

DEFENCE CONSCIOUSNESS AS WAY OF LIFE: 'THE REFUGE PERIOD' AND KARANGA DEFENCE STRATEGIES IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Defensible settlement patterns are neither a new phenomenon in pre-colonial Zimbabwean history nor are they a development peculiar to the 19th century Shona alone. Nonetheless the 19th century in many ways constituted a new status quo altogether for the Shona following the establishment of the Ndebele and Gaza states on the western and eastern edges of the Zimbabwean plateau respectively and this forced the Shona to adapt in many ways to conform to a more defensive and security conscious way of life.

Introduction

The wars begun by Shaka in early 19th Century Zululand had a far reaching impact on the southern African sub-continent and rich academic debates on the causes, nature and consequences of these *mfecane/difaqane* wars have flourished on the region south of the Limpopo river since the 1960s (Hamilton 1995). Until recently the major arguments in these debates had drawn heavily from written accounts by literate European observers and some local oral traditions but very little from archaeology. Far less known, however, is an older debate on the consequences of the *mfecane* wars north of the Limpopo, on the Zimbabwean plateau and beyond, part of which has been inspired by archaeological research from the 1950s. This paper is a contribution to this growing literature on the events taking place on the Zimbabwean plateau during this period using more local case studies. It emerges out of a larger project on the environmental history of southern Zimbabwe which has sought among other things to establish how the local Shona and neighboring groups related to their natural environment in the 19th Century¹.

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From what we have so far, it seems that the key factor governing and regulating this relationship was security against actual and potential enemies, the most serious threat at that point being the Ndebele and Gaza settled on the western and eastern edges of the plateau respectively in the early 19th century. Thus on the one hand earlier versions of the ideas encapsulated in this paper have been construed as permutations of the relics of colonial historiography seeking to depict the Nguni as a savage race preying upon the hapless and helpless Shona (Pikirayi 2000). It is this historiography that gave rise to the ‘refuge period’, a term popularised by archaeologists that I use consistently in this paper for want of a better one. On the other hand they have been interpreted as a simple vulgarization of the otherwise superb and professional Nguni military systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 1999). Some have even viewed them as small scale localised peculiarities.

Whilst it could be true that results obtained from localised case studies may not warrant any grand propositions, I have sought to situate my argument in the broader debate surrounding the emergence of protected settlements on the Zimbabwean plateau and also to expose the fundamental weaknesses inherent in studies of 19th century Zimbabwe that do not take into account evidence drawn from oral traditions and archaeology. Although ideas in this paper emerge from situations observed among the Karanga speakers of southern Zimbabwe who seem to have developed a peculiar response because of their proximity to both the Ndebele and Gaza states, references are made to similar situations obtaining in the northern societies that also fell victim to Nguni raids.

The first part of the paper will seek to situate the argument in the context of the ‘refuge period’ debate by defining the latter and the arguments associated with it. It attempts also to revisit the so-called ‘myth of the Ndebele’ and probes the various sources that have been used to reconstruct Ndebele-Shona relations in the 19th Century. It argues that there is as much truth to the myth as there may be fallacy. For myth is the sum of the development of historical tradition much as the mythical accounts justify the bases of existing societies (Vansina 1985: 23, 167). It will then consider the criticisms surrounding both the refuge period and the Ndebele myth. The second part gives a brief overview of Karanga settlement patterns in the light of the debates between archaeologists and

assistance from Mukundindishe Chifamba, Jeremiah Jangajanga Mabhanditi and Member Zivanai. The shortcomings of the paper are entirely my own.

historians and advances that defence considerations came first in the choice of settlements, though it may be coincidental that for most of the Zimbabwean plateau region, defensible areas, normally mountain zones, have naturally been good agricultural areas due to local environmental factors. In the third section the idea of 'Defence Consciousness' will be further elaborated with examples from amongst the Karanga in particular. Lastly the paper will conclude by attempting to coin a better term that is contextually appealing to the experiences of these people.

The 'Refuge Period' and the Ndebele Myth

'Refuge' is a term coined by the archaeologist Roger Summers (1958: 125) to describe settlements of a concealed nature that he identified in the Nyanga area in the eastern parts of the Zimbabwean plateau in 1949. He was led to believe that these places were used as hiding places during fairly 'recent tribal raids' and were probably meant for use by women and children while the invaders were repelled by their men folk. He described three groups of sites, a common feature of which was their inaccessibility, wide outlook and the abundance of recent Manyika potsherds on the surface reflecting (short-term) domestic use. In Summers' view it was clear that those sites were occupied at least spasmodically, although their position and lack of protection against weather made it highly unlikely that they were permanent habitations. A musket found in Oakvale cave is probably of a type introduced in the British army in 1841, becoming obsolete in 1855 and thus unlikely to have reached the cave until after that date. He thus suggested a post 1860 date for at least the findings at the Oakvale Cave.

While Summers only used "refuge" to describe the nature of these sites, later archaeologists came to use "Refuge Period" to refer to archaeological sites and artefacts loosely conceived as representing a widespread movement of population to walled hilltop sites and hidden refuges as a result of the *mfecane* and other disturbances in the 19th century (e.g. Huffman 1971, 1974; Izzett 1980; Pikirayi 1993). Thus Huffman (1971) referred to the Refuge Period as a wider phenomenon in northern Mashonaland with characteristic pottery, while Izzett (1980) also refers to Refuge Period and "Refuge type pottery". Pikirayi (2001) used "Refuge Tradition", "Refuge Culture" and "Refuge period" interchangeably.

The precolonial historian Beach (1983, 1988) used the term "Refuge Tradition". The term "tradition" is used by archaeologists in constructing cultural and chrono-stratigraphic sequences to

refer to a related series of pottery types traced through time, with the implication of some degree of cultural homogeneity between its makers - though Beach in his discussions seems to treat it more as a chronological period. However Beach also extended his conception of the period to the "period covered by Shona traditions since 1700" (1983:8), or even that "the beginning of the Refuge tradition lies somewhere between the nineteenth century and the last dated occurrences of earlier non-prestige settlements of the Leopards Kopje, Gumanye, Harare and Musengezi culture or traditions a possible time span of between three and five centuries, depending on the area in question" (1988:3). Thus there seems to be some inconsistency between the historical and archaeological conceptions.

In other areas in Africa similar theories have emerged and occupied the interest of archaeologists for a long time. The 'siege hypothesis' is a familiar term amongst archaeologists of East Africa where it has been used to account for the emergence of intensive farming and terracing as a result of situations of unusual stress, or 'siege', when people were forced to settle marginal land owing to political unrest' (Widgren 2004: 13). This hypothesis has been criticed as deterministic and giving primacy to stress at the expense of other factors in accounting for agricultural intensification. Elsewhere in the southern African region there is evidence of settlement patterns emerging in response to other forms of raids. Schoffeleers (1979: 170) has shown how Mang'anja villages in Malawi were moved from the river banks to areas in the dense forests where they were heavily stockaded by hedges to protect the inhabitants from the escalating inter-village raiding fuelled by intensifying slave trading during the period 1850 to 1870.

In the Western Transvaal region, the archaeologist Simon Hall (1995: 307) reported an underground village in a natural cavern known as Lepalong which according to oral traditions was occupied by the Kwena people between 1827 and 1836 in their flight southwards away from the wrath of Mzilikazi's raids. This site according to Hall is evidence for both a social history and an image of 'extreme strategic response to the strife of that period'.

Meanwhile outside the archaeological realm there had existed a much older view of Ndebele-Shona relations well before Summers' 1950s findings. This was the so-called myth of the Ndebele that lay in abundance in missionary and travellers' accounts of the 19th Century (Beach 1986: 16-18). The myth was informed by the view that the Ndebele tormented the meek Mashona with raids. A much more authoritative assessment of this missionary discourse is by Anthony Chennells (1977) who

observes that this rhetoric was an essential part of the fund raising drives of the various missionary societies.

The Ndebele and the Shona themselves took part in this myth-making process so that it is fairly difficult to separate myth from reality in so far as describing this period is concerned. While it is true that oral traditions concerning the Ndebele amongst the southern Shona are retold with much awe and terror, there is some corroboration in the accounts of contemporaneous European observers in Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Thus there seems to be more evidence pointing to a relatively tense situation than we can dispose of simply as myth. The accounts have been useful more for their dating of the events than as eyewitness observers. Yet, looked at in another way it is relatively difficult to judge where there is over-exaggeration or distortion if the same oral traditions we use to verify these sources are themselves contaminated by the Ndebele myth. I advance that all these sources when used cautiously tend to give a picture of incessant Nguni raiding thereby giving rise to defence oriented settlement structures quite akin to the refuge structures described by Summers and others archaeologically.

As our key sources seem to imply, whatever element of myth exists, there is more that the oral traditions can tell us Shona consciousness of the existence of the Ndebele menace; how this was exaggerated is purely a matter of deduction from detailed case studies as shall be shown below.

Critics of the 'Refuge' Tradition or Period

Meanwhile there is now available evidence demonstrating that Nguni presence was much briefer and less extensive than was previously thought. However although these arguments were developed in relation to the impact of Nguni migration on the Zimbabwean population, they have said nothing about settlement patterns except in reference to gold mining (Beach 1988: 4-8). Moreover as Beach (1990) has admitted, we are at loss for good demographic data concerning this period. At the same time there seems to be no alternative archaeological phase that seeks to explain directly the peculiar settlement patterns of the 19th Century.

The sharpest criticism has come from Pikirayi (1993: 181), who has dismissed the term Refuge as biased, racist and an unsuccessful attempt to interpret the cultural and other developments in the whole of the Zimbabwe plateau leading to the 19th century, carrying only chronological connotations with little cultural meaning. For him it implies a biased view of the later Shona, denying or disparaging some of the complex technological, political, social and economic achievements made between the decline of complex state systems and the late 19th century. (This seems to be a reaction to Beach's historical conception). The term should be dropped in favour of the standard archaeological convention of naming specific traditions and phases.

Pikirayi investigated walled hilltop settlements with loopholes in the middle Ruya-Mazowe valleys which in parallel with the "Ndebele myth" we might expect to have been built in response to Nguni

incursions after 1831, but which the archaeological dating shows to have been earlier (1993:182). He suggests that the decline of elite stone building activity and the trading centres in the heartland of the Mutapa state gave rise to the loop-holed stone buildings used primarily as defence against Portuguese depredation. He associates them with settlements of people moving up onto the plateau in response to Portuguese settlement and violent trading activity, or otherwise taking the opportunity to move into depopulated parts of the plateau. For this phenomenon he coined the term 'Mahonje tradition'. However he accepts Weinrich's (1971) picture of the Karanga villages in the south central parts of the plateau which were suggested to have been originally founded on hilltops as defensive sites against the Ndebele but gradually expanded around these hills in response to growing population and increasing demand for arable land.

All these propositions are based in Pikirayi's own research area in northern Zimbabwe. While there is little basis for a uniform pattern for the rest of the country, it seems inadequate to attribute the emergence of such settlements to the presence of the Portuguese alone. Indeed Pikirayi (2001:222-3), while playing down the effects of the *mfecane*, acknowledges that much of 19th century history seems chaotic, which would adequately explain the need for defensive settlements, even if as he implies this only represents a minor aspect of life and culture at that time.

Following the decline of the Great Zimbabwe stone building tradition, stone structures became much more related to defensive military considerations. Pwiti (1997: 92-93) for instance has shown that hilltop forts such as those found in Nyanga can be interpreted as strictly defensive buildings and lookout posts. With their commanding view of the countryside, he suggests, 'lookouts' would have been able to warn people of approaching enemies and at a signal people could retreat into the forts. Many of the forts are intervisible, thus they could signal each other in the event of attacks. This existence of forts in Pwiti's view suggests that the area had a turbulent history, and local oral traditions confirm this. This is the view much accepted in this paper and as shall be shown was the general development amongst most Karanga communities in the 19th century. **[are the Manyika Karanga ?]**Let us now consider Shona settlement patterns in general before the advent of the Nguni phase.

Shona settlement patterns in perspective: A general overview

Defensible settlement patterns such as those in parts of Nyanga already discussed may date back several centuries while there has been a notable preference for protected habitation since. The most revealing evidence about this is that most of the so-called 'refuge' sites are often located on or near earlier archaeological sites, indeed it is not entirely rare to identify various phases of occupation on the same sites. Pwiti (1996:142) has interpreted this tendency for example as indicating continuity in human spatial behaviour. Over time however, the tremendous efforts at improvising either existing or new structures to be more defensible can be observed on various sites showing that people were responding to a crisis and this process of response in itself involved a lot of adaptation (Ranger 1979). Mupira's (1996) interpretation of Gwiranzara hill ruin in Mhondoro Ngezi for example, has shown that later occupants of this Zimbabwe tradition site have modified its wall according to a

19th century stone building practice. He also observed that this feature is quite common amongst many other sites in the area such as Lazy River and Changwe Ranch No. 1 in northern Mashonaland which are also loop holed thus indicating the use of guns. Mupira infers that Gwiranenzara may have functioned as a fort during the later phase of occupation. In many ways therefore the 19th century did constitute a new order where defence as priority seemed to be more the rule than the exception.

Personal security was as important as food or resource security, but there has been some debate as to which of the two came first. Robinson (1962:97) demonstrates that nearly all Iron Age sites found in Chivi were on hills. One of these Mabveni, was certainly occupied in the first millennium AD by people who practiced agriculture though not on a large scale. He concluded that apart from simply offering defence from human or animal enemies, hills were more healthy than level ground where malaria was endemic, and hills were also convenient as sacred shrines and as dwellings of chiefs who often lived in more raised areas than the common people. Beach (1994:45) has seen consideration of water supply and soil preferences among the Shona as coming secondary to those of defence. It is in this light that he sees the varied economic environments and defensive positions of the 'Great Crescent' zone of the Zimbabwean plateau as being the main attraction for long term Shona settlement. Thus for him one explanation for the low pre-colonial population is the limited amount of land close enough to defensible strongholds which could be cultivated and grazed (Beach 1990:39-40). Pwiti (1996: 141-143) on the other hand finds no essential links between social and political ties and settlement behaviour. Using the example of the Goba people of the Zambezi valley he finds such factors to be secondary. He argues that the settlement patterns observed archaeologically have a very intimate relationship with the subsistence economy of their producers. This is quite similar to observations made by Ian Scoones (1997:68) amongst the Karanga speaking farmers of the Mazvihwa and Chivi areas who lived in secure settlement sites on rocky hilltops having adapted to an intensive form of crop production whereby the *dambos* amongst the hills were cultivated.

I find all the above theories to be tenable in their different contexts although their determinist thrust is an inherent weaknesses. In view of the climatic changes recorded archaeologically, it may not always follow that good agricultural land lay adjacent to defensible hills or vice-versa. I therefore

propose that for the 19th century in particular, given the prevailing climate, it was mere coincidence that hilly or mountainous areas constituted good agricultural environments. Mazarire (2003) shows that the effect of the moist winds in the southeastern areas of the country was fairly significant in as far as the provision of relief rainfall was concerned, although this takes into account the disadvantaged position of those areas falling under rain shadows. Thus orographic precipitation or drizzle is a common feature on hills with a tremendous impact on local environments (Stuart-Irwin 1970:26; Pikirayi 1999)

Thus both environmental and defence deterministic theories need not be pushed too far in explaining pre-colonial settlement patterns, although it should be acknowledged that both personal and resource security was of paramount importance in Karanga livelihoods. Given the fact that settling on hilltops offered several advantages all these considerations coalesced to give rise to what one can term a 'Shona Security Complex', which sought to strike a balance between security and subsistence. This in turn allowed for the development of a 'defence consciousness' to be commonplace in the lives of the Shona even where Nguni raids were a rarity. This was only brought to an end by colonial legislation reorganising settlements for administrative and other reasons, so that indeed the major pre-occupation of most Native Commissioners in the early days of the colonial period was to see to it that the Shona and even some Ndebele were brought to settle on level ground from their mountain forts (NAZ N9/1/1 1895).

Karanga adaptation and response.

The Karanga way of life had long been adapted to a defensible orientation prior even to Nguni presence in the area. However during this period it went through various phases of modification. The Karanga dynasties that had started to assert themselves as soon as Rozvi power declined did so with the object of filling the political vacuum left by the Rozvi through building up tributaries-cum-allies amongst fellow people. As has been demonstrated elsewhere, the rise in the demand for women as reproductive tools by 'Big men' in the build up of lineages went hand in hand with the demand for faithful and powerful males (Mazarire 2003). Before the Nguni period resistance to enemy attacks in some areas as amongst the Duma was organised at a confederate level in a top down fashion but with the coming of the Nguni it had to be organised at village level and chiefdom level, going up (Mtetwa 1976: 164). This was achieved through the system of *makota* which became much more prevalent at this time. *Gota* literally means a prefect or councillor but in the traditions

relating to the 19th century, the term gradually comes to refer to territorial guards (Pingirayi Mhosva, Nyakurayi pers. comm. 22/10/99) Amongst the Duma the *makota* were alien territorial chiefs who occupied the same position as autochthonous territorial chiefs or *machinda* and this hierarchy went down to the village level. Today recollections of pre-colonial land allocations amongst the Mhari have much to do with the role of such *makota* who were often allocated land on hills bordering the lineage head's territory, usually those in the direction from which the enemy often came (Jeremiah Mabhanditi pers. com.). They were the first to fight the enemy and to raise alarm. Quite often the *gota* was given a wife and assumed a vassal status as *mukuwasha* or son-in-law. Occupying a similar status to the *makota* were the *nharirire* or sentinels. Unlike what has been implied by Beach (1983: 10), this word does not refer to the summit of a hill. In fact the word is drawn from animal imagery based on the characteristics of rock rabbits and even baboons. In the case of rock rabbits, one of them, the *nharirire*, which is usually brown-black in colour plays the role of the guard by sitting on the topmost position, either a rock or the summit of the hill with a commanding view, where it watches for enemies while others feed. When danger approaches it makes a warning sound and the rest run for safety while it follows last. It usually feeds at night or on what is brought by others to its post. In what Mtetwa (1976: 164-5) terms a revolution in the Duma defensive warfare, during this period a wide range of techniques and devices were introduced including this system or network of watchmen. The watchman or *nharirire* was stationed on every high hill or refuge place (*nhare*) to be on the lookout for the coming of the *Madzviti* and then to warn immediately the people who were attending to the fields, or herdmen, by blowing the trumpet *hwamanda/mbuvuvu*. When one *nharirire* blew his trumpet, the next *nharirire* did the same and the process went on until a very large area was warned. Like this rock rabbit, the human *nharirire* was on the lookout for potential danger, he was stationed at his post on the prominent rock of the settlement while the rest of the community carried on with the daily chores and when enemies approached he raised alarm. Thus a larger community could benefit even more in terms of security from the services of several lineage *nharirire* who could warn the people in time to give them the opportunity to react as in the picture given of the Manyika by Hoyini Bhila (1978: 91). Here, where there was no standing army, men responded to the sound of the war drum by rushing with their weapons to the chief's court or straight to the battle front, and as long as the sound of the drum continued, the army swelled to thousands of men.

To a large extent the concept of *nhare* or strongholds was a significant factor in Karanga way of life. While normal life could have been lived on hilltops, in more vulnerable areas such as Chivi, Chirumhanzu and others where siege warfare was often employed by the Ndebele, it was important to secure strongholds where people could stay undercover for long. This is also true of such areas as Mugabe and Nemamwa. In a description of Mugabe's *nhare*, Bent (1892:81-82) commented:

The aforesaid stream in its course down the valley runs underneath a vast mass of granite rocks, which form a labyrinth of caves exceedingly difficult to approach. To facilitate their entry, the inhabitants have made bridges of trees, and in times of danger from the Ndebele they take refuge therein, they take their cattle with them and pull down the bridges...'

Mtetwa and Sandes confirm the existence of such structures and their similar function in other areas of the Duma such as the two-mile long Dingezhou cave used by Muroyi and Makaure, as well as Wuwuri Cave and Chiwara's Mupata cave (Mtetwa 1976:164; Sandes 1955: 31-40; see also Aquina 1965:11).

In some cases long ladders were used to access the dwelling places pitched high above the hills and these ladders were 'drawn up every night and let down every morning' (de Waal 1974:260).

Claiming that the Shona could not utilize the crevices and geological tunnels at their disposal to their advantage is tantamount to denying them any strategic or tactical ingenuity and that on its own smacks of colonial historiography.

Siege warfare obviously raised the question of storage of food resources that would sustain the people until the siege was over. Bent (1892: 81) observed the interior of Mugabe's stronghold to be full of granaries "well filled with grain in case of accidents". However there is very little research that has been done on the nature of storage among the Shona especially regarding the use of the various grain-bins found in caves all over the country, even in Matabeleland. Although some research has so far confirmed that the Shona could preserve their grain for up to five years under normal circumstances, these bins, although numerous, seem to be too small to sustain large families for a long time. Gale (1980:10) identified such structures at Vukutu in Nyanga but said nothing about them save for the fact that their location in defensible situations indicated that the inhabitants were living under stress. In Chivi several of these grain-bins are found in the most impregnable areas although none that have been identified so far may exceed a capacity above 5500 to 6000 cubic centimetres.

It is interesting to see how so much of the concept of *nhare* draws upon the defence tactics of rodents especially mice. We know from various accounts how southern Mashonaland was considered 'mouse country' by outside observers, the locals thriving on a diet of mice; these were mistaken for rats and the practice was (and still is) despised by both the Ndebele and Europeans alike (de Waal 1974: 261, Darter 1977: 99). The mice have a common dwelling place in a communal hole, which is divided into a sleeping area (*garingidya*, with bedding *mambuze-mbuze*), and a food storage place mistakenly referred to as *kumunda* (taken to imply an agricultural field) when in actual fact it serves the purpose of a granary. Then there are the escape routes with a tunnel leading to a concealed exit (*mbudyo*) from which the mice exit by way of explosion *kudhuvuka* so it can also be known as a *dhuvuko*. After *kudhuvuka* the mice proceed to another hole, the *diziro*, which is more impregnable and difficult to access so that less committed hunters could easily abandon the search. Here in the *diziro* a digger would come across a confusing maze of burrows or he might encounter difficulties accessing closed and reinforced tunnels as the mice engage in a process of digging and closing (*kutsindira*). Typical local knowledge used by any Karanga youth in hunting mice today involves targeting the escape-routes, and this is drawn from traditions of mice digging dating from long ago. There is reason to think that the *nhare* tradition draws much from this.

Another development of the 19th century amongst the Shona communities was the increasing tendency to bring industries to the homesteads. One industry that was successfully repatriated was the iron smelting industry despite its taboos, it of necessity supplied the much needed arms, especially guns. The prevalence of iron smelting furnaces at Iron Age sites is no new thing but certainly the gun trade amongst the Shona had got out of hand by the time of colonial occupation. Guns had entered the Zimbabwean plateau from two main directions. From the east the Portuguese had restrictedly let them in since the 17th century for use by their local soldiers but by the late 19th century they were freely giving African chiefs flags and firearms in the context of the scramble for Manicaland with the BSAC (Bhila 1978: 91-94, Beach 1992: 36-40). To the south the Venda had taken advantage of the emergent *jagtergemeenskap* or hunters' community of the Zoutpansberg Boers to bring to life an effective gun culture which to a large extent influenced the nature, incidence and fatality of the wars in the interior (Wagner: 1980: 335-336). The Njanja are an extreme example of how some of the Shona responded to the Nguni menace through perfecting their

skills in gun manufacture and repair. This is also true of the technology to forge bullets and manufacture gunpowder made from the manure of rock rabbits (Mackenzie 1975: 218). They were however not the only ones. At Madzivire's for example it took a night to forge bullets at short notice of the news of the approach of the Matabele (Burke 1969: 170). Although the powder of these guns was reportedly weak, it was however useful in sustaining the long sieges of the Matabele with much success. The defeat of the Matabele at Nyaningwe in 1879 according to Beach had much to do with the rapid accumulation in the Mhari armoury of such locally manufactured and Venda guns (Beach 1994: 164). The Mhari themselves had come to forge different types of guns, common among them being *kororo*, and *hlabakude* (G. Marufu, M Matumbure pers.comm.). Ellert (1984:57) elaborates the development of this gun industry arguing that the 19th century Shona made copies of most of the imported guns which became known by their onomatopoeic names as *zvigidi* and most of them were extensively and effectively used in the 1896-7 Chimurenga.

In the case of an emergency, people fled into the caves or hills in which grain and water were already stored. Some caves could not accommodate both people and livestock. Therefore, the latter were left outside at the mercy of the *Madzviti*. However the Nguni often countered these strategies in various ways and Mtetwa (Mtetwa 1976: 168) gives a figurative description of some of their counter-strategies, such as laying long sieges on the strongholds, smoking out the refugees or besieging them with hunting nets.

The Mujejeje Hill Complex

Mujejeje is a broken granite kopje some 20 kilometres south of Chivi business centre belonging to a broad tradition of related sites in the area that find their best representation in both style and complexity in the Chomuruvati ruins another 18 or so kilometres further south. Mujejeje falls under the area of headman Chipindu. Ideally situated in a fortified area in relation to surrounding hills and strongholds, Mujejeje is adjacent to the Banga wetlands to the immediate southwest and those of Shokoni to the east. As such, it seems to have attracted human settlement for a very long time and this is supported by the existence of a fairly elaborate Zimbabwe type wall in the middle and fairly secure part of the hill. There are number of grinding stones strewn on the surfaces of huts as well as stone tripods (*mapfihwa*) presumably used for cooking. Oral traditions and ethnobotanical research conducted close to the site seem to point to diets dependent on a variety domesticated animals and

wild vegetables including mushrooms, *chirevereve* (*Senecio erubescens*) and *munenzva* (*Asclepias densiflora*) obtainable from nearby dambos as well as from the banks of the Mutorahuku and Banga rivers (J Jonsson pers.comm.; Gomez 1988).

Although defence could be considered as one of the factors influencing the choice of the site, it however seems too low and less well protected than the later phase of occupation visible at the summit of the hill, where more recent artefacts were recovered including 'refuge' pottery and some beads. By inference it seems there were two different settlements on the same hill; later 19th century people settled at the top part of the hill and disturbed very little the earlier Zimbabwe site further down although they could have used it as a burial place. Most later burials are strewn around the edges of the hill. There were more grinding stones and tripods at the top site. These were found to be concentrated in one area giving the impression of a huge kitchen. On the more prominent section of the hill there is a huge rock overlooking the valley beyond, suitable as an ideal place for a sentinel.

Mujejeje is traditionally known to have been occupied by one Sikida, the son of Mhosva who was one of the many sons of Masunda, the son of the Chivi dynasty's founding father Tavengegweyi or Chivi I. Masunda's descendants occupy the majority of this area today and most were useful in giving figurative descriptions of their ancestors' history. Sikida's court or *dare* occupied a well protected part behind a big boulder but close enough to what we gathered to be the sentinel's post. Most of his sons are reckoned to have occupied *mizinda* at the base of the hill. Adjacent hills are recalled to have been occupied by Sikida's most trusted *makota*. To the west in the direction facing the lineage headquarters at Nyaningwe was a small hill occupied by one Murindi of the Shumba (Lion) *nhinhi* totem who was given a wife by Sikida. To the northern side lay Nyakurai of the Shava-*mhofu* (Eland) totem, another *gota* who fought a number of battles with Sikida and his sons and had actually given Sikida a wife.

Although there is no evidence of any storage facilities in Mujejeje itself, about four grainbins were discovered at Zvesvimbo, a few hundred metres away, and still more are to be found in Mukwakwatara where Sikida later moved to. By conjecture one could conclude that although Mujejeje was a fairly well protected settlement, the occupants often used nearby Zvesvimbo as a

nhare due to the complete absence of caves in Mujejeje and the bins though small may have been used to store food to last the time spent in hiding.

There is much evidence from the history of the whole area that the Mujejeje people constituted part of the formidable defence superstructure of the Masunda area which itself was part of a larger Mhari defense system co-ordinated from Nyaningwe where the paramount Chivi was stationed. Hence, given that the various headmanships of the area were arranged on almost similar lines, it seems plausible to suggest a defence structure that was organised from the periphery to the centre. This brings into question the issue of class structures emerging based on defence. One may suggest that since safety was an issue at stake, class structures may have been dependent on defence values so that the lower one's class was, the less likely one was to be safe from the wrath of the raiders and thieves. The lower class Mhari descendant from inherited mothers were placed in the plains or *deve* where they were vulnerable to Ndebele raids while higher class Mhari occupied the mountainous areas in the safety of strongholds (Mazarire 2003:48). Although this is consistent with Beach's (1994b: 45) picture of Chivero's where the powerful tended to occupy the best sites, it does not seem to show the expected scattering of homesteads as a result. Instead there are traditions and evidence of clustering of homesteads deliberately for defensive purposes (Pwiti 1996: 141).

Conclusion: The 'Nhare Tradition' in Shona History

This paper is a product of protracted consultations and debates with colleagues on the nature of relations between the Ndebele and the Shona in the 19th Century and is in many ways informed by the desire to move away from mere theory to practical knowledge based on sound case studies. It has attempted to use the various sources from archaeology, oral traditions and written records, probing the various debates in each of these sources that have any bearing on this issue. It turns out that from the foregoing there is relatively little doubt that the nineteenth century was a turbulent period on the Zimbabwean plateau region owing to the various developments that took place. This situation had given rise to a defensive way of life among at least the Karanga sections of the Shona where my research has been based and there is surviving evidence of this in the ruins left behind. One can easily observe the centrality of the strongholds or *nhare* in Shona defence strategies and how even dynastic histories and landscapes of the Shona are recalled with specific reference to the *nhare* of specific lineage heads. It was from the *nhare* that all administration was centred from

social, economic to military. A class analysis could even show that the *nhare* was often associated with the nuclear family closely associated with the lineage head, becoming the headquarters or *gadzingo* and it is even at the *nhare* today that the spirits of the departed ancestors are propitiated by their descendants. Thus apart from simply being an important physical feature for the defence it offered, the *nhare* continues to feature in Shona way of life as a religious symbol and a moral geography. I therefore conclude by proposing the 'Nhare tradition' as an alternative term to the ones that came before it for its rootedness in the Shona past and its continuity as a living tradition.

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