looking down into the mysterious depths, Lydia became one with the water. Rivers and pools were the true symbols of femininity, of procreation. Her grandmother, the famous healer Mandisiyeyi, had learnt all about medicine from the njuzu water spirits. After her death her spirit continued to possess Lydia, teaching her about healing. At home her people believed that she had disappeared into a pool when she was three and had lived in the underworld of the njuzu and jukwa spirits until her sixth year. Those first years of her life were nebulous. In the city of spirits she was always in the company of Seri, the njuzu, and Hlatshwayo, the Ndebele jukwa spirit. They would eat together. After the meal the two spirit beings vomited the medicines that their trainee was to use for her healing work back in the world of the living.

The other spirit possessing her was Zano Chabata, the senior ancestor of the Chabata lineage. He was deeply involved with Duma politics in his spirit territory in Bikita. Through his granddaughter Lydia, sekuru Chabata—warrior of many battles— instructed the guerrillas about war strategy and enemy movements. Yet he too was concerned with rain and the water in pools. Throughout her childhood the beer for the mukwerere rain rituals was always brewed at her home. Once the ritual started, she would be possessed by sekuru Chabata and would lead the procession to his grave in the mountains. After the supplications at the grave, sekuru Chabata would instruct the young girls to go and dance at the pools near the foot of the mountain. There, throughout the night, one would hear the drumbeat of the njuzu spirits from their underwater city, calling the rain.

Standing in the pool in afternoon sun she felt the rhythm of njuzu music in the ripples of the water against her skin. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, her breasts started swaying, stirred by the cool caress of the water. From deep inside her broke the piping voice of Seri, the njuzu, summoning the rains to fall. Plentiful rain would bring leafy cover for the bush-fighters; it would also bring new shoots and roots with which to doctor the wounded. Impassioned, Lydia danced.

The comrades watched, spellbound. Those were the breasts of their virgin svikiro playing hide and seek with the water—not the wizened chest of a male ancestor long merged with the soil. Lydia’s movements became frantic. This was the rape of the muse by a serpent from the underworld. The high-pitched cackle of the njuzu spirit announced her descent into the depths. Brown arms flailing, churning up the water in white sprays of resistance. Then consent, as the bewitching bare body sank slowly below the pool’s surface.

Reluctantly, begrudging the pool its mystery, the comrades walked downstream. They knew it would take some time before their svikiro returned to the caves to tend the wounded with her medicines.
THE early moon was already casting shadows between the granite boulders and mountain acacias when Lydia ascended the slope of one of the Chironde hills, south of Mount Rasa, to the cave. She was carrying the special herbs which she had collected in the pool for the ailing guerrilla commander, Weeds Chakarakata.

She had been nursing him for more than two months. He had been carried from the Zimuto farms where he fell ill, first to Chikwanda, and from there to Vunjere. Dr Mazorodze had diagnosed the cause of his illness as poisoning by witchcraft. He had treated Chakarakata at night in one of the cave hideouts on his Zimuto farm, not far from what was then Fort Victoria. The commander’s condition had deteriorated when he was moved eastwards. Gone was the red headband and the jet black plaits which Lydia had so admired. Festering sores all over his head and body had caused his hair to fall out. With his shaven scalp he looked incongruous, stripped of authority. The muscular body had shrunk to a wizened skeletal figure. Despondent eyes lay sunken in their sockets. A raw infection around the navel was causing him great pain. The resolute features which used to inspire courage at the battle front were now set in a mask of suffering and despair. In the twilit cave Chakarakata’s glowing black skin had turned pale grey like faded cloth.

Lydia knew that her patient’s physical deterioration had wrought havoc with his mind. The worst malady was deep inside him. He felt that he had become a burden to the cause of liberation. He could not stand the thought of needing to be cared for. The knowledge that some MOs and mediums had to be withdrawn from the front to treat him and see to his safety preyed on his mind. As they moved him from cave to cave to keep him out of the enemy’s reach, he felt that his condition was exposing them to unnecessary risk. From his hallucinations Lydia gathered that he was fearful of falling into enemy hands, as that could lead to the exposure of his mother and other relatives in Gutu who were active opponents of the Smith regime. He wanted at all costs to spare his family. As his spells of depression deepened, he could think of only one solution.

“I am no more use to chimurenga. I have become a burden. It is time I went,” he had cried in desperation. But in his weakened condition he could barely work the bolt action of his rifle.

It was Jesus who wrenched the AK from his grip. “No, Chakarakata,” he said firmly, “we need you. All the messengers of the war council say you are going to get well. If you die, it will be honourably at the front – not here in a stinking cave.”

Only Jesus could speak to Chakarakata like that. For a moment the dull
eyes flickered defiantly. "The hell with your war council, Jesus. The final
decision is mine," he half whispered. He was exhausted then and seemed to
drift into unconsciousness.

From that day on Chakarakata was never left alone in the cave.

During the past few days there had been signs of improvement, Lydia
thought. A few times Chakarakata had sat up, and he was eating more. This
afternoon even the njuzu spirits had spoken about her patient's recovery. They
had given her special roots to prepare a paste for his sores. But Lydia remained
anxious. She sensed that Chakarakata's inner crisis was not yet over. Doubts
about his usefulness to chimurenga were haunting him, darkening his mind.

Lydia, too, felt that the ordeal was wearing her down. "Ah mbuya, what is
the use of mending his body, if we cannot reach his mind?" she muttered to
her late grandmother, the healer Mandisiyeyi. There was no reply. Only in
the presence of Chakarakata would mbuya Mandisiyeyi take hold of her and
respond to her patient's questions.

Of one thing she was sure. She had to persevere and keep faith. As a child
she had watched her father, a Zionist healer, at work. He did not ask ques­
tions about the mystery of healing or the outcome of his actions. In faith he
kept laying hands on his patients, sprinkling them with holy water and
trusting his Holy Spirit to mend those in need of it. Many were healed. Mwari
alone knew why there also had to be failures. Lydia realized that she could
only do the same. She was but a medium, controlled by spirit forces. Actual
healing lay beyond her. Yet she had to continue playing the role of go­
between, between the spirits and the living. Along with the spirits, chimurenga
had laid claim to her life. She had become part of the fighting forces and their
cause.

"Then why has the cure of Chakarakata become so important to you?"
she asked herself. "Do you want to heal him for chimurenga or for yourself?"
She shrugged ruefully. Such questions led nowhere. Chimurenga demanded
sacrifice, imposed its own unyielding discipline. It kindled relationships,
only to snatch them back in battle. Briefly bitterness welled up in her. Would
there ever be a time to be young? Secretly she could indulge in dreams, even
in romance. But the war and the ancestors kept a tight rein. It was the season
of the hyena, of slinking death and the struggle to survive. Would normal life
ever return? Village voices and a barking dog in the distance told her that life
was going on anyway.

Nearing the cave now, her step quickened. The weariness of the afternoon's
business at the pool had worn off. She had work to do. Tired fancies made
way for determination and youthful pride. She, Lydia Chabata, svikiro-healer
of the ZANLA forces, would nurse this guerrilla back to health, come what
may. Chimurenga needed all its trained fighters. Her task was to help mend
the wounded, so that they could once again face the enemy. It was not for
nothing that Smith’s aeroplanes were dropping leaflets, telling the people that there was a huge reward on the head of that wicked girl svikiro, Lydia Chabata.

She paused near an outcrop of rocks. She could mimic the little dabga owl to perfection. Her call was soon answered by the three melancholy hoots of a large owl. It was Matizamhepo, the faithful MO guarding the cave entrance, signalling that she could approach.

“You’re late, vaChabata,” he said, a note of reproach in his voice. “We’ve been waiting for you to come with the medicine. Chakarakata is running a temperature again. His mood is dark.”

“Ah Matizamhepo, you sound like an old woman,” Lydia remonstrated. “Stop complaining and help me carry these herbs!” She pushed the bundle of medicine into his hands. “Careful now,” she cautioned. “Today grandmother and the njuzu spirits have shown me the best pool-medicine in all Zimbabwe. These powders will cure Chakarakata, not those rubbish pills you MOs get from the whites. They know nothing about the diseases of our land.” Lydia seldom missed an opportunity to slate the remedies of rungu; the MOs were only too happy to acknowledge the power of traditional medicine.

Together they proceeded between granite boulders down the uneven passage. Ahead of them the flame of a paraffin wick cast a wavering light on the saltpetre-streaked rock walls of the cave.

Inside Jesus was reasoning with Chakarakata. He had spent more time than any other MO in Chakarakata’s company in a succession of cave hideouts. He kept his commander informed about developments at the front and persistently tried to rouse his flagging spirits.

“You won’t believe me, Weeds,” he was telling his friend, who reclined against a rock, “but the news about Kasikai and Subshumba ambushing those soldiers whose truck had hit a land-mine is true. Many of the enemy were killed.”

“So what?” Weeds retorted. “That’s just one good break. We remain outnumbered and outgunned. Smith will just push in more men, more aircraft, more weapons. It’s the same old story.”

“That is where you’re wrong, friend,” Jesus countered. “All the latest reports indicate that the pattern is changing. The enemy no longer follow our men into dense bush. During contacts they fire wildly. They bluff themselves by keeping up their fire after we have withdrawn. But they don’t do follow-up operations like they used to. I’m telling you, those soldiers no longer want to fight.”

“It’s no use, Jesus. You’re just telling me stories to put heart into me. If the enemy are losing their nerve, why are they dropping those pamphlets about rewards on my and Lydia’s heads? Why are they still sending out their spies to try and trap us?”
“They’re still trying to hunt down the known leaders in our ranks,” Jesus acknowledged. “That’s true. If they succeed, it will make good propaganda. But they no longer send in their soldiers all over the place like they used to. When last did a company of soldiers drive into Vunjere? Months ago. And yet they know we’re operating in this area; they know we’ve declared it a liberated zone. Does that not show a change in their strategy?”

“Perhaps,” Chakarakata conceded. “But we shouldn’t let ourselves be fooled. We must remain vigilant. The enemy knows many tricks. I’m not sure our hiding places up here are as safe as you say. You know how risky it is to stick around one area too long. Sooner or later their informers get to hear about us. No! You and Lydia and the others must not get caught because of me.”

“Perhaps,” Lydia thought. She and Matizamhepo had remained standing at the cave entrance lest they disturb the two friends’ conversation. Chakarakata’s reasoning still troubled the svikiro-healer deeply. Mentally he seemed to hang back in the shadows of despair, despite his physical improvement. Lydia suspected that he was still bent on self-destruction.

Jesus raised his hands in protest. The little flame cast his outstretched fingers in grotesque, shadow shapes against the wall of the cave. “No, comrade, no!” he remonstrated. “You underrate our own mujiba information network. The young ones are as vigilant as rock rabbits. They’re always a few steps ahead of the enemy. Have they not warned us each time it became necessary to move? And did our forefather Chabata not warn us in advance about the informer we disposed of last week?”

Chakarakata glowered sullenly at the MO. Lydia guessed the conflict behind the sunken eyes. Her patient was fighting the unseen adversary inside himself.

She cleared her throat to make them aware of her presence. Then she walked to the far side of the cave where her own blankets lay, sat down and started clapping her hands.

“Good evening, comrades Chakarakata and Jesus,” she greeted them.

“Good evening, comrade Chabata! What has the good grandmother sent us this time?” Jesus asked. He had grown used to Lydia’s presence and did not hide his pleasure at seeing her. Unwilling to disclose his own fondness of her, Jesus watched her noncommittally.

Lydia smiled happily. “Good news, comrades, very good news,” she said. “Both mbuya and the njuzu spirits predict the complete recovery of our commander here, vaChakarakata.”

“Good! Good!” Matizamhepo, still standing at the entrance, clapped his hands in approval. “But come to think of it, isn’t that what they’ve been predicting all along?” Jesus laughed. Even Chakarakata could not altogether hide a look of amusement.
“Not like this, gandanga,” Lydia retorted confidently. “This time was different. Today they made me work harder than ever at the pool. The medicine they gave me this afternoon is super-strong. Mbuya has no doubt it will hasten comrade Chakarakata’s recovery. I’m going to mix a paste from these roots immediately.”

“Well, you’re the healer. And tonight I am the guard. So I’d better get back out there. If you do your job as well as I do mine, Chakarakata will be fighting fit tomorrow to chase the mabunhu out of the country.” Pleased with himself, Matizamhepo raised his hand in mock salute, then withdrew into the cave passage.

Lydia started donning her headgear of soft rock-rabbit skin, tied her mbuya’s white and black shawl around her hips and slung the njuzu’s python skin across her shoulder. Her demeanour changed dramatically. Gone was the uncertain teenage girl treasuring the softness of romance. Now she was the professional healer: the grown woman Mandisiyeyi, a person of repute and authority. She busied herself with the medicine.

Crooning an ancient song of the pool, she deftly selected the special roots for the mixture. Then she started grinding them with a round river stone on a granite ledge. Backwards and forwards her healthy young arms moved. Between them two firm breasts played under the faded cloth of what was once a uniform. There was no hint of coquetry in her manner. Beads of perspiration formed on her face and arms.

Backwards and forwards her body swayed, as if to the rhythm of unseen drums. The little flame etched glistening lines on her damp skin. Her breathing and the sound of the grinding stone were the only sounds in the cave. Watching eyes became part of the ritual. Backwards and forwards the promise of life replenishing diminished life. Backwards and forwards caught up in the chain of generations, ancient wisdom. Backwards and forwards establishing contact with the spirit-world.

Suddenly Lydia trembled and sighed. She sat back, still breathing hard, sweat running down her face.

“Good evening, warriors of the bush,” she greeted them in the deep, rasping voice of an elderly woman.

Jesus and Chakarakata clapped their hands respectfully. “Good evening, grandmother Mandisiyeyi. You have come. We see you,” they said.

“I have come from the wards without water. I am thirsty. Pass me some water.”

Jesus stood up immediately, filled a gourd from one of the pots and handed it to the mbuya. She drank noisily, slaking the great thirst of a desert world. Then she threw a little water into the wooden bowl which held the dark root powder. With deft movements she stirred the mixture. Then she pounded it with a miniature pestle into a dark porridgy paste.
“Now help me wash the sick warrior so we can apply this medicine to his sores,” she told Jesus. Familiar with the mbuya’s ritual, Jesus helped Chakarakata prepare for his daily bath.

Mbuya Mandisiyeyi studied the sores, then declared with satisfaction: “The colour of your skin is greatly improved, young brother. Life has come back to it. The sores are receding and your hair shows signs of growth. You will soon be well.”

Chakarakata’s eyes remained joyless. He was tired of reassurances, of spirit-possessed therapy. “Mbuya,” he said cynically “you’re always telling me that I will get well; but all these months my body has remained weak. Look at me! I’m just bones covered with skin. There is no warrior left in me. You had better go and nurse other fighters, ones you can still heal. I am no more use to the struggle.” A harsh note had crept into his voice. It came from the pit of despair. As if to blot out the hands of Jesus and the mbuya carefully applying the dark ointment to his sores, he turned his head away and closed his eyes.

“Patience, young brother,” Mandisiyeyi urged; her voice was concerned. “The witch who poisoned you did not just attack your body, she also got at your spirit. She was jealous of your leadership in war, it kept you from sleeping with her. So she planted seeds of doubt in you. As your strength returns, so your spirit will heal. Mwari alone finally removes inner darkness. You should know that. You are a church member.”

“Sure, sure,” he said irritably. His eyes remained closed. He lay passively, not resisting the treatment, but beyond talk. He had barricaded his inner world where he was fighting the phantoms of a strained imagination, the demons of darkness.

Later, after mbuya Mandisiyeyi had left, Jesus and Lydia were conversing in low tones so as not to disturb their patient. Chakarakata had fallen into a restless slumber. He was still running a temperature, his mind in turmoil. Tossing about on his bed of dry grass, he muttered commands in some hallucinatory battle, moaned incoherent protest.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright. He looked around him, suspicious and bewildered. Then, turning to Lydia, he commanded gruffly: “I must speak to sekuru Zano Chabata at once!”

“As you wish, comrade,” she responded calmly, hiding the dread which overpowered her. The eyes that held hers were not sane. Despair had made way for cold, deliberate menace, a look she had never seen before.

Perhaps the end was near for Chakarakata, she thought as she collected the battle dress and spear of sekuru Chabata.

“This is the last crisis,” she told herself. “The hour of the hyena, sent by the witch. The beast has come to claim its victim.” In the shadows of the cave she could see the destroyer’s vicious jaws hovering above its prey.
Evil was invading the cave. It was robbing the patient's mind of reason. Powerless to resist, the weakened warrior was being pushed to the edge of the pit. His call for sekuru Chabata, Lydia sensed, was a last desperate bid for life; an anguished cry to the ancestors of chimurenga to stay the bewitching thrall of darkness engulfing him. Worse still was the spell of blindness that the evil was casting on Jesus. Insensible to the crisis and overcome by fatigue, the loyal MO was on the point of falling asleep.

Lydia shivered. Faced with destructive forces beyond her control, she all but panicked as she clad herself in Chabata's battle dress. She had to hurry, call in her forefather, before she too was rendered powerless by the witch. With trembling hands she measured some snuff into her wooden bowl of water, then gulped the ancestral potion. As her stomach turned to fire she belched and growled at the dancing shadows around her. Then she relaxed as she felt the approach of sekuru Chabata. With the arrival of spirit support, the weight of dread lifted from her young shoulders. Now she could counter the terrifying stare of her friend, turned stranger by the witch. She raised Chabata's spear. Pointing it at the shadowy hyena jaws behind Chakarakata, she ordered in a guttural voice: "Be off, you beast of prey! Out of here, you witch of carrion! Go and devour the livers and minds of the enemies of chimurenga!" Then her body started twitching and her own mind faded as sekuru Chabata took over.

Possessed, she was only vaguely aware of what was happening. She knew that the ancient forefather was arguing with Chakarakata, urging him to give up all thought of suicide and reassuring him about his complete recovery. There were visionary predictions of future battles and talk about Chakarakata's heroic role in them. The trance carried on, as if it would never stop. Snatches of the cave scene entered her consciousness. At times the face in front of her was blurred, then for seconds it stood out in sharp relief. One moment there were the eyes of a stranger, taunting. The next, they were the eyes of a friend, full of vulnerable uncertainty. The two of them were pawns in a struggle between ancestral light and uroyi darkness. At the eye of the storm, their senses buffeted, their resources spent.

The face in front of her vanished. A powerful convulsion and an ancient war cry signalled the departure of sekuru Chabata. Lydia shook her head as she came to her senses. Chakarakata, she noticed, had collapsed sideways on his straw bed. He was breathing evenly now, fast asleep. For a long while she sat, staring blankly at the flicker-flame, too tired to think.

The damp chill told her it was past midnight. She reached for her blankets without removing Chabata's battle dress. She even kept the ancestral spear clasped in one hand. It reassured her: in sleep one is more vulnerable to witches' attacks. She wanted to make sure that the occupants of the cave were safe should the evil forces launch another onslaught before daybreak.
But sleep would not come to her. Exhausted as she was, Lydia lay tense and worrying about Chakarakata’s well-being. Were all her efforts to help restore her patient’s health to be vain after all? And were the predictions of mbuya Mandisiyeyi and the njuzu spirits sheer make-belief? She resented the doubts which the night’s events had aroused in her mind. She envied Jesus his oblivion to the warring spirit forces. She had not snuffed the wick, so the irregular play of shadows and light on the cave walls continued.

She must have dozed off when a movement to her right jerked her senses to the alert. Wide awake in an instant, she turned numb with fear as she heard Chakarakata pushing his blankets aside. From the corner of her eye she could see him: he staggered to his feet and shuffled unsteadily to the sleeping figure of Jesus. Feigning sleep, she watched from behind lowered eyelids. Apprehension stifled her, yet she managed to breathe evenly.

Carefully, deliberately Chakarakata was unclipping the hand grenade from the belt of his sleeping friend. Weakness slurred the movements of his frail hands, but there was no doubt about his intentions. The witch had won the battle of wills. Weeds was standing on the precipice of his life, ready to fling himself into the abyss. For endless moments he stood looking at the grenade in his hand. Then, abruptly, he stumbled down the cave passage.

The thought that Weeds was about to die shocked her into action. She flung off her blankets. Chabata's spear still in her hand, she leapt up, shouting at the top of her voice: “Matizamhepo, stop him! Stop Chakarakata! He has taken the hand grenade!” Her voice echoed through the labyrinth of boulders.

Jesus was on his feet in an instant. Dazed with sleep, he took one look at Chakarakata’s empty berth, then rushed past Lydia down the passage. Terror-stricken, she stood waiting for the grenade to explode. Then the world caved in around her. She sank to the cave floor. In the ancient warrior’s battle dress lay a defeated teenage girl, sobbing in anguish.

Overcome by grief, Lydia did not hear the scuffling feet in the passage, nor the shouts of the two MOs. She was still waiting for the explosion. She felt betrayed by the man she had come to worship. Her sobs were raw with the hurt of futility.

Then the two MOs walked into the cave, half carrying the barely conscious Chakarakata between them. His arms were slung over their shoulders, his limp feet dragged along the rough surface.

“I pinned him down just in time,” Matizamhepo was telling Jesus. “When he heard me coming, after Lydia had shouted, he tried to draw the pin. Luckily he was too weak.”

“NaMwari! That was close,” Jesus said. “To think I was lying there fast asleep while he took the grenade from my belt. From now on, Matizamhepo, we will guard comrade Weeds day and night until this spell is broken completely. Lydia was right: that bitch of a muroyi has crippled his mind.”
"Yes, that is so. But Mwari and the spirit war council will get rid of this evil, I know. The worst is behind us."

"Ah, Matizamhepo, the rays of the sun are all you're prepared to see. I hope you're right," Jesus said.

Chakararaka groaned as they lowered him onto his grass bed. The exertion had drained what strength he had left. In the dim light his face was grey.

Lydia's sobs filled the cave. But it was no longer the grief of a disillusioned teenager. From her chest came the raw moans of a forsaken old man. Sekuru Chabata had returned. In recognition of his presence, Jesus and Matizamhepo sat down beside their friend, clapping their hands.

"Why, comrade Weeds? Why?" The ancient warrior, slumped in his battle dress, croaked his disappointment between sobs. "Why do such a thing when you know you are needed to lead our fighters in battle? Why do you not heed me and the mibuya when we tell you you will recover? Did we not tell you you would be safe from the enemy until you have regained your strength? Are we, the messengers of Mwari, not more powerful than the forces of witchcraft?"

Eyes closed, Weeds nodded his head feebly in affirmation. Gradually the sekuru's sobs and reproaches gave way to more positive talk about future glories and the final victory of chimurenga. The two MO's nodded assent. Chabata's changing mood turned their anguish to relief and renewed strength. Once again they felt fit to join their forebears in the march against the powers of oppression.

Sekuru Chabata departed once he was satisfied that calm had settled amongst the cave occupants. Lydia was left numb and drained. Indecisively she stared in front of her, the spear still gripped in twitching hands. She could barely move.

Matizamhepo realized that the girl had been taxed to the limit. She had drawn unselfishly on her reserves. He got up to help her to her straw bed.

"Come, little healer," he said affectionately. "It is time you rested. Tonight you have saved our friend. Now you can sleep in peace. Jesus and I will take turns to sit with Chakararaka until you wake. And remember, we're proud of our svikiro."

His warmth brought back the tears. "Thank you," she whispered lamely as she sank back on the dry grass. Just a vulnerable girl, sobbing herself to sleep. Matizamhepo stood watching until she breathed evenly.

Lydia watches Weeds' spruce, relaxed figure sitting amongst the black coffins of his friends, listening to the President's speech. In 1977 he nearly made the final sacrifice himself. Now there are no signs of those tortured months in damp, comfortless caves. Gone is the twilit granite world, the putrid smell of
could blow up pretty rapidly for a young svikiro. It was easier for a section leader to vent his irritation on a defenceless girl than to clash openly with a rival commander. All he had to do was isolate the scapegoat from her guerrilla supporters and subject her to a quick trial in the seclusion of the bush.

That was what happened that day near Zinhata township in Vunjere. Lydia was summoned to appear before a court composed of company commander Subshumba and the fighters of one of his sections. When she was called her heart started pounding. She had not operated with these men before. What did they want with her? There was no time to find Chakarakata, Shorty and her other friends. They were all further south, preparing for a big offensive against an enemy camp at Binya Road.

When she approached the group her worst fears were confirmed. The men were openly hostile, ready to condemn her. For a moment she panicked, cold fingers clutching at her heart. Then she took hold of herself. Sekuru Chabata will get the spirit war council to protect me, she thought. Composing herself, she sat down opposite the semicircle of armed men who were reclining against boulders in the shade.

Subshumba came to the point immediately. His voice was ominous when he said: "Lydia, we are putting you on trial for serious offences against the struggle." He nodded to Kris to commence.

"We are told," Kris charged her, "that you appear naked amongst the fighters."

"That is true," Lydia responded.

"That makes you a prostitute," Kris continued. "A prostitute diverts the men from their commitment to fight the enemy. You know well that prostitution is not allowed in this war. Because of your whoring you are an enemy to the cause."

"I spit on this accusation," Lydia said, angry in spite of her predicament. "You have no evidence that I am a prostitute. There is no such evidence and you, comrades, know that. I know and obey the ancestral laws better than you do. The only reason I sometimes appear naked among the fighters is that there is nowhere to bathe in private. That, too, you know. I am on good terms with the comrades precisely because I do not sleep with them."

"Just listen to her cheek," Kris said. The others laughed.

"You had better watch your tongue, little virgin," Subshumba warned sternly. "We have had enough reports about your misbehaviour. Anyway, who gives you the right to command the guerrillas to move in this or that direction? Are you a commander of the forces?"

"Comrade Sub," Lydia responded, thoroughly roused by the unfair accusations, "you know as well as everybody else that I am not assisting the fighters by my own wishes. I have been a svikiro for many years. My com-
mission comes directly from the ancestors of the war council. Sekuru Chabata, who possesses me, receives his authority from this council. The masvikiro at Chimoio have confirmed this. Tell me of one instance where sekuru Chabata has misled the ZANLA forces!"

"Our quarrel," Dakota chimed in, "is not with sekuru Chabata. We also believe that the ancestral bones have risen to help us fight. No, it is the immoral behaviour of Chabata's medium that we want to stamp out."

"Then why don't you give me a fair trial in the presence of the comrades with whom I have worked all this time?" Lydia asked.

"Do you think we are going to get straight answers from people whose minds you have bewitched?" Subshumba asked sardonically.

"Oh God, no!" Lydia thought. "This is it. The ultimate charge against which there is no defence." If Subshumba could manage to brand her a witch, not even Chakarakata nor any of her commander friends - all of whom ranked lower than Subshumba - could save her. She looked defiantly at her judges, but her shoulders sagged. Subshumba knew he had her cornered.

"We have heard, little virgin," he continued cruelly, "that you have carried out assignments of spying on enemy camps and installations on behalf of your guerrilla friends. Now then, as you are obviously a whore and a witch who has infiltrated our ranks, how do we know that you will not turn traitor sooner or later and sell us out to Smith's soldiers? Hey? How can we be sure? You know too much. You are a risk we cannot afford!" Subshumba's words were cold and deliberate. They spelt just one thing, Lydia knew: execution.

Desperately she shouted: "You're twisting things. You judge me on lies, lies, I tell you! I am not a witch. Mwari knows that. The ancestors know that. If you kill me on false grounds my spirit will rise against you as a vengeful ngozi and wreak havoc in your families. Mwari, too, will punish you."

"Shut up!" Dakota ordered angrily. "You're in no position to threaten anybody. Your threats expose you as a witch."

That was when she started to sob. Her position was hopeless. The men facing her were determined to eliminate her. They were convincing themselves that they would further the cause by doing so. Her mind was furiously searching for reasons. Where had she gone wrong? Was Sub jealous of her close ties with the other commanders? Had some of the fighters spread false stories about her naked bathing? Was their judgment clouded by too much mbanje?

She could find no answers. As the day wore on, Subshumba and his men continued to debate Lydia's case amongst themselves. It was clear that they had reached consensus about her fate. They were no longer paying her much attention. A prostitute and a witch was simply removed from society. Such an evil person did not deserve a proper hearing. In her heart Lydia knew that she had been convicted even before the so-called trial.
Execution was scheduled for the next day. That night she did not sleep. The comrades took turns guarding her where she sat by the embers of a dying fire. They ignored her. Kris was the only one who, during his watch, took the trouble to speak to her. From him she learnt that her trial had been kept secret. Subshumba was aware of the opposition of fighters who had benefited from sekuru Chabata’s revelations. He wanted the case concluded without interference. Although Kris held out no hope that there could be a reversal of the verdict, Lydia thought for a moment that her guard was having second thoughts about the judgment.

But hope faded as Kris was replaced by another guard and the hours went by. Even the stars seemed less bright than usual that night. Were they averting their gaze in sheer helplessness? Were they already mourning her death? She felt utterly desolate. Why did mbuya Mandisiyeyi or sekuru Chabata not come to her aid? Who would comfort her? Bitterness welled up in her as she thought about all she had sacrificed for the struggle. She could not bear the thought of coming to a shameful end, branded unjustly by fellow fighters as an immoral witch and an enemy to chimurenga. She had realized all along that she might die at the front. To be shot by Rhodesian soldiers in combat would have been honourable. But this? To be shot in cold blood by comrades! Who would ever be bothered to clear her name?

She kept recalling the helpless anger she had observed in the eyes of some chimurenga offenders whom she had seen judged and executed at punge meetings. She herself had been instrumental, through sekuru Chabata, in detecting and condemning varoyi traitors. Now she faced the same ordeal. She had rarely taken time to think about the proven guilt of those luckless people. Did all of them deserve death? Could the ancestors mistakenly condemn innocent people? It was an ugly question, yet it hung in her mind. She could not dispel the thought that her own execution in disgrace could be a retribution for the blood of guiltless victims of witchcraft accusations. Finally she decided that if she should live, she would campaign for fair treatment at future trials conducted by her ZANLA friends.

That night she shed her childhood. Only the bleak stars witnessed her torment. And Mwari must have heard her fervent prayers, for despair and lostness made way for a calm she had never known before. When the stars paled in the eastern sky and the comrades started to move, they were surprised. There was no trace of the tearful teenager, nor of what they had firmly believed the previous day to be a promiscuous witch. Instead they saw a serene young woman seated by the ashes of the night’s fire. Fatigue and peace gave her eyes a maturity beyond her years. Her composure unnerved her executioners.

Subshumba, however, was committed to the verdict of his court. His leadership was at stake. Although he sensed uncertainty underlying the
sullenness of his men, he could not now back down. After all, he was convinced that he was ridding *chimurenga* of a dangerous impostor. Compassion could cloud one's judgment and make one succumb to the treachery of doubt. The best thing was to get the unpleasant business over with swiftly and then proceed with the war.

There was no hesitation in his voice when he commanded crisply: "We march immediately to the mountains over there." He pointed towards the sun-tipped granite outcrops of the Chivasa range on the Vunjere-Chingombe border. "There," he added callously, "we shall bury this prostitute witch, together with her evil ways."

Instead of cheering, Subshumba's men nodded sullenly. Their lack of enthusiasm merely angered their leader. Grim determination lined his face as he set off at a fierce pace towards the mountains.

To Lydia it was a relief to be on the move again after the night's vigil. Movement spelt life. Young rays of light in the morning sky rekindled her hopes of reprieve. Tired as she was, the fragrance of melting dew on grass shoots refreshed her. She inhaled deeply as if to recapture those early mornings in her father's fields. All of nature was reaching out to her, offering support and protection: the sunlight playing amongst the new leaves of the *mitondo* and *misasa* trees, the drongos and bulbuls flitting between their branches, the distant voices of peasants signalling the start of just another day of toil in the fields. The changing scenery of the Vunjere farms invited her to live. The granite domes of Chivasa held adventure, not threat.

Only the resolute stride of Subshumba belied the promise of life. His boots churned the pale dust of old farm roads into powdery phantoms leading the death march.

All too soon they reached a clearing at the foot of a densely wooded mountain. A great granite dome towered above them. It cast its shade over the death squad and its prisoner, as if to hide the shameful act about to be perpetrated in the name of freedom. There was to be no reprieve. She was to die in utter humiliation, denied any form of ceremony for a decent departure. "Take off your clothes!" Subshumba commanded tonelessly.

Lydia shuddered. This was the final insult. She turned, faced the fanatical gaze in the commander's eyes. "You are making a terrible mistake, Subshumba," she said. "I am neither witch nor prostitute. You have not proved my guilt. Your verdict is based on rumours. I have the same right to a fair hearing as any other freedom fighter."

Subshumba prodded her with his AK. "No time for arguments. I never expected you to confess your evil deeds. But your witchcraft will not confuse us as it did the others. Get on with it. Strip!"

For long moments Lydia looked at her executioner. His cold eyes were expressionless.
She started to strip. Withdrawing into an inner world, she did not notice the looks of admiration and lust of the men around her. The beauty of her full breasts and the prospect of blood spurting from the alluring body transformed them. Their hesitations were swept aside by the ancient urge of men of war to sacrifice life, to destroy.

"Your pants as well," Subshumba ordered.

"Bodo!" she shouted defiantly. "Do what you have to do." She sank to her knees, arms crossed over her breasts.

"Very well," Subshumba said with finality. He moved to where she could see him. Deliberately he removed the magazine from his AK. One after another he took out the cartridges, until there were only two left. Then he replaced the magazine, declaring confidently: "Two bullets should be enough to finish off a whore."

Eyes closed, Lydia braced herself. She heard her executioner move to a position immediately behind her. His voice sounded benevolent: "You have one last opportunity to speak to your ancestors." Boots thudded as the guerrillas stood to attention. Then silence.

Lydia's prayer broke the silence with the clarity of a church bell. "Mwari," she said, "you created me. At this moment I am in your hands. My work in this world is coming to an end. If it pleases you, receive my spirit."

"Why did you not address the ancestors?" Subshumba enquired angrily.

"You know why, Sub. Mwari is the one who decides about life and death, not the ancestors. I refuse to pray to the ancestors when they obviously did not speak to Mwari to prevent my death. They have failed me."

"Ah, ah, you insolent bitch! You belittle the ancestors of chimurenga. No real svikiro would accuse the ancestors like that. You have just condemned yourself as a false svikiro. All you did was to sabotage our operations. You're finished."

As he spoke Sub lifted his AK, drew the spring-loaded bolt back and let it slide shut.

Then the unexpected happened.

Instead of hearing the familiar metallic click of a cocked rifle, Lydia flinched at the sound of a loud report near her head. A bullet whined away harmlessly from the granite dome above them.

There were startled shouts. Two of the younger guerrillas backed away nervously. The one said: "We'd better leave. There is a vengeful spirit here."

Sub was visibly shaken. He looked at his AK incredulously. "What the hell" he stammered. "I never touched the trigger."

"It is an omen," Dakota said, his mouth suddenly dry. "I no longer support this execution."

Subshumba gaped at him. He realized that he was losing control of the situation. The execution was coming apart. "Don't be stupid," he shouted at
Dakota. Steadying himself he lifted his AK to aim at the huddled figure before him.

But a sudden movement to his right made him freeze. Kris was shaking uncontrollably, spasms racking his body. For a moment Sub thought his friend had been poisoned. Then low, deep grunts told him otherwise.

"Take hold of yourself, Kris!" he shouted.

The grunts only grew in intensity, followed after a while by a high-pitched shriek. Then came the tormented sobs of a woman in mourning. In amazement Sub and his men watched Kris. Their friend, the dagger expert, was a fighter – certainly not a svikiro. Yet there he was, unmistakably being possessed by some female spirit.

Still weeping, the woman's voice ordered everybody to sit down. There was no disobeying. Even Sub sat down immediately, confused by the turn of events.

"I am mbuya Nehanda, sent to you by the war council," the spirit voice announced. Gasps of surprise sounded on all sides. Heavy moments of guilt-ridden anticipation passed before someone started the slow handclap of greeting.

"We see you and welcome you, vaNehanda, mother of chimurenga," Dakota said.

Nehanda was not interested in chivalry. Her voice rang sternly as she proceeded: "Why do you fighters try to kill us? In what way have we wronged you? Are we not the ones trying to assist you in this war? You all know that this child you are about to shoot is innocent. I have given you a sign to prove it. Come, Subshumba, let us see what you can do with that rifle of yours."

All eyes were on Sub. He just sat there, totally baffled, his head bowed.

"I shall give you another sign," Nehanda said. Thereupon Kris took his AK by the barrel and, with a powerful swing, smashed its butt against a boulder. "That," Nehanda said, "is how we, the guardians of the land, treat weapons that are turned against innocent people."

It was Lydia's turn to weep. Overcome with relief, her entire body shook with raw sobs of mutilated feeling. "Mwari be praised," she whispered brokenly, "Mwari be praised."

Nehanda looked at her a while, then said simply: "Child, put on your clothes."

Turning back to the guerrillas she continued: "What wrong have we, the ancestors, the soil of the country, done to you that you engage in such deeds? Did we not predict that the bones of the dead will rise during the struggle? Remember, this does not mean that only we – Nehanda, Chaminuka and Kaguvi, the elders of the war council – will rise. No! All the ancestors of Zimbabwe are supporting the struggle. That means that these young ones in the bush, these maswikiro, must be protected. You, fighters, stop harassing the
villagers supporting you. Go and fight the real enemy! Come, all of you, let's be off!"

As suddenly as she had come *mbuya* Nehanda was gone.

For a while Kris kept shaking his head as if to clear his mind. Unaccustomed to the experience of spirit possession, he appeared to need reassurance that he had really pulled out of the surreal world of trance. Nobody doubted that *mbuya* Nehanda had been well and truly present. To be sure, she had chosen the most unlikely host to convey her message. This choice authenticated her revelation.

An excited buzz of conversation surrounded Kris. Only Subshumba, still shaken, sat brooding about the implications of Nehanda’s reprimand. Lydia, too, hardly dared to speak. Her life still seemed to be dangling from a precariously thin thread. To her fatigued senses the sudden deliverance was dreamlike. She restrained the song of praise building up inside her, lest it provoke a repetition of the horror she had just been through.

Distant shouts put an abrupt end to the excited talk: one never knew where the enemy would strike next. But it was only another group of guerrillas who had heard Sub’s shot and had come to investigate. With them were detachment commander Obey and Kirwen, one of his adjutants. The two of them had come to Vunjere to help organize the offensive against the enemy camp at Binya Road.

When he heard what had happened, commander Obey was greatly perturbed. “You mean to tell me, Subshumba, that you put one of our recognized mediums on trial while the rest of us were busy preparing for a major attack?” he inquired, not hiding his disapproval. “And on whose authority were you going to execute a fellow fighter? You are not the senior commander in this zone. From what you tell me you did not even consult another *svikiro* to determine whether the ancestors support your accusations.”

Once their actions came under open scrutiny, Subshumba and his men could offer no plausible defence. The senior commander quickly exposed their misuse of malicious rumours as factual evidence in their eagerness to convict Lydia. Obey impressed on them that biased judgments which led to the execution of innocent people would not be tolerated. He also warned them that any similar offence in the future would be reported and tried at ZANLA high command headquarters in Mozambique.

In conclusion he reiterated sternly: “This girl will continue to help us at the front. As a *svikiro*, she is not a girl but a man. Her grandfather’s spirit is well known in Mozambique. We were told by Chipfeni at Chimoio to heed *sekuru* Chabata’s guidance in our operations. So far Lydia has rendered loyal service to the ZANLA forces. All reports I have received confirm this. Therefore she is not in your custody but under your protection as a fellow fighter. Is that understood?”
There was a hum of assent. Fists were raised to a chorus of: “Forward the struggle! Viva Chabata!”

Lydia ululated until she was out of breath. She was fully exonerated; free to breathe, to feel the healing rays of the sun, the revitalizing water of the njuzu pools on her skin.

Obey then suggested that sekuru Chabata should be invoked to advise on the forthcoming attack on the camp. It was an open invitation to the ancient warrior ancestor to comment on the ordeal of his svikiro granddaughter; to retaliate in the presence of a sympathetic audience. And so it happened that Lydia drank her snuff potion from her sekuru’s wooden bowl to bring on trance.

At first sekuru Chabata introduced himself quite amiably as a seasoned campaigner of many battles against the MaDzviti. He also referred to his grave on the slopes of the Shivaira mountain in Bikita. Then, predictably, he rounded on Subshumba, Kris, Dakota and Mubunhu.

“You men who terrorize people in the villages do not deserve the privilege of protecting yourselves with chimurenga names. For what you have done I shall expose you, your families and your ancestors. I know you well. I shall strip you naked, as you did to my svikiro. I shall tear away the cover of your chimurenga names”

The roles were reversed. In shocked silence the villains listened to a detailed exposition of their real names, those of their relatives and ancestry. At the battle front such exposure was worse than the reprimand of commander Obey. Their covers blown, they and their families were vulnerable to whoever wanted to use this confidential information against them. The wily sekuru was subjecting them to the same arbitrary fate as they had meted out to his granddaughter.

“For what reason,” the old warrior continued, “do you comrades cause us grief at a time when the enemy is attacking our people in the villages? Did you bring your weapons to kill our people or the enemy? Is that what we, the bones of old, have risen for? Never! I tell you, none of you shall rest tonight. You are going to march all the way to Binya Road to attack the enemy there. You will attack, not tomorrow, but tonight! You will start by hitting the camp with those number 80 mm mortars of yours. Do as I tell you!”

“Sekuru Chabata,” one of the guerrillas ventured, “we will do what you require of us. But it is a long march to Binya Road. We need the coolness of rain to quench our thirst and wipe away our tracks.”

“No!” came the emphatic reply. “I shall withhold the rain because you have angered me today. Only tonight I may send some mist to give you cover for the attack.”

That night the mists gathered among the mountains of Bikita before the 80 mm mortars started exploding in the doomed camp.
From a distance Lydia listened to the explosions and rifle fire. She was clad in Chabata's battle-dress, pointing his spear in the direction where the battle was raging. Every now and again the clouds parted, allowing the stars to look down on her. Even through the haze they shone brightly, sharing her mute happiness at being alive.

III

Always again the pool, the mist and the rain. Hers is a lineage of water people. Generation after generation would come forth from the eternal pool, be nurtured by it during life and then sink beneath its mists in death, only to continue sustaining life in the world beyond. Was Mwari herself not called Dzivaguru, the Great Pool, the link between the mysterious feminine potency of water and the origin of life?

At the water's edge she feels whole, in harmony with herself. Here the powers of Dzivaguru, the ancestors and the water spirits somehow become one. Here mbuya Mandisiyeyi generously confirmed Lydia's vocation as a healer by committing her to the watery depths of the njuzu world of wonderful medicines. Here, too, sekuru Chabata fulfilled his rain-making obligations to the living by sending her into the aquatic njuzu city to request that the rain drums be beaten. So all the passages of her life have led to the pool.

Chabata's calling had given him a dual role in his lifetime. As a warrior he had fought valiantly to liberate the land from Ndebele intruders; as rain-maker he had fought to free it from the ever threatening clutches of drought.

Lydia was born into this tradition, grew up with it. She perpetuated the powers and wisdom that sekuru Chabata had brought from the northern lakes. Her underwater childhood had prepared her for her unique role in the liberation of her land and people, symbolized by Chabata's magic spear.

The incident that comes to her mind as she listens to the President is the first of five guerrilla offensives against the RAR camp at Mupindimbi dam in Chingombe North. It was a retaliatory attack, for although the comrades were loath to admit it, they had suffered defeat during a surprise attack by RAR soldiers on Basera township. They wanted to hit back at the heart of the enemy in Chingombe chiefdom. The camp at Mupindimbi had to be crippled so that it would be scrapped, like the one at Bikita Minerals. All forces would be mounted – human, mystical and divine. Thus ancestral support was solicited while several units of fighters were moved from Bikita and Unjere to the woodlands of Mount Rasa. Commanders Kirwen and Chivorvoro were delegated to consult sekuru Chabata. They came to the place where Lydia was hiding with a section of fighters near the Chivasa mountains.

"We need heavy mist for a daytime attack," Kirwen told sekuru Chabata.

But the old spirit warrior would have none of it. "No," he said adamantly,
"you do not have enough men to attack by daylight. That camp at Mupindimbi is heavily sandbagged and manned by many soldiers. There is little bush cover close to it and the enemy have a clear view in all directions. No! They will butcher our forces even if I send mist. Only a night attack can be successful. I shall give you a very dark night with mist clouds, and rain towards morning so that the enemy will be thrown off your track when you retreat."

"That sounds good, sekuru," Chivorvoro answered. "But we have a problem. We don't know the terrain at Mupindimbi all that well." He added, "We need to make sure, sekuru, that we hit this target hard. An attack in darkness may be less effective . . ."

"That is no problem," Chabata said confidently. "We shall have the area scouted thoroughly before we plan our assault by night."

"And who will do the scouting?" Chivorvoro asked warily.

"My svikiro, of course," came the prompt reply. "She has relatives near the dam who will assist her. She can walk to the camp tomorrow and be back in time for you to attack tomorrow night."

"That sounds like an excellent plan, VaChabata," Chivorvoro agreed. The two commanders clapped their hands, visibly relieved that they had not been assigned the hazardous scouting task.

Chabata smiled knowingly. Through the eyes of his young svikiro he seemed to be reading the thoughts of the two men in front of him.

"And the mbanje for the mist-making?" Kirwen enquired.

"Two hornsful will do," Chabata said casually. "These must be placed next to the great pool of the njuzu spirits in the Devure river. You will be led there this afternoon. It is near Chivasa school."

The instructions were clear. Amid more handclapping the consultation drew to a close and the ancient warrior took his leave.

Recalling the episode, Lydia can still feel the pinpricks of apprehension running down her spine. She had barely come out of her trance when the two commanders informed her of her forefather's instructions. They appeared only too happy to assign the scouting task to her. For a moment she rebelled and asked herself: "Are these comrades and vaChabata ganging up against me? They send me into the jaws of the hyena without a thought. Do they care a straw what happens to me?" She managed to hide her feelings behind a mask of dutiful acceptance. After all, she had to set an example to the comrades of trust in ancestral support.

And sure enough, as the day wore on and a plan of action took shape in her mind, her fears gave way to determination and pride in the face of the challenge. Besides, she knew she would find support and understanding at the pool.

That afternoon the comrades accompanied her to the njuzu pool, carrying the two containers filled with mbanje. Having placed their gift to the spirits
on a slate-grey rock near the water's edge, they turned away and walked off hurriedly. Lydia smiled knowingly. The two commanders were intent on not disturbing the secret mist-making rituals lest they anger the spirits and forfeit their protection. They were only too happy to leave her alone at the pool.

It was a hot, windless afternoon. Not even a ripple hinted at the vibrant life in the world beneath the water. What bliss to shed all thoughts of war along with her clothes, to feel the coolness of the pool enveloping her. The water held her like a lover, caressed her as she swam with long, lazy strokes across its shadowy depths and her dusty skin turned the glowing yellowish brown of ripe mutunduru fruit. No human eyes intruded upon her union with the water world. Only Mount Rasa reared its lion's head in the distance, guarding her solitude.

The sun was casting long shadows, like dark fingers of coming judgment, on the Mupindimbi camp and on the njuzu pool's surface when she started smoking the mbanje. The narcotic tobacco had been well prepared. Deeply inhaling the aromatic smoke, she crossed the threshold of a new world. It was a world of beauty, of vibrant celebration. Here one could find courage, shed fear. Here there was no anger, no conflict. Only the goodness which had gone missing in the daily strife of war.

She was swept up into the skies like a feather on the wind. Below her, Mount Rasa lay covered in the purple haze of late afternoon. Under the lion's mane she could see the entrance of the cave passage which led to forbidden vaults deep in the mountain's belly where the ancient treasure pots of gold beads were hidden.

To the south the black domes of the Chivasa and Vinga mountains kept their age-old secrets with dignity. There the royal Duma mummies sat in eternal shade, keeping watch over their territory. To the east a long range of gently sloping ridges hugged the three-fingered bowl where the brown waters of several rivers kissed and came together in the green jewel of the great man-made pool, Kyle.

And there near the shoreline, facing Mount Mugabe, lay the treasure of Zimbabwe, the ancient capital built of stone, seat of power from where Rozvi kings had once reigned over their vassals. Here was the cradle of the chimurenga dream, the birthplace of a nation. The accomplishment of black hands which, under white occupation, kept calling for the restoration of black prosperity and dignity in a new black empire. Here too lay the rain-stone of her forefather: sure sign of the link between Matonjeni and Great Zimbabwe; between Mwari, source of all the waters of the earth, and the great guardian spirits of all Zimbabwe.

Returning from her visit to the skies, Lydia found Seri and Hlatshwayo, the two njuzu beings, waiting for her. They had risen from the pool to remove the remaining mbanje from the two containers. In return they had filled the
horns with ancestral snuff. This was a reminder to Lydia and her fellow fighters of their dependence on their ancestors, and of the union of midzimu and shavi spirits against white oppression.

Seri got to the point immediately. "We have already been told by sekuru Chabat' that you were coming to ask for mist and rain for the camp attack tomorrow night," she said in her fluty voice.

"And will the request be granted?" Lydia asked.

"We shall see, down there," came the reply.

Seri's sleek scaly body, tapering to a tail fin, glistened silver in the afternoon sun. She was exceedingly beautiful: great dark eyes, high cheek bones, finely chiselled nose of the north country, and a wide generous mouth. Yet she was small and the faintly apricot bronze of her breasts and arms suggested San origins. Much darker, Hlatshwayo had the gracious features of Ndebele nobility. Below her arms, her body curved python-patterned like a water snake.

Enchanted by the loveliness of her njuzu friends and their air of goodwill, Lydia willingly entered the water passage. Held firmly on both sides, she was swiftly propelled into the depths of the pool, past some giant rocks, into njuzu land. In a wink she emerged in the world of the water people, the spirits of the lower soil; placed by Mwari in their subterranean villages and cities to lead an untroubled existence and to impart their mysterious powers of healing and rain making to those still struggling in the world above.

As always the sky in njuzu land was pale blue. This world apparently eschewed darkness. Villages stretched as far as the eye could see. Lowing cattle betokened prosperity. But for the moment there was only one overriding concern, one course of action for all njuzu beings: to make mist and rain for the troubled world above! Word must have been put out before Lydia's arrival, for they were all there. All the njuzu people and creatures, massed on the wide open plain, congregated around their most prized possession - the giant rain drums. These were made of polished ebony, covered with satin-soft bushbuck skin, stretched variously to produce all timbres of sound. Mounted on golden pedestals, the drums were adorned with richly coloured beads and shells.

It was a magic sight: the spirit people resembling ordinary humans, side by side with the water-beings, half human, half fish, half snake or crocodile. All had come for the rain dance, some in plain garments, others in splendid robes, yet others with feathered headgear, bronze bangles and a splendid array of leopard or cheetah skins, after the fashion of their human healer counterparts in the world above. Seri saw to it that Lydia was given a beautifully beaded leather skirt. To Lydia dressing up for the rain dance was like a homecoming, a reintegration into the primal world where humans, other creatures and nature itself blended in harmony.

Mwari, too, was present. The first murmur of the drums was a soft whisper in Dzivaguru's ear. In it was the breath of new wind; the rain-clouds, new life,
were born once again. The njuzu people sighed at the melancholy throb of the drums. At the onset of new life post-coital sadness and dying stirred to a quickening pulse of joy.

Gradually, the soft tunes of age-old hurt spunne out into thumps of pulsating, luscious life. Hips started swaying, breasts playing in response to the rhythmic thrusts of stomping male bodies. Thousands of feet pounded the ground, shaking the subterranean water-world into releasing its life-giving raindrops to the bosoms of rain clouds.

Lydia danced and swayed in step with the graceful movements of Seri and Hlatshwayo. As she joined in with the coiling–uncoiling snake body, the twirl of transparent fish fin, the inviting dark male eyes around her, so the vague fears of war that still beset her ebbed away. In this union there was no place for fear. Only acceptance of death, the inevitable, followed by rapturous anticipation of a new cycle of life.

Wars came like the tides of the sea, sweeping over the precious land, leaving it spent as the waves returned to the depths. Together the drums, the stamping feet, the swish of reptilian bodies told the ancient stories of war and regeneration. Much like the shavi dances of the upper world which keep the two realms in balance, the drums spoke of masons laying their stones; smiths smelting the gold and iron riches of the earth into ornaments and implements; hunters performing brave feats in the forests; farmers setting their ploughshares to the rain-drenched soil. Lydia danced to the lower world; she danced to the upper world. Together, she and the njuzu people danced all distinctions away, until there was only one god, one sphere, one cycle of life and death. Until mind faded

When she returned from the spell beyond time only a fraction of moon, a mere nail-paring, hung over the pool. It was chilly, already late in the night. But there was no darkness. A fluorescent light shone from below the water's surface. Seri and her companions were lingering in the pool, Lydia realized, to light with their shiny bodies her return to the upper world. She found herself dancing at the water's edge. The murmur of njuzu drums and song still carried clearly from below into the night sky. Her feet were skimming a patch of powdery dust

She picked up the snuff containers, knowing that the mists and the rain would come in good time. She no longer dreaded her mission the next day.

IV

By noon the next day Lydia had walked all the way from Vunjere to the homestead of the muPostori baptizer Sauro Garanuako. He lived in Kono Murambasvina’s village close to the Zimbizi dam. As nephew of Lydia’s late grandmother, Mandesiyyei, Sauro was a favourite uncle of the Chabata
family. Affectionately Lydia took in his familiar features: the little pointed beard, shrewd mischievous eyes and clean-shaven head.

Sauro was not a tall man. But he carried himself with dignity in the Chingombe congregations of Maranke Apostles under his care, and with humorous zest for life in the circle of his polygamous household. His sympathetic understanding of the ancestral impulses behind chimurenga – an attitude not quite compatible with Apostolic doctrine – endeared him to his aunt’s granddaughter. More by intuition than by spoken words they were allies in the cause of liberation.

“So! What brings the spirit mediums to the doorstep of the church?” he asked with a twinkle of wicked amusement as he came from the hut of his first wife to embrace his niece.

“Confessions about the demons plaguing my life, uncle,” she responded with mock humility. “I’ve heard that the Apostles specialize in chasing demons out of virgins, so they can become obedient child-bearers for the church’s elders.”

There was laughter from Sauro’s wives in the courtyard. Warm handclasps welcomed Lydia. At the war front she missed the jolly banter of women and children busy with the chores of home life.


Later, when they could talk privately, Sauro berated Lydia for coming so close to the lion’s den. The entire army, he said, was looking for a certain svikiro, Lydia Chabata. But Lydia soon persuaded him to help her devise a plausible cover so that she could scout around the Mupindimbi camp undetected. It was decided that she would appear in Postori vestments as Maria Garanuako, Sauro’s daughter from Bulawayo. And she was to enquire about her distant relative, Stephen, a popular soldier in the RAR camp, who Sauro knew would be away on leave.

Aware of the risk to his entire family if Lydia’s cover was blown, Sauro insisted on a brief send-off ceremony to secure the protection of the Almighty. Prophet Elison Mutingwende, renowned in the district for eradicating witchcraft, was summoned to perform the ceremony.

Chill struck at the hearts of Sauro’s wives when the medium emerged from the homestead clad in Tsungi’s garments. The war had suddenly walked right into their midst. But to the other villagers the three robed figures proceeding to the holy place appeared perfectly ordinary, the beginning of just another Apostolic confession and healing ceremony.

Lydia knew that at the holy place there would be no mention of her patron ancestor or njuzu allies, for this was the domain of the all-powerful Holy Spirit. She did not remonstrate. She needed whatever spirit protection she could obtain for her dangerous mission. It was with a sense of expectancy
that she knelt in a little clearing between two boulders, in the shade of a massive wild fig tree.

The ceremony was still vivid in her mind, as if it had all happened yesterday. Over her once again hung the enigmatic face of the prophet, framed by a straggly beard. Intense eyes suggested the approach of the Holy Spirit. Jug of holy water in hand, the prophet moved backwards and forwards in the clearing. Dusty, spindly-ankled feet stepped nimbly across the holy ground, swept by billowing white garments. Nervous black fingers motioned all evil forces to withdraw, implored Mwari’s spirit to descend from above. Round and round Maria he went, fixing her with the hypnotic stare of the possessed.

The first spray of holy water hit her face like a shock. Again and again, from all sides, the cleansing water struck her head and shoulders. Every time water-laden fingers just missed her. Slowly she started to relax, the Spirit was near.

Elison paused briefly, put down the jug and picked up his holy staff. Round and round Lydia he circled, staff pointed heavenward. His entire body started shaking. He breathed in sobs. In front of Lydia he stopped. Again the thin white-clad frame hung over her, seemingly suspended between heaven and earth.

Then the Holy Spirit broke in on them. The prophet’s voice boomed: "Bhu Bhu Bhu um! Hai hai hai! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Arerujah! Arerujah Grrr Amen! Amen! Amen!

It was an explosion of sound reverberating from within the prophet’s chest, followed by shrill snorts and staccato blasts of tongues. The sounds held them captive, played around them, bounced back from granite stone, bound them together. It seemed like ages before it subsided. Sighs and incomprehensible muttering came like soft rain after the storm.

What remained was a frail figure in sweat-drenched attire leaning on his staff in front of her. Lydia hardly dared look at the transfigured face with its closed eyes. That face was a channel of the Spirit, ready for revelation.

"Mwari speaks!" The prophet’s voice was soft but clear. "Mwari says there is a black serpent in the land. It resides next to a pool. It sheds the blood of innocent people, devours children. It takes young women, the mothers of tomorrow, and turns them into whores. The village elders who resist the serpent have their heads bashed in. This creature belches flame and smoke on those who refuse to reveal the hiding places of the young warriors who plan to destroy it." The prophet paused.

"Amen! Amen!" the two listeners chorused.

"Mwari says," the prophet continued, "that his people will destroy the serpent. The warriors of the land will emerge from their caves

"Ameni!"
“The Spirit shows two storms of lightning. The first one wounds the serpent, slows down its movements. But the monster continues to destroy, for it does not understand. Then comes the second storm when the lightning strikes the serpent’s head. Only then does its fire and smoke subside. Peace returns to the villages.”

“Ndizvozvo! So be it! Amen!”

“The Spirit also brings before my eyes a young virgin. She is clad in white. I can see her walking to the pool, observing the serpent. But the serpent fails to grasp her intention. I see her walking away unharmed. She walks in the direction of the big mountain in the south where the warriors are waiting. She tells them to get ready to attack the serpent. She knows that the first storm of lightning is at hand. That is what Mwari shows me. That is all. Amen!”

“Amen! Arrerujah!”

A great surge of relief swept through Lydia. She was ready for the final stage of her mission. All the spirit forces had been harnessed to grant her calm and courage. She looked up, found the knowing, reassuring eyes of the prophet. She said simply, “Thank you, man of God.”

“Go in peace,” he said, leaning on his staff.

Sauro directed her to the short cut to Mupindimbi dam. “Hasten now, my daughter,” he concluded. “We shall pray and wait for you here at the holy place.”

Remembering that afternoon now, she can still feel Tsungi’s veil on her head, the long garments all the way down to her ankles. At the enemy’s camp she walked confidently, like the Catholic sisters she had seen at Silveira. The ploy of asking for Stephen, her distant relative, worked brilliantly. His friends were only too happy to entertain his pretty cousin, Maria Garanuako. They showed her around the camp and boasted about the superiority of their firing power over that of the gandanga upstarts with their toy AKs. They spoke about the terrorists as misguided criminals who could only intimidate unarmed villagers. And Maria, innocent virgin, smiled wide-eyed assent. Nobody noticed the shrewd eyes taking in the positions of machine-guns and the lie of the camp in relation to the dam and surrounding hills.

There were other young women in and around the camp. They looked casual, relaxed; ordinary people enjoying themselves without a thought of war. For a moment she envied them. Then she recalled the prophet’s vision of the whoring mothers of tomorrow, the slain village elders. She shrank from the thought that some of these idle, fun-loving women might be sleeping in the camp when the attack came. That in the morning some of their bodies would lie broken beside a wounded serpent.

She had some anxious moments when the soldiers started talking about the spirit mediums aiding the gandanga fighters. They spoke about the
medium of Mai Marumbi, the famous rain-maker of Mount Rasa, who had helped them establish an observation post on the mountain, only to turn round and betray their position to the terrorists. Ha! That was a stupid thing to do. They would roast svikiro Marumbi alive. The only problem was that he had vanished into thin air. Equally elusive was that cunning girl, Lydia Chabata. She was seen by the villagers in the company of the gandanga, clad in her matembe skins.

For a moment Maria Garanuako panicked. Had it not been for the muPostori garb, she knew her agitation would have been noticed. Only the powers of the spirit world enabled her to return the looks of her admirers with innocent curiosity. After all, she had just arrived at her father’s home from Bulawayo and was unaware of the latest war gossip in Gutu.

Would it not be a great thing if he could capture this girl svikiro and hand her over to the authorities, Stephen’s one friend day-dreamed. With the ransom money he figured he would be able to complete his bride-price payment and get the bickering in-laws off his back for good. This was a good joke. Maria laughed as loudly as the others at his ingenious idea. After all, what right did the arrogant little svikiro have to disturb the peace and order of the country? Ah yes, she said, she too was convinced that the sooner the trouble-makers in the district and elsewhere could be rounded up, the sooner the nation could return to normal life. The near hysterical pitch of her laughter went unnoticed in the rowdy badinage of the soldiers.

Relief was great at leaving that dangerous territory unscathed. The talk about Lydia Chabata had all but unnerved her. For a moment she could feel the serpent’s jaws closing, crushing her neck. But she kept her poise. Ah yes, she said, she would love to visit the camp again soon. But she had to hurry now because her father was a strict man and she had to be home in time for evening prayers. That they understood. So she hastened away, carrying a plastic bag with cans of bullybeef, gifts from her admirers.

She can still see the anxious faces of the two men under the fig tree lighting up as she returned in the fading afternoon light. Even in the Garanuako courtyard there was a marked lightening of the atmosphere when the tins of beef were presented to Sauro’s senior wife. Mai Shuwai cheerfully helped her ‘daughter’ change back into her own clothes.

Lydia departed as dusk was falling. Her parting words to her father were: “When the storm of lightning and thunder strikes the serpent at the pool, keep everybody at the homestead. Afterwards, if soldiers come to enquire about your daughter Maria, tell them that an angry boyfriend had arrived unexpectedly to take her back to Bulawayo.”

Sauro’s laughter was still ringing in her ears as she walked away. She wished then that he really was her father. From the distance he shouted: “Don’t underrate the greatest baptizer of Chingombe! One day, little virgin, I
shall take you to Jordan and drown all those demons of yours. Then you can wear the garments of chiPostori for keeps"

His laughter buoyed her, lightening her step. Young as she was, she knew that laughter was healing. Laughter at life’s riddles, at things one cherished, mysteries which otherwise become too heavy to bear.

In the afterglow of sunset she noticed that Mount Rasa had already buried his lion’s head in a cloud of thick mist. The njuzu spirits and the people of the lower soil, she knew, had not forgotten

 darkness had settled on the land when she met commanders Kirwen and Chivorvoro on a densely wooded hill not far from Bishop Nyasha’s homestead. They had brought with them several sections of heavily armed fighters and a number of mijiba messengers, who were to carry final instructions about the attack to the other forces on stand-by at Mount Rasa and at Chagonda. There were also two fighters still convalescing from their wounds. They were to stay behind with Lydia and accompany her further south to the safety of Vunjere after the attack.

Tired as she was, there was no time to rest. Between mouthfuls of sadza and chicken she gave the commanders a detailed report of her scouting mission. They were nervous. Yet the sheer effrontery of a notorious svikiro turned Postori right under the enemy’s nose was not lost on them. When she told them about the innocent Maria Garanuako’s indignant comments about the wanted girl svikiro, they roared with laughter. “So,” they joked, “the wicked little svikiro was tying knots in the serpent’s tail without its even noticing.” Everybody agreed that the bloated head of the smug creature at Mupindimbi needed treading upon.

Sekuru Chabata was called in for a final discussion about the strategy for attack. Lydia had to comply with the demands of chimurenga. Bone weary, she donned her forefather’s battle dress and drank the snuff liquid from his wooden bowl.

When she came to her senses after the trance, she felt strangely refreshed. Perhaps sekuru Chabata had revived her. Or perhaps it was the njuzu spirits. The chill of enveloping mists had meanwhile settled on the hill. All the fighters except her two wounded companions had disappeared into the night.

It was a long vigil up on the hill. Chabata’s battle dress did not keep out the cold. But she persisted, shivering, facing north in the direction of Mupindimbi, Chabata’s spear pointed heavenward. All forces were working in concert against the enemy: the njuzu beings providing the mists and rain clouds from their subterranean world; she, keeping the mists low on the
ground with Chabata's spear; and the invisible old warrior himself close behind the guerrillas stalking the camp. And somewhere in their midst hovered the power of the Holy Spirit. For the spirit of Mwari was to Lydia the summation of all the powers drawn together in the spirit war council. Contrary to the Christian prophets, she believed their Holy Spirit, Mwari himself, to be in league with all the spirits who had risen against the evil of oppression.

In the early morning hours the mortars and bazookas started thundering. Faintly through the mist the northern sky was lit up. Lydia's companions lifted their fists excitedly, shouting: "Forward the war! Down with the enemy!" But Lydia felt no elation at the thought of the serpent writhing beside the pool. Her mood was restrained, sad. In her mind's eye she could still see the laughing faces of the soldiers, the unsuspecting merriment of village girls. These were brothers and sisters, misguided perhaps and fighting on the wrong side, but fellow humans of the same blood as their liberators now bombarding them. She could see those faces contorted in agony and terror as the mortars whined in from the skies. She saw also the families of Sauro and Elison hugging each other close in their huts, listening wide-eyed to the cacophony on their doorstep, fearful of the reprisals which would surely follow.

Suddenly the role of Maria Garanuako seemed a heartless imposition on the lives of others. The struggle, she knew, was inevitable, the objectives justified. But the wanton loss of lives was raw tragedy, a shadow which clouded her vision as the mists clouded that of the stricken serpent.

As the eastern skies paled and the onslaught abated, heavy rains started to fall.

Yes, comrade President, she thought as she watched the trim, dark-suited figure on the rostrum, we know about suffering and sacrifice in the cause of freedom. The masvikiro, the comrades, the povo know that tightrope, where one false step could mean instant death. We know about exposing our loved ones to the cruelty of war. We, the survivors of chimurenga, know. We have died many deaths, yet we live.
"Our great, great weapon was the masses of the people. The overwhelming support from the people cancelled out the enemy's superiority in arms and aeroplanes. Today we give special thanks to the people of Gutu. You served well, you uncles, as I now address you in kinship terms; you gave your full support to the war. Your contribution made us successful, made our striking power surpass that of the enemy. We not only commemorate the deceased fighters today, but all those who died because of chimurenga: fathers, mothers and children."

President Mugabe

Our support of chimurenga cost us dearly, Bishop Musariri Dhliwayo thinks. His Ndaza Zionist attire contrasts sharply with the Western suits and dresses of the crowd around him. He does not mind. He is proud of his vocation, of the vestments that confirm it. Even in wartime he never prophesied to the comrades or attended pungwe meetings without wearing his official Zionist garb: dark blue robes reaching down to his ankles, coloured cords hanging from his waist, his holy staff glittering in the sun.

Musariri's quest for liberation had started long before the ripples of chimurenga began to affect village life in Gutu. More than half a century before, as a young orphan in Mukangangwi's chiefdom in Bikita, he had suffered continual illness. Thus his first liberation was from sickness and neglect, when the kind healer laid hands on him and led him to Jordan to be baptized into Bishop David Masuka's Zion Apostolic Church. That was when he learned to belong to a family.

Then followed the slow rise to the status of a prophet. For many years he fasted and prayed regularly up in the mountains, days and nights at a time. The spirit of prophecy was slow in coming. He persevered until the Spirit started revealing to him the real causes of patients' illnesses. Until his prophecies started coming true. That was when he was liberated from obscurity to the prominence of a recognized Ndaza prophet.

Even then there were still the shackles of illiteracy constraining his freedom. Once he had shed these, years of missionary work followed. They were good years, trekking
from Bikita to Gutu to Selukwe to Mashava to Mutare. Preaching, prophesying, healing people; baptizing them into the Zionist fold. The good news of Jesus was liberating the people from sin, the lonely from their isolation, the poor from their poverty, the ill and the crazed from demons and wizardry.

Then, in the mid-fifties, he settled on a little farm in Vunjere. Chindoza, who had broken away from David Masuka, was prepared to ordain him bishop of several Ndaza congregations in Vunjere and Bikita. The new church was called the Zion Apostolic Church in Patmos.

How good those years of building Zion were, even when the destroyer was drawing close. Even after he became a bishop he remained a prophet. The sick and afflicted kept coming to his homestead for faith-healing. Some stayed and worked in his fields. Others moved back to their villages to inform their friends about the Zionist man of God. The farm itself became a refuge for the needy, Zion in Patmos where the compassion of Mwari was embodied for Africa. Everything fitted together. Zionist families grew. The Spirit moved in the rain clouds, in the seed they sowed, in the crops they reaped. Growing herds of cattle, sheep and goats showed that Christ's salvation is not reserved for the distant heavens. It happens right here, where people can feel it, taste it, celebrate it. You can dance in it, preach about it, see it with your eyes – this place of milk and honey, little black Canaan in Vunjere.

You grow in the Spirit together with fellow vaZioni. You plan new missionary campaigns while you prepare for the communion meal of Paseka. You grow in wisdom and authority during council meetings where you solve the problems of distant congregations. You share with your people the produce of your lands, and in return see the crop yields and animal herds increase. You are to witness blessing upon blessing but all the while you hold your breath.

Until the force of chimurenga strikes. The suffering you have prophesied so often becomes part of your life. Perhaps Mwari allowed abundance before the storm. So that there would be food for the freedom fighters So that the exacting price of recapturing Zimbabwe's lost lands would be paid in Zion. Perhaps Zion in Patmos had to be stripped naked in the cause of freedom so that it would admit its complete dependence on Mwari. Who knows?

In 1977, when the first five guerrillas arrived at his haven, he knew that the time of testing had come.

"Are you the muZioni prophet we heard about in Zinhata township?" Dzawira asked on that morning when they arrived at his homestead.

There were five of them: Dzawira, the most senior and most talkative; Guymore, the quiet one, famous marksman; Subshumba, broody, with an explosive temper; Kris the dagger expert, a terror when drunk; and Magidi the light-hearted joker.
"I am only one of several Zionist prophets in this area," Musariri said. "Not far from me lives Bishop Krinos Kuudzerema of the Zion Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. Prophet Mashereketo stays close to Bhunu's farm, and Peter Muponesi also works in this region from time to time."

"No, old man, it is prophet Musariri we are looking for," Dzawira insisted. "The people say he is a wealthy farmer who can feed a whole army. They also say he is a true worshipper of Jesus, that white son of a whore."

The guerrillas looked at him piercingly. For a moment he was dumbstruck. For months he had been hearing rumours about comrades harassing church leaders in the Bikita district. At Norumedzo an unco-operative Zionist leader had his church burnt down. Bibles and vestments were burnt. VaPostori who openly criticized the guerrilla slogan, "Down with Jesus", had their beards shaven off and were forced to drink ancestral beer in public. It was even whispered that defiant believers had been martyred for their faith.

Musariri had often wondered how he would react to such threats. Now the challenge had come. To his surprise he felt perfectly calm as the decision he had all along expected of himself crystallized.

"So, old man, don't just stand there! Are you the one we are looking for?" Subshumba's words had a harsh ring.

"Yes, indeed, I am Musariri, leader of the Zion Church in Patmos in this area. And if the one you call son of a whore is Jesus of the Bible, then, yes, I worship the son of a whore." Having taken his stand, Musariri easily held the gaze of the comrades.

Kris was the first to react. "Be careful, old man," he said, lifting his AK menacingly. "We have heard many brave speeches by Jesus followers. But they all end up hiding their Bibles or burning them when we give them some chimurenga treatment."

"I was telling you the truth," Musariri said calmly.

"What kind of shit truth are you talking, old Zionist fool?" Kris shouted. The prophet's refusal to be intimidated had touched a nerve. "The truth of chimurenga is that we are fighting for our ancestors, for the people of Zimbabwe. This Jesus is the idol of the bhunu bastards. They have blinded our people. They have kept them enslaved for years with their stories about this whore son. I say, pasi nafesu! Down with him! Where is he anyway? Just show him to me, old man, let me see him. I'll drill him full of holes with this rifle. Then we'll be rid of him for good."

"Shut up, Kris!" Dzawira commanded curtly. "You forget you are speaking to a supporter of chimurenga. All the reports we have had about comrade Musariri tell of his prophecies about how we will conquer the varungu. Besides, you know damn well that many church people support our cause just as much as you and I do."
Kris shrugged. He mumbled something like an apology to his commander, then moved off to sit in the shade of one of the prophet's huts.

Turning to Musariri, Dzawira smiled. "As you see, prophet Musariri," he said, "some of our fighters are sensitive about the Jesus issue. But have no fear. I myself shall not interfere with your religion as long as you remain true to chimurenga."

"You know that I support the struggle. All the people in Vunjere know it," Musariri said simply. "What is it you want of me?"

"First of all," Dzawira enumerated, "your farm has thick cover. We shall often base our fighters not far from your house. Our presence is to be kept secret under all circumstances. In the second place we shall expect you to provide us with food. Chicken, for instance, should never include the heads, claws or intestines. Finally, and most importantly, we shall expect you to assist us with your prophecies. If you are as good a prophet as the povo in this area believe, the spirit of Mwari will certainly give you the information we need for our operations. We shall also expect you to attend pungwe meetings in Vunjere."

It was a daunting brief. Musariri realized that life in his peaceful Zion would never be the same. The produce of the farm would no longer be his to control. Implicated so deeply in the shifting fortunes of war, his own life and that of his family would be in constant jeopardy. Have no fear, said the confident commander in front of him. Have no fear, Mwari had repeatedly told the beleaguered Israelites through Isaiah and his other prophets of old. Have no fear indeed! What do you do when the anti-Jesus freedom fighters get drunk and run amuck on your farm? How do you protect your wife and children when the collaborators betray you to Smith's army, when the soldiers come to take you away, break up your home?

"Have I made myself clear?" Dzawira's voice put an end to his reverie.

"Yes, yes. We shall assist you as best we can."

And that, Musariri remembered, was how the war entered the haven in Vunjere which he had struggled so hard to secure for his family and his church.

Zion in Patmos changed overnight. The church headquarters became a little city under siege. There were simply too many mouths to feed; the comrades kept coming back with demands for more and more food. They cared little about the dwindling herds of livestock and the empty granaries at the prophet's homestead. The hard-won signs of divine blessing and well-being were soon consumed. When the fowl run no longer held any chickens, Musariri's wife, Mai Rudo, shrugged her shoulders disconsolately and called for some goats to be slaughtered. The sons and daughters of war had to be fed. A herd of thirty goats was quite a nest egg for a small farmer. But chimurenga had no care for the long-term interests of individual families.
There was only one big family, one overriding objective, no matter what it cost individuals, whether *povo* or fighters.

Soon the herd of goats at Patmos had gone. Then followed the sheep. Until the kraals of Zion stood empty. Only a few cows with calves were left to provide the comrades with milk. The people of Zion and their dwellings were left alone. But the good life, the milk and honey of Canaan, was no more. Lament hung in the air like a beggar's cloak slung across the shoulders of the poor.

To build a black Zion means to have peace. To be in Zion means to be in the presence of Christ, to realize his good news of salvation in this world. It means establishing signs of his justice in a world of oppression. Chimurenga's ideals, prophet Musariri reflected in that time of tribulation, are similar to those of Zion. Yet its practice casts a shadow. It breeds fear, deprivation and bitterness, not love.

At least, that is how it often appeared in the war years in Vunjere.

There was an afternoon of dread when one of the guerrilla commanders threatened to shoot Mai Rudo. He had accused her of skimming the cream off his milk. Beside himself from smoking *mbanje*, he would have carried out his threat had one of the other comrades not appeared on the scene in time to stop him. When drunk, Kris too was a menace to whoever irritated him. What utter humiliation to be beaten around one's own courtyard in front of one's wife and children by this drunken upstart. Kris could not forgive his superiors for not disciplining the Zionist prophet who continued openly to worship the *murungu* whore son. Musariri can still feel the thumping blows, taste the blood trickling over his lips.

Increasingly he had to contend with fear inside Zion. Mai Rudo was a pillar of strength, but fear for her husband's safety every time he was called out to *pungwe* meetings wore her down. Whenever he returned he noticed the anxiety in the faces of his wife and children.

There was the day when an army helicopter unexpectedly dropped from the skies to pick up a group of white soldiers who came walking down the granite face of Madungambira hill, right behind Musariri's house. The little community was shaken. It was a bad omen: the enemy, it seemed, knew about Zion's role in the struggle.

Later that afternoon Dzawira and a few comrades walked into the courtyard to inform them that the soldiers had been watching the prophet's house for three days from Madungambira. Meanwhile the guerrillas had been watching the soldiers from another hill. Had they not seen the soldiers' arrival they would have walked into the trap. That would certainly have been the end of the little settlement at Zion in Patmos. Commander Dzawira felt that the sell-outs who had alerted the enemy should be sought in the Chibarirwe church. Some of its members, seeking to please the comrades, had publicly stated that
they no longer worshipped the Bible's son of a whore. They were known to be envious of the Zionist prophet, not only for having stood his ground on the Jesus issue, but also for his influence amongst the comrades. He was one of the few church leaders who was allowed to continue celebrating Paseka.

For weeks after the army incident a cloud of apprehension hung over the inhabitants of Zion. Whenever army movements were observed in the neighbourhood they feared the worst. At night, when army trucks could be heard in the distance, Musariri felt Mai Rudo tense, then shiver. He held her close as silent tears ran down her cheeks.

"The mabhunu will fetch you," she insisted. "They will torture you for information. What will happen to our children?"

He tried to reassure her. "No, Mai Rudo, the Spirit of God will protect us. I pray and fast. I have had no revelation about the return of the soldiers. The message of Mwari is that we should not fear."

All he could do was to seek strength in the word of Mwari, in prayer, in the seclusion of the bush. His own fears always subsided when his family needed support or when he was assisting the comrades. Inner peace grew; his bitterness at losing all his livestock faded; his anxiety about army interference abated. Chimurenga could wear an ugly mask, yes. His task in the Vunjere community, he felt, was to give it a humane face.

In spite of its empty granaries Patmos kept functioning as a refuge for troubled members of the community, both guerrillas and povo. Sick comrades came to prophet Musariri for prophetic diagnosis and laying on of hands. Commander Dzawira regularly asked for holy water for his chronic stomach complaint. Comrade Magidi started attending services after being healed and converted. He became a member of Zion and his infectious laughter brought lightness to the prophet's home. Comrade Nyika was an outspoken Christian. He insisted that the guerrillas operating from the liberated zone should always consult their prophet at Patmos before every military or scouting operation.

So there was no rest for the man of God. He prayed for the safety of the fighters. He prophesied about enemy movements and how these had to be countered. He warned the guerrillas of ambushes. He sprinkled their AKs with holy water, declaring their campaign a holy war against oppression. He preached that Mwari was on the side of the oppressed, that his whore son was the true liberator of all humankind. At night he sometimes prayed with comrade Nyika for a speedy end to the suffering. Patmos became a kind of operational base from where the war of liberation was masterminded by the powerful Holy Spirit of Zion.

Pingwe meetings were often arbitrary ordeals of life and death. Musariri had no option but to participate. Reflecting upon those occasions as he looks at the black coffins containing the remains of comrades Guymore and Shamhu
he had seen them die - he came out in goose-pimples in spite of the humid heat. Ah bodo, these are not pleasant thoughts. The blue robe he wears today is the same one he wore when, as bishop and prophet, he helped decide the fate of those unfortunates in Vunjere. The robe symbolizes the ultimate authority of the Holy Spirit which he represented at those sessions, which he still represents today.

During those court sessions - for that is what the pungwe meetings often were - he was cast in the role of judge on account of the divine power and illumination he stood for.

He had to be careful. Against his will he was empowered to do what he had never aspired to: in the name of the Spirit, to take or save lives. To exercise the unbearable power of destiny.

The pungwe after the death of comrade Guymore was one occasion, Musariri remembers with gratitude, when the spirit of Zion saved lives. During the weeks after Guymore's return to Vunjere, a hero of the Musukutwa battle with shattered arms, several families were responsible for providing him with food and drink in his cave hide-out. Towards the end it was the family of Shumbaererwa who fed the ailing commander. Prophet Musariri often visited the wounded fighter, treated him with holy water and prophesied for him. The Spirit had revealed that there was a chance of recovery provided Guymore stopped his heavy drinking. But Guymore persisted and was eventually told by the Spirit the exact date of his death. To the prophet no less than to the guerrillas this meant bidding farewell to a heroic liberator of the land.

Someone, probably an enemy of Shumbaererwa, sensed that the popular commander's close comrades were suspicious about the circumstances of his death. His death had to be avenged. A sorcerer had to be found. So the suggestion that the Shumbaererwa family had poisoned their patient's tea was planted in the minds of the guerrillas. In the right circumstances mere suspicion grows into blind certainty, clamouring for Old Testament justice: a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye.

At the pungwe the comrades had already started rounding up members of the Shumbaererwa family when the prophet arrived. “Down with the wizards!” they were shouting angrily. They had seen other comrades-in-arms poisoned. And the suspects knew that in reprisal enemy collaborators, the true varoyi of chimurenga, were driven with their families into huts and burnt alive. The situation was explosive.

Inside his blue robe Musariri shivered then, as he shivers now. Could he turn the tide? Desperately he started to pray out loud: “Mwari of all power, reveal your truth. Let your will prevail.”

Then the heavens opened and Mwari’s Spirit possessed him with a fury he had not experienced before. He shook like a leaf buffeted in a storm, his teeth
chattering. From a distance he could hear his own muttering in tongues: "Urindi witi, urindi witi Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah overlord wamasimba kan tek forrorition Arrerujah! Arrerujah!" It went on and on. The force of the Spirit dazed him. He lost track of his surroundings, felt a numbness in his legs. Insensibly he lingered in another universe where the darkness of the underworld alternated with the blinding light of God's presence. Gradually the tempest subsided. Peace returned

He found himself standing at the centre of the pungwe gathering, exhausted but calm, leaning on his holy staff. Everybody sat patiently, not saying a word. For the moment the storm of the Spirit had quenched the flames of wrath. They were waiting for the message of his revelation. The change of mood wrought by mystery beyond the pungwe, beyond war, was astounding. Gone was his inner turmoil, the trembling, the fear. In his mind God's command was inscribed as on a stone slab.

"Mwari says," he announced calmly, "that comrade Guymore has died the death of a courageous warrior in the cause of liberation. He died a hero of Musukutwa."

"Hmmm" the crowd agreed.

"Mwari says that because of men like Guymore, because of fighters who are prepared to sacrifice their lives, chimurenga will succeed. The war will soon come to an end. Blacks will reign in a new Zimbabwe."

"Viva! Viva!" the comrades shouted, lifting their AKs.

"The Spirit clearly shows that there was no poison in the food of our deceased friend. The Spirit says too much beer weakened his body so that it could not resist the destruction of his terrible wounds. Sometimes the real wizards are our own weaknesses, not the people we accuse. Therefore the Spirit commands that the case of Guymore be closed peacefully, without further bloodshed."

For long moments there was not a murmur to be heard. Mwari's Spirit had spoken; he awaited the response of man. In the distance the njerere, Mwari's rain-bird, called.

"Ameni! So be it!" one of the commanders said solemnly.

The crowd hesitated. Then there was a deep sigh and a murmur of assent. Life had vanquished the need for death. Shumbaererwa's wives and daughters sobbed brokenly.

"Quiet! Quiet!" the prophet shouted. "The Spirit also says that the family of Shumbaererwa will have to come and stay at Zion in Patmos for a while. There they can rest and receive instruction in the ways of Mwari."

"Ameni!" Shumbaererwa and his family chorused. They knew only too well that the prophet was offering them sanctuary. Survival for them lay in Zion. Until such time as the emotions had calmed down, they had to be seen by the comrades and the community to live willingly under the direction and
control of the Spirit at Zion in Patmos. They knew that prophet Musariri's farm had been denuded of agricultural produce. They also knew that it had become a haven to many falsely accused members of society. Here they could live for a while under the protection of the prophet and the Spirit he obeyed.

To Musariri the outcome of his prophecy that day was a victory for his wartime ministry of justice and sanity in the midst of vengeance and unreason. Stemming the tide through the Spirit's intervention on the side of the accused was like taking on bare-handed the demonic titans of the underworld. The risk was extreme. There was no guarantee that the flames would not consume you as they threatened to consume the accused. One could never calculate in advance the cost of surrendering oneself to the Spirit and acting as his agent.

But as the Spirit of God, he was also the spirit of liberation, of chimurenga. He could act as prosecutor and judge of collaborators, varoyi who delayed the new order by their support of white rule. In such cases the prophet's task was inhuman. When the Spirit disclosed the identity of a muroyi it was a death warrant. Those were prophecies that cost life; an enemy life, to be sure, but life nevertheless. These occasions were to haunt his dreams.

On that day of doom the mijiba came running into Zion in Patmos towards noon. They were out of breath. "Come quickly, vaMusariri!" they shouted. "There is trouble at Zinhata. Some comrades are very ill. The others are rounding up the villagers for a big killing."

"God forbid," he thought as he listened to the young messengers of ill tidings. For a moment he resented the intrusion, wishing them gone. But there they were, waiting impatiently for him to get ready. From the house Mai Rudo, who had overheard the conversation, brought his blue robe. Although her eyes were wide with fear, her hands were firm and reassuring. When she noticed his fumbling fingers she helped him put on the garments and holy cords. She also fetched his holy staff. Thus she steadied him for the ordeal that lay ahead.

He jogged behind the mijiba in scorching sun, the hard soles of his feet impervious to exposed patches of burning sand. Despite his apprehension and hurting, heaving chest, the billowing robe buoyed him. The man of God had been summoned and was flying in blue on yet another life-and-death mission. Somewhere along the road the self-image of a shaky, unwilling prophet vanished.

In the shade of huge muchakata trees near the kraalhead's homestead he found a motley crowd of subdued, bewildered people. MOs were tending three critically ill comrades. They were writhing in dreadful pain and vomiting blood. Shamhu, the whip, was one of them. He was ashen grey, on the verge of coma. A short distance away from these stricken fighters, comrade Shungu sat slumped against a tree trunk, doubling up every few minutes with severe
stomach cramps. Two less ill fighters were being carried to the pick-up of a Zinhata businessman. He would take them to Father Kaufmann, the Swiss Catholic missionary at Mutero, to see if he could smuggle them into the hospital at Silveira mission for treatment. To the comrades Father Kaufmann was a war hero. He ran errands for them, helped to repair faulty AK rifles and, like Musariri, blessed their weaponry by sprinkling it with God’s water.

There was no time to waste. Still sweating profusely and breathing heavily, prophet Musariri started to pray. The Spirit took hold of him, showed him three corpses and a healthy fighter before his eyes. Without hesitation he prophesied that Mwari was about to take away Shamhu and the other two convulsing fighters, but that comrade Shungu would survive with proper treatment at Zion. He immediately called for boiling water and salt so that he could start the Spirit’s treatment of the suffering Shungu. This one, he realized, had to be made to vomit repeatedly to rid his body of the varoyi’s poison. And so, while three of the men were slipping into the dark valley, Musariri started treating Shungu – treatment which was to continue for many weeks at Zion in Patmos before the young fighter fully recovered.

The mood under the trees was ominous. This was a terrible blow. Seldom had the enemy succeeded in killing so many fighters in one incident of food poisoning. Nobody doubted that the eggs which had been prepared for the comrades by the leading women of the village had been poisoned. The fighters’ eyes reflected grief; but the underlying mood was one of outrage and anger. It could erupt at any moment into murderous retaliation. The arrival of a group of commanders from the neighbourhood prevented the close friends of the poisoned men from firing into the crowd of villagers they had rounded up.

Wide-eyed and whimpering children were hugging their mothers. Terrified young people gaped; some wept. Elders sat with sunken heads, while their wives stared back at the guerrillas defiantly. Musariri knew that some of them had sons in the Rhodesian army.

As the afternoon wore on and one after another the three limp bodies were covered with blankets, the tension reached breaking point. Even the commanders appeared unwilling and unable to prevent a massacre. Retribution was in the air. One of the comrades shouted: “This whole village is guilty. Evil has invaded it and it will strike again at the forces of chimurenga. Down with the varoyi! I say kill them all, young and old!”

It was then that prophet Musariri made the most daring move of his life. “Wait! Wait! Don’t shoot!” he shouted loudly as he lunged into the clearing between the terrified villagers and the angry guerrillas. There he stood, a lean figure in blue, looking down the barrels of several AKs.

“Shoot the old Zionist bastard together with the others!” one of the fighters urged.
"No, wait, give him a chance to speak. He has supported us all along!" The deep voice commanded obedience. It was Chakarakata, the one with the red headband and long plaited hair. He was seated to one side, along with Obey, Kirwen, Subshumba and a few other commanders.

There was a lull. AK muzzles dropped grudgingly; the men remained silent.

"Listen, valiant fighters of Zimbabwe," the prophet said. "You are quite right to be angry at this terrible deed. The guilty must be found and punished. But the new nation of Zimbabwe and the Spirit of Mwari, who is directing our struggle, refuse to have innocent people shot. Mwari says that if there are some rotten members in a family, a village, it does not follow that all the relatives or all the villagers are evil too. You fighters of liberation know that in the customs of our forefathers we have a practice of detecting wizards. Now we have the Holy Spirit who can guide us to determine who the varoyi are.

"I implore you to remain calm and to give us a chance to do just that. Let someone go and fetch prophet Chimbare, whom all of you know. He, too, is a muprofiti of Zion. Allow him and me to fast and pray through the night. Then, tomorrow morning, we shall find the varoyi for you to punish.

"Let there be true justice in our liberated zone of Vunjere! If we shoot the innocent together with the guilty, we shall only worsen the scandal which has already taken place today. The Spirit of God may abandon us and invite the powers of evil to strike us down if we waste the lives of his people."

Musariri's speech carried on and on while the shadows grew long. He repeated himself. He spoke about the lives of good people he knew in the village. He dwelt on the heroic deeds of the fighters who operated in the district. And when the seething anger had subsided into murmurs of approval, he started moving around in the crowd, turning briskly hither and thither so that the authority of the Spirit was punctuated by the billow of his blue robe. Towards the end his speech was interspersed with Spirit language, a reminder to the still hidden offenders of Spirit revelations to come. At last he sank to the ground, utterly drained of strength and emotion.

Impressed by the prophet's courageous appeal for sanity and justice and relieved by what they felt was divine prevention of a bloodbath, the commanders seized the opportunity to announce a pungwe the next morning. The villagers were to remain where they were under guard; senior guerrillas were to withdraw to various poshitos in the vicinity; and mijiba were dispatched to fetch prophet Chimbare.

That night there was no rest for the man of God. He was relieved that the village was saved. Yet the ordeal was far from over. The reprieve obtained for the community was temporary; a terrible price in human life would still be exacted in the morning. To save lives in this instance meant to take life. As at
other *pungwe* meetings in the past, he would have to help determine who the secret enemies of *chimurenga* were. Committed to the cause, he was irrevocably bound to the task of detecting and stamping out witchcraft. The personal cost of virtually forming part of a guerrilla death squad was unbearable. But it was war. Besides, it was nothing other than Mwari's war against oppression in which the Holy Spirit kept intervening and directing the affairs of life and death.

In between spells of tending comrade Shungu beside one of the fires, prophet Musariri made regular sorties to a nearby hill. There he could sit and rest in the moonlight, collecting his thoughts. He was too tired to pray for any length of time. At no point, however, did he doubt that the Spirit was listening to the inner cry of his soul: that he be given a conclusive revelation on the morrow, as well as the wisdom to act justly, whatever the pressure. Every time he moved back to the fires, the subdued voices from the dark blob of humanity where the villagers sat anxiously huddled together under a *muchakata* tree deeply distressed him. The occasional eerie howl of a hyena to the north, near Mount Rasa, kept reminding him that amongst their number there were witches to be dealt with.

Next morning at the *pungwe* court the massed faces in the crowd were drawn and haggard from the night’s vigil. A putrid smell under the *muchakata* trees betrayed human fear and torment. Even the guerrillas were drained. They wanted prompt action, to get the grim procedure over and done with.

Prophet Chimbare, who had arrived in the early hours, was the first to prophesy. He pointed out seven witches. While he was busy the prophet in blue sat at a distance, his eyes averted. Mwari had to speak conclusively through their two voices, without human influence. The easy way out would have been to watch and merely confirm Chimbare's findings. But that was not the way of the Spirit.

The experience of that morning would never leave him. He was trembling, more from the impossible weight on his shoulders than from the presence of the Holy Spirit. He can still hear the sharp intake of breath as he approached the villagers. Tried beyond endurance, he just stood there. A dry leaf in the wind - deliverer, yet judge, before friends and acquaintances. Pleading eyes, terror-stricken eyes, sad, defiant eyes held his until he could stand it no longer. Involuntarily his arms rose, his hands beckoning heavenward. "Mwari! No! Let this ordeal pass " his inner self protested. His lips moved but there was no sound.

Then the Spirit took hold of him, shook him out of inertia. His limbs loosened. Blue billows swept around his hips and ankles. The holy staff flashed in the morning sun. And the ancient words of Mwari started to flow like the rumble of thunder against the offenders of God's holy order.

The vision in front of his eyes comprised a sea of faces. Unknown faces
black faces white faces faces young and old. Then a beam of light illuminated a number of known identity. As they emerged in sharp relief, the others faded and disappeared. There were seven of them, the faces of popular leading women in village society, the wives of friends, mothers of youngsters who came to play and dance at Zion in Patmos. Mothers, too, of soldiers in Smith’s army. The kraalhead’s wife was one of them. She was pregnant. So were two of the others.

As he watched intently, he saw that the seven had shadows obscuring their eyes, deflecting the beam of light. He could not read the expression in those eyes. Behind them, in the distance, hovered blurred images of hyena, snakes and owls – symbols of witchcraft. Faintly his nostrils registered the odour of rotten eggs. As if standing outside his body, he watched his right hand rise. Slowly, unerringly, he raised the holy staff. Its tip rested briefly on each of the shadowed faces. Thus spoke the Holy Spirit.

The next moment a babble of voices erupted around him. Cheers and angry shouts, thanks and derision, ululation and shrieks of anguish, praise, the low wail of mourning engulfed him all at once. His head was spinning. He was out of breath and darkness was closing in.

Strong arms held him, led him to a tree. “Father, your staff pointed out the same women as did prophet Chimbare. There can be no doubt now. The seven varoyi will be executed immediately. Forward the struggle!” It was the deep voice of the commander with the red headband.

Sick at heart, he sat down in the shade. In the Spirit he had saved the village; in the Spirit he had exacted an inhuman price. Part of him gave way as he listened to the reports of AKs and the dull thuds of bodies falling to the ground. Three of those bodies carried unborn babies with them to the grave.

“Yes, comrade President,” he muses, his eyes fixed on comrade Shamhu’s coffin, “we, the uncles of Gutu, did give our full support. Some of us still suffer because of it. I shall never know whether the seven women were all equally guilty of poisoning those eggs. None of them confessed. They died in the morning sun before they could speak. Mr President, you should know this: those eyes still haunt my dreams.”

II

The mass burial at Dewende in 1978 was a nightmare. After it was over Prophet Musarirí and two friends – evangelist Mutema of the Chibarirwe church and Bishop Forridge of Makuti’s Zion Christian Church – sat under a tree contemplating the horror of the massacre at Chimungoma’s farm. They had just seen the blanket-wrapped bodies disappear into the earth. Raw hurt and anger mingled inside them as grief-stricken women and children sobbed and wailed in the background.
"How many did you say were killed altogether?" Musaririri asked evangelist Mutema.

"They say a hundred and fifty villagers were shot at the Chimungoma pungwe. I did not count the bodies, but I can tell you there were many. Truck loads have been taken away for burial."

"And you were there the next morning?" Bishop Forridge asked.

"Yes." Mutema sighed. "A terrible sight; all those mangled bodies. Some of them we could not even identify. Their faces were gone, brains spattered all over the place. I wanted to vomit"

"I knew something terrible was happening, the other night when I lay listening to the rifle fire," Bishop Forridge commented. "You could hear the shots as far away as our place near Sote river." Forridge was an elderly, light-complexioned man with kind, lively eyes. He removed his khaki cap with the ZCC badge to wipe the sweat from a clean shaven pate. Scrutinizing Mutema's white collar and black suit as if to size up the differences between Zion and the Chibarirwe, he carefully phrased the question nagging at the back of his mind. "Tell me, friend, how come that you who live here at Dewende, so close to Chimungoma's farm, did not attend that pungwe?"

Mutema looked at Forridge, his wide eyes and heavy face intent, as if to probe the motive behind the question. He smiled disarmingly. "You surely don't think I stayed away because I am a sell-out, old man."

"No, no, that is not what I am suggesting." Forridge held up his hands defensively. "I was just wondering."

"Well, it's like this." Mutema seemed relieved. "I have attended all the pungwe meetings in our area, ever since they started. But this time I had a warning dream." Mutema looked teasingly at his friends. "Yes, you need not look so surprised. It is not just to you vaZioni that Mwari speaks in dreams. Even the old Chibarirwe, for all its beer and ancestors, is close to God's heart!"

The three men chuckled softly, not to disturb the mourners. For a few moments mirth lit up their eyes.

Mutema cleared his throat and proceeded on a more serious note. "It was a heavy dream, that. I could clearly see the foot of the mountain where Chimungoma's farm is. A large number of people were gathered there. In the dark sky above the farm, there appeared a huge white cloth. As I was watching it, it slowly turned red with blood. The blood oozed out of it and started dripping all over the farm. When I woke up I found myself sitting upright, trembling with fear. I have never had such a vivid dream of coming danger before. When I told my family about it, we all agreed that it was a warning from God. We decided to act upon it immediately. So I sent the family away to visit relatives down the other side of Chiwara. I myself stayed home. I informed my neighbours that I would be absent from the pungwe on
account of illness. When I heard the firing that night I knew that Mwari had saved our family."

"The ways of Mwari are unknown," Musariri said after a while. "One just wonders why such a terrible thing should happen at all. I believe whole families were wiped out."

"Many families." Mutema heaved another deep sigh. "Mukwembi's wives and children are all dead. How can I rejoice about the survival of my own family when so many of my neighbours are grieving?"

"To feel guilty about your good fortune is pointless. You can only thank God." Musariri spoke with conviction.

Inwardly he knew that he was addressing his own conscience, disquieted by involvement in many pungwe meetings that ended with summary executions. He guessed that the harrowing sight of all those corpses of friends was preying on Mutema's mind. How easy, he thought, to start mistrusting your continued good fortune when you live in the midst of turmoil.

"You know," Musariri continued, "the three of us are blessed to be around still. At pungwe meetings the Holy Spirit has often saved me from ugly situations. It is hard to be a prophet of chimurenga. How do you think I feel when I have to detect the varoyi and the sell-outs, knowing that these people are sure to be killed? The war must come to an end soon now." Musariri looked pensively at the shiny staff in his right hand, fondling the familiar roundness of the doorknob at one end of it as if to feel the reassurance of the Spirit he so often spoke about.

"I wish I could see things as clearly as you do, Musariri," Mutema replied. "I do not experience the Spirit as you do, and I certainly do not envy your role at pungwe meetings. Let God be praised for giving us brave prophets to preserve sanity and peace between the fighters and the povo."

Mutema paused, then continued almost tonelessly. "Here at Dewende, this massacre will waken us at night for the rest of our days. All those familiar faces, the talk, the laughter - all gone. Just like that." Mutema flicked his fingers, raising his shoulders in resignation. "I wake up telling myself that I have been dreaming, that nothing terrible has happened. But over there are all those mounds of soil. They tell me . . ." Mutema's voice trailed away in sorrow as renewed wailing in a distant hut thrust the reality of death upon them.

For a long time the three figures, forlorn icons of a troubled humanity, sat silently in the shade. The prophet's lean hand rested on Mutema's shoulder, supporting the evangelist as he found relief in tears.

When outward grief had subsided, Musariri asked: "How is it possible that the soldiers got to know about this pungwe?"

"According to the comrades," Mutema replied, "the informant they tried at the Gumindoga pungwe in Chingombe must have overheard talk about the
meeting to be held at Chimungoma. He escaped before he was sentenced and must have informed the soldiers at the Mupindimbi camp."

"That just goes to show how careless our people have become of late," Bishop Forridge interjected. He stamped the ground in front of him with the tip of his staff to emphasize his point. "The comrades should have changed the date and the venue of that pungwe after the escape of that informer. But no! They have become too accustomed to the misleading quiet here in their liberated zone. I keep telling them and the villagers not to underestimate that Satan just around the corner at Mupindimbi. He can still strike whenever or wherever he chooses. I know! I have experienced it."

"You are right. One must always be vigilant," Musariri said. "But our people are getting tired of harassment. They need a bit of normal life for a change."

"Not if it costs that many lives!" Mutema's eyes flashed. "You should have seen those bodies. May Mwari avenge their deaths. Some were shot from behind, others from above. A number of the soldiers must have climbed into the trees. They just fired from there into the milling crowd below them, killing men, women, children. Apart from the povo they killed only one comrade - the one who was addressing the pungwe when the firing started. Think of it. One hundred and fifty villagers butchered in the process of killing one armed fighter! It was plain murder!"

In his outrage Mutema jumped to his feet. He waved his arms in an attempt to describe the wicked destruction of his neighbours. Then, looking down into the gaze of his friends, his movements faltered; his outstretched arms froze in mid-air. Slowly he sank back to the ground, burying his face in his arms.

"Well, the killing reveals one thing about the soldiers," Musariri murmured, staring stonily in front of him.

"And what would that be?" Bishop Forridge asked. He leaned forward, his hand cupped behind one ear, straining to hear the prophet's words.

"That they are getting desperate. They sense that the tide of the war has turned, that more and more people are siding against them. So now they feel they have to punish the sell-outs. Every incident in the villages becomes an excuse for punishment. But behind it there is fear and uncertainty.

Forridge was nodding his head in agreement. "Yes, yes, that is so," he muttered.

Musariri guessed that something was weighing on his friend's mind. "Is anything the matter, friend?" he asked gently. "Why is it that you have difficulty hearing me?"

Forridge sighed. In contrast to his usual enthusiastic self, he seemed shrunken and frail. "It is that very thing you talk about, my friend. The punishment of the people. I was beaten up badly myself in the Mupindimbi camp not so long ago. Since that time I have this noise in my ears. Some days
I can hardly hear at all. I worry about it. How am I to preach if I become completely deaf?"

"Sorry, sorry, I did not know. What happened?" Musariri's voice expressed his concern. His friend clearly needed to unburden himself. Suffering became bearable through sharing.

"Oh, I suppose it is just another war story " Forridge said, waving his right hand self-deprecatingly. But his eyes flickered with anticipation. He enjoyed telling stories. And you don’t tell a story sitting down. It refuses to come out properly unless you move around. So the old man rose slowly, dusted his trousers and poked the ground with his holy staff while he gathered his thoughts. Then he cleared his throat and turned to his friends.

"There were eight of them waiting for me at my house when I returned from Fort Victoria. It was some months ago. I had gone to Fambidzano's office to fetch the lessons for our students in Chingombe. You know about Fambidzano's work of uniting churches and our training programme in Bible knowledge and church history; the one for which my wife and I also got certificates a few years ago?"

The two listeners nodded affirmatively.

"Ha! My heart beat like a bass drum when I saw the eight fighters with their AKs. They only had eyes for the briefcase in my hand. And where are you going with all those papers, old man?' they asked. 'Bring them here. Some of the people here in Chingombe say you are collaborating with the whites in Fort Victoria. You know what that means.

"Ah, ah, ah, my friends! I knew I had been sold out by my enemies. I could already hear my death sentence at the pungwe. I tell you, my knees were like water as I handed over the briefcase."

Forridge tottered around on wobbly legs, half expecting to keel over at any moment. He shivered, swallowed and croaked from a dry mouth, his eyes wide with mock fear. Mutema's spirit returned from the Chimungoma debacle. His wide face creased with laughter at the old man's miming.

"Can you believe it!" Forridge continued. "The comrades spent all afternoon reading those lessons. They had expected something else. I tell you, they could not stop reading the history of our black churches in Africa. In the end they said that they would also like to study such courses. They volunteered to help me distribute the courses to the students. Can you imagine such a miracle? Many of our students had buried their papers for fear of being branded sell-outs. And here the fighters themselves come to do our work. Week after week they read and distributed in the Chingombe villages all the lessons that I brought them from town. Soon they had convinced all the drop-outs to dig up their material and start studying afresh. It was a happy time; it lasted a full two months. The comrades said: 'Chimurenga also liberates the churches of the black people. "
Forridge smiled at the incredulity in the eyes of his friends. He knew they thought the story too good to be true.

Prophet Musariri shook his head. “Aiwa bodo,” he ventured, “the ways of the Spirit are beyond comprehension. Miracles still happen.”

Mutema plucked at a tuft of dry grass, his brow puckered at some hidden irritation. “What I want to know, Bishop,” he said pointedly “is what the comrades had to say about the white man working in your organization. Or did you not tell them about him?” The question was a challenge.

“You mean Mafuranhunzi, the one who writes black church history, who lived in Chingombe during the early days of chimurenga?” Forridge asked.

“Yes, the very one. He is your close friend, is he not?”

Forridge leaned on his staff, meeting the questioning gaze of the Chibarirwe man. “Of course he is my friend. We hunted together in the mountains of Gutu. We started Fambidzano together. He is the one who set up our training programme. No, Mutema, you are trying to trap the wrong polecat.”

“How can you be so sure, Bishop?” Mutema frowned. “Mafuranhunzi is a muDutchi, a real bhunu. How can he not be a supporter of Smith?”

“This one is different. He is the first muDutchi to side openly with our black churches. He has dodged several call-ups to serve in Smith’s army. He says that would be the end of his work in Fambidzano. I say he has the skin of a murungu and the heart of a mutema.”

Mutema grunted disapproval. “Can you be sure, vaForridge, that he does not carry any weapons against our people?”

Forridge shook his head. “Ch-ch-ch, the questions my friend asks!” he mocked. “Mafuranhunzi has anti-mine plates on his truck. Land-mines, you know, are not selective! And he always carries an anti-ambush weapon in his truck. He says he has a right to return fire at anybody who starts shooting at him on the road without provocation. All he wants to do is to write books about the black churches. Maybe it sounds like blasphemy against our liberation struggle. But after all, he is a man of books.”

“You are right there,” Musariri agreed. “Mwari sooner or later judges the indifference of these spoilt rich varungu. They write stories while we suffer.”

“You see!” Mutema held out both hands in exasperation. “Just another bhunu! He has black friends but he remains an exploiter. They are all the same.”

Forridge shook his head emphatically. There was irritation in his voice. “Mutema, your bitterness about Chimungoma is clouding your judgment. Even the fighters in this area will disagree with you. At several pungwe meetings I had to tell them all I know about Mafuranhunzi. They were impressed by the Fambidzano courses he had worked out. They laughed at his name and said if he is really such a good shot he should be carrying an AK on their side. But the important thing is that they have all agreed not to fire at his truck when they see it on the road. I described the truck to them.”
"And you think you can protect your white friend in this war?" Mutema asked cynically.

"Bodo! bodo! I know that is impossible. War gives no guarantees of anyone's safety! But I have at least told the comrades the truth. I have done what I can for my friend. So let us drop the subject!" Forridge swept his staff sideways with finality, cutting short the conversation. There was anger in the line of his mouth.

"Yes," Musariri concurred. "Let us not argue about this white man. The war is difficult enough as it is. What I want to know, mukuru, is why you got beaten up at the Mupindimbi camp."

Musariri wondered whether the bishop would continue his story. The old man had walked away a few paces and was standing with his back turned to them, facing Mount Rasa.

There was no trace of anger left when Forridge turned round to face his friends. He merely asked casually: "Have you ever seen a land-mine explode?"

Without waiting for a reply he proceeded: "I did! Why my guerrilla friends decided to plant that demon's device in the Basera road opposite my homestead I shall never know. That morning I stood at the cattle kraal watching the army trucks coming down the hill from Mupindimbi's side. Suddenly there was this flash of lightning. Then came a deafening thunderclap and a huge cloud of dust. The one truck just drifted off the road like a feather and crashed into our maize field. Ah, iwe! It was like the roar of Satan himself."

Forridge was getting back into stride. He raised a clenched fist. "I thought of shouting 'pamberi nechimurenga' but I saw some of the soldiers running towards my house. They were mad, angry. I realized then that we had entered the pit of fire. Someone must have informed them about the comrades visiting my place. I rushed into the house to see if I could salvage something. All I could think of in my panic was the two framed Fambidzano certificates, mine and my wife's, hanging on the wall. I ran for my life around the kopje to hide them in the little cave on the far side." Forridge paused, chuckling ruefully at himself.

"When I returned my wife and children were running towards the kraal, shouting and crying. They were terrified. The flames were already consuming our huts. It did not take long before everything was razed to the ground. Only one of the granary huts remained standing. It was like a dream, standing there watching your home burn away; all the clothes and things you had worked for. And the soldiers shouting at you, calling you a traitor. Helle wena! It was a nightmare."

Forridge appeared lost in a world of his own, a world crackling with the sound of flames. His hooded eyes refused to reveal their hurt; only a brief tremor puckered his lips and chin. His friends waited patiently.

"What came after the fire was worse," he continued wearily. "The soldiers
had to punish someone for the land-mine. For days they tortured me in that Satan's camp of theirs. Every time I refused to tell them about our fighters they beat me. It was tu! tu! tu! against my head, first this side, then that. The old man swayed on his feet as he lashed out with both hands to convey the helpless fury he had felt. "My ears just kept droning inside after the beatings. Sometimes the darkness closed over me to relieve me from pain. The next day it would start all over again. There was no rest and I lost count of the days. Not a single piece of information did I give them! Do you hear me? Not a word about the fighters!"

"Mwari alone kept me alive in that pit of fire. Eventually, when they saw I was no use to them, the soldiers just threw me out, like you throw away an old rag."

There was another long pause. "Now we are rebuilding our home," the old bishop concluded his story. "I may not hear so well any more. But my hope - no, my certainty of winning chimurenga has come back. May God be praised!" His voice held no bitterness.

"Ameni!" the other two whispered.

"And when the new house is finished the two of you must come and visit us. You will see the two Fambidzano certificates hanging on the wall in the front room all that was left of my life before the fire. They remind me of everything our black churches stand for, of the unity we have built."

Mutema stood up, stretched out his large hand. Frail brown fingers clasped his firmly. "I am sorry about your loss, mukuru," he said simply. "And about the murungu I have never really doubted that Mafuranhunzi is our ally."

Forridge smiled, not noticing a tear coursing down his cheek.

III

The day after Paseka was hot and cloudless. It was 1978. The congregation of Zion in Patmos had gathered from far and wide. They were the courageous ones who continued beating the drums. They danced in praise of Mwari in spite of the heat of war. They walked with death by their side. Perhaps that was why they insisted on eating and drinking the sacrament, whatever the risk. In the body of Christ at Mount Zion they found rest and fresh courage for what lay ahead.

Zion, that sultry afternoon, was at Chikukutu, the place of Musaririri's birth near Nyika Halt. It seems like yesterday Musariri thinks. The white, blue, red and green garments. Knotted holy cords. Shiny staves of all inventions: carved wooden ones bearing the symbols of Zion, electric conduit fittings attached to pieces of piping, polished bronze door knobs of antique design mounted on silver rods. Holy staves carrying God's blessing. Cardboard
crowns painted silver on the heads of ministers and elders, contrasting with the demure white veils of the women.

Some of the older faces stared in front of them, pensive and serene. Young faces shone with expectation and excitement as if there was no war. The young evangelists and preachers were dancing faster and faster in a close circle, twisting and twirling, displaying their bright robes in splendid billowing swoops of colour above a cloud of ashen dust. Concentrated sweat-streaked faces went round and round, taking in and responding to every move of the dance leader. Alongside the rotating wheel of life uniformed women swayed in a sideways movement, first this way, then that, a graceful backdrop to the circle of dancing men. In the centre stood the drummer, face impassive, peering into the distance, his sensitive hands directing the rhythm.

In dance and song Jerusalem of Africa took shape. Over and over the words confirmed it:

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
City of the righteous
Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
This, the city they proclaimed
Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
City of the righteous

There was no splendid holy city. Only the mud-plastered village huts, thatched conical roofs, a cattle kraal and, to one side, a kopje of massive granite boulders. This was little Mount Zion, harbouring its treasured history of divine encounter. Here the man of God had spent endless nights of fasting and prayer with only the granite boulders witnessing his first revelations.

Jerusalem in Africa does not have great temples, Musariri thought as he watched the dancers. It exists in the throng of believers gathering to celebrate Paseka. Jerusalem is scattered throughout villages where the Spirit drives out demons; where the healer prophet tends his patients; where dancing feet raise clouds of dusty praise; where the cool splash of water in Jordan proclaims a new existence under the scorching sun. And now, in wartime, Jerusalem is the place where the Spirit issues battle directives; where freedom fighters come for peace and healing; where

Suddenly the drumming stopped. The voices trailed away. Unco-ordinated, dissonant, without the final drum tap. Another kind of tapping sounded in the distance. Everybody strained to listen. There it was unmistakably: the uneven tap-tap of the messenger of death. Over there in the direction of Sanje's village the muffled thuds of AKs, sharper reports of army FNs and the occasional deep boom of rockets disturbed the Sunday stillness.

"How strange it all is," he thought. "Here we are preaching life, trying to establish the peace of God's city through our worship. Yet at this very
moment our people are hunting each other down, dying out there in the sun, just the other side of the mountain."

When the firing eventually stopped Zion came to life again. Dust-laden feet defied the war, stamping out the fears lurking in the crowd of believers. The sermons of the young preachers were a clear call to repentance, to confession of sins in preparation for the sacrament. But the atmosphere was brooding like before a thunderstorm; inevitably they must come to the burning issue of the day. The believers of Zion willed their man of God, their own Moses of chimurenga, to address the war situation which was threatening to overwhelm and destroy them: this cruel menace with many faces, this destroyer of lives in the name of the freedom they all yearned for.

Standing at Heroes’ Acre, Musariri still feels the appeal of the crowd, the surge of his own spirit. His people needed comfort. Reassurance. Above all they needed to hear a strong message of defiance and prophecy, so powerful that it would liberate them from their helplessness amid the forces of war. To satisfy their expectations was far beyond his capabilities. Besides, making radical statements in public could be tantamount to signing one’s own death warrant. By the time it was his turn to preach he was sweating profusely. Once again the Spirit came to his rescue, clearing his troubled mind for the sermon. After a few proclamations of peace that drew thunderous response from his audience, he relaxed and proceeded without anxiety. He started with the story of Moses.

"The heading of Exodus, chapter 3, says that Mwari called Moses to liberate Israel. So you see, it was God himself who took action. He wanted to liberate the Israelites from oppression and slavery in Egypt. Mwari is the one who wages war. He starts war and he stops war at times of his own choosing. Our gospel sees war as belonging to Mwari. That is the strengthening of our backbone! We hear people say that this war is a chimurenga of the ancestors, of the masvikiro. We understand their views. They show respect for our tradition. But we vaZioni, citizens of a black Jerusalem, say: ‘This war belongs to Mwari. Mwari makes war! Mwari gives life!’ Peace to you all!"

There was a rumble: “Ameni!”

“It was Mwari who directed Moses to the burning bush while he was herding Jethro’s sheep. From the outset Moses, the chosen one, had to obey Mwari. In verse 5 Mwari tells Moses: ‘Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’ Here we have a command which we vaZioni obey to this day. Take off your sandals! Like Moses, we take them off. It was ordered by Mwari. Nobody treads the holy ground where we worship God with shoes on their feet. Peace and joy to all of you!”

“Ameni”

“When Mwari chooses a messenger and directs his actions, he must wait and follow instructions. Even the angel in the burning bush was silent while
Mwari was talking to Moses. Likewise we must remain silent when God speaks. Only afterwards do we, the messengers, convey God’s message to the people. In doing so we recognize that we are not Jehovah.

"Mwari told Moses, in verses 9 and 10: ‘I have heard the cry of my people and I see how the Egyptians are oppressing them. Now I am sending you to the king of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of his country. Is it not true that Mwari saw the plight of the black Israelites in this country? Did he not choose believers like Moses to act as his messengers in the struggle? Peace in Zion!”

“"Ameni!”

“In the conflict between Moses and King Pharaoh, God directed Moses’ every move. Mwari himself was leading the chimurenga of the Israelites, just as he is leading the chimurenga of Zimbabwe today. Do you think Pharaoh was just naturally a stubborn man? No. He was destined to become hard as a rock; deaf to Moses’ request for liberation from slavery. And Smith, and the rest of the varungu? Do they listen to the black man’s plea? Do they release us from slavery?”

"Ah bodo! Amen!” the crowd responded with a burst of laughter.

“Before Moses died he had one important task still to perform. That was to give the Israelites the history and the laws of war. He told them: ‘If you disobey God’s laws of war you will not survive, nor enter Canaan. You will surely die. Like Moses taught the laws of chimurenga, we – the messengers of Zion – are also busy with the laws of chimurenga, the way to liberation.”

“Tell us, old man, what these laws of chimurenga are. We have come to listen to your teaching.”

The taunting voice broke into his sermon abruptly, like a bucket of cold water from behind. When he turned round there were four of them. Four comrades, AKs in hand, grinning at his embarrassment, still panting from their flight from the battle scene near Sanje. He stood dumbfounded, staring at the newcomers.

“Well, old man, can we join you? Can we listen to your law?” one of them asked.

While he stood nodding, fumbling for words, the drummer came to his rescue. Vigorously he picked up the drum, faced the comrades as if this was nothing unusual and struck up a tune with sure hands. The entire congregation rose. Hundreds of feet came to life, stamping the ground in praise of Jehovah and in welcome of the comrades.

They sang:

Jehovah, King of Zion,  
We praise you. Hallelujah!  
Jehovah, King of Zion,  
We praise you. Hallelujah!
In no time the guerrillas had donned some spare Zionist robes. With soldiers in the neighbourhood they could take no chances. Musariri showed them where to hide their AKs and boots in a banana patch behind one of the huts. Their faded denims posed no problem, as many of the young preachers wore similar trousers under their vestments.

Their camouflage complete, the four fighters joined the inner circle of rotating dancers with great abandon. They were obviously relieved to be safe. Musariri's anxiety evaporated as he watched the immaculate dance steps of the visitors. Those perfectly timed sideways swoops, spinning to make the garments billow and delicate taps with one foot showed that these men either were vaZioni or at any rate had had experience of Zionist dancing. No outsider arriving on the scene, he was sure, would be able to tell the fighters from the other dancers.

Elated, the bishop jumped into the whirling circle in front of the leading guerrilla. He shook his staff imperiously, changed the dance step and set as fast a pace as his legs could carry him. Zion exploded in sound. The women shrilled ululations as if they were leading a war dance. Echoes reverberated from Mount Zion. Accelerated drumbeat and frenziedly swaying hips whipped up emotion to ecstasy. In their abandon the enemy was vanquished, danced into extinction. And from the war dance of death issued lusty, earthy life, a burgeoning swell of fertility.

As fevered movement reached its climax, Bishop Musariri broke through the crowd, leading a phalanx of male dancers out into the ploughed fields. There they twisted and twirled, sending clouds of dust into the air, until the colours of their robes blended with the red ochre of loamy soil in the afternoon sun.

Gradually the pace slackened. The column of sweating dancers returned, to be gathered once more to the bosom of Zion.

Those wild moments of joy Musariri remembers: faithful worshippers mingling with armed men of war. The dance itself was Mwari's statement about the blacks of Africa casting off once and for all the shackles of slavery. And Mwari's statement, thundering through Zion, was what the believers needed. Without it Musariri's own proclamation of Mwari's word would have been barren. As he waited for the congregation to settle and for his own heartbeat to slacken, he was at peace, knowing that God would give meaning to what was to follow.

"What then are the laws of chimurenga which Moses taught the Israelites?" he asked when quiet had resumed. "Our answer" - he held the quizzical glances of the four visitors with ease - "is to be found in Deuteronomy 20. Read the first verse."

The reader read dramatically: "Verse one: When you go out to fight against your enemies and you see chariots and horses and an army that
outnumbers yours, do not be afraid. The Lord your God, who rescued you from Egypt, will be with you."

"Listen to that, you men and women of war," he spoke out with great confidence. "Mwari calls you not to be afraid. When you are outnumbered, do not be dismayed! When you see chariots and horses, nay, when you see aeroplanes and troop carriers, when you hear explosions all around you, do not fear. Mwari, who is waging this war against oppression, will protect you. He has given you knowledge of the wilderness. Take to the mountains and the caves. There the God who led you out of Egypt, the one who started showing us the way to freedom already in the days of Mkwati, Kaguvi, Mashiangombe, the heroes of Zimbabwe's first chimurenga, will keep you safe. Come, let's have verses two and three!"

The young reader obeyed. "It says here: Before you start fighting, a priest is to come forward and say to the army, Men of Israel, listen! Today we are going into battle. Do not be afraid of your enemies, or lose courage or panic."

"Take note! Our book says: before you start fighting, you men at arms, you must consult the men of God. Is that not what is happening these days in Zion in Patmos? Is that not where the Holy Spirit gives revelation upon revelation of the enemy's movements, so that our fighters can avoid danger and plan their battles carefully? Is that not where the wounded come to rest and be healed? Peace in Zion! Forward our liberation from slavery!"

"Ameni!" the audience thundered. And the four fighters nodded, raising their fists.

The reader resumed. "Verse 4 says: The Lord your God is going with you, and he will give you victory."

"Did you hear that?" Musariri proceeded. "Moses is but the messenger, and so are the men of God from Zion. The only one going into battle with you, the one who grants you victory, is Mwari himself. Hallelujah! You, the weapon-bearers, know that you are fighting Mwari's holy war. Know him! Rely on him! Praise him! He is the victor. He will secure justice for the land. He will redistribute the lost lands which the varungu have stolen. Peace to the land!"

"Ameni!"

He then turned to the New Testament, "Our black prophets," he said, "find their commission in Mark 15, verses 16 to 18. There Jesus tells them to go into the world to preach the gospel. He gives them power to baptize converts, to drive out demons and to heal the sick. This Jesus is not really the son of a whore as some people say these days. Neither is he a murungu. No! He is the son of Mwari, the king of all creation, the saviour of all people in this world. Above all, this Jesus is the champion of the oppressed in Africa. He stands in the line of Moses and King David. He guides our deeds and
thinking. He leads the black Israelites from the white house of slavery. His spirit is the true Spirit of God who reveals to our fighters how they should engage in battle; the very one who at *pungwe* meetings detects the sell-outs and the *varoyi*. And he also keeps reminding us that we are not to spill innocent blood. We, the black prophets, respond to his Spirit. The Spirit of Mwari is amongst us. Now is the time of Africa! Africa be blessed! Mwari be praised! Amen!"

As the drummer rose to his feet, the women ululated; a few of them broke from the crowd, briefly showing the steps of an ancient war dance. Then the powerful voice of the lead singer rang out:

I believe in you, Lord
Hallelujah, Jesus King, hallelujah!
I believe in you, Lord
Hallelujah, Jesus King, hallelujah!

Relief and joy flooded the man of God as he watched the spontaneous steps of the four fighters, dancing in praise of the King of Zion. He had known intuitively that these men, having found temporary refuge in Zion, were not going to call Christ the son of a whore.

His own sermon done, Bishop Musariri could sit back and listen to the preaching of his followers. His loyal adviser and friend Mufundise Mutasa, robed in dark red, stepped into the circular clearing between the men and women to elaborate further on the liberating functions of Moses, King David and Jesus.

Mutasa’s droning voice was lulling the tired bishop to sleep when loud voices nearby startled him. Instantly he was wide awake. There was no mistaking the RAR uniforms. Five black soldiers were interrogating villagers about the presence of *magandanga*. They sounded aggressive, ready to punish at any sign of hostility. Zion went deathly quiet as the five figures, FNs at the ready, came striding purposefully towards the place of worship.

Even now Musariri can feel the cold grip of fear constricting him. “Please God, no bloodshed in Zion” he prayed fervently. He looked up into the steady gaze of one of the comrades. The eyes were telling him: “Our lives are in your hands, old man. Be courageous! Try your best!” And he found the nerve to rise slowly, with grave dignity, and face the soldiers.

“Are you the bishop of this meeting?” the leader of the group asked gruffly.

“Yes, I am Bishop Musariri of the Zion in Patmos Church. We are preparing to celebrate *Paseka,*” he replied.

“I guessed as much. My father is a MuZioni of the Holy Cord. Two of us here are vaZioni. We recognized the singing. You have an excellent drummer.”

For a moment he nearly panicked when it occurred to him that the soldiers might have been watching from a distance when the comrades
joined the congregation. Forcing himself, he returned the fiercely probing stare of the soldier in front of him.

"Tell me honestly, Bishop, have you seen any gandanga movement here this afternoon? Be careful how you answer. I am a prophet myself with the gift of the Spirit. You should know what that means."

"No, my son," he replied as calmly as he could. "We have indeed heard shooting in the vicinity of Sanje, earlier this afternoon, but we have not seen any gandanga movement."

"Should I believe you or consult the Spirit?" Just for a second there was a hint of a smile in the soldier's eyes. Musariri could have sworn that the man was aware of guerrilla presence.

But he kept his poise and replied: "You are welcome to call on the Spirit. But the senior prophets here may require you first to go and fast and pray in the mountains. The revelations of a man of war who carries a rifle may not be entirely accurate."

The answer was spot on. The soldier and his companions laughed outright. A ripple of relief ran through Zion. "Ah, Bishop," the soldier said, "you have a brave heart and you know about prophets. Do you mind if we join the service for a while? One gets tired of chasing magandanga who keep vanishing like phantoms." More laughter.

"You are most welcome, my son. As long as you take off your boots and put your weapons on the ground. Mwari requires peace when we worship."

Suddenly suspense gripped the crowd. One of the soldiers was checking out the nearest homestead. He was looking directly at the banana patch. Would he see what had he seen?

The drummer picked up his drum casually. His eyes fixed in the distance in true drummer's tradition, he tapped out the call to song. Everybody rose and the lead singer started:

Ask and you’ll receive
Those who seek shall find
Those who seek
Oh, oh, they shall find!

What the worshippers in Zion found was silent relief as the soldier sauntered back to join his friends, who were unfastening their bootstraps. What the soldiers found were the sinuous movements of the fair dancers of Zion on which to feast their eyes. The banana patch was forgotten.

Mutasa was desperately nervous when he resumed his sermon. Realizing that the lives of people depended on his ability to preach normally and appear relaxed, he stammered as he gave instructions to the reader.

His throat went dry at the thought that the soldiers might become suspicious if they noticed his unease. Then he felt his bishop's firm eyes on him, collected himself and shouted loudly: "Peace to Africa! Peace in Zion!"
Musariri, noticing his friend’s dilemma, jumped up, raised his holy staff and performed a bishop’s dance all on his own. Applause and laughter rolled over Zion in waves, long after the bishop had sat down. Mutasa clapped his hands until everybody had settled down. Then he proclaimed jubilantly: “The chosen one is in Zion! The man of God is in our midst!” From then on he had no trouble preaching.

“Read to us from Romans 8: 28,” he told the reader. And the reader read: “We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.”

“We have already considered the purposes to which God called his messengers,” Mutasa told his listeners “Moses was called to free the Israelites from oppression in Egypt. David was called to spell out the consequences: the Israelites had to use their newly won freedom to truly worship Mwari. That was the beginning of another liberation, aimed at eventual resurrection from death. We read about it in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus was the one called to bring about that liberation. This is the state of new life after death. The body dies like a seed planted in the soil, whereafter it can bear fruit.

“Now, in this time of war, Mwari has chosen another man to lead us. Musariri is the chosen one who follows in the steps of Moses, David and Jesus. He teaches us in our Jerusalem the laws of war. He also teaches us about the final liberation which leads to heaven. May Jerusalem rejoice! Amen!”

As the audience responded Mutasa mopped his brow, then resumed: “Remember what Musariri said today about the laws of war on behalf of Moses, David and the lamb. No innocent blood must be shed! Prevent Satan from devouring innocent people. It is too easy to say: ‘The varungu are Satan! Drive out the varungu!’ No! Where there are battles between the soldiers and ZANLA’s forces, we don’t speak of Satan. For the war was ordained by God. What we call Satan is when either the soldiers or the guerrillas come into the villages to torture or kill ordinary people. That must stop!”

“Steady, Mutasa, steady now,” Musariri thought. “NaMwari, don’t overplay your hand. No more talk about war laws!” From the corner of his eye he saw both the soldiers and comrades nodding affirmation. He hoped they were genuinely agreeing with what Mutasa had said. But one couldn’t be sure. Right now he sensed a need for diversion. So he motioned to Mutasa to stop. This time he himself would lead the dance.

And he sang:

You have come, you have come,
The great reaper.
The people shall see the Lord of heaven

What a dance that was! At first the people were hesitant to follow him into the circle, anxious as they were about the possible detection of the comrades. For a while they just shuffled, waiting, watching, dreading. Then
there was a sudden blur of red, green and blue as the four comrades themselves joined the dance. Not to be out-performed, three of the soldiers in their RAR uniforms fell in behind the comrades. All of Zion held their breath; even the drummer missed a beat. Was this the moment of truth? But no, the soldiers danced with obvious joy, totally unaware of the identity of the four enthusiastic vaZioni ahead of them.

Musariri felt the crowd heave a sigh. His spirit soared. "God be praised! God be praised!" he sang to himself, stepping up the dance rhythm. Up came his shining staff, pointing heavenward. The drummer noticed, accelerated the drumbeat. Then all of Zion exploded in a great surge of colour and sound.

There was no let-up as the wall of fear and tension burst; ecstatic abandon flooded the crowd. Round and round Musariri went, pirouetting like a whirlwind to set off wave upon wave of billowing colour. He side-stepped this way and that, his staff held aloft. The snake of trailing dancers coiled and uncoiled behind him.

The women and girls twirled faster and faster, their uniforms lifting in the wind. They ululated until they were hoarse.

It flashed through Musariri's mind: "A miracle in Zion! The dance of reconciliation between hostile forces has begun here today. Mwari be praised!" At last the Spirit took hold of him. His head shook. Snorts, hisses, the tongues of Zion erupted all around him. Prophets dropped out of the line of dancers, shaking uncontrollably. Women, falling possessed, collapsed in the cloud of dust.

The drummer slowed his beat. Sweat-streaked, the dancers followed the leader at a slowed pace. Finally they came to a halt. The drumbeat faded to a closing tap-tap, accompanying the weary shift of dusty feet.

The rumble of speech in tongues was taking over. It grew in volume, until the crowd roared itself into hysteria. Musariri listened closely, his holy staff held high like a conductor's baton, raising himself on his toes to draw the final crescendo from his orchestra. Then suddenly, in one clean movement, he plucked the staff from on high and dropped to his knees.

In an instant Zion was at prayer. There was a deep, palpable hush. The wave of possession changed to a groundswell of praise. The voices came from afar, softly murmuring supplications to Mwari, acknowledging his peace. Slowly the wave of sound gathered force. The pleasant babble of voices grew in volume and urgency until a thunder of entreaty crashed at the foot of Mount Zion.

"Ameni! Ameni!" Musariri shouted as loud as he could.

At once the tide of prayer abated. In the abrupt silence weary worshippers sank back, content.

A little later, five tired soldiers walked away into the setting sun, their FNs slung across their shoulders. Their carefree stride commemorated the celebration of Zion.
It was well after dark before the AKs were retrieved from the banana patch. For once the sacrament of Zion had caused the guns of war to stutter into silence. The prayers that night were a prophecy of peace in the land.

Prophet Musariri shifted to another foot. He was sweating under his blue robe in the hot sun. The discomfort did not bother him while his mind was wandering down the tracks of *chimurenga* history. Neither did the president in his black suit appear to suffer from the heat as he recounted the vicissitudes of war.

Yes, *comrade* president, Musariri mused. You are right to pay tribute to the *povo*. The men, the women, the children of Gutu. Independence was not won cheaply. Today the fallen fighters go back to the soil in neat black boxes. Yesterday we hid the corpses of the victims of Chimungoma in the soil in cheap blankets. It is all the same. *Chimurenga* claimed them all. In the end we all turn to dust. Only in the womb of the earth are we equal. That is the way it goes. Until true liberation dawns until we all celebrate in the new Jerusalem!
“Chimurenga is not yet over. Fulfilment has not yet been achieved. The land must come to the people! The land belongs to the people! You are one nation. That is what these young men [and women] fought for. See, that yellow band, the gold on our flag; that is our riches, the gold we work for. In addition to that the land holds the riches of our bush: the mupani trees, the fruit trees. The green section represents the wooded land.”

President Mugabe

The stories of chimurenga have taken time to tell. As I write, 1993 is drawing to a close. Much has happened since that memorable day of the reburial at Gutu.

As I recall the closing words of President Mugabe’s speech I see once again the green on the flag above his head enveloping the black and white bands in the ripple of the breeze. It signified then, and still signifies, the greening of our lost lands through the endeavour of the nation, black and white citizens alike: liberation in reconciliation.

Indeed, chimurenga is not yet over. The commemoration of the fallen heroes concerns the land itself: its equitable distribution, its value, its proper use, its vulnerability. Conscious of the continuing lostness of the land, the traditional forces of chimurenga had already regrouped prior to the Gutu ceremony, this time to clothe the barren earth; to wage the War of the Trees. The new struggle was dedicated to the fallen fighters of yesteryear, to the green on our flag, on the day when the new chimurenga army congregated to plant the cypresses around the Gutu Heroes’ Acre in preparation for the reburial.

They were all there: comrade Haurovi Chinovuriri, once the go-between for the ancestral war council’s mediums and ZANLA high command at Chimoio in Mozambique; svikiro MuDende, who had correctly prophesied the massive air raid by the Rhodesian Air Force on Chimoio; svikiro Pfupajena, the Duma war medium; svikiro Lydia Chabata, the njuzu mist-maker; ex-combatants Weeds Chakarakata and Subcheka; and a host of other war mediums and chiefs from Gutu and neighbouring districts. On the spot where the fallen heroes were laid to rest in the soil of Mabwazhe,
the call of the ancestral custodians of the land to their living descendants to heal the earth was heeded. In the district where Vondo Mukozho, the late Matonjeni rain messenger, had collected Mwari's gifts, the green revolutionaries decided to consult the ancient oracle about their war strategy.

And the prophets and bishops? Are they forgotten now that the traditionalist forces are forging ahead with the new struggle under the banner of their Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists? No. Their liberation dreams too found expression in a new holistic mission in which Jesu Krestu is seen as the great custodian of the land and the Holy Spirit as the healer who brings renewal and wholeness to all creation. The new mission is being conducted by their Association of African Earthkeeping Churches. Who but Bishop Reuben Marinda, who helped me collect the chimurenga stories of the Independent Church prophets, became the first general secretary of the AAEC; who but Bishop Musariri, erstwhile war prophet of Vunjere, was elected patron of the new church movement — Bishop Musariri still wears the same, now faded blue robes when he pronounces his new war prophecies — this time on behalf of the earthkeeping freedom fighters.

Thus the ranks of the fighters are being organized; the weaponry for green warfare is being produced in new nurseries and woodlots; the encroaching evils of overpopulation and deforestation are being confronted. Pamberi nehondo yamitir! Forward the War of the Trees!

That day, listening to Chief Gutu fusing past and present as he opened the reburial ceremony in the name of our common ancestor Mabwazhe, and to President Mugabe expounding the task of further liberating the land, I was acutely aware of two things. First, how crucially important our understanding of past events, of our dreams, myths and links with our forebears is for meaningful living and planning for the future. Second, for all our matter-transcending ideals, beliefs and fantasies, how utterly bonded we human beings are to the soil under our feet, our mother earth. Each one of us has this land-love, this rootedness in soil: a place of birth, a place of living — whether we consider ourselves modern, highly mobile citizens of the world or patriots of a circumscribed corner of earth that we call our country — and a place of rest, when life as we know it ceases. Each merges into the other. The dreams and the myths shaping our destinies give contour and colour to our landscape: barren desert, mountain peaks, limpid river, shaded glen.

As I listened, feeling close affinity with my Gumbo kinsfolk, I realized that there were essentially two sets of dreams dreaming me, two genealogies receding into the misty past, each with its own language, history, culture and land-love: the one Western, the other of Africa. At the time when my African forefather Mabwazhe — with his kinsmen Nendanga, Munyikwa, Rutsate and Nemashakwe — migrated southward from Musana to what is now known as Gutu, my West European Flemish ancestors were merchants sailing the high
seas. They rounded the Cape to secure their share in the spice trade with the East. My Flemish *tateguru* had three ships. At about the same time as Mabwazhe - having driven Chasura and the Shiri people off to the west of his territory - was making treaties with the Duma rulers to the south and the Hera in the east; my Flemish ancestor shipwrecked one of his precious vessels off treacherous Cape Point. His other two ships lay anchored in Table Bay after the calamity, and I can picture him staring at Table Mountain, wondering about the future. In the end he decided to settle at the Cape. Africa stole into his being. He was incurring a new land-love. So he sailed back to Belgium to sell his ships and his business in preparation for a new life.

I sometimes think he must have been a pirate. For he carefully closed the chapters of the past by burning all his papers before he returned to the Cape. Be that as it may, my Flemish ancestors fared well at the fairest Cape of Africa. Although the merchant instinct was not extinguished by the burning of the papers, one generation after another produced its crop of distinguished clergymen. You find their graves in the cemeteries adjoining the lovely old Reformed church buildings where they had served.

Then there were the missionaries, at a time when new horizons were opening in Africa. They went north: a dedicated patriarch who ministered near the mountains of the northern Transvaal; an uncle whose career included the building of numerous churches in Malawi; and my father, who dwelt on the holy mountain near Great Zimbabwe for more than forty years.

This ancestral tide of merchants and pirates, ministers and missionaries, eventually deposited me in Zimbabwe. It seemed as if the heavy weight of all those ordained ministers was pulling the ancient genealogy slightly skew. A new merchant pirate was needed to restore equilibrium. So Zimbabwean soil obliged with a lay missionary, qualified but never ordained, who then traded the history of white missions for the uncharted territory of black Independent Church missionary work.

The Flemish merchant tradition stood me in good stead over the years. Most recently it enabled me to find sponsors in Europe to fund the new liberation struggle, the War of the Trees. So the old merchant's dream has become part of independent Zimbabwe. As of old, the Flemish merchant's pendulum swing between Africa and Europe is maintained, only now the movement is reversed: some of the spoils of colonial enterprise are being channelled back into the scarred, over-exploited land of Africa, for it to heal.

My Western tradition, transplanted to African soil, merges with the dream directives of African ancestors. I can see Mabwazhe with his long bow and magical quiver standing on those high cliffs of Mount Rasa, beckoning us, his Gumbo descendants, to ascend the mountain. From there he shows us the eroded, stripped lands of Chingombe, Chitsa, Munyikwa and the other chiefdoms. He is agitated by the absence of animal life. Even dassies and
rabbits are no longer to be found in the hills. Enquiry turns to reprimand, then to command: “Clothe the barren earth with grass and trees! Bring back the animals of the wilds, the fish of the rivers, the green pigeons of the wild fig trees! Let there be abundance once more!”

The deep voice booms through the valleys, echoes in the calls of other national ancestors standing on their holy mountains. There is tumult in the land. The drums come alive. From the spirit war council rings the voice of Chaminuka: “Mobilize all Zimbabwe! Arm yourselves with picks and shovels, not AKs. Plant trees for new forests! Use the hunting rifles sparingly. Obey, oh people, lest Mwari withhold the rains .”

Mabwazhe’s eyes reflect a vista of virgin land as it was long ago – perhaps the promise of a green tomorrow? I glimpse there the wooded slopes of Mount Mugabe; the mishuku, minhunguru, mitunduru and masvazva trees heavily laden with fruit, as I knew them in childhood, before the felling.

From somewhere the voice of Zenda, the hunter’s shavi spirit, whispers in my ear: “Mafuranhunzi, we shall become the guardians of the animals .”

I nod assent. Even hunters can change.
# APPENDIX

## List of the Deceased Fighters
Re-buried at the Gutu Re-burial Ceremony

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chimurenga name</th>
<th>Cause of death, year, area and war sector</th>
<th>Place of shallow war grave</th>
<th>Source of information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shamu</strong></td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977 Zinhata at Chiworese, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Masango Farm no. 100, Masango</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Weeds, Mabunhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shingirirai</strong></td>
<td>Air raid, 1979, Matizha Gwiranenzara, Buhera A, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Matizha township</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka and Rhon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gondo Maxwell</strong></td>
<td>Drowned in Mbirikwi river, 1978, Ndawi, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Mbirikwi river</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Weeds, Mukoko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>James Lancer</strong></td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977 Vunjere farm, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Bhundi Farm no. 54</td>
<td>Cde Subcheka, Weeds, Paundi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alex Hondo</strong></td>
<td>Witchcraft, 1977 Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Mutungwazi Farm no. 393</td>
<td>Cdes Mutungwazi, Weeds, Subcheka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Event/Action</td>
<td>Location/Context</td>
<td>Other Details</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mava Penzi</strong></td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977 Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Mpirikisi village</td>
<td>Cde Mpirikisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fasurai Chirongoma</strong></td>
<td>Air raid, 1977 Musukutwa, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Mutsvanga village</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds and Mutsvanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shumba</strong></td>
<td>Executed for bad conduct, 1979, Zinhata, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Mahofa farm</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds and Vushe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tichabayana</strong></td>
<td>Grenade blast 1979, Maungwa, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Madzivaniswa village</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds, Trust and Mudzivaniswa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shorty</strong></td>
<td>In action, 1979, Nyazvidzi farms, Buhera A, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Chisarasara hill, Chitsa</td>
<td>Cdes Alexio, Fadzai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dhi-Dhi-Dhi</strong></td>
<td>Illness, 1978, Simba-negavi, Mupata, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Madheya farm</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds and Madheya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Granger</strong></td>
<td>In action, 1979, Zinatha, near Mahofa farm, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Mahofa farm</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds, Subcheka, Mahofa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gondoharishayi</strong></td>
<td>Internal conflict, 1979, Munyikwa, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Munanga village, Munyikwa chiefdom</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds, Subcheka, Munanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Incident Description</td>
<td>Location Details</td>
<td>Sector/Chiefdom Details</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Granger-4</strong></td>
<td>Air raid, 1979, Serima Buhera A, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Pindura village, Matizha area</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Rose and Kurutenga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>John Hondo</strong></td>
<td>In action, 1978, Dewende farming area</td>
<td>Chiwara chiefdom</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka Weeds, Mabunhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mashoko</strong></td>
<td>Air raid, 1978, Makumbe Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Guvamatanga</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds, Chikwanda and Musoni</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Black Zimbabwe</strong></td>
<td>Illness, 1978, Zimuto, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Bhaundi Farm no. 540</td>
<td>Cde Bhaundi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jimmy Jambaya</strong></td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977 Chiwara, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Masango Farm no. 100</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds, Subcheka, Masango, Madhedhe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guymore</strong></td>
<td>Air raid, 1978, Musukutwa, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Shumbaerwa farm</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds, and Shumbaerwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uramba Kwerwe</strong></td>
<td>Air raid, 1978, Musukutwa, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>John</strong></td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977 Zinhata, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Mada farm</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka Weeds, Mada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grenger</strong></td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977 Chiwara, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Majojo farm</td>
<td>Cdes Mabunhu, Majojo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dhambi</strong></td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977 Vunjere farms, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Majojo farm</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds and Majojo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Incident Type</td>
<td>Location Details</td>
<td>Sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sam Kufa</td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977</td>
<td>Vunjere farms, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds and Gumba</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gumba farm</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Satan</td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977</td>
<td>Vunjere farms, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka and Vushe</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Devol Devosa)</td>
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<td>Vushe Farm no. 79</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyamayedenga</td>
<td>Air raid, 1979</td>
<td>Nyazvidzi farms, Buhera A, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Mushai</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mushai Farm no. 237</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaspoon</td>
<td>Air raid, 1978</td>
<td>Vazizi river, Maburuse area</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Weeds and Chikwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vazizi river, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mupangaduri</td>
<td>Drowned, 1978</td>
<td>Mukoko village, Ndawi area</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Weeds and Mukoko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mukoko, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baba va Pedzai</td>
<td>Poisoned food, 1977</td>
<td>Chibvene hill, Nerutanga area</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Weeds, Nerutanga</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Chibvene hill, Cdes Subcheka</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Nerutanga area</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several unidentified</td>
<td>Air raid, 1978</td>
<td>Along Chinyika Rd, Zvavahera area</td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Weeds, Chief Munyarakadi and Chief Gutu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comrades</td>
<td></td>
<td>Makumbe, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chinyika Rd, Zvavahera area</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cdes Subcheka, Weeds, Chief Munyarakadi and Chief Gutu</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Cdes Subcheka, Weeds, Chief Munyarakadi and Chief Gutu</td>
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<td>Along Chinyika Rd, Zvavahera area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Several unidentified</td>
<td>Air raid, 1978</td>
<td>Chinyika Rd, Mahofa farm</td>
<td>Cdes Weeds, Chief Gutu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mlijba</td>
<td></td>
<td>Makumbe, at Mbanje and Muchineripi, as well as Zinhata farming area, 1979, Bikita B, Musikavanhu sector</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chinyika Rd, Mahofa farm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cdes Weeds, Chief Gutu and Mahofa</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aiwa</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ameni</td>
<td>Amen (corruption)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baba</td>
<td>father; <em>baba wedu</em>: our father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>babamukuru</td>
<td>uncle, father's elder brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bako</td>
<td>cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bara/bumburu</td>
<td>cartridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benzi</td>
<td>fool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhunu pl. mabunu</td>
<td>‘boer’, farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bodo</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bute</td>
<td>ancestral snuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chakarakata</td>
<td>difficult to swallow; the powerful and mighty;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>chimurenga</em> name of Cosmas Gonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>changamire</td>
<td>chief, sir (title used to address a superior;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>traditionally used to indicate Rozvi royalty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chapungu</td>
<td>bateleur eagle, <em>Terathopius ecaudatus</em>; emissary of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ancestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chibako</td>
<td>snuff container/horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chibarirwe</td>
<td>derived from <em>kubara</em> or <em>kubereka</em>, ‘to give birth’: that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>which was born for us; in the African Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church context it means ‘heritage of our fathers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>our very own’ and as such is the popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>designation of the African Congregational Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chikara</td>
<td>predator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chimugwido</td>
<td>girl scout of youth brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl. zvimigwido</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chimurenga</td>
<td>riot, war (popular term for Zimbabwe’s liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>struggle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chinamukutu the one with the quiver; nickname of Mabwazhe, founder of vaRufura in Gutu district
chindunduma rebellion; cannon thunder
chipembere rhinoceros
chipo pl. zvipo gift
chiratidzo pl. zviratidzo symbol
chisi ancestral rest-day
Chivorvoro revolver; used here as chimurenga name
chizumbu hen-run
dabga Scops owl, *Otus senegalensis*
dare rechimurenga ancestral war council
dombo rock, boulder
doro beer
Duma a tribe in the Bikita area
Dumbukunyuka lit. 'the one with a big tummy'; a name
Dzivaguru Great Pool; praise-name of Mwari
Dzviti Ndebele raiders
Fambidzano lit. 'co-operative'; popular designation for *Fambidzano yamaKereke avaTema*, 'Co-operative of the Black churches'; i.e. the AICC, African Independent Churches' Conference (in Zimbabwe), founded in 1972
gandanga terrorist; derogatory term for chimurenga's freedom fighters
pl. magandanga freedom fighters
garakata a big, fully-grown (old) bull
gomba remoto pit of fire; hell
Gumbo leg; clan name of Rufura tribe
Gumbo-Rufura people of Gutu, whose guardian spirit is Mabwazhe
hondo war
hongo yes
hosipitara hospital
Hossana praise-singer of traditional Mwari
pl. vaHossanah
jukwa shavi spirit, closely associated with traditional Mwari and his/her rainmaking powers
kugadzira  to settle the spirit of a deceased person; the induction rite through which the spirit of a deceased relative is 'brought back home' and simultaneously elevated to the status of ancestorhood

kupira midzimu  venerate the ancestors; *kupira*, 'to offer or propitiate' (from *kupa*, 'to give')

kwaziwai  a word used for greeting strangers

mabhunu  see: *bhunu*

Mabweedziva  rocks of the pool; alternative name for Mwari's shrines in the Matopo hills

Madyirapazhe  lit. 'you eat outside' derived from *kudya*, 'to eat' and *pazhe*, 'outside' subclan name of Rufura tribe

Mafuranhunzi  lit. 'you shoot the fly'; nickname for sharp-shooting hunter

magandanga  see: *gandanga*

maiwe!  exclamation of surprise, sorrow or regret

mambo  king; chief; formerly used for the Rozvi rulers

mandionerepi  Bushman; lit. 'where did you see me?'; a very short person

mashavi-shavi  the seven-widows birds; white helmetshrike, *Prionops plumatus*

masvikiro  see: *svikiro*

matembe  assortment of skins and traditional objects, used by spirit mediums for ritual purposes

Matonjeni  land of the rocks/granite hills; popular designation of the Matopo hills. Mwari vaMatonjeni: God of the Matopo hills, i.e. traditional deity whose major oracular shrines are situated in the Matopo hills

Mazhindu  the ill-tempered one

mbanje  dagga (*Cannabis sativa*), marijuana, or drugs generally

mbira  dassie, rock-rabbit, *Procavia capensis*

mbonga  woman dedicated (usually in girlhood) to the service of the traditional Mwari; sometimes referred to as 'the wife of Mwari'

mbuya  grandmother

mhandara  virgin

mhondoro  tribal spirit; lion spirit
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>midzimu</td>
<td>see: mudzimu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midzimudzangara</td>
<td>see: mudzimudzangara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mijiba</td>
<td>see: mujiba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mishuku</td>
<td>see: mushuku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mlimo</td>
<td>Ndebele name for God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mobola plum</td>
<td>see: muchakata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muchakata</td>
<td>mobola plum or hissing tree; Parinari curatellifolia;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>because of its shade and fruit it symbolizes the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>protective and sustaining function of the ancestral spirits; it is the tree</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>most often selected by the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shona for rain ritual purposes, when a rushanga (pole enclosure,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>symbolizing the dwelling place of the ancestral spirits) is usually built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>around the trunk of a muchakata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muDutchi</td>
<td>Dutchman; member of the Dutch Reformed Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mudzimu pl. midzimu</td>
<td>ancestral spirit; spirit elder of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mudzimudzangara pl.</td>
<td>spook or frightening being which appears in a sudden flash of light and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disappears in a few moments;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>destroyer</td>
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<tr>
<td>mudzvinyiriri pl.</td>
<td>representative; lit. 'the one who walks'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vadzvinyiriri</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>mufambiri</td>
<td>representative; lit. 'the one who walks'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mujiba pl. mijiba</td>
<td>boy scout of the youth brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukoma</td>
<td>older brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukomana pl. vakomana</td>
<td>boy; vakomana vesango: boys of the bush, i.e. the bush-fighters of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chimurenga</td>
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<tr>
<td>mukombe</td>
<td>calabash used at a beer-drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukuru pl. vakuru</td>
<td>senior or elder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukute</td>
<td>fruit tree, usually found in marshlands; Syzygium cordatum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukwerere</td>
<td>rain ritual during which the senior tribal spirits are propitiated at their</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>graves or at a ritual tree; derived from kukweverera, kukweva, 'to draw</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(the rain)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>munhu vaMwari</td>
<td>man of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mununguna</td>
<td>younger brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>munhunguru pl.</td>
<td>batoka plum: Flacourtia indica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minhunguru</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>munyai pl. vanyai</td>
<td>messenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>munyori</td>
<td>writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mupani</td>
<td>a tree, Colophospermum mopane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mupawa</td>
<td>wild rubber tree, Diplorhynchus condylocarpom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
muPostori pl. vaPostori an Apostle; follower of Johane Maranke or John Masowe
muprofita/muprofiti pl. vaprofiti prophet
murapi pl. varapi healer
muridzi venyika pl. varidzi venyika (ancestral) guardian of the land
muroyi pl. varoyi wizard, witch or sorcerer
murungu pl. varungu white person
musasa pl. misasa tree of acacia species, Brachestegia spiciformis
musha pl. misha village
mushuku pl. mishuku wild loquat; mahobohobo; Uapaca kirkiana
Musikavanhu creator of the people
musiki creator
musvazva large sourplum tree, Ximenia caffra
mutema pl. vatema black person
mutengesi a sell-out, traitor
mutezo member; mutezo vekereke: member of church
muti pl. miti tree; miti echivanhu: lit. ‘trees of the people’, i.e. indigenous trees
mutondo pl. mitondo tree of acacia species, Julbernardia globiflora
mutorwa pl. vatorwa foreigner; someone who does not belong to one’s lineage
mutumwa messenger
mutunduru small evergreen tree with yellow edible fruit, Garcinia buchananii
pl. mitunduru clan name
mutupo pl. mitupo mountain acacia, Brachystegia glaucescens
muvengi pl. vavengi enemy; from kuvenga, ‘to hate’
muwuzhe pl. miwuzhe
muZioni pl. vaZioni
muzukuru pl. vazukuru nephew, sister’s son; or grandchild
Mwari God; Mwari vaMatonjeni: God of the Matopo hills
Mweya Mutsvene Holy Spirit
n'dauraya chikara I have killed a beast
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ndaza</td>
<td>holy cord used by Zionists; vaZioni veNdaza: Zionists of the holy cord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ndini</td>
<td>it is I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ndizvo/ndizvozo</td>
<td>so it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngeni</td>
<td>sour plum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nganga</td>
<td>traditional doctor/diviner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngozi</td>
<td>avenging spirit; harmful or dangerous influence of any kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngundu</td>
<td>ornamental, official or ritual head-dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>njerere</td>
<td>black kite, <em>Milvus migrans</em>; Mwari’s rain-bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>njuzu</td>
<td><em>shavi</em> spirit associated with water and with healing activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkondekoni</td>
<td>gnu, wildebeest, <em>Connochaetes taurinus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyangarika</td>
<td>to disappear; become invisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ova-ova</td>
<td>walkie-talkie; military radio; lit. ‘over-over’</td>
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<tr>
<td>pamberi!</td>
<td>forward! <em>pamberi nechimurenga</em>: forward the liberation struggle!</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>pamberi nehondo remiti</em>: forward the war of the trees!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>pamberi neZimbabwe</em>: forward Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paseka</td>
<td>Easter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pasi</td>
<td>down; <em>pasi nafesu</em>: down with Jesus; <em>pasi navavengi</em>: down with the enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pfunye</td>
<td>grey lourie (go-away bird): <em>Corythaixoides concolor</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pfupajena</td>
<td>the white (bleached) bones; name of founder ancestor of the Duma tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poshito</td>
<td>guarded hide-out of the guerrillas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>povo</td>
<td>idea of doing something on a big scale; <em>chimurenga</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>term for ‘the masses’, the rural population among whom the guerrillas were operating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punge</td>
<td>secret meeting, mostly conducted at night by guerrilla fighters to instruct villagers about objectives of liberation struggle, developments at the front and to deal with members of the community who collaborated with the enemy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roora</td>
<td>bride-price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rugare</td>
<td>peace; <em>rugare ruve nemi</em>: peace be with you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ruponeso</td>
<td>salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sadza</td>
<td>stiff porridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sango</td>
<td>bush, woodland, wilderness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>sekuru pl. vasekuru</td>
<td>uncle, grandfather</td>
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<tr>
<td>shamwari</td>
<td>friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shavi</td>
<td>a patronal spirit that takes possession of its human host</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subcheka</td>
<td>the sub-machine-gun that cuts (down the enemy); chimurenga name of Mberi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>svikiro pl. masvikiro</td>
<td>spirit medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tateguru</td>
<td>great-grandfather (paternal), ancestor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tezvara</td>
<td>father-in-law; vatezvara: general term referring to a man’s in-laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topia</td>
<td>abbreviation for First Ethiopian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ukama</td>
<td>relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umfaan/umfana</td>
<td>young boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uroyi</td>
<td>wizardry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usvikiro</td>
<td>spirit mediumship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vajudah</td>
<td>an independent church movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vamba</td>
<td>Vampire aircraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vanhu venyika</td>
<td>people of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vaPostori</td>
<td>an independent church movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>varidzi venyika</td>
<td>the owners of the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vateete</td>
<td>paternal aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vatorwa</td>
<td>see: mutorwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vavengi</td>
<td>see: muvengi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vaZioni</td>
<td>see: muZioni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vuya mundionero</td>
<td>come and see me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watangakugara</td>
<td>the One who sat/existed first; praise-name of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wokumusoro</td>
<td>the One above; praise-name of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenda</td>
<td>shavi spirit conveying hunting skills; Zenda rabuda! Zenda has come out! triumphant exclamation when hunter brings down quarry with well-aimed shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zvapera</td>
<td>it’s over; it is finished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zvimigwido</td>
<td>see: chimugwido</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zviratidzo</td>
<td>see: chiratidzo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations

AAEC Association of African Earthkeeping Churches
AK Assault rifle used by guerrillas
AZSM Association of Zimbabwean Spirit Mediums
AZTREC Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists
CID Central Intelligence Department
DC District Commissioner
FN 0.762 assault rifle used by Rhodesian forces
MNR Mozambique National Resistance
MO Medical Officer
PATU Police Anti-Terrorist Unit
RAR Rhodesian African Rifles
RPG Rocket-propelled grenade
TEE Theological Education by Extension
UDI Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UNO United Nations Organization
ZANLA Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU(PF) Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZUM Zimbabwe Unity Movement