

Nationalism and Self-Government in Rhodesian Detention: Gonakudzingwa, 1964-1974

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Political prisoners have commonly resisted the terms of their imprisonment. Under certain circumstances, they have also sought to displace the state's authority with their own institutions of government. These efforts provide a unique window onto political ideas and 'languages of stateness', as well as the effects of particular conditions of confinement. ZAPU detainees' practices in the remote outpost of Gonakudzingwa revealed a commitment to a model of bureaucratic power that drew on the Rhodesian state while also offering a critique thereof. Detainees constructed a hierarchy of rule-bound and specialised committees that closely regulated daily life; they imagined an inclusive nationalist mythology, and they promoted civility and restraint. Detainee self-government could not contain all divisions and disputes, but it did offer an alternative vision of nationalism and authority that stood in stark contrast to the practices of nationalists and guerrillas in exile and in the war zones of Rhodesia.

State-making undertaken by anti-colonial movements is normally associated with the relative freedoms of exile or with guerrilla armies able to establish at least partial control over people and territory. The capacity to displace or evade a state is seen as essential to the creation of new institutions. Recent studies have, however, stressed the extent to which imprisoned members of opposition movements have not only sustained political life but established institutions of governance from firmly *within* the grasp of the state. Fran Buntman's study of Robben Island confirms it as the famous 'university' of nationalist lore, but also details the elaborate bureaucratic institutions established by several generations of political prisoners belonging to the ANC, PAC and Black Consciousness Movement.¹ Peter Zinoman's study of political prisoners under French colonial rule documents the 'modern regimes of authority and control' developed by Indochinese Communist Party members, and shows how such 'regimes' served both as a critique of French rule and as a means of gaining advantage over other political movements.² Studies of Mau Mau prisoners in Kenya note detainees' concerted if not always successful efforts to establish a hierarchy of committees focused on ensuring unity and discipline through solving disputes, regulating social interaction, organising the distribution of resources, and presenting grievances to the authorities.³ Munyaradzi Munochiveyi's important study of

¹ F. Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially chapter 9.

² P. Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam 1862-1940* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001).

³ See M. Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory and Politics* (Boulder, 1998), Chapter 6.

Zimbabwe, on which I build here, has made similar points.⁴ These explorations of political imprisonment force us to broaden the consideration of anti-colonial and nationalist struggle to include the interiors of penal institutions as places not just of repression and resistance but of practical and imaginative exercises in self-government and even of state-making.

My interest here is to explore the Zimbabwean case in order to press further the consideration of carceral institutions as spaces that are productive of authority, and in which we can both find a plurality of nationalist visions of political and social order and gain new insight into nationalist relations with the settler state. The ‘languages of stateness’⁵ Zimbabwean political prisoners deployed owed a heavy debt to the bureaucratic, centralised settler state, constructed as both model and failure. The institutions created by prisoners countered and called on the strengths of the state in surprising ways, driven in part by the particular demands and pressures of imprisonment. Prisoner government prized civility and restraint and sought to imagine an inclusive – if rigidly hierarchical – social order and nationalist mythology alongside a rule-bound and expert bureaucracy. It was notably distinct from the institutions established by nationalists in exile or in areas liberated or semi-liberated during the guerrilla war, and thus marks an important alternative to them.

In exploring this topic, I draw on a combination of archival records, political prisoner memoirs, and interviews with a small group of former detainees, most of whom were at the time of their detention middle-ranking members of the nationalist movement ZAPU (the Zimbabwe African People’s Union). Rhodesian regimes of political imprisonment were highly varied, and prisoners often moved through more than one institution and set of conditions over time.⁶ My focus here is on the categories of ‘detainees’ and ‘restrictees’ (both of which I will refer to as detainees for simplicity’s sake), and the remote site where the largest number of detainees were held for the longest period – Gonakudzingwa. This category of prisoner was not convicted of a crime. Detention was ‘preventive’: detainees were held on grounds of their *potential* to endanger public safety or public order, a status that was reviewed by a tribunal established for the purpose but which in practice offered scant protection, instead acting as a ‘rubber stamp’ for ministerial action.⁷ Under these terms, thousands of detainees, including many of Zimbabwe’s leading nationalists, were held for lengthy periods in conditions that were often considerably less regulated than those of convicted political prisoners, and hence in which it was possible both to imagine and build elaborate institutions of self-government.

⁴ M. B. Munochiveyi, “‘It was a difficult time in Zimbabwe’: A history of imprisonment, detention, and confinement during Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle, 1960-1980”, PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2008.

⁵ I use this phrase in the sense outlined by T. Blom Hansen and F. Stepputat, ‘Introduction: States of Imagination’, in T. Blom Hansen and F. Stepputat (eds), *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* (Durham, Duke University press, 2001), pp. 5-10, that is to mean the historically specific practices, symbols and rituals used to imagine and constitute a ‘proper’ state.

⁶ One of Zimbabwe’s most famed political prisoners, the ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) stalwart Maurice Nyagumbo, for example, spent time in Kentucky, Khami, Selukwe and Marandellas prisons, restriction camps in Lupane and Gokwe, the notorious Goromonzi police cells, Salisbury remand prison and Connemara, Gwelo and Que Que prisons. See his memoir, *With the People: An Autobiography from the Zimbabwe Struggle* (London, Allison and Busby, 1980).

⁷ G. Feltoe, ‘Law, Ideology and Coercion in Southern Rhodesia’ (MPhil Thesis, University of Kent, 1978), Appendix B.

Inventing and Reinventing Detention

The 1950s and early 1960s in Southern Rhodesia were marked by a boom in and radicalisation of nationalism. Nationalists moved from a posture of negotiation and participation in political institutions to an aggressive demand for self-rule. Southern Rhodesian governments moved away from the promise of ‘partnership’ and multi-racialism, which had animated the Central African Federation, the Garfield Todd government, and the host of liberally-minded societies in which middle-class Africans had participated alongside whites, towards repression in the form of repeated states of emergency, preventive detention – introduced in 1959 – and the criminalisation of a wide range of political activity. The practices and ideas that shaped political imprisonment in this period were heatedly debated by officials and detainees alike, revealing shifting goals and ideas about the state and nationalism on both sides.

The post-World War II promise of rights-bearing citizenship for at least some Africans formed an important backdrop to the repression that followed, and produced an early period of confusion and negotiation around practices of detention. The Southern Rhodesian government was not at first sure how to detain its political opponents and nationalists were not sure how to behave in detention. Following an initial period of confinement of Southern Rhodesian nationalists in prisons, often alongside their brethren from Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, detainees were legally recognised as distinct from criminals by right of the fact that they had not been convicted of an offence, and were shuffled between a host of different carceral regimes, ranging from rural outposts to ‘open’ prisons to high security institutions. The state accepted that it had obligations to the maintenance of detainees’ businesses, properties and dependents through the provision of allowances and a range of other material and administrative support. The guiding state dictum – never remotely achieved, but nonetheless politically salient – was that detainees’ dependents should not be rendered *worse off* as a result of detention.⁸

These views set Southern Rhodesia apart from contemporaneous Kenya and Nyasaland. Political opposition was not diagnosed as a mental disorder; ‘rehabilitation’ through coerced confessions and the discipline of hard work was not required (in fact detainees as opposed to those convicted of criminal offences could not be made to work in this period).⁹ Detainees were assigned rights and privileges – however circumscribed – that distinguished them from criminals. The obligations assumed by the state served to create an intimate arena in which detainees, local organisations (most notably in this early period the Southern Rhodesian Legal Aid and Welfare Fund) and officials of the Native Affairs Department (NAD) and municipalities corresponded and conversed about the minutiae of family relations, business matters, rents and school fees, the organisation and cost of agricultural

⁸ See the elaboration of this position and detailed debate over how to go about achieving it in National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), S3338/2/2/1, Restricttees, 1959-63, e.g., S. E. Morris, CNC, to all PNCs and certain NCs in Southern Rhodesia, Circular Minute No. 18/59, Public Orders Act, 26 February 1959. The legal justifications made for detention also adamantly (though by no means convincingly) stressed that detention was not intended as a punishment for acts committed. See materials in NAZ, RG4, Miscellaneous Reports, 1958-9, especially Review Tribunal, Preventive Detention (Temporary Provisions) Act 1959, General Report, 6 August 1959.

⁹ See J. McCracken, ‘In the Shadow of Mau Mau: Detainees and Detention Camps during Nyasaland’s State of Emergency’ in this issue for a discussion of contemporaneous policies in Nyasaland and Kenya.

labour, even lobola payments and the best means to ensure wives behaved ‘properly’ in the absence of their detained husbands. Detainees used this space to contest both the conditions of detention and the state’s execution of its obligations in highly varied ways. They demanded recognition as citizens and as clients; they deployed lawyers and instituted letter-writing campaigns; they appealed to the NAD’s paternal and patriarchal ethos; and they used violence. Detainees did not in these early years realise either a common identity or means of self-government. This was partly because they were regularly divided and transferred among institutions, but it was also because they did not agree on how best to respond to the state.¹⁰ The elaboration and realisation of alternative visions of order among detainees awaited the changed context of long-term, large-scale detention under the rule of the right-wing Rhodesian Front government, elected in December 1962 with Winston Field at its helm, and led by Ian Smith from 1964.

If the early years of detention were marked by uncertainty over the nature of obligation and citizenship on the part of both the state and detainees, from 1964 there developed a very different ethos. The banning of Zimbabwe’s two nationalist parties, ZAPU and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) - themselves successors to previously banned parties - in 1964 marked the end of the so-called ‘open’ mass nationalist period and was accompanied both before and after the banning by large scale detentions. Hundreds and then thousands of nationalists were detained, at first in Wha Wha detention centre and prison and then in Gonakudzingwa restriction area in the remote south east for ZAPU and Sikombela restriction area in Gokwe for ZANU. Initially, these latter two areas were remarkably lightly policed and porous, and they were always less closely controlled than Wha Wha with its barracks, strict time-tables and manned observation towers, or the many prisons where political prisoners were held in cells. At both Gonakudzingwa and Sikombela, detainees at first freely interacted with local people, went to beer drinks and dances, and received a steady flow of hundreds of visitors. In Gonakudzingwa this lax regime changed in mid-1965 when camps were fenced and visits were severely curtailed, even for close family members and legal representatives.¹¹ Even so, Gonakudzingwa was a far cry from a prison, and its administration was variably relaxed and tightened over time. Sikombela was closed after a few years and its occupants transferred to Salisbury Remand Prison, but Gonakudzingwa would remain home to hundreds of ZAPU detainees until mid-1974, and thus presents a unique opportunity to explore detainee practices of self-government.

¹⁰ Extensive and detailed correspondence and reporting on these matters, including a great many letters from detainees, can be found in NAZ, S3330/T/1/8A/1/1-3, Emergency Power Temporary Detention Regulations 1959; S3338/2/1/1/4, Detainees Arrangements, Que Que, Shabani, Buhera and Selukwe, 1959; S3338/2/1/1/1, Political Detainees and Restricttees, 1959-62; and S3338/1, Political Detainees and Restricttees, 1959-62. Further material is contained in the correspondence of the Southern Rhodesia Legal Aid and Welfare Fund, available in the Terence Ranger Papers, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford. Memoirs of detainees are also revealing. See for example, Nyagumbo, *With the People*, and E. Tekere, *A Lifetime of Struggle* (Harare, Sapes Books, 2006).

¹¹ See J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (London, Methuen, 1984), pp. 125-6; NAZ, MS 1184/3/1/1, Amnesty International, 1966-1971, James Waddington, Amnesty International, ‘Circumstances Surrounding Restricttees’, n.d. [c. 1966]; MS591/2/7, Ian Smith’s Hostages, Geneva Press Conference, October 1976, ‘Extracts of Interview with Michael Mawema’, n.d; and C. Palley, *The Constitutional History and Law of Southern Rhodesia, 1888-1965* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 748-50.

The shift in scale, length and locale of detention was matched by a change in the views of government. In contrast to its predecessor, the Rhodesian Front did not view detainees as citizens temporarily deprived of their rights in the interest of security. It constructed detainees as something considerably worse than convicted criminals, referring to them as violent thugs and terrorists, miscreants who had placed themselves outside society and so – quite literally – deserved to be isolated in the ‘bush’. In a much repeated refrain, officials and Rhodesian Front Ministers ruled that detainees and their dependents should not be made *better off* as a result of detention, an absurd proposition that marked the conversion of detention from an act of prevention to an act of punishment, though one that still lacked rehabilitative ambition.¹² The allowances, rental payments, school fees and other forms of support, paltry though they may have been, were withdrawn. Detainees and their families were told that they could apply to the Department of Social Welfare or to Native Commissioners if they were destitute, just like any other African.¹³

In practice, this meant that virtually no state support was forthcoming. G. C. Senn, the Red Cross representative who had been visiting detainees since 1959, described the shift. He now brought his concerns to Lloyd Roberts, the Assistant Secretary to the infamous Rhodesian Front Minister of Law and Order, Desmond Lardner-Burke. Lloyd Roberts, he remembered, ‘had a grudge against detainees generally. He was never sympathetic – never, never. His principle was the minimum and nothing but the minimum.... I think he was just prejudiced.... [H]e would say, “No,” and you’d say, “But why not?” and he’d say, “No, it is no. They are in prison, they are prisoners.” He was just incapable of discriminating between a detainee, who has not committed a crime and is not sentenced, and a convict. It was just beyond him.’¹⁴

Detainees increasingly relied not on the state but on the expanding, though never sufficient in the face of ever escalating demands, work of international organisations such as Amnesty International, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the International Defence and Aid Fund, which funded legal representation, helped detainees and prisoners with study materials and access to degree programmes, and provided welfare support for the families of detainees through Christian Care.¹⁵

¹² The shift in discourse and elaboration of the new dispensation is outlined in reports, parliamentary debates and correspondence in NAZ, S3330/1/35/25/T14A/2/1, Wha Wha Re-establishment Centre, 1964-5, e.g., Clifford Walter Dupont, ‘Reply to the Queen’s Speech’, 25 February 1964; P. G. C. White for Secretary for Law and Order, Salisbury, to Secretary for African Education, Salisbury, 22 May 1964; Secretary for Labour and Social Welfare, Salisbury, to Secretary for Law and Order, Salisbury, 25 June 1964. Also see correspondence in S3336/8, Wha Wha Detention, August 1964-April 1965. ‘Rehabilitation’ of detainees on their release (meaning, basically, their reintegration into society without nationalist activism) was an official goal in the mid-1960s, but not one that achieved success or to which resources on any scale were devoted. See the account of Francis Staunton in NAZ, ORAL/256, Francis Anthony Staunton, November 1986.

¹³ The state’s rejection of its obligations was a messy process just as its definition of those obligations in the first place had been. It took some time before the various branches of government realised the nature of the new dispensation and, for example, began to evict detainees’ families for a failure to pay rent. See especially the confusion within municipal governments in NAZ, S3330/1/35/25/T14A/2/1, Wha Wha Re-establishment Centre, 1964-5, e.g., E. H. Ashton, Director of Housing and Amenities, Bulawayo, to Secretary for Law and Order, Salisbury, 26 June 1964; P. G. C. White for Secretary for Law and Order, Salisbury, to Secretary for Local Government and Housing, 19 August 1964.

¹⁴ NAZ, ORAL/219, Geoffrey Cassian Senn, interviewed by G. Gibbons, Driefontein Mission, Umvuma, 15 July 1978.

¹⁵ See correspondence and reports in NAZ, MS591/2/7, Ian Smith’s Hostages, Geneva Press Conference, October 1976; MS 587/2, Rhodesia, Material on Christian Care and IDAF Relating to

Obligations previously accepted by the state, however problematically, were now refused, curtailing the range and nature of engagement between officials and detainees.

In these changed circumstances, detainees' views of the state shifted. The mix of responses that had characterised earlier negotiations and interactions specifically around the question of the state's assumption of obligations to detainees was replaced with an organised effort to displace the state's authority with detainees' own government, and to set the terms on which interactions with officials occurred. Detainee leaders no longer believed in the state's capacity to engage with nationalists as citizens, and nor did they seek to negotiate a better deal as clients. This shift was cast in part as a consequence of the Rhodesian Front's changing relationship to law. For ZAPU president Joshua Nkomo, the Rhodesian Front's predecessor had taken care to observe the 'rule of law' because of its concern for British and international opinion during the break up of the Federation, and because the legal system offered real redress.¹⁶ The Rhodesian Front was different. Nkomo recounts an incident where police ordered a halt to an impromptu march marking the release of several detainees: 'In the old days this argument would have had the policemen discussing among themselves the exact interpretation of the law. Now there was no such doubt. "If you take one step further we shall shoot", said the police commander – and we believed him.... Until now our relations with the police had always been correct, even when they were strained. Once Field became prime minister all that changed.'¹⁷

This shift did not mean that the rule of law as an ideal had lost its appeal to nationalists, or that the strategy of legal appeal ceased.¹⁸ But they did not think of law as a means to political victory: as one detainee explained, 'You can't take a revolution to court'.¹⁹ The rule of law came to serve instead as a standard against which the Rhodesian Front could be held up and found wanting, and as a basis for the elaboration of detainees' own languages of stateness, now standing as a critique of the settler state's failings.

Establishing Authority in Gonakudzingwa

In exploring the nature of this new round of detention, I focus on the restriction area of Gonakudzingwa, with occasional reference to Wha Wha. Gonakudzingwa was located hundreds of miles from any town in the low-lying, south-eastern wildlife zone of Gonarezhou near the Mozambican border. The area was populated with wild

Detainees, 1973-1976; MS 1184/3/1/1, Amnesty International, 1966-1971, and Al Cook, 'The International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, or IDAF', in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol 3, International Solidarity, Part 1 (South Africa, UNISA, 2009), pp. 141-253, for an indication of the wide range of work of these organisations.

¹⁶ Nkomo, *Nkomo*, pp. 95-6.

¹⁷ Nkomo, *Nkomo*, p. 106. Interestingly, an official report on the changing role of the police noted with some concern the start of this shift in 1962. NAZ, RG4, Southern Rhodesia, Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs, C.D. Packard, *Report of the Survey of the BSAP*, Salisbury, 5 May 1962.

¹⁸ Nationalists never stopped appealing to law, and never stopped winning cases even under the slender protections of martial law, though the odds were greatly and increasingly stacked against them. See, e.g., cases and correspondence in NAZ, MS 311/15, Vol. 1, 1973, The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia, A Commission of the Rhodesia Catholic Bishops' Conference; MS591/2/4, Legal, Sheridan, 75/1; F220/LP/615/4, Press Criticisms; MS 587/4, no title; MS587/2, Material on Christian Care and IDAF Relating to Detainees, 1973-1976; and ORAL/239, Leo Solomon Baron, interviewed by I. J. Johnstone, Borrowdale, Harare, 5, 8, 9, 16 August 1983.

¹⁹ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

animals including lion and elephant, subject to extremes of heat and cold, expensive and difficult to access, and had virtually no infrastructure save for the tin huts, roads and boreholes put in for the detainees.²⁰ The restriction area was run by police rather than the prison service, and as we have seen it held the largest number of detainees by a considerable margin, with over 3,000 residents at some points, and some of the most senior of ZAPU politicians, including ZAPU president Joshua Nkomo. It would remain the main centre of Rhodesian detention for ten years, until moves to Mozambican independence and the escalation of the guerrilla war forced its closure, and it thus offers a unique opportunity to explore detainee ideas and practices of self-government.

Detainees in Gonakudzingwa adopted a policy of cooptation and confrontation in their interaction with the policemen who were charged with running the camps.²¹ Nkomo writes that their policy was always to be ‘nice’, but distinctions were made among policemen, most clearly on grounds of race.²² White policemen were considered ‘very arrogant’ and were believed to have been recruited for their hostility to nationalists: ‘They’d bring those they knew were anti-us to work here’, as one detainee explained, a view echoed by the Red Cross representative G. C. Senn who described the white policemen in charge of Gonakudzingwa as narrow-minded, racist, and unable to conceive of detainees as other than ‘bandits’ and criminals.²³ A special department was, however, devoted to wooing black policemen. Due to the hardship of the posting, the turn over in policemen was regular: a six month stint was the norm. Whenever a new policeman arrived detainees were assigned ‘to go and talk to them – the police patrols were always in conversation.’ The very isolation of Gonakudzingwa helped: ‘The black officers were quite friendly – some were sympathetic, and because Gonakudzingwa was so remote they also felt they were in exile, in detention.... So there was this mutual dependency.’ In addition, in periods where detainees were allowed visitors, they had resources to share: ‘We in the camps had more food, more resources than the police officers because visitors brought in all kinds of foodstuffs and money. So the police ... families benefited.’²⁴ Police were crucial in carrying news and information in and out and in passing messages among the camps.²⁵ Refusal to help was rare: one detainee remembers there being just one such case: ‘There was one guy from Masvingo who said, “No, I shouldn’t lose my sadza because of your problems.”’²⁶

The other side to this policy was confrontation. Everyday interactions were the source of constant conflict. Fletcher Dulini Ncube recalled how police would seek to make visits and letters contingent on ‘not doing any confrontation with police – but that was impossible! Conflict happened every day. They would bring bad meat and we would

²⁰ See descriptions in Munochiveyi, “‘It was a difficult time’”, pp. 160-1; Nkomo, *Nkomo*, especially chapters 12 and 13.

²¹ Interviews, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008; Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

²² Such distinctions were the norm in all places of Rhodesian political imprisonment. See J. Alexander, ‘Political Prisoners’ Memoirs in Zimbabwe: Narratives of Self and Nation’, *Cultural and Social History*, 5, 4, 2008, pp. 403-4.

²³ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008; NAZ, ORAL/219, Geoffrey Cassian Senn, interviewed by G. Gibbons, Driefontein Mission, Umvuma, 15 July 1978.

²⁴ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

²⁵ Nkomo, *Nkomo*, pp. 141-2.

²⁶ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

throw it back, and they would withdraw visitors [or deny us letters] ... because we weren't repentant enough.' The detainees responded by lodging complaints with Amnesty International and the Red Cross, at times gaining redress. Detainees would also insult and harass the police, for example by answering roll calls by calling out insults rather than their names. Dulini Ncube recalled with great mirth an instance in which a detainee had hid in the tree under which the policemen stood during roll call so as to monitor what was written against each man's name: 'we put a guy in the tree to see the writing – he would write this guy is repentant, that one is arrogant, then he called the one in the tree and the game was over!'²⁷

Violence was rare, but occurred where, for example, police sought to infringe on detainee space. In the aftermath of an escape by a number of university students in 1966,²⁸ the police put razor wire around the camps. In Dulini Ncube's camp, the razor wire ran inside what the detainees understood as the correct boundary: 'So at 5 O'Clock we decided to increase the boundary. This white guy came and he ... found someone outside the border and he starts harassing this guy and he started fighting back and some guys pinned him down and took his gun. There were negotiations to give the gun back with his superior. We said, "He's silly, he wants to tamper with the boundary." So the superior agreed he had made a mistake and we kept the [old] boundaries.'²⁹

While detainees were willing to interact with police in this range of ways, they refused any contact with Native Affairs officials. In contrast to the early years of detention, Native Affairs' paternal authoritarianism was rejected as wholly inappropriate to the governance of citizens.³⁰ Detainees in Gonakudzingwa thus chose which officials they would work with and tried to shape the behaviour of officials with whom they interacted, establishing a balance of power which meant that they policed the police as much as the other way around. This was a daily struggle that marked out broad areas in which detainees were able to construct their own government, based on a shared vision of nation and state.

Foundations: Nationalist 'Structures' and Mythology

Detainee government was founded on the 'structures', as they were called, of ZAPU committees outside prison. These ran from the Branch through the District to the Provincial and National bodies, and were bound by strict rules of conduct, seniority, and practices of bureaucratic record-keeping.³¹ Nationalist hierarchies provided a ready scaffold on which to graft new institutions; the idea of the nationalist community was also carefully cultivated from the moment of arrival in detention. The most senior nationalist leaders in detention welcomed newcomers, who were often

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ On this incident, see the account of Cephass Msipa. NAZ, MS 308/15/1, Detentions and Restrictions 1967, 'Cephass Msipa, or the one that got away', *Free Labour World*, November 1966.

²⁹ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

³⁰ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008. Police confirmed this view. On Gonakudzingwa, see NAZ, S3330/1/35/25/T14A/2/1, Wha Wha Re-establishment Centre, 1964-5, Report from the Officer-in-Charge (Superintendent Bremner), Vila Salazar, 23 August 1964, Confidential. NAD officials who visited detainees described meeting a wall of implacable hostility and silence in Gonakudzingwa and elsewhere. NAZ, ORAL/256, Francis Anthony Staunton, November 1986.

³¹ Interviews, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008; John Mzimela, Bulawayo, 4 February 2009.

disoriented and fearful, and impressed on them that they should take pride in their detention. These were made into celebratory moments, filled with the sounds of ululation and song. As Munochiveyi emphasises, these initial interactions were important to detainee morale, sense of purpose, and identification with others.³²

The process of induction continued in the camps and focused on creating and maintaining a shared identity among a diverse and shifting community. Fletcher Dulini Ncube along with ten others was transferred from Wha Wha to Gonakudzingwa when the Rhodesian Front made its Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, a moment that brought a widespread crackdown. Over the next few months, they were joined by over 200 others: ‘They came in helicopters from Harare with whole structures’, Dulini Ncube recalled. Middle-aged and middle-class urban activists were joined by youthful saboteurs and old people from the rural areas of Matabeleland. Establishing a shared political project and a shared nationalist culture and mythology was a priority.³³

Detainees were in part concerned to break down ethnic division and prejudice, as Dulini Ncube explained: ‘We had a policy of integrating people. We weren’t living as Ndebele, Shona, Tonga. We ate in groups of five to learn about others’ culture. That was Josh’s [Joshua Nkomo’s] idea. There was that understanding – some were coming for the second time.’³⁴ The old were especially valued and called upon to share their knowledge, as Welshman Mabhena explained: ‘Nkomo had created education – Binga people have their culture, Masvingo people have their culture. Now you need to know each other’s culture. They’d target the grey-haired ones to teach the young.’³⁵ Sharing knowledge went much further than an ethnic cultural exchange. Special efforts were made to incorporate and create ‘discipline’ among the youth through a programme of political education, a project conceived of by Josiah Chinamano and carried out through lecture series.³⁶ These lectures also served as venues where diverse experiences could be woven together. Jane Ngwenya, who was in Gonakudzingwa for five years and Wha Wha for two years in the 1960s, recalled: ‘We’d be addressed by Mr Chinamano and I would address [people].... We’d discuss problems. People from Tanda in Rusape would tell us what was happening there, those from towns would give us their problems, those who were from reserves would sit and discuss, exposing each area, how they’d been [evicted]. Everyone would participate. We would sing – not sorrowfully like the church but revolutionary. Everyone would learn all the songs.’³⁷ In this way an inclusive and hierarchical nationalist political mythology was created that fitted the stories of new arrivals from all classes, ages and regions into a broader narrative of political struggle, equipped detainees with a common culture of song, dance, history and politics, and placed the young at the feet of the old.

These acts of inclusion were also aimed at overcoming the state’s segregationist practices. ZAPU had numbers of members classed by the state as Asian, Coloured and

³² Munochiveyi, “‘It was a difficult time’”, pp. 175-6.

³³ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Interview, Welshman Mabhena, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008.

³⁶ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

³⁷ Interview, Jane Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 14 October 2008. Also see Munochiveyi, “‘It was a difficult time’”, pp. 191-2.

European. When such individuals were detained, they were kept in segregated spaces. R. K. Naik, who had worked his way up from branch chairman in the Bulawayo township of Makokoba to the ZAPU central committee, was flown with a group of detainees to Gonakudzingwa where he was separated as the sole ‘Asian’. (Several ‘Coloured’ members of ZAPU were also held at Gonakudzingwa at various times.) Naik remembers the other ‘new recruits’ being ‘welcomed by their colleagues’ with ‘dances and singing’, but he was taken alone to an isolated pair of huts late at night, and left with a few supplies, a lamp and, only after an altercation with his police escorts, two matches. Naik was terrified: ‘It was a scaring atmosphere. All around bush, nothing else.’ His hut was rapidly overrun with insects drawn to the lamp and Naik spent a sleepless night composing a letter to his wife. Joshua Nkomo learned of his presence in the morning and demanded to visit him. When he saw Naik’s hut he scolded the police: “‘Don’t you have any sense? What if wild animals came and took him? He’s our colleague!’” He was very angry,’ Naik explained. When Nkomo heard Naik had been left with just two matches he became enraged: ‘He got so wild’, Naik remembers. Nkomo sent two men to the police headquarters to protest and delegated two detainees to live with Naik, thereby bringing him into the wider community, as well as cementing Naik’s loyalty to Nkomo: ‘He was a fine leader. He had feeling for me.’³⁸

The foundation of detainee government was thus built on the ZAPU ‘structures’ imported from outside detention and the careful elaboration of a common political project. There was much that was creative and consensual in this, but it was also an endeavour that placed a high value on hierarchy and discipline.

Bureaucracy and Detainee Life

Over time, detainees engaged in self-government through the institution of an elaborate and functionally specialised committee structure dependent on the technologies of writing and record-keeping. Their efforts were shaped by the ideal of a rule-bound, routinised, hierarchical institution, as well as by the fractious pressures of long-term detention, which produced an exaggerated emphasis on discipline and civility as an antidote to what was often glossed as ‘frustration’. Detainees thus drew on a model inspired by the Rhodesian settler state – a centralised bureaucracy *par excellence* – to build a coherent, efficient, and symbolically compelling alternative to it. The extent to which this vision of statehood was shared and embraced – even celebrated – is a striking aspect of detainee life.

On his arrival in Gonakudzingwa, Joshua Nkomo immediately set about establishing what he called a ‘government’ in the wilderness. As he explained in his memoir,

Our prison became a centre for political education, both for us prisoners and for our visitors. The government had evidently not thought what the effect would be of putting us away in that remote place, almost without supervision. We took control of our own lives, set up our own camp government and ran it as a practical course in democratic administration. The camp was run by the central committee, whose members acted as the chairmen of specialized committees for education, reception, hospitality and so on. The committee

³⁸ Interview, R. K. Naik, Oxford, 17 September 2008.

secretaries ran the day-to-day business, carrying out policy and reporting back on the people's reactions to it.³⁹

Nkomo's hut, where he received visitors, dignitaries and journalists, was called 'State House'.

The detainees lived in five separate camps, each with its own administration. At first communication among the camps was relatively easy, but with restrictions on movement and visitors and the fencing of the camps, they were forced to function more autonomously, with consultation through the circulation of written messages.⁴⁰ Newcomers with party posts were assigned to administrative roles and set about gathering the sort of information about resources and population on which bureaucratic states depended to make their citizens visible and to establish a normative basis for claims to legitimacy. Victor Kuretu, an early entrant into Gonakudzingwa, describes how Nkomo, 'told us at our arrival that we had to run the detention camp along the lines of a "government".' This meant keeping track of its citizenry: 'We kept intricate records of every inmate, with details about their names, places of origin and so forth. We generated a number of records that filled books....'⁴¹ While he was resident in Gonakudzingwa, R. K. Naik served as treasurer for the overall administration. He kept meticulous records of party funds, and the funds and goods brought into the camp by well-wishers and visitors: 'I had a receipt book and everything. We had to. How can I justify what I've done otherwise? Everything is recorded.'⁴² The committee structure was specialised and expert, 'so as to reflect government' as another detainee put it.⁴³ The orderliness, specialisation and record-keeping was something of which many detainees were – and still are – extremely proud; this was the 'proper' basis of authority. John Mzimela explained, 'we had order and discipline. We had a register of our own.... We had a pure administration laid out.'⁴⁴ Jane Ngwenya exclaimed, 'We had committees; we were organised; we could run a government!'⁴⁵

The crowded spaces of Wha Wha were even more rigidly governed. Paul Themba Nyathi remembers, 'a much stricter regime because of the tighter confinement. Issues of discipline were very important. You'd have 30 people in a space for 10. We had to be very disciplined.... There were far too many rules. Some of us complained we were creating a prison inside a prison. But the desire was to ensure order – so many people in such a confined space, there would always be fights. So we needed rules.'⁴⁶ Even where the elaborate committee structures and rule-making was deemed oppressive, it was nonetheless described as necessary: without it there would have

³⁹ Nkomo, *Nkomo*, p. 124.

⁴⁰ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008. On the shifting conditions in the camps in the first few years, see NAZ, MS 1184/3/1/1, Amnesty International, 1966-1971, James Waddington, Amnesty International, 'Circumstances Surrounding Restricttees', n.d. [c. 1966].

⁴¹ Quoted in Munochiveyi, "It was a difficult time", p. 178.

⁴² Interview, R. K. Naik, Oxford, 17 September 2008.

⁴³ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2009.

⁴⁴ Interview, John Mzimela, Bulawayo, 4 February 2009.

⁴⁵ Interview, Jane Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 14 October 2008. There are parallels with ZANU's governance in Sikombela, which even had a police force, presciently called the Zimbabwe Republic Police. See Munochiveyi, "It was a difficult time", p. 180; Tekere, *A Lifetime of Struggle*.

⁴⁶ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

been ‘havoc’.⁴⁷ In all instances, rule-following was deemed particularly important to disciplining unruly youth. As Fletcher Dulini Ncube explained: ‘Understanding the hierarchy and the rules, that tamed the youth. [We’d say,] “Do it and complain last, Do it and complain less!”’⁴⁸

The emphasis on discipline and order built through expert knowledge, bookkeeping and rule-bound institutions was partly an expression of the nationalist vision of the ideal state, and partly about the threat that the conditions of detention constantly posed to nationalist unity. Former detainees stressed the fragility of order in the camps, due to the pressures of boredom, depression, and close quarters.⁴⁹ Mutiny, violence and mental breakdown always threatened. As Nyathi explained: ‘It does things to you. Whatever time you lose in prison, not just the emotional effect that it has on you. You begin to wonder, to be unsure of yourself. Was it right to do what I did? Maybe I wouldn’t have ended up here. Some people in detention gave up the struggle. [They] couldn’t take it anymore. I can understand why you need all these support mechanisms in detention, more than in the armed struggle.’⁵⁰ Another former detainee held, ‘If you get over five men you get problems. It was these frustrations of detention’.⁵¹ In fact, three was enough to break the peace. After his initial stint in Gonakudzingwa, Joshua Nkomo shared his camp with only Joseph Msika and Lazarus Nkala, the second and third most senior ZAPU men in the restriction area. As Nkomo writes: ‘Even the mildest people grew tense in prison. One day my two friends, Joseph and Lazarus, got so angry with each other about some trivial thing that I took their knives away, just in case they did each other harm.’⁵²

Conflicts – physical and other – endangered the nationalist project of self-government and controlling them was the subject of great effort. Order was maintained through the close disciplining of language, gender relations and the etiquette of everyday interactions, through leisure, welfare and educational activities, and through the establishment of formal judicial mechanisms. Civility was essential. Nyathi remembers that in Gonakudzingwa, ‘insulting language was forbidden. We were all *mwana wevu*, sons of the soil.’⁵³ Such rules were part of the effort to bring detainee behaviour into a respectful, domestic realm. Former detainees insisted that they had lived like a family, and that they had cared for each other in that mould.⁵⁴ Nyathi remembers, ‘What made life tolerable in Wha Wha was the community spirit. If someone didn’t have relatives the welfare committee would make sure he was adopted by people who would visit. People became lonely and bored [otherwise].’⁵⁵ Efforts were made to make life homey and comfortable. Detainees built their own huts as well as shacks for visitors. John Mzimela even used his connections at his former employer, the Springmaster company, to import beds. ‘We tried to make it as

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

⁴⁹ External observers commonly noted a pervasive problem of depression among detainees. For example, see NAZ, MS 1184/3/1/1, Amnesty International, 1966-1971, James Waddington, Amnesty International, ‘Circumstances Surrounding Restrictees’, n.d. [c. 1966].

⁵⁰ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

⁵¹ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

⁵² Nkomo, *Nkomo*, p. 133.

⁵³ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

⁵⁴ Interview, Jane Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 14 October 2008.

⁵⁵ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

normal as possible,' he explained.⁵⁶ Acts of generosity and altruism were remarked upon by many former detainees, and recalled as a defining feature of detention.

Added to efforts to make detainee life civil and 'normal' was a host of leisure activities. Detainees have fond memories of particular performers: one man's apparently excellent *a capella* impersonation of Harry Belafonte or the dances taught to detainees by local Shangaans.⁵⁷ Sports, especially football, were popular too, as were news-making and reporting activities. Gonakudzingwa had for some time its own cyclo-styled newspaper; radios were at times allowed, and when they were not they were smuggled in. Individuals were designated as clandestine news listeners and reporters.⁵⁸ Jane Ngwenya explained: 'We did these things to keep ourselves alive. The spirit in us! I can't explain it – it's like pregnancy, you can't explain it. We were filled with that spirit. We were so together.'⁵⁹

All these efforts notwithstanding, emotional and other stresses – most seriously worries over family – remained a consistent cause of disruptive behaviour among detainees. Jane Ngwenya recalled: 'You could see a man really weeping, missing his children'. There were only two issues that had sparked hunger strikes in her experience of Gonakudzingwa and Wha Wha – the quality of food and access to children: 'We'd starve ourselves, have a hunger strike, to have the children coming.'⁶⁰ Learning of hardships at home was disturbing and painful to detainees, some of whom preferred to cut themselves off so as not to know of troubles they could not address.⁶¹ Conjugal visits were allowed at various times at Gonakudzingwa and could be particularly disruptive. As Joshua Nkomo explained: 'They hated it. During that time, while the pair were confused about meeting again after so long, the woman would tell her man all the bad things that were going on at home – the house was in bad condition, her boss had died and she had no job, their daughter was pregnant by some wild man.' The police sought to exploit these moments: after a visit they would try to bargain with detainees, promising release for 'good behaviour'.⁶²

Male detainees' worry over specifically the fidelity of their wives, and the possibility of such fears being used by the state, led the detainee government to address this danger directly. It did so by assigning elderly men the job of 'counselling' young men regarding the necessity of changing their attitudes to adultery, and in effect to women's sexuality.⁶³ As Welshman Mabhena explained, they told the young men, "You're wives will have children while you're away. You must understand that, not blame them." We were being taught by the elders around the fire – "boys ... don't listen to stories about your wife. Don't fight." The elderly people were charged with

⁵⁶ Interview, John Mzimela, Bulawayo, 4 February 2009.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ See accounts in Nkomo, *Nkomo*; interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

⁵⁹ Interview, Jane Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 14 October 2008.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Interview, Welshman Mabhena, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008.

⁶² Nkomo, *Nkomo*, p. 132. Also see Alexander, 'Political Prisoners' Memoirs', p. 402.

⁶³ Punishing adultery, and controlling women's mobility and sexuality more broadly, had long been a goal of (certain) African men as well as the settler state. The initiatives in Gonakudzingwa made an interesting contrast to such efforts. These issues were also heatedly debated in the guerrilla camps in exile, though with decidedly different outcomes to Gonakudzingwa. See Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For Better or Worse? Women and Zanla in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2000), chapter 3.

that. Some divorced but some did not – we considered it a successful exercise.’⁶⁴ For women detainees, threats to marriage came in different forms. Following her first stint in prison, Jane Ngwenya’s husband and in-laws demanded to know ‘what kind of woman is this?’; her husband responded to her frequent absences with beatings, and eventually divorced her.⁶⁵

The most central activity undertaken by all detainees was academic education, ranging from basic literacy to ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels to university degrees. Study was made possible through the support of international organisations that provided materials to the detainee ‘secretaries for education’, and registered political prisoners for correspondence degrees, as well as the work of the teachers, university students and other educated people in detention.⁶⁶ Like other activities, education gave purpose and stability to detainee lives: ‘It prevented people from breaking. This was our priority’, explained Welshman Mabhena.⁶⁷ Those who undertook teaching were remembered fondly, and recalled their own contributions with pride.⁶⁸ Education was also characterised as an act of defiance. Colonial education was both highly discriminatory and essential to the advancement and status of Africans. Munochiveyi describes education in detention as ‘a unique platform to empower oneself, to defiantly demonstrate that without colonial barriers to African education Africans were capable of acquiring academic credentials similar to those held by colonially privileged white Rhodesians.’⁶⁹ For Jane Ngwenya, herself a teacher, detainee education was about access to new academic disciplines and ideas: ‘Some subjects were never taught to Africans – economics, commerce. We were brainwashed with white history. We taught subjects we couldn’t do in schools.’⁷⁰

Detainee education offered access to knowledge denied and a means of self-improvement. It was in addition conceived of as an essential qualification for both political leadership and mastery of the bureaucratic state. Within the nationalist movement, academic qualifications had long been seen as a source of prestige and criterion for top posts; many senior leaders were drawn from the ranks of teachers or had tertiary degrees, and these men and women worked to obtain additional advanced degrees during their long stretches in detention.⁷¹ They also read widely, and had access to an extraordinary range of political and historical works, often favouring radical writing as well as the new generation of African historical monographs written

⁶⁴ Interview, Welshman Mabhena, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008. Such measures were also taken in other places of imprisonment. Interview, Batandi Mpofo, Bulawayo, 5 February 2009.

⁶⁵ Interview, Jane Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 14 October 2008.

⁶⁶ See the account of Cephass Msipa, secretary for education for some time in one of Gonakudzingwa’s camps, in NAZ, MS 308/15/1, Detentions and Restrictions 1967, ‘Cephass Msipa, or the one that got away’, *Free Labour World*, November 1966, and of Christian Care’s work in education in NAZ, MS 591/2/7, Ian Smith’s Hostages, Geneva Press Conference, October 1976, ‘Education in Rhodesia for Persons Restricted, Detained and Imprisoned, and on Secondary School Education’, memorandum, 22 May 1968.

⁶⁷ Interview, Welshman Mabhena, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008.

⁶⁸ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

⁶⁹ Munochiveyi, “‘It was a difficult time’”, p. 183.

⁷⁰ Interview, Jane Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 14 October 2008.

⁷¹ E.g., see Maurice Nyagumbo’s discussion of ‘graduates’, and his concern that detainees from Nyasaland were better educated than their Southern Rhodesian counterparts. Nyagumbo, *With the People*, pp. 125-6.

in the 1960s.⁷² As we have seen, the most basic skill required to produce detainee administration was literacy. Education allowed participation in the business of constructing – as well as deciphering – the practices of government, in detention as well as outside. Former detainees proudly noted that educational qualifications gained in detention had allowed some of their number to acquire jobs after independence in (as well as outside) the new government. It is unsurprising that detainee leaders emphasised education as a moral duty to the nation.⁷³

Education offered knowledge, citizenship and authority. It was also cast as transformative of the illiterate. The story of the uneducated old man who, as a result of his classes in detention, was enabled to write and read is told again and again by former detainees. The moment of reading is narrated as an emotive one: a ‘miracle’ that made men cry,⁷⁴ and which enabled new forms of social connection. Welshman Mabhena remembers: ‘There were elderly people who couldn’t read and write, and now they could! He’d send letters and get letters from his wife and you’d see him jumping around.’⁷⁵ For all these reasons, it was extremely difficult to opt out of education in detention: Paul Themba Nyathi recalled, ‘It wasn’t compulsory but it was embarrassing not to be in any of the classes. You’d need an excuse!’⁷⁶

This range of organised work, leisure, study, and welfare activity underlined the nationalist aspiration to achieve a particular kind of government, rooted in bureaucratic rationality, and founded on a commitment to self-improvement, civility and restraint. Without exception, these activities were subjected to the detainees’ rule-bound regime. Singing – and even particular kinds of singing – was scheduled for strictly specified days and times, as were political debates and classes.⁷⁷ Football had to be played with an irrefragable referee: detainees here and elsewhere remember vividly who the best referees were – in Gonakudzingwa it was John Nkomo.⁷⁸ Tight regulation was needed for domestic tasks: strict rules applied to the duties of washing, cooking, dishing out food and the like. For those held in Wha Wha, where detainees shared cramped rooms at night with just a bucket as a toilet, rules also applied to bodily functions: ‘there was ... a rule that you could pee in that bucket but you couldn’t relieve yourself – you had to be disciplined. If by some misfortune you had a runny tummy you had to cover the bucket with your blanket to stop the smell.’⁷⁹ Such

⁷² Terence Ranger, for example, regularly sent his hot-off-the-press writings on African history and specifically on Zimbabwe to detainees. See correspondence in the Terence Ranger Papers, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford. Munochiveyi, “‘It was a difficult time’”, p. 184, reproduces a wonderful picture of Josiah Chinamano reading on his bed in Wha Wha with a great stack of books in front of him, including J. A. Hobson’s classic study of imperialism. Perhaps surprisingly, given their class and educational backgrounds, the bible was not widely referred to, and nor did organised religion play an important role in Gonakudzingwa. Religion was important for some detainees, however, such as Didymus Mutasa. See Alexander, ‘Political Prisoners’ Memoirs’.

⁷³ See Munochiveyi, “‘It was a difficult time’”, pp. 187-190.

⁷⁴ Munochiveyi, “‘It was a difficult time’”, p. 185.

⁷⁵ Interview, Welshman Mabhena, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008. Also, interviews, Jane Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 14 October 2008, and Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

⁷⁶ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

⁷⁷ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

⁷⁸ Interviews, Welshman Mabhena, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008. Leopold Takawira was apparently the best referee in Sikombela. ANC prisoners on Robben Island elaborated extraordinarily detailed written rules for the proper playing of football to avoid conflicts. See Buntman, *Robben Island*, p. 67.

⁷⁹ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

close regulation of time, space, relationships and the body did not, however, always succeed in maintaining order.

Law and Order

The rules that governed detainee life had ultimately to be enforced by a judicial system with the capacity to punish. The formal administration of justice took a number of different forms. In Gonakudzingwa, detained chiefs held court. Chiefs Wedza, Mangwende and Musikavanhu all ran courts in the various camps. Some saw this as an Africanist statement: ‘Courts were traditional not Rhodesian’.⁸⁰ (Ironically, however, this was precisely the moment in which the Rhodesian state was expanding chiefs’ judicial powers.) Others saw chiefs’ courts as a sign of backwardness, out of keeping with the progressive aspirations of nationalism: ‘With due respect to my colleagues’, remarked Paul Themba Nyathi, ‘it was very backward’, and could only be justified on the grounds that ‘Unlike the majority of chiefs, the few in detention had defied the colonial order’. He much preferred the system in Wha Wha in which senior nationalists presided over courts. Due to the number of university students present, provision was also made for legal representation of the accused.⁸¹

In both Gonakudzingwa and Wha Wha the most common form of punishment meted out to those found guilty of crimes was domestic labour. A fight or insult might result in having to wash dishes, empty toilet buckets for a week, or dig a rubbish pit. The most severe punishments involved isolation and loss of position. As one detainee recalled, ‘They could send a letter to the branch outside suspending you. That was the worst. Detainees were leaders, they were held in high esteem. You would want to avoid losing your standing at all costs. Or you might be excluded from the evening debates. That was a very heavy punishment.’⁸²

Cases arose from a variety of contexts. Most were the product of trivial disputes, ‘fights and insults’ or ‘thuggery and drunkenness’, fuelled by homebrew, and especially apparently the wine that the detainees were able to trade for with Mozambicans at various junctures.⁸³ Disputes also originated from the world outside detention, some for example involving ‘cattle and lobola’.⁸⁴ Two of the most divisive and difficult to investigate categories of accusation – political disloyalty and witchcraft – received special treatment. ‘Sell out’ accusations were banned from adjudication in Gonakudzingwa. Fletcher Dulini Ncube explained, ‘People could ... bring disputes from outside – accusations that so and so told the police. The organising department would say, no, we’re here now. There were no trials of sell outs. We just kept an eye and let them leave, even when we knew [they were sell outs].’ In place of accusation and punishment, administrative measures were taken to constrain opportunities for informing, for example by only allowing designated spokespeople to interact with camp authorities.⁸⁵ The attitude towards sell outs was echoed in the treatment of witchcraft accusation. Gonakudzingwa had a designated witchcraft specialist. However, according to Paul Themba Nyathi, he never identified

⁸⁰ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

⁸¹ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008. On Sikombela, see Munochiveyi, ‘“It was a difficult time”’, p. 180; Tekere, *A Lifetime of Struggle*.

⁸² Interviews, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

⁸³ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

⁸⁴ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

⁸⁵ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

possession or witchcraft among detainees, only occasionally among their visitors. Visitors so identified were made to undergo a cleansing ritual. Only one detainee – a man who regularly sleep-walked – caused heated debate. After much discussion it was decided that this was a medical condition only and no action was taken.⁸⁶

The policy regarding both sell out and witchcraft accusations marked an extraordinary tolerance compared to other arenas – in exile and on the battlefield – in which nationalists and guerrillas wielded power. In these other contexts, both categories were at times subjected to corporal punishment, violent forms of interrogation, and execution.⁸⁷ Dispute resolution was, like all other camp activities, constructed in terms of institutions and rules, and aimed at restraint. There were, however, limits to the ability of disciplinary institutions to contain certain kinds of stresses.

Some disruptive cases concerned challenges to the prerogatives and privileges of leaders. Paul Themba Nyathi recalled – with some glee – being charged ‘numerous times’ while in detention in Wha Wha in the late 1970s.⁸⁸ One charge related to the ideological slant he adopted as a newsman. Nyathi and Frances Chirimuta were charged with listening to the news on a radio that had been smuggled into Wha Wha in a loaf of bread, and reporting significant items to their colleagues. ‘After a year we lost our positions and the radio was given to less ideological people. Our slant was that ZAPU was a socialist organisation and a lot of leaders said it wasn’t and we would quote Nkomo saying it was – and that’s what lost us our positions. We’d embellish [the news]...’ The charges most often, however, derived from his objections to what he saw as the abuse of position in the party hierarchy. He explained: ‘My first encounter with the disciplinary system was because they had this ridiculous rule which said if you were a provincial official then you didn’t have to do a number of camp duties including dishing [out] food... Then the other thing I found appalling was that if you were a member of the national executive you were exempted from emptying and cleaning the toilet bucket.’ In the first instance he was convicted of insubordination and sentenced to washing plates for a week, but in the second instance he had the support of a broader constituency of detainees who agreed that exemption from toilet bucket duties constituted unacceptable privilege. As Nyathi explained, ‘I wasn’t punished [for that] because it was very contentious. So some of the national executive said we are willing to do it, but you could see the resentment. And if they were about to take it, someone else would volunteer. It died a natural death. It was extremely unfair.’ While Nyathi could not be openly punished for this challenge to the privileges of rank, he eventually suffered the more severe consequence of being stripped of his post as spokesman for the camp.

The privileges Nyathi challenged in Wha Wha were sanctioned by the detainee government, even if they were controversial. John Mzimela by contrast sought to challenge what he saw as unsanctioned abuses of power based on position and

⁸⁶ Personal communication, Paul Themba Nyathi.

⁸⁷ See discussion of ZAPU’s practices during the guerrilla war in J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred years in the ‘dark forests’ of Matabeleland* (Oxford, James Currey, 2000) and of ZANU in G. Mazarire, ‘Discipline and Punishment in ZANLA: 1964-1979’, this issue, and Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For Better Or Worse?*. Corporal punishment was also used among political prisoners for a variety of infringements in other places of imprisonment, such as Khami Maximum Security Prison. Interview, Batandi Mpofu, Bulawayo, 5 February 2009.

⁸⁸ Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Bulawayo, 29 September 2008.

wealth.⁸⁹ When Mzimela was sent to Gonakudzingwa he was the chairman of ZAPU's north west province and had been involved in some of the earliest efforts to recruit young men for military training outside the country. He was a firm believer in the 'order and discipline' of the camp, but came into conflict with some of the most senior politicians – specifically Joseph Msika – over the question of the treatment of young, poor men by senior, wealthy leaders. The young men were, in his account, subjected to 'unnecessary humiliation' that was all the worse for them having given up the possibility of holding a job, building a home and marrying, i.e. becoming men, for the party: 'I was serving the people who were my soldiers. Why frustrate them? Why humiliate them? Msika had his wife, he had his shop. It was easy to have things. The youngsters had nothing – so they were being enslaved for a slice of bread. You don't blackmail a youngster to the point he has to wash your panties.' Mzimela wrote a letter outlining his charges to Lazarus Nkala, ZAPU's organizing secretary, and camp mate of Joshua Nkomo and Msika. He explained: 'I objected to the enslavement of young boys. I said we've deprived them of their manhood in the struggle and still you want to humiliate them. I carried my knobkerrie and I went to harm Msika, in the presence of Nkomo. They said I'd disobeyed. I said I tried to reason, and if that fails I'm going to hit him. Josh [Nkomo] didn't bring me here or to the struggle. I won't tolerate people who have been deprived of their livelihoods being humiliated.'

Mzimela was sent to Chief Mangwende's court, but he refused to recognise Mangwende's authority: he was a traditional leader with no jurisdiction over Mzimela the nationalist and citizen or Mzimela as a member of a different ethnic group. Mzimela was not then subjected to any punishment: 'They said me *and* Msika should be punished. These youngsters I was protecting – they said they'd do the punishment themselves. So it flopped.' He was eventually suspended from the party, however, for making further accusations: 'They said, "the walls are worrying you. It's just the frustration of confinement."' Mzimela was, however, unrepentant. He argued that behaviour such as Msika's was against the principles and the constitution of ZAPU, and that both were a higher authority than either the political leaders or chiefs' courts in detention. He was adamant that he had not betrayed ZAPU – the leaders had.

The stories recounted by both Nyathi and Mzimela underlined the abuses of power that went uncontained by rules and regulation, and hinted at radically egalitarian understandings of nationalist citizenship.

Nationalist Division and the Settler State's Authority

Detainees' accounts of what was probably the largest and most violent breakdown of order in Gonakudzingwa attributed conflict to a murky combination of the dangers of politicising ethnicity and the tendency to insubordination of youth. As we have seen, the induction process in Gonakudzingwa deliberately sought to break down ethnic and other division by assigning mixed groups to cook and eat together and by creating a shared and inclusive political culture. Special effort was also aimed at instituting 'discipline' among youth, and subordinating them to their elders. In this instance these efforts failed dramatically.

Fletcher Dulini Ncube, who was in charge of the youth and held the post of secretary in his camp, blamed the conflict on news reaching the camp of a split in the

⁸⁹ Interview, John Mzimela, Bulawayo, 4 February 2009.

nationalist parties in exile in Zambia that had led to the formation of the breakaway Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI) in 1971.⁹⁰ He recounted: ‘A guy was in hospital and someone briefed him about FROLIZI. When he came back he said people had split according to tribes in Zambia. So, we had an uprising.’ The ‘uprising’ at first took the form of abrogating camp rules and asserting ethnic identity through the singing of traditional songs on the part of a group of Shona-speaking youth: ‘We called an administrative meeting and they started singing. We had agreed we could only sing [traditional songs] on Tuesday. Otherwise people are studying, and on Friday we had revolutionary songs. They sang on the wrong day, up to midnight. We called a meeting and said, “why haven’t you adhered to the rules?” Then they defied again, knocking on the barrack doors at night. They managed to split the youth by tribe.’

In response, Dulini Ncube recalled, another meeting was held. At this one the tribalism of the youth was rejected from within their own number: ‘three guys from Mashonaland stood up and denounced, saying “We didn’t come [here] for rituals and song.” The youth met secretly and passed sentences on those three men and instructed people to kill those men.’ One of these men was ambushed when he went to make tea: ‘They started hitting that man and he ran for his life up to us. They stopped short and then the other structures started hitting the ring leaders. It was bad. One man was taken to Mpilo [hospital]. They ran over the wire; they were all scratched. The police started shooting and brought back those who had jumped the fence.’

Welshman Mabhena, another office holder in the camp, agreed that the conflict was at root ethnic but he believed it had started owing to the government having infiltrated ‘elements to split ZAPU between Ndebele and Shona’: ‘Some people fought and they began to say it was the Ndebeles and they ran around saying “they are preparing to beat us!” ... So we started beating each other and some broke the fence and ran to Nkomo, and he said, “Go back! We don’t want your fighting here!” ... We were all brought back.’⁹¹

Witnessing the conflagration from afar, Joshua Nkomo recounted: ‘in the early darkness of a very hot night, we heard a loud noise of fighting from the nearest of the other camps. It went on for some time, and then the sky lit up as the thatched roofs of the shelters caught fire. Then came the sound of gunfire, and sudden silence.’ For Nkomo this sort of violence spelled doom: ‘We in our separate enclosure were desperately worried. I said to Joseph Msika: “If our people are actually fighting each other, that could be the end of our struggle.”’ Nkomo contends the cause of the fight, as explained to him by two men who turned up at his camp, was disagreement over the allocation of jobs, and specifically objections to the policy of excusing elderly detainees from unpleasant tasks like cleaning toilets.⁹²

Each witness saw the conflict in a different way. For Dulini Ncube the ‘uprising’ reflected wider nationalist divisions, and was the immediate result of a break down of adherence to the rules that ensured order in the face of tribalist sentiment; for Mabhena it was the result of government manipulation of ethnic division; for Nkomo it was youthful insubordination against the camp hierarchy and specifically a lack of

⁹⁰ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

⁹¹ Interview, Welshman Mabhena, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008.

⁹² Nkomo, *Nkomo*, p. 133.

respect for the elderly. For all three, this battle threatened the nationalist unity constructed in detention and made civil through the regulation, discipline and restraint of self-government. While these stories differ in certain respects, they all agree on a surprising conclusion: none of these nationalists credit their own leadership or institutions with restoring order. They instead agree that the violence was stopped through the actions of the white senior police officer. Despite the consistent descriptions of white policemen as racist and arrogant, this officer's success in re-establishing order was not credited to heavy-handed repression, though he certainly did bring force to bear in the shape of an armed police contingent. His success was instead attributed to his chastisement of the detainees for their betrayal of the ideals of nationalist government, a role he played while acting as both representative of the repressive state and as neutral arbiter standing outside the detainees' imagined nation.

Dulini Ncube remembered how the rioters were lectured by the senior police officer: he said 'the whole world is watching and *this* is what you do?' The effect was immediate. Unity was re-established with no disciplinary action on the part of the detainees. 'The ring leaders just apologised and it was finished. We became friends again.'⁹³ Mabhena explained that they were all forced back into their barracks by police the next morning. The senior police officer then 'came direct to us to discipline us. He said, "If there's anyone who wants to destroy Nkomo's work, he can come out!" ... he went right round saying the same thing and after that we were blaming ourselves. We asked, why are we destroying our desires? ... No one spoke negatively after that. Even at football, if someone wanted to foul, everyone would say, "No! We're brothers! We're one team!"'⁹⁴

The same officer came to visit Nkomo later that day and delivered a short speech which Nkomo reproduced in his memoir as follows: "I am very sad today and I have come to you, Nkomo, as leader of these people. I am here guarding you not because it is a pleasure, but because it is my job. Many of us white people are carrying on with our jobs because we believe at the end of it all there will be peace in this country.... If you cannot work together it is not just you, the black people, who will suffer. We whites too will suffer.... I wonder whether it is worth remaining in this country after all.'" Nkomo interpreted this to mean that there were whites 'who really understood what we were there for', and he appealed to the police officer 'not to abandon our country'.⁹⁵

The Rhodesian state, in the form of the police force no less, and detainees thus appeared to find common ground – for a moment at least – in a vision of a multi-racial future ordered by a rule-bound state.

Conclusion

It is common for political prisoners, as it is for criminal prisoners, to organise elaborate hierarchies within conditions of confinement. Such hierarchies are in part about resisting and rejecting the authority of the state. They are also, as Fran Buntman argues in the case of Robben Island, attempts to institute a 'productive and transformative' politics that is not just about refusal but about the creation of what she calls 'proto-governance' or a 'state in miniature' capable of competing with if not

⁹³ Interview, Fletcher Dulini Ncube, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

⁹⁴ Interview, Welshman Mabhena, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008.

⁹⁵ Nkomo, *Nkomo*, pp. 133-4.

wholly displacing the state's authority.⁹⁶ The form such governance takes is shaped by the conditions of confinement, the aspirations of political movements, and the outcomes of struggles among political prisoners. Under some conditions – in South Africa as in Rhodesia – it was not possible to aspire to more than survival. The relatively unfettered life of ZAPU detainees in Gonakudzingwa, however, offered the opportunity for an extended experiment in self-government, and thus provided a unique window onto nationalist languages of stateness.

Compared to their predecessors, ZAPU detainees were ambitious. The first generation of detainees engaged a state that acknowledged a set of obligations to them, and they responded in diverse ways, from denying the subversiveness of their politics to confrontation, from claiming citizenship to constructing clientage. ZAPU leaders arrived in the wilderness of Gonakudzingwa with the explicit desire to establish a 'government', and with a model of what that government might look like. The Rhodesian Front recognised few obligations to them as prisoners, never mind as citizens, and thus left little space for the varied negotiations of earlier years. The detainees instead set about devising means of displacing state power – through cooptation and confrontation – and establishing their own institutions of rule. The political hierarchy of ZAPU offered a ready platform that could be elaborated according to a model of bureaucratic power that drew on the Rhodesian state and that adopted with relish paperwork and record keeping. A hierarchy of specialised committees was established to govern all aspects of life – education, welfare, health, hospitality, law and order, domestic labour, leisure – as well as the induction of new arrivals from all backgrounds and regions into a shared nationalist mythology. This project required forging connections among parochial struggles and developing a common culture of song, politics, dance and sport, as well as inculcating civility and restraint generally and discipline among youth more specifically. Education took pride of place as a route to self-improvement and as a moral duty that enabled detainees to participate in government. Means were developed to contend with the costs to family and marriage occasioned by detention, extending even to the revaluing of adultery in the service of nationalism.

All this regulation, political education and social discipline countered the 'lawlessness' of the Rhodesian state and its construction of nationalists as uncivilised thugs and terrorists who deserved no more than to be confined to the nation's wild frontiers. Detainee society was productive, creative and disciplined. The aspirations of government were not, however, realised without rupture and conflict. The conditions of detention allowed space for the elaboration of nationalist identity and authority but they also produced frustration, depression, and division, as well as alternative views of citizenship, both ethnic and radical. Some disputes could be resolved through the detainee courts, but accusations of selling out and witchcraft were ruled too dangerous and charges against leaders deemed to be betraying the egalitarian nature of nationalism or to be 'humiliating' young men who had sacrificed their manhood for the struggle proved difficult to manage, and resulted in the extreme punishments of removal from office and even from the party. Detainee self-government had its limits, underlined with great irony by the role of the Rhodesian state's repressive apparatus in enforcing nationalist order and unity in the face of violence and ethnic division.

⁹⁶ Buntman, *Robben Island*, pp. 236-7.

Thirty-five years later, Paul Themba Nyathi wondered if the experiment in self-government in Gonakudzingwa was not naïve. It may have been in the face of the rapidly escalating violence and repression on all sides of the guerrilla war that spread across Zimbabwe at the time of Gonakudzingwa's closure, or in light of the violence meted out to ZAPU after independence by the newly triumphant ZANU(PF), neither of which recognised the restraint, civility and embrace of rules so central to Gonakudzingwa's ideals. Gonakudzingwa's inmates nonetheless offered a powerful alternative version of nationalism and nationalist self-government, achieved in the unlikely embrace of Rhodesian detention.