

**Albert Sumbo-Ncube: AmaNdebele Oral Historical Narrative
and the Creation of a Popular Hero**

by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own original work and that where use has been made of the work of others, it has been duly acknowledged in the text.

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Abstract

In 1998 I conducted a series of interviews with Zimbabweans who recounted, often using English, their memories of Albert Sumbo-Ncube. From these I have selected and transcribed five interviews with ZIPRA ex-combatants in which they tell the story, as they remember and elaborate on their memories, of Sumbo's escape from Rhodesian police custody at the Victoria Falls in 1977 during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. The interviews represent Sumbo as a hero and reveal the folk hero creation process at work. This hero figure was created by people who needed an effective figure of oppositional propaganda and who did not have access to the technology and resources of the Rhodesian government. Their narratives were communicated orally and they fused material found in the Rhodesian government-controlled newspapers with an amaNdebele oral tradition.

I shall draw on Hobsbawm's (1972) notions of the social bandit and Roberts's (1989) study of the folk hero creation amongst post-slavery African-Americans in order to understand the ZIPRA guerrillas' hero creation. The 'Sumbo' folk hero creation served to promote an ideal self for the Zimbabwean guerrillas and their recruits. Sumbo's daring and his ability successfully to defy authority evoked admiration amongst the guerrillas in the 1970s, and in 1998 revives for them the idealism of the struggle. In Zimbabwe the 'hero' has become a contested category, because of the government's will to control the historical representation of the liberation struggle by promoting an official history with official categories of heroes. Working with Barber's notion of popular African arts (1987 and 1997), I

argue that a folk hero can be redefined as a 'popular hero' when created by a proletariat and expressed by means of a popular art form.

The interviewees use a specific form, the oral historical narrative, to preserve and transmit the Sumbo hero figure. I argue that though this oral historical narrative is less fixed in form and occasion than praise poetry, songs and genealogies, it nevertheless possesses identifiable and recurrent characteristics, and I have established a number of criteria for identifying oral historical narrative as a genre.

In order to avoid taking a generalised and essentialising approach to the notion of 'African culture', I have drawn on theory that is as specific as possible to the understanding of oral historical narratives within the context of siNdebele speakers in Zimbabwe. I have drawn on research published by Hofmeyr (1993) and Scheub (1975) because they focused on Nguni-speaking societies. Their research is further supported by my own research conducted in the rural area of Tsholotsho in Zimbabwe. The analysis of the oral historical narrative genre used by the interviewees demonstrates that significant formal and performance skills occur in this type of narrative, which takes place within apparently informal conversations.

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Albert Sumbo Ncube being led into Bulawayo Magistrate's Court December 14 1976. Photograph courtesy of <i>The Chronicle</i> .	Opposite page 127

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
UANC	United African National Council
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU/PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPA	Zimbabwe People's Army
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe African People's Army

Introduction

Within this thesis, I have documented and analyzed interviews containing oral narratives, recorded in 1998, in which ZIPRA ex-combatants tell the story, as they remember it, of Albert Sumbo-Ncube's escape from Rhodesian police custody at the Victoria Falls in 1977 during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. The thesis takes as its main theme those oral narratives which represent Sumbo as a folk hero and which in fact reveal the folk hero creation process at work. Contrasting narratives which represent Sumbo as a bandit, a sellout or a brutal murderer were also recorded in the same series of interviews. The latter interviewees, whose sense of Sumbo was more negative, do not belong to the target group on which I shall focus. My concern with the 'real' Sumbo, that is to say, the owner of this name, who is still alive today, is limited to information about him that operates as the originary fact for these popular representations of him.

Zimbabwe was only officially named in 1980 after the liberation war. Demarcated as a country in the late nineteenth century and settled in 1890 by the British South Africa Company, it became part of the British Empire. The postage stamps 1901 to 1910 carry the British South Africa Company's name and only in 1910 is the name Southern Rhodesia used. The country only became Rhodesia in 1963 with the break-up of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, when Northern Rhodesia became independent and was renamed Zambia and Nyasaland, Malawi. The country was briefly renamed

Zimbabwe/Rhodesia under the Muzorewa government¹ during 1979, before becoming Zimbabwe. For the sake of clarity and consistency with the interviews I shall follow the ex-combatants' usage and name the country Rhodesia when referring to it during the liberation struggle and perceiving it as a space under colonial control. I shall use the name Zimbabwe when referring to both the country as the guerrillas envisaged it, a liberated, or potentially liberated, space, and to the actual post-1980 country.

The Zimbabwean liberation struggle is often understood as comprising two major factions, ZANU and ZAPU, who opposed the colonial Rhodesian government. In 1963 ZANU was formed as a breakaway group from ZAPU. The two parties controlled the two major liberation armies, ZANLA (answerable to the ZANU political leadership) and ZIPRA (answerable to the ZAPU political leadership). Over the ensuing years of the liberation struggle, and more particularly, in post-independence politics, the two parties have come to be identified with the two major ethnic and language groups in Zimbabwe, ZAPU with siNdebele speakers and ZANU with chiShona speakers.

In this thesis I have used the siNdebele forms when referring to this ethnic group and to their language. The collective noun for the people is amaNdebele and the singular noun Ndebele. When referring to the language I use the noun siNdebele.

¹ Bishop Able Muzorewa led a government achieved through an internal settlement that excluded the liberation parties and remained firmly under Rhodesian Front political control. At the British-led Lancaster House Conference, his government negotiated with the Patriotic Front, and finally Zimbabwe achieved independence.

The thesis deals with a popular hero figure created by ZIPRA guerrillas and their recruits. These guerrillas were drawn from the rural and urban African population, oppressed by the Rhodesian colonial state. In Zimbabwe they are commonly described as the people, the masses or the *povo*,² all words with connotations of the proletariat as a potential political power base. In this thesis I describe them as a proletariat, using the economic sense of the word to describe this group. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of the term is

that class of the community which is dependent on daily labour for subsistence, and has no reserve or capital; the indigent wage-earners; sometimes extended to include all wage-earners; working men, the labouring classes. (*Oxford English Dictionary Vol XII* 1989:606)

The elements in the definition, "dependent on daily labour for subsistence," "no reserve or capital" and "all wage-earners; working men, the labouring classes," combine usefully, in the case of Zimbabwe, to describe the peasant and urban working class who move between rural and township homes and who, in their working lives, may work far away from home as migrant labourers, usually in South Africa. It should, however, be noticed that during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle this was not necessarily a homogeneous group. ZANU and ZAPU competed with each other for support from this group

² *Povo* means people, nation, population or the public (*A Portuguese-English Dictionary* 1970:506). The expression, used to mean 'the people', was brought back into Zimbabwe by the ZANU liberation movement from Portuguese-speaking Mozambique, where they ran refugee and training camps.

as, eventually, did the Zimbabwean ANC.³ There were also elements within this proletarian group who sought employment from or collaborated with the Rhodesian authorities.

The structure of my thesis is as follows: in Chapter One I will discuss the Sumbo folk hero creation. I will describe how the Sumbo hero figure conforms with Hobsbawm's definition of social banditry and folk hero creation. Hobsbawm claims that the social bandit as folk hero is one of the most uniform and universal of social phenomena (1972:18), found wherever there is a large society of oppressed, landless and exploited peasants (1972:19-20). This explains why social banditry fits into modern national independence struggles.

The representation of Sumbo as a hero figure, during the late 1970s, demonstrates the proletariat's ability, without the resources available to the Rhodesian state, to create an oppositional propaganda by having recourse to its own African oral culture. The Sumbo hero figure is created from material selected from the Rhodesian government-controlled newspapers, elaborated in repeated retelling and fused with elements of a southern African oral tradition. In these retellings Sumbo comes to be represented as an idealised self for the guerrillas and their recruits.

³ The ANC in Zimbabwe was created as a front for ZANU and ZAPU inside Zimbabwe, under the leadership of Bishop Abel Muzorewa.

John W Roberts's (1989) study of black folk hero creation in the post-slavery African-American context provides parallels with the Sumbo hero creation in the context of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle in the late 1970s. Roberts argues that the African-American folk hero represents an ideal self, informed by and in opposition to white authority, and that the hero is a product of a creative process which is a component of culture building. Like the Sumbo folk hero creation, the African-American folk hero creations harness fragments of an African storytelling tradition as part of this culture building process.

Whilst it is necessary to understand the Sumbo hero figure in the context of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, it is also important to reach an understanding of it within the context of the post-independence Zimbabwean society. The five interviews presented and analysed here were recorded in 1998 in post-independence Zimbabwe. I explain that the 'hero' has become a contested category because of the Zimbabwean government's policy of creating multi-tiered categories of official heroes. The controversy surrounding the heroes also relates to the fact that certain groups of people believe that the official liberation history has been appropriated by a ruling elite and that the contribution of liberation groups other than the ZANLA army and the ZANU politicians is under-represented. The Sumbo stories, when told in 1998, celebrate the ordinary guerrilla as hero and revive the memories of revolutionary idealism.

Finally in this chapter, I argue that it is possible to place these narratives and the Sumbo folk hero creation within the category of popular African arts, as defined by Karen Barber (1987:9): the narratives are created from a fusion of written texts and oral tradition and their representation of Sumbo diverges from the official Rhodesian representation of him and from the representation of him in post-independence official history. The Sumbo hero figure, a cultural creation in itself, is an example of the category of ‘popular hero’ – a figure who cannot achieve official recognition because of his murder of the missionaries and his desertion from ZIPRA, but who is still able to exist strongly in the popular imagination.

In Chapter Two I analyse the oral form used to create and communicate the Sumbo hero figure to others. The stories fuse selected information from the newspaper accounts of Sumbo’s escape, through oral repetition, with an amaNdebele tradition, and male oral historical narrative. My analysis draws on Isabel Hofmeyr’s study of oral historical narrative amongst the amaNdebele in the Northern Transvaal (1993), Scheub’s study of Xhosa *ntsomi*⁴ (1975), and includes my own research amongst elderly men in Tsholotsho in the Matabeleland North province of Zimbabwe (Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998 and Interviews, Gaduza 1998). I have identified the elements that define these kinds of oral historical narratives as a particular oral genre, which occurs along a continuum that has at one end informal conversation and at the other praise poetry

⁴ *Ntsomi* is a Xhosa word commonly understood in English to mean folk tales. *Ntsomi* are fictional stories (as opposed to historical) and are more often narrated by women.

In order to avoid taking a generalised and essentialising approach to the notion of 'African culture', I have drawn on theory that is as specific as possible to the task of understanding oral historical narratives within the context of siNdebele speakers in Zimbabwe. I have therefore drawn on research published by Hofmeyr (1993) and Scheub (1975) because they focused on Nguni-speaking societies, Hofmeyr on the amaNdebele of the Northern Transvaal and Scheub on the isiXhosa speaking people. The Zimbabwean amaNdebele culture is a fairly recent offshoot of amaZulu culture, isiZulu being another Nguni language and cultural group. Stephen Taylor gives this account of the amaNdebele migration from Zululand into what is now the south-west of Zimbabwe:

The Kumalo leader, Mzilikazi, had been an Ndwandwe protégé and for some time after Zwide's defeat he submitted to Shaka. Then he broke away and followed the by now well-trodden route north, conquering and absorbing adherents from Pedi, Phuthing and Sotho peoples. He settled near what is now Pretoria, only to be uprooted twenty years later when an even more powerful force of invaders was born on to the scene on horseback and in columns of ox-wagons. The indomitable Mzilikazi thereupon decamped to the north of the Limpopo where, in present-day Zimbabwe, he founded the Ndebele kingdom. (Taylor 1995:64)

The amaNdebele can be said to have colonised this area, creating a nation through a process by which other conquered groups became assimilated into amaNdebele identity. The missionary Robert Moffat's journal of November 1829 to January 1830 (Moffat 1976:9) describes how on his first journey into the amaNdebele kingdom it was difficult for him to get local information from people he describes as "aborigines" who, he says, dared not give answers in the presence of their masters, the amaNdebele. These people, he tells us, were ruled by the amaNdebele "with a rod of iron" (1976:9). He continues to describe, in condemnatory terms, the strategies of violence and tyranny that were used to amalgamate local people with the ruling amaNdebele (1976:9-11). The amaNdebele imposed both their language and culture on the constituent peoples of the kingdom through a system of patriarchal power, with the king at its centre.

AmaNdebele culture is strongly present in Valtyn in the Northern Transvaal where Hofmeyr conducted her research. She describes how "[f]or most senior members of Valtyn, attachment to the chiefdom express[ed] itself as a deep sense of 'Ndebeleness'" (Hofmeyr 1993:18); with many people believing themselves to be descendants of a remnant of Mzilikazi's amaNdebele. At the time of her research, amaNdebele people constituted fifty-three percent of the Valtyn population, virtually the highest amaNdebele component out of the thirteen Ndebele Tribal Authorities in the Northern Transvaal (Hofmeyr 1993:19).

Scheub's analysis of *ntxomi* focuses on isiZulu and isiXhosa speaking storytellers (1975:4). His work with isiXhosa and isiZulu language groups and their folk tales focuses on 'core-images', which he defines as "a remembered image which is not in itself complete" (1975:47) but which functions in order for speaker and audience to evolve complex and extensive meaning (core-images are explained more fully on p 43). These core-images are also found in Zimbabwean amaNdebele folk tales. The information used to construct the folk tales is remembered in well-established core-images which form the building blocks from which the stories are assembled. For example, Scheub describes a core-image involving a cooking game in which one protagonist eats the other (Scheub 1975:25-32). In the course of community research in the Bulawayo township of Makakoba in 1986, I identified a similar core-image of a cooking game, in a local folk tale, in which the hare eats his close relative, the spring hare. This story formed the basis of a play used in a school touring project of which I was the director and which used folk tales to promote amaNdebele culture.

Scheub also refers to *mbulu makhasana*⁵ and how the *mbulu* frantically attempts to secure for itself a human identity (Scheub 1975:57-58). The core-image of the *mbulu makhasana*, found in a well known amaNdebele folk tale, formed the core-image in a dance drama I created called *Three Faces of a Woman* for *The Poor School Project* in Harare in 1993.

⁵ *Mbulu makhasana* is a story in which the *mbulu*, a creature, takes on human identity, that of a young girl on her way to be married. The creature brings disaster to the village until its non-human identity is revealed.

Other core-images that Scheub refers to also occur in Alexander McCall Smith's collection of African folk tales collected in Matabeleland in Zimbabwe (McCall Smith 1989). For example, Scheub refers to seven versions of a story that uses as a core-image a magical bird with the ability to defecate *amasi*, thick sour milk (1975:107). The same core-image occurs in McCall Smith's collection (1989:32-38). The vocabulary and concepts used by Scheub and Hofmeyr to analyse their material could therefore usefully be applied to the analysis of oral historical narratives about Sumbo, which are rooted in a Zimbabwean amaNdebele cultural tradition.

In Chapter Three I present the transcripts of five interviews with ZIPRA ex-combatants. I discuss how the interviews were conducted and then analyse the interviewees' use of the performance techniques characteristic of oral historical narrative. The style and different registers they use while telling their stories affect the way in which they establish Sumbo as a hero figure. It is interesting to note that Richard Werbner points out the similar prevalence of performance techniques used by his informants, Kalanga speakers, themselves a subdivision of the Matabele people in the Matabeleland South Province of Zimbabwe. He describes his informants as using, "artful and stylised discourse" (1991:3) and "honing the art of arguing a case while spinning an anecdote to a persuasive point" (1991:47).

Before embarking on this research I had already established that Sumbo was a memorable figure. In 1990, I and a small group of ZIPRA ex-combatants who were members of the Simukai Collective Farming Cooperative Society held a series of meetings to discuss memories of the liberation struggle, particularly the aspects of oral culture that served the ZIPRA liberation movement. This is where I first came across stories about a guerrilla who escaped from the Rhodesian police prison cells at the Victoria Falls. At this time the ex-combatants remembered Sumbo by his pseudonym King Shungu.⁶ The project was abandoned because we all moved off to work in other areas. However, informal research amongst other people proved to me that many people who had been involved in the Zimbabwe liberation war had memories of a guerrilla escaping from police at the Falls. At this time I heard that Sumbo had also been involved in the murder of some missionaries and that the ZIPRA officials had been suspicious about his escape. He had been investigated by the ZIPRA officials and then kept in the refugee camps away from sensitive information and further military action until the war ended.

When I returned to Zimbabwe in July 1998 I was involved in informal discussions with Andrew Nyathi and other ZIPRA ex-combatants who were members of the cooperative movement, which led to a decision to document Sumbo's story. We formed a research team comprised of myself, Andrew Nyathi and Pussen Tabengwa, both of whom were ex-combatants. Pussen

⁶ The guerrillas, once recruited, used pseudonyms as a protection for both themselves and their families during the war. Shungu is a chiShona word meaning determination or courage.

Tabengwa had attended school at Regina Mundi with Sumbo and been the political commissar in the same unit as Sumbo. In 1998, having established Albert Sumbo-Ncube as the guerrilla who had escaped at the Falls, we eventually found him serving a three year prison sentence for smuggling marijuana into Botswana. During this first meeting with him in prison, he agreed to tell his story. Andrew Nyathi and I set about getting government permission to interview him in prison. Our objective at this time was to record his own story along with the story of other ex-combatants who had been motivated to join the liberation struggle because of his escape. We also intended to record the stories of guerrillas who were imprisoned at the time of Sumbo's escape and for whom the escape served to boost morale.

In an attempt to verify Sumbo's escape I made contact, through a member of my family, with ex-Rhodesians now living in South Africa. These individuals had served in the Rhodesian police during 1976 and 1977 and were involved in Sumbo's arrest. They refused to speak with me. I believe that in the climate created by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee hearings they feared that any research into the events of the Zimbabwean liberation war might complicate their own lives. They also did not want to participate in any project that might represent a guerrilla who killed white people as a hero. Subsequent to my above-mentioned contact with the group, I received an anonymous phone call informing me that I had been involved in a car accident, followed by a series of calls from concerned friends who had heard a rumour in Zimbabwe that I had been killed in a car crash.

I returned to Zimbabwe in December 1998, reassembled the research team, Nyathi and Tabengwa, and began to conduct the interviews. At this point Sumbo refused to tell his story. We were left with no option but to collect the stories from people who remembered the escape. Both Sumbo's voice and those of the white Rhodesian police officials are therefore not present in the body of interviews from which this thesis is drawn.

My focus in the discussion of oral historical narratives will centre on five main interviews. These interviewees are all ZIPRA ex-combatants: Mavule (pp76-83) and Nyathi (pp83-91), who heard about the escape before being recruited to join ZIPRA; Moyo (pp91-99), who trained and operated with Sumbo; and two political prisoners, Ngwenya (pp119-122) and Mathias Nyoni (pp112-119), whom we had interviewed in July 1998. In order to support, challenge or otherwise bring into question these five narratives, I shall also draw on the larger body of interviews collected during December 1998 by the team. These interviews include three women ex-combatants, MaDube, MaNgwenya and MaDlamini (Interviews, MaDube 1998, MaNgwenya 1998 and MaDlamini 1998). We also interviewed Christopher Nyoni (Interviews, Nyoni 1998), who was involved in recruiting for ZIPRA. At the Victoria Falls we interviewed Teriary Mwasire (Interviews, Mwasire 1998), who worked at the council beerhall and witnessed Sumbo's escape. Teriary Mwasire was mistakenly arrested by the Rhodesian army, who thought he was Sumbo and shot him through the arm while questioning him. All of these people remember Sumbo

as a hero figure, although for the women guerrillas, he was not remembered with the same significance as the men.

We held further interviews with Sumbo's mother and sister (Interviews, MaMoyo 1998 and MaNcube 1998). Sumbo's arrest had led to his mother and stepfather serving prison sentences for harboring a 'terrorist'. They were released in 1980 at the end of the war. Sumbo's mother, now widowed, lives in rural poverty. Although she is categorised as having been a political prisoner, she has little conception of herself in these terms. She feels that the prison sentence ruined her life and she does not view her son as a hero. However, Sumbo's sister does view him as a hero and is very proud of her brother.

Sumbo is generally believed to have murdered Bishop Adolph Schmitt, Father Possenti Waggartner and Sister Francis Van Den Berg. We interviewed Sister Ermenfried Knaur (Interviews, Knaur 1998), the sole survivor of the attack on the missionaries, Sister Dube (Interviews, Dube 1998) who nursed her, and the current Bishop of Matabeleland, Bishop Ncube (Interviews, Ncube 1998). To them, Sumbo is a criminal, even a demonic figure.

One interviewee, Moyo, remembers Sumbo's attack on Peter's Motel at the Falls (p95). Two women (Interviews, Peter's Motel residents 1998), who were present in the hotel during the attack but unwilling to be named, confirmed that contrary to the press accounts at the time (*Herald Correspondent* 1976a), the

attack had been a traumatic experience and, combined with further attacks, had ultimately ruined the business. Although they preferred not to be named, they viewed the attack as an incident in a war and told us they now live in Zimbabwe in a spirit of understanding and reconciliation.

Two African men working as Rhodesian policemen at the time of the escape confirmed that Sumbo had actually escaped from the Falls. One was Mapala (Interviews, Mapala 1998), who was working in the Rhodesian police force at the time and remembered reading reports about the escape. The other man, who did not wish to be identified by name, had been present at Sumbo's arrest and accompanied him to the Falls, acting as his interpreter. He confirmed that Sumbo had in fact escaped from him while he was opening the cell door. I have included this interview in the thesis (see Appendix) because, amid the speculation about whether Sumbo escaped or not, this interview goes some way towards confirming the escape. Although these ex-Rhodesian policemen confirm that Sumbo did escape, they have no impulse to represent him as a hero and view his escape merely as a piece of good luck for him.

Finally, we interviewed Swazin Ndlovu (Interviews, Ndlovu 1998) who worked in ZIPRA intelligence. He confirmed that ZIPRA commanders found it difficult to believe that Sumbo had escaped and found his inability to accept military discipline a nuisance. He described the story of Sumbo's escape as "unbelievable", although he admitted that their official findings on the matter were inconclusive.

In contrast to the verbal testimony, written accounts of the Sumbo story all represent him negatively and they can be grouped into two categories. First are the reports in the Rhodesian newspapers which represent him as a “terrorist”. On 1 January 1977 the newspapers reported Sumbo’s arrest and linked him to the murder of the Catholic missionaries, Bishop Adolf Schmitt, Father Possenti Waggartner and Sister Maria Francis van den Berg, with the headlines, “Terrorist admits he murdered missionaries” (*Herald* Correspondent 1977a), and “Bishop’s Murderer - Man in Court” (*Chronicle* Reporter 1977a). On 9 January 1977 the Sunday papers broke the news of his escape from the police cells at the Victoria Falls (*Sunday Mail* Correspondent: Bulawayo 1977 and *Sunday News* Reporter 1977). During the ensuing week the daily papers carried stories of the escape and the unsuccessful search for Sumbo (*Herald* Correspondent 1977b,c,d and *Chronicle* Reporter 1977b). His arrest is described in an editorial comment as one of the prize captures of the terrorist war, and his subsequent escape as humiliating for the Rhodesian police force (*Herald* Reporter 1977). These are the newspaper reports from which the oral hero representation of Sumbo draws its material.

The second category of Sumbo representations produced and circulated by officials of the liberation movements presents Sumbo as a Selous Scout,⁷ a Rhodesian agent. In 1976 the liberation movements under the banner of the Patriotic Front met with the Rhodesian government at the unsuccessful Geneva

⁷ Rhodesian forces who masqueraded as guerrillas.

Terrorist admits he murdered missionaries

*Herald
Correspondent*

BULAWAYO.

SEVEN murders, including those of Bishop Adolph Schmitt and a Catholic priest and nun, were admitted by Albert Ncube (26) when he appeared at Bulawayo Magistrates' Court yesterday.

Ncube, who was not asked to plead, was remanded until January 14.

He appeared under a special procedure which allows the Prosecutor to apply to the court for continuation of the admissions were freely and voluntarily made. The hearing was in public at Ncube's request.

He told the Provincial Magistrate, Mr Jack Riley, that nobody had influenced him to admit the murders and other acts of terrorism. "The statements recorded by the Police were correct," he said.

The Magistrate then confirmed the statements and told Ncube they would be received as evidence "before any Court" upon their mere production by the Prosecutor and without further proof.

The admissions included terrorist training in Tloaxela and re-entering Rhodesia with weapons of war.

Others were:

- The murder of Mr Robert Culvert, who was killed when a group of terrorists attacked Peter's Motel, Victoria Falls on October 30.
- The murder of a Victoria Falls farmer Mr. Arthur Ross Cumming at his home, France Farm, on November 2.
- Mining and detonating handmines on the Victoria Falls railway line at Masout Bridge on November 2 and December 1.
- Robbery at Gwaai siding store and the attempted murder of Mr John Hartley, on November 27.
- The murder of three Catholic missionaries; Bishop Adolph Schmitt, Father Pomeroy Weggartner and Sister Maria Francis van den Berg at Lupane on December 5, and the attempted murder, on the same date, of Sister Ermanfried Krauer.
- An attempted robbery at Forestvale Butchery, Bulawayo, on December 11.

for African Ullly cars to Zambia.

"We then left for Kariba where we were given weapons by Zambian forces," a statement said.

The Court was told that this and other admissions were written out by Ncube, by hand, in his own language and translated into English.

One statement said that with four others he crossed the Zambezi River by boat last November carrying mines which they left in a game area. The group split up and he and two others went to a police station in Botswana.

"They took us to Francistown and in November we left by plane for Lusaka."

From there they went to Livingstone.

By that time the group of five had assembled. They crossed to Kazungula, went "to the bus near the place where they dig stones", then went to attack Peter's Motel, the statement said.

"When we left, we went to the farm (France Farm) to shoot another European. When we left that farm we went to the Luise where it was hard because of Europeans. We went to blast the railway line. When we left there we started to separate. I left for the Falls."

Ncube travelled to Gwaai and went to the store owned by Mr Hartley.

"I arrived and shot Mr Hartley. I was by myself. I took some money, about £20. I left and went to stay in the bush. I went to the road in Lupano and stopped the car of the Bishop," his statement continued.

"I ordered them to give me some money. They said they had no money. I then shot them. They were four. I left for Bulawayo. When I arrived I went to Number two, House No. 58135/2.

"I had my gun. I left for Luveya Road. I wanted to get some

money, but I failed. I was given \$2 by somebody who had a car. I left for Mubamba Beer Hall. I got there and shot another European. I took very small money consisting of 20 cents and 10 cents. I then left for Kwezi.

"I fired some shots at Kwezi and took some money amounting to \$20.

"I did all this by myself. I then left for Makuanga in search of money but I failed because they had locked.

"I then left for Magweys near the cemetery. I attacked a Portuguese at his store. I shot him on his leg. I got into his house and asked his children where the money was. They took the keys from the father and opened for me where there was money. I took money amounting to \$300.

The admissions made by Ncube were put in by the Acting Senior Prosecutor, Mr Joseph Kitalafor, through Detective Section Officer Gordon Gray Brunfield.

- The murder of Lieutenant Corporal Charlie McLeod at Unthambi Cooktail Bar and of Mr Auhla Nyhati at Ikhwezi Club, Bulawayo, on December 11.
- Attempted robbery at Makuanga, Beer Garden, Bulawayo, on December 10.
- Attempted murder of Mr Antonio Camacho, and robbery of Hyde Park Store, Bulawayo, on December 22.

In his statements admitting acts of terrorism, Ncube said he left Rhodesia for Johannesburg in 1973, and was recruited there.

He went to Botswana in 1976, contacted members of Zapu and two months later was sent to Zambia by air.

From there he went to Tanzania for training. With 30 others he left Tloaxela in September travelling in Organisation

conference chaired by Britain's Sir Ivor Richards. The world media interest that accompanied the conference provided the opportunity for the Rhodesian government to use the murder of the missionaries to discredit the Patriotic Front and its liberation armies by representing Sumbo as a criminal and bandit. The Patriotic Front in turn publicly disowned Sumbo and claimed he was a Selous Scout (McLaughlin 1996:160; *Herald* Reporter 1976a-f; *Herald* Correspondent 1976b-f; Fairbairn, Ross 1976a and b). Post-independence writing about the Zimbabwean liberation war has continue to represent Sumbo as a Selous Scout in order to discredit the Rhodesian government (Martin and Johnson 1981:283-284; Frederrikes 1982:205; and Nkomo 1984:169).

The representation of Sumbo as a Rhodesian Selous Scout in Nkomo's autobiography is clearly a fiction. Nkomo's evidence, that Sumbo was airlifted out of the guerrilla camps by the Rhodesian forces is disproven by the fact that he did not emerge from the camps until 1980 after the war. It is difficult to believe that as head of the Revolutionary Council in 1977 (Brickhill 1995a:54), Nkomo did not know that Sumbo was a ZIPRA guerrilla and that he had remained in the camps. After 1980 Sumbo worked for Nkomo's nephew, the politician Stephen Nkomó. Nkomo's account of the Sumbo story reflects the official ZIPRA position and characterises the post-independence representation of him. For that reason, I have quoted it here:

The worst thing about the war was the callousness it bred. It is true, and I regret it, that atrocities were committed by people on our side, by



Comment

The warmongers

BY PLEDGING full and exclusive support for the Patriotic Front of Mr Mugabe and Mr Nkomo, the "front line" presidents could have crippled attempts at finding a peaceful settlement in Rhodesia. Their attitude is a clear indication that they are at one with the terrorists in wanting the war to continue.

Even at this late hour they would do well to ponder on what Mr Ivor Richard said before leaving Nairobi yesterday: That a situation "as dangerous as World War Two" might develop if the Rhodesia talks fail.

To some extent, the British Government's clumsy handling of the Geneva conference has contributed to the impasse. Yet Mr Richard's present mission is to find a peaceful solution, and it is intolerable that he should have been rebuffed in this way.

There seems to be only one way out of the difficulty: Mr Smith must try to reach an accommodation with Bishop Muzorewa and Zupo. If the UANC has resisted previous attempts along these lines, at least it must now appreciate the strength of the forces ranged against it.

So long as the outside presidents are allowed to create the impression that it is the terrorists, and only the terrorists, who hold the key to majority rule, the bishop runs the risk of losing support, even of those who want peace, not war.

But any new initiative must be governed by a willingness to compromise, and an acknowledgement that neither side would want to lose face. Rigid stances will get us nowhere.

BLOT ON BSAP

THE CAPTURE of Albert Neube, the terrorist who has confessed to seven murders, was a feather in the caps of those responsible. The story of how he was traced and caught has not been told publicly, and might never be, but it is safe to assume the BSA Police had a lot to do with it.

Now this vile man, who was taken into a Bulawayo court in leg-irons and handcuffs, has escaped from a police cell at Victoria Falls.

He must have been one of the prize captures of the terrorist war. He should have been one of the most closely guarded men in Rhodesia at all times. There should have been no room for laxity or carelessness.

Whatever inquiries are held, whatever new security procedures are adopted, the incident will remain a severe blot on the fine reputation of the BSAP.

Feeding the hungry

AFRICA faces a massive grain shortage in the coming decade, according to world authorities on agriculture. Rhodesia has the potential to produce vast quantities of food and is well placed on the supply routes. But politics decrees otherwise and we have the ridiculous situation in which it is being made all that harder for Rhodesian farmers to do the job they can do so well. Must it take starvation to show the leaders of nations where their priorities should lie?

Zipra fighters as well as by Zanla men. Some of those killed were isolated white farmers and their families who happened to be in the way. Some were African chiefs who may have collaborated with the Smith regime, but who had little alternative if their own families and their people were to survive. It was not our policy to kill such people. But armed men, alone or in small groups, may come to disregard the importance of human life. It was necessary to fight a guerrilla war, and in such a war terrible things are bound to happen.

One killing that I especially regret was that of Bishop Adolph Schmitt of Bulawayo. The Bishop was retired, and was a very old personal friend of mine - he had in fact blessed my marriage to maFuyana, an event complicated by her insistence on remaining a Catholic, while I insisted on remaining a Methodist, so that we had a registry office wedding and two blessings by clergymen. A lone killer murdered the bishop, one of his priests, Father Possent, an old friend of my family, and a nun: the story illustrates the confusion to which the guerrilla war gave rise.

The killer was found by our people, alone, on the Zambian shore of the Zambezi, which he had apparently crossed by swimming. He said he had been fired on from both banks while crossing, and that he had got across the river after escaping from a cell in Victoria Falls prison, where he was wearing leg-irons and manacles: his wrist did indeed



The Rhodesia Herald
December 14, 1976

have what appeared to be the marks of irons. We investigated, and found that he had previously been in a Rhodesian prison. This he admitted, claiming that he had escaped once, stolen a weapon, murdered the priest, then been arrested again and once more escaped to join us.

This was an unconvincing story. We detained the man in Mboroma camp, where we kept those whom we regarded as accomplices of the Smith regime. Then Smith's forces raided Mboroma. Some of the detainees were heard to say: 'Our friends have come, folks, let's go.' With the murderer among them they ran to a helicopter and were whisked back into Rhodesia. It is a fact that the Smith regime did its worst to turn the Catholic church against us, though whether they, or their freelance agents, went so far as to murder the bishop is impossible to prove. On other occasions Smith's undercover troops, the Selous Scouts, certainly killed priests and missionaries in order to put the blame on our nationalist guerrillas. (Nkomo 1984:169)

Nkomo's account demonstrates his wish to disclaim responsibility for the murder of the missionaries, rather than for the escape; this murder dominates the written accounts and representations of Sumbo. Sister Ermenfried Krnaur (Interviews, Krnaur 1998) confirms during her interview with us that Sumbo had shouted "Missionaries are enemies of the people" immediately before he fired, and a similar comment from her appears in Bishop Karlen's report on the

incident (Karlen:1976:4). The report of this statement by Sumbo introduces into the written commentaries on the killing of the missionaries the fears of atheistic communism that were present in the Catholic Church at the time. The fear of communism was also a feature of the Rhodesian propaganda against the guerrillas.

During the liberation war, there were incidents in which both the guerrillas and the Rhodesian forces killed missionaries, as McLaughlin points out in her account of this and other attacks on missionaries (1996:30-31). Sumbo was trained as a ZIPA soldier before the ZIPRA/ ZANLA collaboration fell apart. However Tabengwa, who was the political commissar for Sumbo's unit, said he remembered that Sumbo was not deeply politicised. McLaughlin points out that the first killing of missionaries took place during the ZIPA period, when a more radical Marxist-Leninist ideology developed amongst a younger generation of guerrillas (1996:57). At this same time, a Marxist critique of religion was spreading amongst some of the guerrillas. McLaughlin reports that the Bishop's Conference in February 1977 expressed its concern over the dangers of atheistic communism which was promoted by both ZIPA and ZIPRA guerrillas (1996:61). In his interview with us, Bishop Ncube (Interviews, Ncube 1998) confirmed, as does McLaughlin (1996:37), that in 1978 the Catholic Church's concern about atheistic communism led to a meeting between senior representatives of the Catholic Church and the nationalist leaders of the liberation movements.

Certainly, many people who supported the liberation struggle were also appalled by murder of the missionaries. Bishop Ncube told us that the funeral of Bishop Schmitt was attended by about 10 000 people (Interviews, Ncube 1998). McLaughlin names Schmitt as one of three members of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Rhodesia who “had been in touch with the nationalist leaders from the inception of the various national parties” (McLaughlin 1996:25). Nkomo's children were educated at Regina Mundi by Father Possenti.

When ex-combatants represent Sumbo as a hero figure, the issue of the murder of the missionaries is mostly ignored. It is disregarded in silence. This silence is ambiguous and difficult to interpret. Werbner (1991), while noticing the performance techniques of his Kalanga informants, also considers what is *not* said to be worthy of noting. His example is the Provincial Governor's speech at the installation of Chief Charles Bango Dube in 1986. He notices how the Governor's speech omitted any reference to the “recent terror and violence” (1991:44-46) perpetrated by the dissidents and Fifth Brigade in the area, and made no reference to the young chief's involvement with ZIPRA as a freedom fighter, or to the community's experiences during the liberation war. Werbner claims that the Governor's omission from his speech of what he knew to be in the forefront of his audience's minds was understood by the audience to be a refusal by the governor to acknowledge and mention matters on which he was likely to feel differently from them.

I shall take up the interviewees' treatment of the murder of the missionaries and the use of silence in Chapter Three. Most of the interviewees, with the exception of Moyo and Mavule, pass over Sumbo's murder of the missionaries in silence unless pressed on the issue. Sumbo's killing of white people who were missionaries, together with his successful escape, may, in the ZIPA phase of the liberation struggle, have combined in the minds of combatants to represent an anti-colonial and revolutionary ideal. However, the group of guerrillas for whom this might have held true has been dispersed. The ZIPA ethos of 1977 that condoned the murder of the missionaries and saw such murders as not to detract from, even to contribute to, Sumbo's hero status is difficult for the individual interviewees to recapture and explain in 1998, especially to the English-speaking audience envisaged by the interviewees while being recorded. The murders were a controversial issue at the time and remained so in 1998. The oral historical narrative form and its use of core-images, in this case a heroic core-image, also exerts a pressure on the narrators to exclude incongruous information. It is clear that the interviewees do not want to associate the murder of the missionaries with the Sumbo hero figure. They choose to set it aside, often by remaining silent on the topic.

In the conclusion of this thesis I provide a brief biography of the 'real' Sumbo, and explain that though it would be possible to give a psychological account of the creation of the 'Sumbo' hero narratives, my own account of them is largely cultural and performance orientated.

Chapter One

The Sumbo Hero Figure: Folk Hero and Popular Hero

My theoretical approach to and analysis of the Sumbo folk hero creation presented in the narratives incorporated in this thesis is informed by, and is a response to, the political context that produced them, namely the Zimbabwean liberation struggle of the mid 1970s and the memories of it which survive in 1998. In this analysis the notion of the hero, already a contested category within the context of Zimbabwe's liberation history, will be examined and a sub-category of the 'popular hero' will be set up. The controversy surrounding the hero figure, in the Zimbabwean context, has its roots in the official ZANU(PF) representation of Zimbabwean liberation history. This history underrepresents the other liberation movements, ZAPU, ZIPRA, FRILOZI and ZIPA, and generally promotes the role of the politicians over the guerrillas. This partial and distorted representation has led, in some sectors, to dissatisfaction with the official status accorded to both the dead and living heroes in Zimbabwe.

The fact that there are differing representations of Sumbo which survive in the present day relates to the fragmented nature of Zimbabwean society, damaged by the social and cultural clashes involved in colonisation and the struggle for freedom. This social fragmentation isolates people in terms of their different wartime experiences, separating from each other groups such as ex-combatants, rural people and the urban middle class. It extends this separation

into a variety of ethnic divisions. This is clearly evident when the contrasting representations of Sumbo are viewed as cultural products that emanate from and support the identities of these different groups.

A researcher who seeks to document Sumbo as folk hero or 'popular hero' is therefore seen to be intervening in the already contentious arena of Zimbabwe's living and dead liberation war heroes. Sumbo was seen as a hero figure in 1977 because he was able to escape successfully from Rhodesian police detention and survive, therefore becoming an oppositional figure to the authoritarian Rhodesian government and an idealised self for the guerrillas and their recruits. To record, in 1998, the ZIPRA guerrillas' memories of Sumbo as a folk hero documents and creates a space for a contradictory history to the 'official' one. This 'official' history constructed by the new elite addresses the latter's need to establish legitimacy by appropriating the right to appoint hero symbols from within its own ranks. In contrast, the Sumbo folk hero narratives are constructed by a proletariat who represent Sumbo, an ordinary guerrilla, as a hero from an army, ZIPRA, the history of which is suppressed by the ruling élite.

In accordance with the idea that one person can stand for all, a concept presented to the research team by one of the interviewees, Matheus Chibya Nyoni (p119), the ZIPRA ex-combatants' commemoration in post-independent Zimbabwe of one of their members, Sumbo, as a hero, allows them to vicariously recuperate their own sense of worth in relation to their contribution

to the liberation struggle. In post-independence Zimbabwe, to recognise the suffering and sacrifice of the dead is arguably easier than to deal with the wounds of the living. The Rhodesian government categorised all liberation politicians, guerrillas and their supporters as criminals, while the liberation movement, plagued by power struggles within its ranks, has also created categories of dissident groups. The different liberation movements and the Rhodesian government all used violent methods of coercion to elicit support from the peasant and urban working classes. After independence, the ZANU government's Fifth Brigade, named by President Robert Mugabe *Gukurahundi*,¹ was the main instrument used to perpetrate human rights violations against civilians living in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces, traditionally areas of ZAPU support. While many people simply 'disappeared' and are presumed murdered, other human rights violations also involved the destruction of homesteads, mass detentions and torture of civilians, including rape and mass beatings. The violence fulfilled two needs: one was to combat the dissident activity which received support from the South African apartheid government as part of its policy to destabilise the front-line states; and the other, to eliminate ZAPU support and suppress those known to have been guerrillas in the ZIPRA army during the liberation struggle (The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe 1997:3 and 29-30).

Unlike South Africa, Zimbabwe has never unpacked this painful history. To revive liberation war memories often exposes unhealed injuries and feelings of

¹ *Gukurahundi* means the rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe 1997:45)

insecurity while also raising the many unresolved legal and social matters of the violent past.

In order to fully understand the Zimbabwean liberation struggle as it is remembered in 1998, it is useful to explain both the status of liberation heroes and the documentation of the war history. It is the victors who write official history and who create their own heroes by demonising their opponents and tearing down the relics of the old heroes. In Zimbabwe, 'hero' has become a contentious category because of the government's policy of creating a hierarchy of national, provincial and district heroes. The failure of the policy to enshrine the heroes and unite a nation is perhaps inevitable, considering the divisions and power struggles that characterised the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. The major political parties in the liberation war all created personality cults around their leaders, with Ian Smith personifying the Rhodesian Front, Joshua Nkomo personifying ZAPU and Robert Mugabe finally personifying ZANU(PF). The very nature of hero symbols, representing an imagined ideal for a certain group, limits their ability to serve as a tool for national identity building in Zimbabwe.

Norma Kriger, in her chapter "The Politics of Creating National Heroes: The Search for Political Legitimacy and National Identity" (1995a:139-162), provides a detailed account of the controversy the new government encountered in its attempt to build a new national identity after independence, with its project to create a graded series of 'Heroes Acres' at national,

provincial and district level. She argues that this served to reveal the mass/élite inequities in Zimbabwean society. The government provided expensive financial assistance for state funerals for National Heroes, while offering no support for the burial of heroes at district level. The project included a building a National Heroes Acre in Harare, built by North Koreans, who also endeavoured to reinterpret their own hero cult of Kim Ill Sung in Zimbabwe to serve Robert Mugabe. The policy included reburying, at these sites, the 'fallen heroes' who died during the war. This became a point of conflict between the two major political parties, ZANU and ZAPU. ZAPU preferred that the 'fallen heroes' graves be identified and shrines built for them at their original burial sites. Before the signing of the unity accord in 1987, conflict also arose over the ZANU government's bias in recognising national heroes. Questions were raised about the procedures for marking the different status of heroes (Brickhill 1995b:163-165). In an attempt to legitimise the new ruling elite, high ranking politicians and government officials were given the status of national heroes and buried alongside liberation military leaders at the National Heroes Acre.

Kruger observes that the controversy over the National Heroes project exposes the social and political tensions in Zimbabwean society and draws attention to the Zimbabwean leadership's inability to create shared national values, thereby revealing the fragility of their government's legitimacy (1995a:141). She notes that:

[t]he entire project has revealed the governing elite's commitment to hierarchy, bureaucratic control, and top-down decision-making. These features of the project have alienated many ordinary people and so they no longer participate in the official commemorations of the heroes of the liberation struggle. (1995a:145-146)

She adds that the controversy over the status of dead heroes also calls into question the status and treatment of the living heroes, the ex-combatants, many of whom are living in poverty and seem to be abandoned by the new government (1995a:156). After a scandal involving the abuse of the war victims fund by senior politicians and government officials, a back-dated pension payment was made to the ex-combatants in 1998. The payment has now created further divisions between the *mujibhas* and *chimbwidos* (the young boys and girls who worked with the guerrillas), the peasants who clothed and fed the guerrillas in the rural areas and the political prisoners detained by the Rhodesian government, who have not been 'rewarded' for their contribution to the liberation of Zimbabwe.

The political agendas that inform the controversy over the status of heroes in Zimbabwe also emerge in the research and documentation of liberation history. Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger (1995a:2-3) point out that 'official' Zimbabwean liberation history (a term I explain below) has focused on the creation of an 'official' version of the war history which gives all the glory to political leaders and to the generals, most of whom, they observe, are safely

dead. Publications about soldiers and fighting have mainly come from the Rhodesian side of the war, with the African side represented by academic research reflecting the impact of the war on the Zimbabwe peasantry, on African women, on ideology and religion and the role of healing. Bhebe and Ranger (1995a:3) describe a strange silence from the guerrillas themselves and note that the only autobiography published by a guerrilla since 1980 is Andrew Nyathi's *Tomorrow is Built Today* (1990). The reasons which they suggest for this scarcity of guerrilla accounts range from researchers not having access to the records of any of the armies, the reluctance of ex-combatants to talk about their traumatic war-time experiences, and the fact that only recently have ZIPRA veterans and former members of ZIPA and the 'left' groups within ZANLA felt it safe to speak. Publishers are reluctant to accept guerrilla life stories and so the guerrilla experience is now remembered through fiction rather than autobiography.

Bhebe and Ranger's criticisms help to explain the general fear among Zimbabweans of revealing personal attitudes to official Zimbabwe liberation history. Their criticism centres around the widely circulated 'authorised' account of the war, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (1981) by David Martin and Phyllis Johnson. One criticism is that the book celebrates and buttresses ZANU(PF)'s claims to power and plays down the contribution of ZIPRA and ZIPA (Bhebe and Ranger 1995b:6). As I have mentioned above, ZIPRA guerrillas and the rural populations in the areas from which they drew their support were targeted by the Fifth Brigade in the post-independence

civil war. As for ZIPA, David Moore in “The Zimbabwe People’s Army: Strategic Innovation or More of the Same” (1995:73-86) describes it as a revolutionary Marxist army led by a younger generation of guerrillas, whose ideological strategy included uniting the ZANU and ZAPU armed forces. ZIPA conducted most of the fighting during 1976. Sumbo trained as a ZIPA guerrilla and the representation of him as hero figure emerged during a phase of the war when the political and military initiative was briefly held by younger and ideologically more Marxist guerrillas than those of the older nationalist faction. With the release of the nationalist political leaders, both ZANU and ZAPU had to confront a generational and ideological struggle within their organisation. Finally, the ZIPA leaders had to battle to save their lives when the ‘old guard’ of the ZANU high command were released from prison in Zambia. This ‘old guard’, who had been wrongly accused of assassinating Herbert Chitepo,² later combined with the revitalised political leadership, headed by Robert Mugabe, also recently released from prison in Rhodesia. André Astrow gives this account of the demise of ZIPA:

Machingura and the entire ZIPA leadership, except Nhongo and Webster Gwauya, were arrested in Mozambique early in 1977. Sadza had died in mysterious circumstances, another 90 guerrillas were thrown into prison in Tanzania. In January 1977, about 300 cadres had been murdered in Tete Province, Mozambique, in an effort to impose

² Herbert Chitepo, chairman of ZANU in exile and head of the Dare reChimurenga, the war council, was assassinated by ‘agents’ of the Rhodesian Government. At the time it was believed that he was assassinated by a tribal faction of maKaranga within ZANU (Martin and Johnson 1985:1)

Mugabe's leadership and to reinstate Tongogara as Chief of Defence of ZANLA. The suppression of ZIPA, with the active support of the Frontline states, forced the ZIPA leadership to appeal to the OAU to intervene... Nhongo soon established himself as Tongogara's second-in-command in ZANLA, once the ZIPA leadership had been physically isolated. As for Gwauya, he was arrested soon afterwards. Mugabe and Tongogara were, therefore, both able substantially to strengthen their own positions within ZANU, a process that, by September 1977, was finalised. At the Chimoio Congress, ZANU established that the military should accept the decisions of the political Central Committee. The destruction of ZIPA demonstrated that armed struggle was not of primary importance to the *petit bourgeois* leadership of the nationalist movement. Armed struggle was seen only as a means of putting pressure on Smith to negotiate. Guerrilla leaders and their rank and file supporters who became an obstacle to their manoeuvres, were rapidly eliminated. (1983:107-108)

Those of ZIPA who survived constituted the 'Vashandi' (the workers) element within ZANLA, an element that Fay Chung describes as a thorn in the side of the 'Veteran' old guard (Chung in Bhebe and Ranger 1995c:10). Ironically, Tongogara died in the last week of 1979, leaving the political leadership of ZANU unchallenged by the military legacy of ZANLA. Tongogara's death is seen by many as the pivotal moment in Zimbabwean history when power shifted irrevocably from those involved in the military struggle to the

politicians. Ken Flower, the head of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation, comments that Tongogara's death placed ZANLA more directly under the political control of the ZANU(PF) party leaders. However, in a footnote to this comment he describes how General Walls and he were invited by the Mozambicans to check the facts surrounding Tongogara's death and were satisfied that there was no foul play (Flower 1987:252). This account is contradicted in Ian Smith's autobiography where he states:

I made a point of discussing his [Tongogara's] death with our police commissioner and the head of special branch, and both assured me that Tongogara had been assassinated. This was a dreadful act of treachery that would have sad ramifications on [sic] the future of our country (Smith 1997:335)

The second criticism Bhebe and Ranger make follows on from the political and military power struggle described above. If the military leadership was to be sidelined then so too were the soldiers. The authors quote Teresa Barnes's argument that Martin and Johnson's *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* draws solely on the recollections of national leaders and ignores the role of the common soldier (Bhebe and Ranger 1995b:6).

This then is the context that surrounds the Sumbo folk hero creation in 1998. The Sumbo hero figure was first created within the historical context of the Zimbabwean liberation war in 1977 and was an expression of opposition to

colonial rule by the proletariat; yet in 1998, 'Sumbo' continues to stand as a symbol of the ideals of freedom and justice imagined by a Zimbabwean proletariat.

The division between this proletariat and the ruling élite emerges throughout the Sumbo narratives and directs my approach to their analysis. The relationship between the ruled and the rulers defines the nature of the folk hero as a social and cultural phenomenon. It is central to E J Hobsbawm's analysis in *Bandits* (1972) of the folk hero as social bandit. His analysis allows us to define and understand Sumbo, in the context of the Zimbabwe liberation struggle in 1976, as a social bandit. Hobsbawm states that social banditry is one of the most uniform and widespread social phenomena known to history (1972:18), found wherever there is a large society of oppressed, landless and exploited peasants (1972:20). This, according to him, explains why social banditry fits into modern national independence revolutions, particularly against foreigners (1972:104). Hobsbawm remarks, "[i]t does not take much sophistication to recognise the conflict between 'our people' and 'foreigners', between the colonised and the coloniser"(1972:103). He draws on a diversity of written accounts of oral traditions and summarises the social conditions and types of social bandit as follows:

Social banditry is universally found, wherever societies are based on agriculture (including pastoral economies), and consist largely of peasants and landless labourers ruled, oppressed and exploited by

someone else - lords, towns, governments, lawyers or even banks. It is found in one or other of its three main forms. . the noble robber or Robin Hood, the primitive resistance fighter or guerrilla unit of what I shall call the haiduks,³ and possibly the terror-bringing avenger. (Hobsbawm 1972:19-20)

Hobsbawm also helps to explain the 1998 context of the Sumbo folk hero narratives when he observes that bandits as folk hero symbols belong to the peasantry as remembered history, as distinct from the versions of official history books (1972:133). Hobsbawm also argues that the appeal of the bandit myth is to an idealised longing for justice, which arises within a peasant society, but appeals in addition to individuals outside it and finds its way into popular culture (1972:130-134). However, our ability to identify with the romance of freedom inherent in the Sumbo story depends on how we, as outsiders, respond to the contradictions within the Sumbo narratives which allow him to be constructed as a guerrilla or a bandit. Sumbo the folk hero is a political and cultural creation by a particular group – Zimbabweans who were involved in the liberation struggle – and his name, performed outside of this group, cannot evoke an ideal self for all listeners. This difficulty emphasises the need to add to the socio-historical understanding of the Sumbo hero figure a cultural and political one.

³ A term used to describe a collective form of peasant dissidence that produces the social bandit; the term describes these groups in Hungary and the Balkan peninsula north of Greece. The word may have Turkish or Magyar origins. Hobsbawm uses it to describe the free robber-liberator (1972:70-71).

John W Roberts, in his discussion of the folk hero creations in an African-American context, finds black folk hero creation in the post-slavery African-American context to be a political act. He builds on Robert Penn Warren's observation that "to create a hero is, indeed, to create a self" (Penn Warren in Roberts 1989:1), and argues that the African-American folk hero represents an ideal self informed by and in opposition to oppressive white authority. This enables him to argue that the hero is a product of a creative process similar to culture building, and exists as a symbol of one group's identity as differentiated from another. He explains:

[i]n this regard, heroic creation is a process very much like culture building - the means by which a group creates and maintains an image of itself to proclaim difference from others by objectifying in its institutions the ideals that it claims for itself. (1989:1)

Roberts develops his argument further by introducing into his analysis of the folk hero the role of law and authority – both identified as white. He summarises his argument as follows:

[t]he difference in the factors influencing the life style of African Americans and thereby folk heroic creation after emancipation facilitated African Americans' combining of their conception of the conjurer and trickster as folk heroes to create the 'badman'. In folklore, the 'badman' emerged as an outlaw folk hero whose characteristic

actions offered a model of behaviour for dealing with the power of whites under the law that created conditions threatening to the values of the black community from both within and without (1989:215)

Roberts is analysing a process very like that used by the Zimbabwean proletariat to construct Sumbo as their hero. 'The law', for the Zimbabwean proletariat during the war, had little to do with ethics or morality, and was experienced by them as the Rhodesian regime's will to use its power as a tool of oppression. In contrast to the criminal representation of Sumbo which the Zimbabwean proletariat saw in the newspapers, his ability to challenge the Rhodesian law and survive, through the use of magic, as they saw it, and trickster behaviour, offered to them an ideal of justice, and this produced the strong feeling that informs the Sumbo narratives.

Like African Americans in the post-slavery period, black Zimbabweans were alienated from government by segregation within Rhodesia. In the case of many whose family homes were in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces and who worked in South Africa, their lives were controlled by segregation codified under Apartheid.⁴ The oral narratives reveal very close links between ZIPRA and the South African ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. Furthermore, between 1978 and 1980, martial law was extended throughout Zimbabwe with the exception of the urban corridor between Salisbury and

⁴ Similar segregationist laws were enforced in Rhodesia and South Africa. Apartheid is simply the name given to the separationist economic, social and cultural policies enshrined in the laws passed by the Nationalist-controlled government of South Africa, in power from 1948 until 1994.

Bulawayo (Frederikse 1982:5), and between 1973 and 1978 many peasants were forced to live in 'protected villages' constructed like prisoner-of-war camps in the rural areas (Frederikse 1982:84).

While Hobsbawm and Roberts help us to understand Sumbo as a folk hero creation, it is important to discuss the form used to construct this particular Zimbabwean folk hero creation. Roberts noticed that the African-American 'badman' creation drew on remnants of an African oral tradition, particularly the trickster and conjurer figures from folk tales (1989:215). The interviewees who narrate the Sumbo folk hero myth draw on an amaNdebele oral tradition to construct the Sumbo hero figure. They particularly remember Sumbo through the use of a core-image in which he exists as a hero, and they develop narrative detail to support and explain his actions, often describing trickster behaviour and the use of magic. The folk hero creation and the African oral form used to communicate it to others cannot be separated from the socio-political context that gave rise to the social banditry and the need for a hero figure.

The notion of 'them' and 'us' is pervasive in any discussion of the Sumbo folk hero creation because it is an expression of opposition to oppressive and authoritarian rule by an elite. Oral 'Sumbo' narratives selected only material from the newspapers that supported the idea that Sumbo was uncapturable. They fused this material, selected from the newspapers of 'the enemy' compiled for a white readership, with an amaNdebele oral historical narrative tradition in which story telling makes a very broad use of trickster behaviour.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, who celebrates the fusion of Western and African material in the sculpture *Man with a Bicycle*, suggests “[i]t matters little who it was made *for*; what we should learn from is the imagination that produced it” (1993:157); as we have seen in the case of the Sumbo folk hero, however, it *does* matter who it was made for. The Sumbo hero figure serves a political and cultural function. Christopher Kamlongera describes how in African ritual and performance the actors and audience are not separate and neither is performance, or art, separated from its function (1988:22-23).

The Sumbo folk hero creation fulfils the function, for the guerrillas and their recruits, of giving shape and form to an idealised self, able to oppose the military might of the Rhodesian government. It uses a southern African oral tradition and specifically an amaNdebele one to create and communicate this ideal, which is crucial to its anti-colonial intention. When remembered in 1998, the Sumbo hero creation recovers a sense of that idealised self. Sumbo is often described by a siNdebele speaking proletariat as *iqhawe*, which can be translated into English to mean warrior or hero. In 1998, the use of an amaNdebele oral historical narrative form to celebrate a ZIPRA folk hero opens the Sumbo hero creation to interpretations that emphasise ethnic influences. The Sumbo narrative may contain elements of ethnic divisions that inform the ZANU and ZAPU conflict at grass roots level, and which are masked by the 1987 unity accord. Even if these divisions are obvious within the Sumbo narratives, the form also affords us an opportunity to see how,

although shattered by its confrontation with colonialism and modernity, amaNdebele oral tradition still retains the power to mobilise people and to articulating the imagination of the proletariat. Fragments of this tradition survive to fuse with fragments of colonial culture and to subvert the power relationship between rulers and ruled.

The Sumbo hero creation can be categorised as a 'popular hero', a cultural product existing within the broader category of African popular arts. Karin Barber describes African popular arts as created by 'the people', an 'us' in opposition to an authoritarian 'them' (1997:4). She continues: '[i]f naming common suffering is one shared theme, then the aspiration to a better life is another one that often follows from it" (1997:5). Her comments are true of both the Sumbo folk hero creation and the oral historical narratives that are used to communicate this hero creation to others. Barber defines 'the popular' as "a fugitive category, seemingly ubiquitous and yet always fading as one tries to grasp it" (1987:5-6), and as existing between traditional and elite art forms:

[p]opular arts have usually been defined in terms of what they are not. In this model, they are not traditional arts transmitted more or less intact, though slowly changing, from a pre-colonial past. Nor are they elite or high arts produced by the educated few who have assimilated European languages, form, and conventions more or less thoroughly. Popular is usually left as a shapeless residual category, its borders

defined only by juxtapositions with the clearly demarcated traditional and elite categories. (1987:9)

Barber has used liberation cultural products as examples of African popular arts: for instance she gives the Mau Mau songs from Kenya and the Zimbabwean Chimurenga songs as examples of popular arts where the collaboration between intellectual activists and peasants produces radical art from a common struggle (1987:9). As I shall show in the next chapter, Sumbo's name featured in a liberation song as a metaphor for the 'uncapturable' hero. The syncretic nature of the accounts, the subject position of the narrators and the political intention revealed in the narratives are all features of African popular arts.

What becomes evident is that the notion of a folk hero can be redefined as a 'popular hero' when it is created by a proletariat and expressed by means of a popular art form. The Sumbo hero figure itself inhabits a space between the official hero, which he cannot be, and the demonised figure that written history attributes to him. The ambiguity that surrounds Sumbo defines his status as a 'popular hero' and also acknowledges his humanity by registering his fallibility. It would be almost impossible to fight in a guerrilla war, where social and moral boundaries become so blurred, and at the same time achieve the kind of moral purity that official history ascribes to its heroes. Only figures like Mandela and Gandhi have managed to do this.

Sumbo could never be acknowledged as a hero by official history without offending prevalent standards of morality because of his murder of the missionaries. Yet the representations of him as a popular hero that have emerged express the complicated situation that engulfed Zimbabwe during the liberation war.

The category of 'popular hero' thus allows us to acknowledge the roles individuals fulfil as symbols, along with their human frailty within the complex social situations in which they find themselves. In other words, the category allows us to understand and discuss the Sumbo hero figure as a cultural phenomenon arising from the Zimbabwe liberation war, and to discuss other 'popular heroes' such as Winnie Mandela in the South African liberation struggle. The 'popular hero' is not only created and celebrated through forms of African popular arts, but is itself a category of cultural creation that has meaning for a proletariat, even if the hero figure's symbolic status is contested. This category embraces the contested nature of such heroes and allows us to understand them as complex cultural creations, despite the moral controversies that surround them.

Chapter Two

Oral Historical Narrative: Communicating the Sumbo Legend

In this chapter I will first establish characteristic features of amaNdebele oral historical narratives that arise from their origins in the communication events that 'traditionally' took place in the *idale*, the male space, outside and around the fire, in the traditional homestead. I will argue that such narratives occur far down the continuum between dramatic performance and informal conversation. If the *izibongo* of royal praise singers form one extreme of this continuum, genealogies and songs which are structured and performed in a set manner on particular occasions are several degrees less formal. Proverbs and *ntsomi*¹ drawing on traditional images and vocabulary are placed next; the anecdote comes close to the end; but last, because least fixed in form, vocabulary and content, comes the informal conversation. Into this continuum I wish to insert the oral historical narrative of the kind that I analyse in this thesis; I will place it next to the *ntsomi*, with which it shares core-images (Scheub 1975:3 and 46-61), a term which I shall explain below; it is, however, less formal than the *ntsomi*, and is unfixed in terms of occasion. It can be placed before the anecdote, which is often trivial in its content and is usually related to the experience of the raconteur.

Secondly, following Hofmeyr's example of using terms that originate from Scheub's (1975) analysis of Xhosa *ntsomi* to analyse amaNdebele oral

¹ *Ntsomi* are also referred to as *ingane kwane* in isiZulu, and understood in English as folk tales.

historical narratives from the Northern Transvaal (Hofmeyr 1993:111-113), I will demonstrate how features similar to those found in the *nisomi*, particularly core-images and core-clichés, also occur in the oral historical narrative tradition of the amaNdebele in Zimbabwe. Scheub describes the core-image as the basic element to which the story teller adds detail, either to elaborate or to link the image to other core-images. A core-image is “a remembered image which is not in itself complete, a distillate of the full performance, expanded and fleshed out during the process of externalisation” (Scheub 1975:47). Core-clichés consist of habitually used words, phrases or sentences which evoke the core-image and can be spoken, sung or chanted. Scheub gives this explanation: “[t]he *saying-cliché* is a statement, conventional and stylised, which is seldom omitted from relevant performances” (1975:47).

Applying Scheub’s terms to a familiar story in the western tradition, a story like ‘the three pigs and the big bad wolf,’² one might recognise the core-image as being *a wolf attacking three pigs*, while the core-cliché might be the phrase *he huffed and he puffed till he blew the house down*. I will argue that the oral historical narratives make similar use of core-images and core-clichés as a way of storing knowledge and then externalising it during moments of story telling. In oral historical narratives, however, the core-images are derived from remembered accounts of the past rather than from consciously produced

² The epithet *big bad* describing and naming the wolf is also a ‘core-cliché’.

fiction, as is the case in *msomi*, and the themes are 'serious' and intended to educate in terms of history, identity and values.

Thirdly, having established a set of features that might more fully characterise oral historical narratives as a genre, I will discuss how these narratives, by using Sumbo's name as a core-image, belong to a broader oral cultural practice in which names may be core-images carrying meaning. The meaning of the names and information contained in them may have been learnt by the hearers originally through oral historical narratives in the *idale*.

Though I am indebted to the work of Isabel Hofmeyr (1993:7-9 and 78-101), who acknowledges the role gender plays in the construction of 'traditional' African society, and who uses the gendered places in which historical narratives occur to define them as a literary genre (1993:25-37), I wish to go beyond her definitions. Hofmeyr places her emphasis almost entirely on gendered space: I shall show that the criteria which define oral historical narratives include, as well as space and gender, the use of core-images drawn from 'real' sources, details that expand the stories in terms of socio-political content and which deal with themes related to identity, values and history. The authority of the narrator is derived from his age, status and his witnessing of the events.

Some of the intrinsic features of the narratives explain the difficulty western academia has in recognising oral historical narratives as a genre: they are

perceived as 'loose' and informal in occurrence. The perceived looseness and informality, which Hofmeyr calls "lack of performance visibility" (1993:3), arises from the fact that historical knowledge is stored, as is the case with the fictional material of Xhosa *nisomi* (Scheub 1975:3), in core-images which often consist only of a name or event, occasionally supported by a core-cliché. Similar core-images occur in praises, genealogies and songs. However, historical narratives differ from these latter in that they tend nowadays to be unfixed with regard to the times and places at and in which they occur, other than being confined to groups of men. This lends to such oral narratives the appearance of being, as Hofmeyr describes it, simply "a type of passive, general knowledge" rather than part of a performance tradition (1993:3).

Yet far from being part of 'passive' knowledge, historical narratives in fact descend from a tradition of active education of the young. In the discussion with the old men in Tsholotsho³ (Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998), the elders explained that fifty years ago, the conversations that occurred in the *idale* served to educate the younger men. Historical knowledge stored and remembered in 'core-images' was explained and elaborated upon, so that it fulfilled an educational function in terms of community history, identity and values. These practices continue in contemporary oral historical narratives which also interpret history, not only in terms of great events, but in personal accounts of the effects which such events had on the society. The changes brought by modernity to family life, along with the authority given to written

³ Tsholotsho is a rural area in the Matabeleland South Province of Zimbabwe. The population speaks siNdebele and Kalanga.

accounts of history, have lessened amaNdebele society's ability to value history that is perceived and presented in this fashion. Nevertheless, in the recent past, the essentials of the *idale* seem to re-emerge in places where men meet to discuss important events, usually of a socio-political nature.

Examples of this occurred when in 1998, two groups emerged in Bulawayo to express dissatisfaction with the ZANU (PF) administration in the Matabeleland provinces. One group, called *Imbovane Yamahlabezulu* (the weevils of the slaughtering Zulus), met at the Bulawayo City Hall and attracted a predominantly middle-class and urban attendance. The name originates from that of one of Mzilikazi's military regiments. Although the meetings included women, the name gives to the meeting a male identity. The report in the *Sunday News* describes a three hour meeting which sought to achieve acknowledgement from the ZANU PF government of the atrocities of the Fifth Brigade in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces, with the public hearing the testimonies from survivors (*Sunday News* 1998). The second group called itself *Inhloko Yamadoda* (the head of the cow eaten by men) and attracted a more traditionalist group of men. This meeting was attended by male traditional leaders and young intellectuals, who met at Amakhosi's⁴ performance venue, Township Square, on the last Saturday of each month during 1998. They discussed current socio-political issues and finally decided to test rural opinion as whether or not to revive ZAPU. In early 1999, ZAPU 2000 emerged as a political party to challenge the older leadership of PF-

⁴ Amakhosi Productions is a Bulawayo, township-based community theatre group, founded by playwright Cont Mhlanga.

ZAPU who had merged with ZANU (PF) as part of the unity accord of 1987. Makhathini Gaduza (Interviews, Gaduza 1998) found similarities between the meetings of the *Inhloko Yamadoda* and the *idale* of his youth. At the meetings of *Inhloko Yamadoda*, historical narratives were included in the discussions about topical socio-political subjects and issues related to identity and values.

It was in comparable gatherings of men discussing the liberation war that narratives that construct Sumbo as a folk hero originated. Nkosana Mavule Sibanda describes how the stories were told in the work place and at beerhalls (pp81-85); Nyathi (pp92-93) places them as conversations by male recruits in the guerrilla camps; while Ngwenya (p123), Nyoni (pp117-118) and Gaduza (pp68-69) report that such conversations and songs occurred amongst male detainees in prisons. Discussions with women ex-combatants (Interviews, MaDube 1998, MaNgwenya 1998 and MaDlamini 1998) revealed that although in some cases they were aware of the Sumbo story, he did not provide a symbol of an ideal self for them and therefore was not constructed as a folk hero figure. However, their recollections about him do link him to newspaper stories about his escape, and connect Sumbo's story with the general belief that guerrillas could disappear.⁵

⁵ The recorded, unpublished interviews, in my possession, with women ex-combatants from the ZIPRA army, revealed stories of their experiences of raids on the camps in Zambia, and their recruitment and return to Zimbabwe in 1980 after the war. While Sumbo's activities are remembered, they are not given the same significance here as they are amongst male ex-combatants. In the following extract, Thokozile Ngwenya remembers Sumbo through the core cliché "a hit and hide terrorist": "Ah, Sumbo, I heard about Sumbo before I ever went to the war. I had heard that there was a 'hit and hide' terrorist who had hit at Kwezi. But I do not remember clearly because I was young... It was common understanding that freedom fighters had the ability to disappear after action." Angela Dlamini when asked if she had heard about Sumbo remarked, "Yes, I heard about Sumbo. I heard that he was responsible for the Khwezi operation. However I only heard about him when I was already in the war... I only read about

In order to prove the past existence of the *idale* and its survival in memory, I offer an anecdote from my journey through the rural areas while collecting Sumbo stories. We met with a group of elders in the rural area of Tsholotsho to discuss their memories of the cultural practices of their youth (Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998). This meeting was organised by Makhathini Gaduza, with whom I had already discussed the *idale* and who connected it to the *Inhloko Yamadoda* meetings at Amakhosi (Interview, Gaduza 1998). The Tsholotsho meeting was an open discussion in which we invited the elderly men to talk freely about the memories of their youth. The old men's memories allowed us a glimpse of an older form of rural family life, and sometimes we were able to see the use amaNdebele culture had made of its oral tradition demonstrated during the meeting.

The discussion at Tsholotsho took place outside and away from the women's kitchen area. Although the men spoke in turns, recounting anecdotal episodes from their youth, there were also moments when discussion dominated the meeting. Andrew Nyathi, who grew up in Tsholotsho and was known to the community, initiated the discussions which were recorded and later translated by him. During the meeting, other younger men present in the group felt able to ask questions and elicit information. Two women who came from the kitchen area to join the group only listened and did not enter into the

some activities and also through the news by the commissars saying "our brother has done this, our brother has done that".

discussion. During the conversation, the register shifted easily to include dialogue, anecdotal stories, poetry and storytelling.

The old men confirmed in their anecdotes the strong gender divisions of 'traditional' family life. Sindi James Mazalu remembered during childhood play recreating family life with all its gendered divisions, including the *idale* (Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998). He also described the *idale* as "the 'school of life' for men" (Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998). The elderly men remembered the *idale* as a male space where the fathers and boys lived and described the social interactions that took place in the *idale* as centring around meals, socialising around the fire and becoming educated. Saimon Peter Ndlovu describes the *idale* in these terms;

I must say that *idale* was also used as a handicraft place, storage and learning place. All ages of boys would live at the *idale*. The most important thing is that the tradition, the laws of life were given out here. (Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998)

Makhathini Gaduza, in his discussion of the *idale* (Interviews, Gaduza 1998), describes his failed attempts to revive it and finally having to resign himself to its loss. The loss of the *idale*, in his account, seems to represent the emasculation, in terms of power, of African men by the processes of colonisation and modernisation. The patriarchal authority of the older amaNdebele society was replaced by the patriarchy of colonial authority. The

idale, in Gaduza's discussion, was a symbol of family unity, strength and accountability, that encompassed the entire extended family and achieved this social order through patriarchal authority. The *idale* was more than a space; it was the externalisation of an idea, a social structure and a way of life. With the loss of the *idale*, family life moved into the house, the women's space, with the result that – as Gaduza perceives it – power moved away from the men to the women:

I became Gaduza's son controlled by my wife, my wife telling me when to sleep and when not to sleep. That alone changed the whole character of Gaduza's own system of living. And we lived that way, each one of us, not to have control of his house. But when people see us attending meetings, talking boldly, showing our power, they did not know that weakness which we have at home.

(Interviews, Gaduza 1998)

Sindi James Mazalu offers this reflection on how the destruction of the *idale* has damaged family relationships and left the old men disempowered:

No. There is no more *idale*. These days I do not teach my children. If my child would ask me about life today, I have nothing to offer. Children are the shepherds of themselves.

(Interview, Tsholotsho Elders 1998)

The old men's description of the *idale* is very similar to Hofmeyr's account of the male space called the *kogoro*:

In this symbolically central place as opposed to the peripheral woman's area, men congregated to discuss and resolve issues, perform certain types of work and direct the activities like communal labour and transfer of cattle that linked households into homesteads and homesteads into wards. Another factor integrating households and homesteads was the storytelling that men performed in the *kogoro* in the evenings. (Hofmeyr 1993:29)

I observed the space in which senior males taught the community while attending a service held by the Shembe church at Eshowe in August 1998. The church draws heavily on Zulu culture as a basis for its style of religious practice. I noticed that the church practices reflect a strictly gendered view of society. The church members were grouped as older men, young men, married and unmarried women, all dressed distinctively, sitting in their designated areas; later, all performed their own dances in dance groups. Other sub-groupings within these groups were defined by age and social status. While there are occasions when teaching for women by women occurs, in the large public gathering I attended, the oral history of the church was passed down by old men who spoke at the service. The old men recounted their childhood memories of Isaiah Shembe in the form of stories told to them by their parents, or stories of events involving Shembe that they themselves witnessed. Male elders' oral historical narratives give authority and authenticity to the Shembe

myths, and the themes of the stories teach values consistent with the philosophy of the church.

I wish to return to the subject of the old men in Tsholotsho, and in particular to the discussions of war stories, which revealed how the returning African soldiers of World War II were able to tell their war memories to the community, in contrast to the liberation guerrillas, who have been largely denied this catharsis. Nduna Tshuma described how the soldiers returning from the Second World War were welcomed back, often with ceremonies of thanksgiving and cleansing at which the soldiers 'performed' accounts of their wartime experiences. I use the term 'performed' because, as Nduna Tshuma recalls, the soldiers told stories and demonstrated activities like marching drills. However, he also explains that performance expertise was not a major criteria for these events. Here is the extract:

However praise poems were better left to the experts. I should say that the soldiers had to do personal praise poems to indicate what they did in the war, especially important accomplishments. They also did their marching. The sergeant would shout the marching orders. They showed how they lived and fought to us who had not participated in the war. People in the village would come out in numbers, especially because most people knew which homes had soldiers. Those who died in the war became known. (Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998)

After the Zimbabwe Liberation War, similar ceremonies to welcome back the guerrillas were less common. The conversation with the old men revealed the perception of silence that surrounds the Zimbabwean liberation history. I have discussed the 'silencing' of unauthorised versions of liberation history in Chapter One of this thesis. The liberation war was fought in the rural areas and involved the rural communities in complex relationships, caught as they were between the Rhodesian authorities and the soldiers of the different liberation movements. The guerrillas' stories have not been told. In this extract, Nduna Tshuma tells us that the rural community is still waiting to hear these stories and blames the silence on the *Gukurahundi*:

We are waiting to hear the stories. We know some of their problems: they were just sent into the country without pocket money. They were told to come to us for food. We gave them. We fought the war with them. They did not have the chance to tell us stories because they were dispersed by the *Gukurahundi*. (Interview, Tsholotsho Elders 1998)

The elders seem to agree that the *Gukurahundi* disrupted any opportunity for the ZIPRA guerrillas' and their families to negotiate and achieve reconciliation with rural communities. Nduna Tshuma describes, in the extract below, how the unresolved relationships between guerrillas, their families and the rural community have been further exacerbated by the government's recent pension payments made to the guerrillas:

Nduna Tshuma: The guerrillas came back but before we did anything for them there came a certain army which was called *Gukurahundi*. This army was brutal, we failed to do anything for our children [the guerrillas]. This army even killed those guerrillas. The guerrillas had to disperse in panic to the bush and others went to South Africa ..

Nyathi: Are there some of you who did the cleansing ceremonies for their sons and daughters who came back from the war?

Nduna Tshuma: That has passed. We saw that they have been given gratuities and pensions... Now that they have been paid they are the ones who should foot the bills for the cleansing ceremonies. We fed them when they were in the bush, we clothed and gave them blankets. For that reason they even must now organise a thank you for us.

(Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998)

The conversation in Tsholotsho partly explains why only fragments survive of an older oral tradition in the post-independence memories of the liberation war, and indicates that the project of eliciting the Sumbo folk hero narratives was

not a simple one. The conversations did, however, offer two very solid oral performance events. One was the performance by the elderly men of *izithakazelo*, names recited as core-images for remembering the family lineage. The other was an oral historical narrative told by Nduna Tshuma which gave an account of the Second World War.

The features that characterise oral historical narratives as a genre are demonstrated in Tshuma's story of Churchill's victory over the Germans. They are also present in the Sumbo folk hero narratives. I would summarise these features as follows:

- They originate or derive their form from discussions conducted in a male space.
- They make use of 'core-images' and 'core-clichés' that are derived from 'real' life sources rather than fantasy sources.
- They deal with socio-political themes involving community identity, values and history.
- They use detail to expand and explain these 'core-images' within a socio-political context.
- The details include personal testimony that interprets great events in terms of their effect on the community.
- The speakers are selected on the basis of criteria related to their age or social status or the speaker's presence at an event.

pour the petrol into the sea. Churchill did like so. Churchill seeing the Germans advancing, he went back to the old man and said, "it has gotten bad now these people are now too near." The old man checked the first time and thought, the Germans were not near enough, meanwhile Churchill was getting frustrated and panicking. The old man said, "Okay, light the fire in the sea." Churchill said, "I do not have matches with me." The old man said, "What kind of a soldier are you who fights a war without matches?" The old man who was smoking his pipe gave Churchill the box of matches. Churchill lit the fire in the sea. A big fire advanced towards the direction of the Germans. The old man again asked Churchill to look through his binoculars. When Churchill saw what was happening in the sea he said to the old man, "I win the war." That is how the war was won and our people came back home.

Nyathi: What happened on their arrival back home?

Nduna Tshuma: When they came back home, some were given something some were not. Others were given black bicycles. When my father came back, beer was brewed for them. Cattle were slaughtered.

Nyathi: What was the significance of that, slaughtering of cattle and brewing beer?

Nduna Tshuma: This was both gratitude and cleansing.

Nyathi: Did this have something to do with praise poems?

Nduna Tshuma: Yes indeed. However praise poems were better left to the experts. I should say that the soldiers had to do personal praise poems to indicate what they did in the war, especially important accomplishments. They also did their marching. The sergeant would shout the marching orders. They showed how they lived and fought to us who had not participated in the war. People in the village would come out in numbers, especially because most people knew which homes had soldiers. Those who died in the war became known.

(Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998)

I have already demonstrated the connection between this story and the male space in which it was recorded at Tsholotsho. The story formed part of a larger discussion about the process of welcoming soldiers back from war and therefore deals with a topic, war, that was traditionally the preserve of men.

Tshuma's oral narrative about Churchill has its origins in the late 1940s at the height of colonial rule in Rhodesia, and tries to make sense of the African participation in the Second World War from the distance of a rural village in Rhodesia. Werbner, in his research amongst Kalanga speakers in Matabeleland South Province in the 1960s, documents this comment in a conversation with Tobela Bango, quoting him as saying, "[t]hey were fighting for this country, and when our rulers, the whites, fight, they also invite us to join in this, their helping party" (1991:57). Tshuma demonstrates this same notion through the character of the old man in his story, who allows Churchill to assume the position of victor. Tobela Bango makes this relationship between the colonial rulers and their African helpers political by adding: "What we fight about now is that after they have invited us to their helping party and we come, they do not make us equal with their own people" (1991:57). The possibility that Tobela Bango's feeling might have been more widely shared adds interesting possibilities to the ways in which listeners, in the past, may have understood Tshuma's story. However, Tshuma's narrative does not move the story in this direction.

Tshuma uses siNdebele and his story predates the Sumbo folk hero narratives. The Churchill story draws heavily on literary and colonial influences both in terms of its structure and content. Furthermore, I would argue that the story's theme colludes with colonial authority by representing the African soldiers,

through the figure of the old man, as subordinate and in service to the colonial and imperialist masters, represented by the figure of Churchill.

Both Tshuma's story about Churchill and the Sumbo narratives, because they deal with modern history, derive their core-images from material supplied by the media. These narratives demonstrate that orality and literacy do not stand in opposition to each other but are to some extent complementary, and orality is able to absorb material that has its roots in written text. The distinction between the characteristic features of literacy and orality in these cases has then become blurred. Ong's analysis (1995:31-156) of the characteristics of orality and literacy, which he sees as having separate origins, however, provides a useful vocabulary for understanding the interplay between orality and literacy.

For example, in Tshuma's story we find the use of hero figures of the kind that Ong describes as 'heavy' characters (1995:70), embodied in the figures of Churchill and the old man trickster from a previous war. Ong argues that the heroic traditions found in primary oral cultures and early literate cultures with a massive oral residue occur because:

[o]ral memory works effectively with 'heavy' characters, persons whose deeds are monumental, memorable and commonly public. Thus the noetic economy of its nature generates outsize figures, that is, heroic figures, not for romantic reasons or reflectively didactic reasons

but for much more basic reasons: to organise experience in some sort of permanently memorable form. (1995:70)

In terms of oral narratives that have their origins in amaNdebele culture, the connection Ong makes between hero figures and memory is similar to the role hero figures have as core-images in the memory process described by Scheub (1975:3 and 46-61). In Tshuma's story, the "person whose deeds are monumental, memorable and commonly public" (Ong 1995:70) is Churchill, the hero who wins the Second World War with his cigar and his famous 'V' for victory handsign. This image of Churchill is strongly remembered and associated with the Second World War and easily becomes a 'core-image', having been effectively promoted by the British and colonial media. This representation of Churchill, which originates in the printed media, is the core-image derived from 'real life' which is required for the construction of amaNdebele oral historical narratives. The core-cliché that interprets this image is the phrase "I win the war," which is spoken by Churchill and forms the climax of the story. Ong describes this linear movement towards a dénouement as characteristic of literacy rather than orality. He says,

[o]ne of the places where oral mnemonic structures and procedures manifest themselves most spectacularly is in their effect on narrative plot, which in an oral culture is not quite what we take plot typically to be. Persons from today's literate and typographical cultures are likely to think of consciously contrived narrative as typically designed in a

climactic linear plot often diagrammed as the well-known 'Freytag's pyramid' (i.e. an upward slope, followed by a downward slope): an ascending action builds tension, rising to a climactic point.

(1995:141-142)

Clearly, literate, modern and imperialist influences are present in the story and not only in the representation of Churchill, an official hero, but also in its narrative style. The theme of the story is developed through its detail which centres around the dialogue and action that occur between Churchill and an old man. The description of the old man seems to provide an African presence in the story; his age, his beer sipping and pipe smoking conjure up an image of an old rural African man. This is further supported by the old man's introduction of Churchill to trickster behaviour in order to help him win the war. The details of the battle seem to shift from Germany's invasion of France to Germany's attempted invasion of Britain. This could be a conflation of various famous World War II battles, Germany's land invasion of France, the allies' D-Day landing and the Battle of Britain. Alternatively, the German fleet may have become confused with the Spanish Armada's advance on Elizabethan England and the traditional story of Drake playing bowls at Plymouth Hoe; when asked to confer with the Lord Admiral, he answered that there was plenty of time to finish the game and beat the Spanish too (Williamson 1951:114). Tshuma might have been exposed to this story about Francis Drake in a colonial junior school history class. Tshuma may also have faint recollections of the fireships which were used to destroy the Armada. The story appears to contain elements

of traditional African social beliefs (the wise old man who advises the war leader); accounts of World War II originally derived from newspapers (the invasion) and of colonial history books (the Drake story). These elements are fused: the old trickster is also the Drake figure.

Oral historical narratives, like *ntsoni*, achieve their educational function through the values they promote and, as one might expect in a rural society, they often support conservative values. Tshuma's story promotes a colonised view of the world. Hofmeyr provides an example of how the stories of the Siege of Gwasa affirm the system of chieftancy among the Northern Transvaal amaNdebele (1993:123-136), thus promoting the values of pre-colonial amaNdebele authority.

Tshuma's authority to tell his World War II story and the element of personal testimony that features in these kinds of narratives emerges in the last line of the story, "[t]hat is how the war was won and our people came back home", which is followed by a discussion of how these men were received back in their villages, events that Tshuma witnessed.

The trickster behaviour which occurs in Tshuma's story is an important element in many historical narratives, and tricksters also occur in *ntsoni*. The trickster is, however, too frequent in occurrence and too diverse in his nature to be used as a categorising element: he may occur amongst winners or losers in a conflict, he may be seen either as good or evil and may succeed or fail

Hofmeyr notices trickery in the oral historical narratives she documents and records the “stealth and cunning” used in the killing of Piet Potgieter and again in the “hoodwinking” that takes place at the Siege of Gwasa to preserve the dynastic lineage of the chief (1993:114-116). She makes the following observation about trickery and defeat:

This emphasis on the wiles of the weak is one that often occurs in historical traditions that narrate defeat. One way of saving face is to imply that the conquerors while victorious are stupid and have, in some small way, been outwitted by the guile and wit of the conquered. (1993:116)

While this may be true in certain narratives, it is not true for all. Trickster behaviour occurs in both oral historical narratives and *ntsomi*. Canonici (1995:11), in his study of the trickster in Zulu folktales, notices that the trickster figure is not a homogenous concept and occurs in a variety of characters who can be either successful or unsuccessful. He observes that trickery represents both a cultural behavioural archetype and a narrative function. His observations can also be seen to apply to trickery and tricksters in oral historical narratives where trickery or wiliness occurs in both the stories of victory and of defeat. In Tshuma's World War II narrative, Churchill is a successful trickster against the Germans, but as the colonial master he is not clever enough and needs the assistance of the colonised subject, the old man.

Sumbo as a trickster is successful against the Rhodesian army and so represents a personal ideal, thus becoming a folk hero for the guerrilla recruits.

The narrative of Sumbo's escape, his status as a folk hero, its political context and his quality of 'uncapturability' are all contained within his name as a core-image. When his name is 'performed' in the narratives it is given dramatic significance by the rhythmic weight the narrators give to its utterance of his name. The narrators develop detail about the significance of the Sumbo name and explain his status as a folk hero, while adding to the Sumbo story their own personal narratives in relation to this story.

The use of names of people, places and organizations to serve as tools for remembering seems universal. Frances Yates, in her preface to *The Art of Memory* (Yates:1966:11-15), explains how important a trained memory was before printing arrived, and describes the European technique of 'mnemotechnics' which uses visual images of objects and places to 'store' and 'retrieve' information. Scheub records that core-images play a role in remembered information that becomes externalised in the performance of both *izibongo* and *nsomi* (1975:23). In Africa, the relationship between names and the memory of events is well known. In his study of a narrative about a family history in the South-west of Zimbabwe, Werbner explains that he particularly paid attention to "the coded memorials in familiar names and nicknames. 'The names speak', as I was told: forming a whole series in Lupondo's family, the

names of children evoke memories of their mothers' histories, their quarrels and their grievances at the time of childbirth" (1991:3).

The old men in Tsholotsho could recite their family *izithakazelo*⁶ as a poem (Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998). The significance of these names was taught in the *idale*. These are the names of family heroes, and as ancestors they might well be called upon to support an individual in times of adversity. Here is an example of *izithakazelo* performed by Saimon Peter Ndlovu:

I am,
Ndlovu
Gatsheni
Ntmeho
Mulevu
Nkotho...
Debehe
Mukaya
Ibula.

(Interviews, Tsholotsho Elders 1998)

The use of real names as core-images continues in present-day Zimbabwe. A contemporary example of heroic creation around a name is found in the marching chant of the notorious North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade, who used

⁶ *Izithakazelo* are family clan names recited as a family genealogy.

English to present President Robert Mugabe as a hero figure, much like Kim III
Sung:

Long live, comrade R G Mu – ga – be

Long Live, Long Live

We are the people – s army

We are here to defend, our country, our people

Our leader comrade R G Mu – ga – be

Long live, long live

(Dube 1999)⁷

The significance of Mugabe's name is created by the rhythmic performance of the name, with each syllable given the value of two beats. Rhythm is used to link "Mu-ga-be" to "the people – s army". The shift from calling or speaking a name to performing it lies in the rhythmic value given to it.

The core-image of Sumbo the hero is summoned up through the performance of his name Makhathini Gaduza, a well-known ANC political activist who was deported back to Rhodesia and detained at Wa Wa Prison, remembered the excitement that the newspaper stories of Sumbo's escape created amongst the prisoners. A song that used the name 'Manama', another core-image, to

⁷ This rendition of the marching chant was given to me by Mr Dube and is presented in full here.

remember the abduction, by ZIPRA guerrillas, of children from Manama Mission school to join the liberation struggle was also sung, incorporating the name 'Sumbo'. The Sumbo folk hero and the accompanying core-cliché of Sumbo being 'uncapturable' are distilled down to just his name as core-image. Sumbo, his hero status, and 'uncapturable' quality are assumed to be summoned up in the memories of those singing or hearing the song. The song uses the core images to warn other Africans who are collaborating with the Smith regime of their foolishness, because the liberation war will succeed. Here is the song:

Gaduza: In *Manama Khulabantwana* they were saying
(singing)

eManama khulabantwana

Muthengisi ngekeupinde njalo upumelele

[In Manama there are children

Sellouts you won't succeed again]

They were singing

(singing)

EZimbabwe kulo Sumbo

Muthengisi ungekeupinde njalo upumelele

[In Zimbabwe there is Sumbo

Sellouts you won't succeed again]

This was the type of song. So Sumbo was sang that type of singing. They were compared him that [comparing Sumbo with] young children [who have] gone out [from] Manama in their hundreds leaving school. So they are going to come there with guns so sellouts, they're not going to succeed, then even if they arrest people Sumbo has shown us a way, we're not going to succeed because we are going to run away.

(Interviews, Gaduza 1998)

The oral historical narratives created after Sumbo's escape in 1977 created the Sumbo core-image. The oral historical narratives that form the subject of this research and which were recorded in 1998 teach and explain the meaning of Sumbo as a core-image. His name is often extended rhythmically in the narrative and this lends to the name a heightened quality, or what I would describe as a performed quality, which makes 'Sumbo' a significant image in the narratives.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss how these features, the oral historical narrative, the performance of names, and the use of core-images and core-clichés, appear in the interviews with the ex-combatants, who narrate a variety of Sumbo stories, all representing him as a hero figure.

Chapter Three

Five Sumbo Narratives: Ex-Combatants Remember the Sumbo Hero Creation

I

In this chapter I will present and analyse five transcripts of interviews with ZIPRA ex-combatants, all of whom construct narratives that represent Sumbo as a hero. The narratives were gathered through recorded interviews in which English was used as the medium of communication. They are not spontaneous narration; discussions were first held with the interviewees to establish their willingness to participate in the research, and in the course of these discussions they talked about their knowledge of Sumbo with the research team. Andrew Nyathi, an ex-combatant, and I were present at all the interviews and Pussen Tabengwa, who had been part of Sumbo and Moyo's unit, was present at the interview with Moyo. The interviewees therefore had a sense that they were speaking to their own ex-combatant community as well as to a wider audience available to them through the tape recorder.

In all cases, the informants were offered the opportunity to speak in either siNdebele or English. They understood that they were participating in a research project and felt that by being recorded speaking English, they would have greater control over their material, since they would communicate more directly with the envisaged audience to which the interviewer would transmit their material.

The Sumbo story, as they retold it in 1998, revived for the ex-combatants memories of the revolutionary ideals of the liberation struggle in the late 1970s. The ex-combatants also wished to claim a place for the ZIPRA

guerrillas' experience in an official academic space. This is itself a reaction to the official Zimbabwe liberation history, in which they believe they are under-represented. The interviewees, in response to the envisaged audience represented by the tape recorder, at times shifted towards a more formal register, which was accompanied by a greater degree of self-awareness than had been present in the informal discussions that preceded the recordings.

During the interviews, I first established the identity of the informants before cueing them into the 'narratives' by asking them about Sumbo. As I have explained in the introduction to this thesis, I had realized the importance of Sumbo during a research project with the Simukai Collective Farming Co-operative (p11). I had established over a period of time that he was a well-known figure in various sectors of the Zimbabwean and Rhodesian community. The narratives demonstrate that my questions about Sumbo in fact presented to the interviewees the Sumbo core-image, to which they responded by developing narrative detail around this core-image. I offered further cues in the form of questions to extend the narrative or to clarify details. For example, in the interview with Mavule, I asked him questions that enabled him to elaborate further on the role that media other than the Rhodesian papers played in publicising Sumbo's escape (pp81-82). The question to Nyoni about what he would do if he met Sumbo allowed him to respond with a very powerful image that demonstrates the extent to which the guerrillas value Sumbo's heroism (p118).

The narratives offered during the interviews are not formulaic in the sense that they consist of large standardised passages. The formulaic components are the Sumbo core-image, the hero, and the core-cliché, 'Sumbo is uncapturable', which remain constant, while the narrative detail has fluidity and an

improvised quality. The narrative detail is an elaboration of the Sumbo core-image and core-cliché appropriate to a particular occasion. Nonetheless, the interviews do produce large sections of uninterrupted narrative about Sumbo. They demonstrate that elements of performance and different oral genres can appear within a broader dialogical interaction. The interviewees at different times make use of a variety of registers (conversational, theatrical, rhetorical, sung) and oral genres (dialogue, monologue, historical narrative, song).

The interviewees imply that the Sumbo core-image and core-cliché were originally formed through repetition in discussions, presumably using siNdebele (pp80-81,84,97-98). Here the interviewees use a second language, English, and have less facility than in siNdebele. They are necessarily less eloquent and idiomatic and at times their narratives become ambiguous or obscure. They also transfer the Sumbo core-image and core-cliché into English along with the detail which supports them. Being present at the interviews, I can recall the context in which they took place and the gestures and facial expressions that the interviewees used. Furthermore, I witnessed, and through the recordings can revisit, the distribution of vocal energy used throughout the interviews. The different degrees of vocal energy provide important clues to the interviewees' changes of registers and the introduction of elements of performance into the narratives. These features are unfortunately impossible to reproduce in this thesis.

The features I have used in Chapter Two to categorise oral historical narratives (p55) are present in the interviews. The male space, in the form of conversations restricted to groups of men, continued to exert its influence over the narratives: the interviews with the ex-combatants were arranged as formal

discussions of war experiences and took place in living rooms, offices or rural court yards designated by the interviewees for the recordings. The women withdrew, leaving the men, comprising the interviewing team and interviewee, alone. In the interviews with Mavule, Nyathi and Moyo, the speakers explain how the hero figure was constructed during the late 1970s in conversations conducted in the predominantly male work place and by groups of male guerrilla recruits. The elements of historical narrative in the interviews with Nyoni and Ngwenya have their origins in conversations conducted during the late 1970s between captured guerrillas in prisons.

In all cases, the narratives demonstrate that the core-image of Sumbo the hero is derived from the newspaper articles that report his escape and the Rhodesian forces' search for him. The core-cliché that emerges in the narratives is that Sumbo is 'uncapturable'. Sumbo's 'uncapturable' quality is the personal ideal for the guerrillas and their recruits, and forms the basis for the representation of Sumbo as a folk hero. This 'uncapturable' quality is clearly recognisable as that of a successful trickster figure. The narratives do not all overtly use the core-cliché. It is strongly present in Mavule's, Nyathi's and Nyoni's narratives, while Moyo's narrative deals only with the Sumbo core-image of a hero. Ngwenya also uses the Sumbo core-image of hero but rather than focusing on the 'uncapturable' quality, he attributes a political idealism to Sumbo's actions.

The narrative detail in the interviews provides the contrasts between the narratives. The narratives by Mavule, Nyathi and Moyo generally provide accounts of how the representation of Sumbo as a hero came about and the power the Sumbo hero figure held for the young recruits. The remaining two interviews with older guerrillas, who were detained in prison at the time of the escape, offer details that give political meaning to the Sumbo hero figure.

Broadly, the themes of the younger guerrillas' narratives defend the Sumbo folk hero figure, while the older guerrillas use the Sumbo story to celebrate political idealism. All the interviewees present their own personal narratives during the interviews, and these narratives are interwoven with the Sumbo narratives: they relate to the war and the interviewees' encounters with the Sumbo story. The personal narratives serve to explain the narrator's right to tell the particular story.

As I have noted in the Introduction, the interviewees do not include information about Sumbo's murder of the missionaries as part of the narrative which constructs him as a hero. Although the core-image of a hero makes it difficult for them to include narrative detail which might undermine or destroy the core-image, I still felt the need to investigate the apparent disregard of such a prominent event connected with Sumbo. In Mavule's interview, he explains that the proletariat reading the newspapers were excited by the report of a successful escape by a ZIPRA guerrilla; the readers were conscious that they were reading Rhodesian propaganda and therefore excluded all negative information as fake (pp80-81). The Sumbo story caught their attention because the Rhodesian propaganda machine seemed to be telling a story against itself. In 1977 there was confusion and doubt as to whether Sumbo had actually killed the missionaries as the Rhodesians were reporting, or if the Selous Scouts had committed the murders, as the nationalist leaders claimed at Geneva.

The exclusion of, or the glancing reference to the information about the murder of the missionaries was at the time a conscious process, and through subsequent retellings it seems to have become habitual. Ngwenya and Nyoni in their interviews do not admit that they are conscious of the issue of the murdered missionaries at all, although it is extremely unlikely that they could

be unaware of it. Nyathi simply refers to it as “a shooting at Kwezi” (p84). If the exclusion of this information is deliberate, it could be that the speakers fear that it would offend the envisaged English-speaking audience and damage the ex-combatants’ standing in the eyes of this audience. It is also possible that ex-guerrillas in the 1990s feel unable to argue that the killing of missionaries was ever compatible with the ideals of the liberation struggle. They feel equally that this killing is incompatible with the figure of Sumbo as hero, as they have created him. They therefore remove the incident completely from their narratives, and if questioned, condemn it.

Moyo does not exclude the information about the murder of the missionaries and does not attribute it to Selous Scouts. He is quite clear that he and his fellow-combatants thought that the murder of the missionaries might have been committed by Sumbo or a colleague (p96). He unequivocally states that the guerrilla group of which he was a member was not happy with the news of the murders and that it was not ZIPRA policy to attack the Roman Catholic Church because it was seen to support the liberation struggle (p96). Moyo links Sumbo’s attack on the missionaries with his desertion from ZIPRA, which Moyo admits problematises Sumbo’s hero status (p98). However, Moyo values Sumbo as a hero figure because of his successful escape and the recruitment that the escape inspired.

The first three narratives are presented here in a sequence that serves to draw attention to the particularities of each, highlighting a sense of progression and contrast between them. Mavule, in his interview, provides a clear account of how the Rhodesian newspaper reports formed the basis for discussions that, through repetition, eventually came to represent Sumbo as a folk hero.

Nyathi's interview reveals the power that this hero figure held for the recruits. His narrative demonstrates that the Sumbo hero figure was able to appropriate additional legends that serve to reinforce the original Sumbo core-image and core-cliché. Moyo's interview provides something of a contrast to the preceding interviews. He knew Sumbo, and his interview reveals an unresolved tension in his mind between Sumbo the soldier and Sumbo the folk hero. Like Mavule's and Nyathi's interviews, Moyo's interview reveals how the Sumbo folk hero emerged from the proletariat's reaction to the reports of Sumbo's escape. It is only because the guerrillas' supporters at the Falls represent Sumbo as a hero to Moyo, that Sumbo finally becomes a hero for him as well.

II

Interviewee: Nkhosana Mavule Sibanda

Approximate age: Mid forties
Place: Nkayi
Date: December 1998
Present at the interview: Christopher Hurst, Andrew Nyathi
Language/s used: English

Notes: Nkhosana Mavule Sibanda had been part of the discussion group at the Simukai Collective Farming Co-operative where I first heard about Sumbo as a folk hero. He is a ZIPRA ex-combatant and now works as a rural farmer. He

showed great interest in the research, particularly in establishing the authenticity or lack thereof of Sumbo's escape.

Mavule: My name is Nkhosana Mavule Sibanda

Hurst: And where were you in 1976 when this escape happened?

Mavule: I was working in Supersonic.¹

Hurst: And currently what are you doing?

Mavule: Now I'm just at home and I'm just becoming a peasant farmer and I'm busy cultivating the fields.

Hurst: And you were a guerrilla?

Mavule: Yes.

Hurst: When did you leave the country?

Mavule: I left the country in 1977.

Hurst: '77. OK. Let's talk about your memory of Sumbo.

Mavule: Well, if I try to bring my memories up of Sumbo, it was during the rain seasons. It was the end of 1976. When it appeared in the paper that Sumbo escaped from the prison everybody was captured by the story and it was quite interesting in those days to have information about freedom fighters. Now this one, really it was a bit moralising people in a way that it showed a defeat to this mis-government because this guerrilla managed to escape and they quite hunted him and they couldn't get him. The stories that came really that were quite interesting is that at

¹ A company that manufactures electronic equipment such as radios.

one time the fighter which was searching for Sumbo landed on the road because it had no fuel anymore. That was quite interesting and then we said “Sumbo is a great man. They can’t find him.” And the other time, when they followed Sumbo they said they last saw his footprint crossing the Zambezi, when the Zambezi was full, and that one really, it was quite an interesting story. I’m just talking about stories that came from the newspapers. It was quite interesting that Zambezi was full and that Sumbo went in. How I don’t know. But people imagined that something or some sort of ZIPRAs had some magic to do these things or to just disappear. You see, they could manage to just disappear anywhere, anyhow. And the other thing which makes me feel Sumbo was a great man is that he created an atmosphere that recruitment was quite easy, created an aware of recruitment because everybody was saying, “well I have to go so that I must be a different man, I must do wonders.”

Hurst: Did it affect you?

Mavule: It affected me as well, really. I felt my morale was high, even if I was working, I could speak the whole day, politics in the company, you see, about the boys, because we called them *abafana*, you see. Whenever there’s a target that they have done we said *abafana bachile* [the boys they hit], we used to call it like that, you see, even though there was some quite big people, old people but we called them *abafana* regardless of

what age, you see. So really you will find that people were not considering whether we are Ndebele, whether we are a Shona speaking person but the Sumbo, I think nationally really everybody was interested in the story that he, Sumbo, have escaped and the manner was quite nice but they couldn't find him. They used the dogs, they used police, they used the soldiers, they used the spotter planes but they couldn't find Sumbo. Just imagine.

Hurst: Did it make you feel that if you joined the liberation struggle you would be safe?

Mavule: I felt that I'd do more than Sumbo. I felt I would do more than Sumbo and I felt it is possible to fight these people. Look, they can't get, they can't find Sumbo.

Hurst: Now tell me how people read the papers because the papers were full of propaganda; they often reported guerrillas being killed and their kill figures. Explain the view people had of the liberation war from the newspapers and then how they set about reading the Sumbo stories in the newspapers.

Mavule: Now there are two things, if we are talking about in the paper. I think the business of the paper was booming those days because everyone was wanted to have his copy and you'll find that the sellers of the papers will tell you, the paper is finished, you see. Now, I think the Sumbo story motivated people to join the armed struggle, that is another important thing. And reading the

paper, although whether it was a distortion or what, but people they were interested that a ZIPRA combatant have escaped. That distortion they didn't bother. They were not interested actually but what they were interested to, is Sumbo have escaped and who is a ZIPRA combatant.

Hurst: Now this story and the manhunt happened on successive days. You know there was the original story and then there were follow-up stories. Did people buy papers?

Mavule: People were interested to know whether the white forces are going to capture Sumbo again. And that proved to be a failure because the last story which came they saw the footprint getting into the river, Zambezi, the biggest river in Zimbabwe.

Hurst: Tell me the process of reading the papers.

Mavule: OK, first thing in the morning is to rush to a newspaper seller. That was the first thing and it was sold in the morning only, it couldn't be a later copy. It was only in the morning and what really happened, for instance, at work, you'll find people at tea-time or before they go for work in the morning when they are outside the gate, they were having some groups reading about this story and they showing others that, look, what happened today, look what happened today, reading the headlines, showing each other and everybody was shouting "Sumbo, the Great, Sumbo is a hero." You see. And even at tea-times you will find people are still reading, lunch-time people revising this

same story, you see. So the Sumbo story was so popular than what other events that were taking place by those days...

Hurst: So would people then, having read the paper, would they then recount a verbal version of the story to each other and where would that happen?

Mavule: That is what people used to do. You know the paper those days used to tell a lot of propaganda about the freedom fighters. There were a lot of distortions. You see, for instance, if there is an operation which has been carried out and the whites' soldiers were defeated, really they will tell you that so many guerrillas died and one white soldier injured, you see. They won't say any people from their side who died, they won't mention that, you see. If they [the guerrillas] kill people who [the Rhodesians] tell so and so died in crossfire, those kind of languages. But about Sumbo stories that he killed somebody, they didn't bother, that he robbed a store, they didn't bother about it. But what they were interested to is, Sumbo is uncapturable.

Hurst: OK, what I'm interested in now is having read it in the paper, how did the verbal tradition begin?

Mavule: Now the stories were just, like did you hear about Sumbo? I opened the Zambian Radio: it tells us that Sumbo did not kill anybody. Sumbo was on the operations, was captured with others and after being captured he ran away from the prison. You see, those were quite stories. Somebody will tell me, I

heard from the BBC. This was kind of the stories. Somebody will tell you, I heard from the Moscow Radio. It was an international thing, you see. People were interested to read the papers, people were interested to listen to the radio and different radios, you see, radio stations, internationally and locally. And compare which one tells the truth. So in the morning, when people meet, somebody's going to tell you what he heard from another radio station, not the Rhodesian station, you see. He will tell you something else that I heard this story, I heard this story about Sumbo... What actually happened is that people could meet other ex-combatants and they give them a different message. Those were kind of messages that used to come, not from the scene that Sumbo was or from somebody who saw Sumbo from the relatives, myself I didn't get that. But I used to see people who saw his combatants [comrades], who saw freedom fighters in the bush or at home, that they were narrating a different story about Sumbo. That Sumbo - they won't catch him, whatever way, because he was trained to hide and disappear and they won't catch him, you see. When trained like that you can disappear anywhere. That was kind of influence, that was kind of understanding that we had and that made us the young people to be more interested, that you wanted to join the freedom fighters and become freedom fighters as well and fight the Smith regime.

Hurst: When you went into Zambia did you ever meet Sumbo?
Mavule: No. I only read about Sumbo in the paper, that was all.
Hurst: And you've never met him?
Mavule: I didn't met him. Ja. Even in Zambia I didn't met him, I only heard that he's that camp and I was in a different camp.

Interviewee: Paul Nyathi

Approximate age: Early forties
Place: Bulawayo
Date: December 1998
Present at the interview: Christopher Hurst, Andrew Nyathi
Language/s used: English

Notes: Paul Nyathi is a ZIPRA ex-combatant. He grew up in the urban areas in Njube in the townships of Bulawayo. He composed popular liberation songs during the struggle. Now he runs his own small business designing and making clothes. He is related to Andrew Nyathi

A Nyathi: Tell us your name, your identity, where you stay and so on.

Paul Nyathi: I'm Paul Nyathi and I stay here in Pumula, I'm a former ZIPRA combatant, who trained in Angola. I joined the struggle in 1976, that was December, end of the year. I went through Botswana, then to Zambia. I stayed in the first camp, I stayed is Nampundo camp.

Hurst: OK, before we go on to that, you were inside the country. Do you remember Sumbo's escape?

Paul Nyathi: Yes.

Hurst: What do you remember about it?

Paul Nyathi: The time this incident took place I was living at Njube, one of the suburbs here in Bulawayo. We read this in newspapers and it was broadcast over the air, in radios, that there was a shooting which took place at Kwezi, and we were told that this guy was Albert Sumbo. Then, you know, when that shooting took place Sumbo was arrested within a few days, he was arrested. He was taken to gaol. But during the process of the findings we were told that the man had escaped. So they described the way he escaped. It was terrific.

Hurst: What did they describe?

Paul Nyathi: They said he was fast, fast as a bullet and he just disappeared and they couldn't apprehend him anymore. It was 1976. When I joined the struggle, now I had that in mind that at one time it was a shooting in Zimbabwe and the man who did it was Albert Sumbo. Then I was very, now, I was quite inspired. I wanted to know if that man reached back in Zambia and when I was there at Nampundo I discovered that Albert was there. People were talking about him.

Hurst: Was he a hero amongst you?

Paul Nyathi: Yes, he was a hero.

Hurst: And was he a hero back in the country before you left?

Paul Nyathi: Yes, amongst normal citizens.

Hurst: How did they make him a hero?

Paul Nyathi: The way he escaped made him a hero.

Hurst: So they told each other stories.

Paul Nyathi: Yes, they do, of course. You know, to escape from someone who is carrying a gun, it definitely makes you a hero, because he was not armed by then. They'd taken his gun.

Hurst: Did this inspire people to join the struggle?

Paul Nyathi: Definitely.

Hurst: How? Did it inspire you?

Paul Nyathi: It did inspire me because I was recruited by him because I thought probably if you are a guerrilla, this is a magic somehow which just makes you disappear from the regime. We were very much inspired.

Hurst: You believed that at that time?

Paul Nyathi: Yes, I really believed it.

Hurst: And your reasons for joining the struggle were? Partly him?

Paul Nyathi: It's part of it. But now the internal situation was not conducive for me to continue, you see, really.

Hurst: What about it was not conducive?

Paul Nyathi: There was just a good number of reasons, you know, there was segregation. Segregation is broad. There could be segregation at work, socially, you know, its quite a broad.

Hurst: So there was a political awareness?

Paul Nyathi: There was a political awareness. There was definitely inspired.

I believed this situation and Sumbo inspired me to leave the country.

Hurst: Did he also make you feel that, you know, if you went to join the struggle you were joining a war and people died in wars. Did he make you feel safer to join the war?

Paul Nyathi: Yes. You know, after this incident I thought probably if he joined the liberation movement, you know, there is magic that prevents you from dying, you know. That's what I thought, I had to feel that if I join these guys probably I'd just disappeared from the regime. I don't fall prey, you know, that's what I believed.

Hurst: And others around you?

Paul Nyathi: That's what they believed. It's like if over the radio, if you heard the regime claiming that they killed two or three guerrillas, you would just deny it. They are lying. You can't kill a guerrilla. That's what we believed in.

Hurst: At that time they used to report a lot in the paper?

Paul Nyathi: Yes, they used to report a lot in the papers but you couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it because I thought those people had the magic, you can't kill them.

Hurst: OK, so now you're in the camp.

Paul Nyathi: Now when I was in the camp I met Albert Sumbo. He was a

reserved guy. He was very reserved, he was not friendly. Then I thought probably it was because of the situation which he went through.

Hurst: Tell us about that situation.

Paul Nyathi: The situation is when he went back to Zambia ZAPU or ZIPRA leadership were suspicious about him. They thought probably the regime just let loose and he just disappeared so that he could collect information there at the rear for the enemy. So he was living under frustration, he was very frustrated because he knew that the leadership is very suspicious about him. But from the look of things he was just a free man, we really know he was not sent there by the Rhodesian forces. He really escaped from their hands. So at Nampundo we stayed together, that's true, till a time when I went to training. I left him there. Sumbo was a very, very reserved guy. You couldn't discuss a lot with him. You just Hi! Hi! And he just keeps quiet. He was not even friendly to the instructors. Just imagine.

Hurst: Was this a refugee camp?

Paul Nyathi: It was a refugee camp, a transit camp.

Hurst: And did he want to come back and fight or not?

Paul Nyathi: No, even though he wanted to come back, because I know he wasn't happy with the conditions at the rear there but the command, the high command wouldn't allow him to come back. He was just sitting in camps. He was bored. He was just

imagine. And when, you know there was a bombardment that took place at Nampundo, bombardment which took place at Nampundo and this guy was like, he was detained. I don't know for what reasons, probably for misbehaviour, I don't know.

Hurst: Sumbo?

Paul Nyathi: Sumbo was detained.

Hurst: Sumbo, put in a prison?

Paul Nyathi: Put in a prison. No there was this Zambian prison which was adjacent to our camp so that's where he was together with other comrades who were detained there for different reasons. But when the Rhodesian airforce struck the prison, Sumbo managed to jump over, you know, the prison had high Durawall,² but he jumped that Durawall. Some of the comrades died in there, so that proved to everyone that the guy is a hero. Because the wall was very tall but he managed to jump over that wall, how we do not know. But during this day we couldn't just think of jumping and leaving the prison and going elsewhere but there was a bombardment. He managed to show the rest that he was a hero...

Hurst: Were you there then, when this bombing took place?

Paul Nyathi: I wasn't there, I just heard about it. The bombing which took

² A wall constructed from concrete posts with sections of solid concrete slotted in between the posts.

place at JZ,³ it was in 1978, I was there.

Hurst: OK, let's talk about the other bombing, when did that happen, which years?

Paul Nyathi: In 1978.

Hurst: The other one?

Paul Nyathi: That other one at Nampundo, it was earlier. It was still early '78 and end '78 another bomb took place at JZ, I was there. And you know what happened after the bombardment at Nampundo, he was moved to JZ where there used to be our youngsters, young boys, you see. So when that bombardment at JZ took place, I was there and Sumbo was there. But he managed to escape again, without any injury.

Hurst: Tell us about that.

Paul Nyathi: You see, it was mid-day after lunch and then we were all relaxed. We were just surprised because we just saw these jet planes approaching and we were not suspecting anything. All of a sudden they started pouncing, pouncing, you know. People were running all over, some getting injured and so forth. Until such time everyone was out of the sector and they were escorted by helicopters. The helicopters managed to land there and the soldiers alighted and started shooting tent by tent, tent by tent, shooting inside the tents, you know, assaulting, that's what happened and when they reached Sumbo's tent but that one I didn't see but some reliable sources said they left a message,

³ JZ Moyo was the name of a refugee camp.

frightening Sumbo “we know you are around” and so forth, “wanted to kill you” - but I didn’t see that. So he managed to escape, I managed to escape. So after that bombardment we just separated. I went to a different camp. I left Sumbo there. We never met until we came back home.

Hurst: Tell us about meeting him back here.

Paul Nyathi: Here I saw Sumbo, we greeted each other, you know, we used to talk to each other. He was just a quiet guy but we knew each other though we couldn’t go into details. Then he started driving these emergency taxis 404s⁴, I don’t know if it was his car or if he was driving for somebody else, I really don’t know but I used to meet him, to talk, greet each other, but he was just as reserved. Sumbo is such a reserved guy he doesn’t want to talk much. He just doesn’t want to talk much, you cannot tell what he is thinking. You know, he is just reserved. So we met and met and met, just greeting each other until that time when I got a job in Harare. So I didn’t see Sumbo anymore up till now, I haven’t met him.

Hurst: And your opinion of him as a popular hero? What do you think? Do you think he escaped and what do you think his contribution to the struggle is?

Paul Nyathi: You know his contribution is great, it is enormous because he

⁴ Emergency taxis are privately run forms of commuter transport, more recently in the form of mini buses, transporting people to town from the suburbs and townships. In the early 1980s the fleets consisted mainly of Peugeot 404s.

recruited many people. He made people here in town aware that there is an armed struggle going on out there. So most people left town. Because, you know, when the armed struggle started here it was like people from rural areas were close to the borders were going to join the struggle but people in towns were very reluctant, but soon after Sumbo's incident people started moving out of town so I really regard him as a hero. He recruited many people.

Hurst: And do you believe he escaped?

Paul Nyathi: Yes, I do believe, I really believe he escaped because, you know, if he hadn't escaped, if he was being used by the Smith regime, then we could have heard a lot about him being saved by the regime but they never said anything about him after his escape so I really believe that Sumbo escaped. Probably the guy was properly trained so I really don't know where he was trained. I think he was properly trained.

Interviewee: Ernest Moyo

Approximate age: Mid forties

Place: Bulawayo

Date: December 1998

Present at the interview: Christopher Hurst, Andrew Nyathi and Pussen
Tabengwa

Language/s used: English

Notes: This documented conversation was recorded after Moyo had already given us a full account of his story. In this second telling, the interviewer's questions led Moyo through a repetition of his account of the Sumbo story. Moyo was a ZIPRA ex-combatant. He operated as an engineer and later as a zone commander in the SZ2 zone. His name in the liberation struggle was Robson Nkhabinda. He trained with Sumbo in Tanzania and crossed into Zimbabwe, in the same group with Sumbo, to operate in the Victoria Falls and Jambezi area. Nowadays he runs a small mining business.

Hurst: How did you join the liberation struggle and meet Sumbo?

Moyo: I stayed with Sumbo at Francistown, Botswana, in prison, that was August 1975. Because I left this country in 1975, July - it was Rhodes and Founders Day - it was a holiday, that was on the 14 July.

Hurst: What made you join the struggle?

Moyo: To me as a young boy, it was like an adventure. I didn't have, exactly, politics because I had gone with my brother and my cousin; those people who took me and said let's go to Zambia.

Hurst: You crossed from Tsholotsho or Plumtree?

Moyo: We crossed to Botswana from Plumtree.

Hurst: So you met Sumbo in prison?

Moyo: We met Sumbo in prison.

Hurst: Why were you in prison?

Moyo: We were in prison that time because there was no refugee camp or transit camp, because we were few, and they had to keep us in prison

and then take us secretly in planes to Zambia... at Magorogoro [in Tanzania] we started training at January. It was that time when ZIPRA and ZANLA were forced to be that one organisation, ZIPA... We trained with Sumbo there, he was there.

Hurst: What is your memory of him as a recruit with you?

Moyo: The memory of him, it was Sumbo, because if you are thirty and this man come to be known more than other people, you cannot forget him. Even if somebody tells you “do you know who-who-who?” – “Oh, that one we saw sometimes being punished,” always punished, you know. He was sometimes punished.

Hurst: Why?

Moyo: He was not having hundred percent discipline.

Hurst: Give us examples?

Moyo: An example like going out. “Where is Sumbo?” When it’s time to call us from somewhere. “Where is Sumbo?” He’s gone for the line, where there were civilians gone for, sex-what, here, there. Who would be missing? Sumbo is one of those guys.

Hurst: Tell us about coming back into the operational areas. How did you cross?

Moyo: We were crossing using dinghy, you know these dinghies... we take about seven, seven guys crossing, you know the Zambezi. We look where the Zambezi’s wide, so that water’s not going very fast, so we use those points. So we called them points. So we got other ones who stay that side in Zambia guarding the point, tactically not seen,

not guarding like this - guarding as guerrillas, not seen - so somebody cannot see you but you are on guard. We were using those tactics, the ground was clear, we'd take us cross across, to the area. We crossed the area. We following the unit of Sumbo. We were with Sumbo all those times. We crossed followed the unit of Sumbo, it was already inside. We were going reinforce what? That unit. As a platoon, because we were going in three sections.

Hurst: And you all had different tasks to do. What was your task?

Moyo: That time? That time my task was an engineer. I was going to plant mines, land mines. To see there, what, otherwise, some expect there were *amapersonnel mines* [siNdebele plural form], I go in front.

Hurst: And what was your unit going to do?

Moyo: Our unit? What was it going to do?... In fact we were in the operation areas. So we were given operations with the commander in that area. Your section must go and attack this, this. Your section must go and attack this, that, that, that. We were not coming from Zambia with missions, we were taking the mission from the commander inside.

Hurst: So what was your mission? Your group's mission, you talked about attacking the farms.

Moyo: No, we have been given missions by the commander. If the commander thinks, today go and attack the what, what - Munetsi farm or what farm - we must go and attack. We weren't think we must attack this, we must attack this, no. We took our commands;

today such and such a unit must go to attack Victoria Falls; this unit must go to attack Ndlovu Camp. This unit must go to attack...

Hurst: And Sumbo's unit was told to attack Peter's Motel.

Moyo: Ja.

Hurst: Tell us about the effects of the hotel attack.

Moyo: Before that unit, there was another attack we did ourselves, we attacked Ndlovu Camp. We attacked Munetzi Farm, where we attacked a white man there - killed him. We attacked Ndlovu Camp. It was there that - it was freedom guerrillas around. But after attacking that hotel it became worse. So that hotel, there was tourists inside, and it was the aim of the attack, was to attack the tourist point. So that those tourists must know there is war; they must not come here; if they come here they are sponsoring what? The Rhodesia regime. They come with money. So it was another aim. We must attack that thing, so they cannot not come, cannot come. So as Sumbo attack that place, that place come to be worse with Rhodesian forces.

Hurst: The Rhodesian forces mobilised.

Moyo. Mobilise the area and comb the whole area. Trying to move each and everyone outside.

Hurst: And what happened? Did it split you all up?

Moyo: They splitted us there, they started to move in small units, helicopters, small units, helicopters, in the area...

Hurst: What happened when you heard about the attack on the missionaries?

Moyo: No, we just heard that the missionaries had been killed but we were not happy with it because as we in Zambia we were told the Roman Church, they were supporting us. They didn't talk that we must attack them. We were surprised.

Hurst: Did you know who had done it?

Moyo: No, no. We didn't know exactly who has done it, but we thought otherwise it can be Sumbo, *uyahona* [you see]. Because there was Sumbo, there was Ngongotshi there, those guys who left us there. So we thought it can be the two of them, but we didn't exactly sure, but we were not happy with it.

Hurst: How did you hear about Sumbo's arrest?

Moyo: We heard that Sumbo was arrested, when he come to the Falls. We heard that Sumbo had come to Falls with a helicopter, captured. We heard about it from the civilians. A guerrilla was captured but we didn't know it was Sumbo exactly but there was a guerrilla was captured. But we thought it was Sumbo or Ngongotshi. ... After that when Sumbo escaped, is where we heard it is Sumbo...

Hurst: So let's talk about hearing about Sumbo's escape.

Moyo: We heard about Sumbo's escape - a guerrilla escaped - and somebody brought us a newspaper, somebody brought us a newspaper - the guerrilla escaped, Sumbo . A guerrilla escaped. That's why we seen the helicopters, too much helicopters in the area.

It seems that guerrilla who's captured, otherwise he's giving them what? Information. Helicopters up and down, helicopters up and down, the whole day. The second day, we heard by somebody carrying a newspaper, "do you know this guy Sumbo, he ran away." "Ah, Sumbo he ran away." Ah, somebody with T-shirts wearing Sumbo. The people printed T-shirts.

Hurst: How did they do it?

Moyo: I don't know how they did it but it was secret T-shirts. There were other people seen wear a Sumbo T-shirt - Sumbo T shirts. I don't know whether it's people or a business man who thought of that - because business men sometimes think of things. We have seen them in the Victoria Falls.

Hurst: The peasant people were very excited.

Moyo: Ja, They were very excited and they were congratulating us "one of your heroes, Sumbo, escaped." "You know, Sumbo escaped," and they were very happy, they were very happy. It mobilised many supporters, if somebody who didn't know there's guerrillas fighting for the liberation movement, they know, they come to know. There's a guerrilla, "that man escaped is Sumbo." Otherwise I can say, in short, he organised for us. So many people interested in the area, "I want to go there, I'm Sumbo, I'm Sumbo." It spreaded, so other people, we take them, other people we recruited, other people. Some come to us to go to Zambia, "No I want to go to Zambia, go and fight - Sumbo."

Hurst: What is your feeling about Sumbo?

Moyo: Now? Now, I feel Sumbo is a hero and he must be respected as a hero for what he did. Although he was not given a mission to go where he was captured, you know. That's why some don't recognise him as a hero because he wasn't captured on a mission. That's why in Zambia they think this guy was used. If they say go and attack that house, but not there, and then you come and attack it, then you get captured. Your heroarity [heroism] must be clean, *antsho* [isn't it]. Yes, he deserted from the unit, *uyabo* [you see]. Of course you're congratulating Sumbo as a hero, but he deserted from the unit, that's why in Zambia they think so many stories.

Hurst: Why do you think people think he didn't escape?

Moyo: Those who think he didn't escape, they are the people who were not here in action. Who were outside, they'll say lot of things, you can hear a lot of things, *uyabo*, you can hear a lot of things, *uyabo*.

Hurst: So you, as a guerrilla, you think there was a big difference between the guerrillas who were operational and the organisers?

Moyo: Ja, there was a big difference because we are the people who were telling them information. As you said when you come here that "we wanted to come and see exactly the people who were in action, not to hear about those". We were in action.

Hurst: And you were junior to them.

Moyo: Ja, we were junior to them. So to tell somebody senior to you, *uyabona*, he doesn't tell you more, otherwise he will think you want

to know better than him. But, of course they were not wrong to say Sumbo was not captured. They had to think so many things *nyabona*, because a rumour comes in so many ways.

* * *

Mavule's interview is particularly valuable because in it he narrates how the Sumbo folk hero was constructed. He explains how the figure originated from selected information taken from the media, which through repetition in discussions by men was then fashioned into the Sumbo folk hero myth. He was particularly concerned about historical accuracy and wished to recall as much detail as he could. Unlike the other interviewees, he does not extend his own narrative beyond events that he actually witnessed, nor does he attribute to Sumbo motives for his actions. The story of what happened to him is very controlled and becomes woven into the story of Sumbo as hero. Mavule's own presence in the story gives authenticity to his account of the events, much like a witness's statement in an official investigation.

In the recorded interview, I introduced the name of Sumbo soon after establishing Mavule's identity (p77). His response establishes Sumbo as a core-image since the word unleashes in his memory a range of 'facts' concerning Sumbo. He tells us that Sumbo's escape represented a defeat for the Rhodesian government: it demonstrated the magical powers of the ZIPRA guerrillas and produced a wave of recruitment (p78). He then develops his narrative, for this particular telling, in response to the Sumbo core-image. He relates narrative detail that explains how these perceptions of Sumbo's escape occurred, and provides the political and social context in which heroic qualities were attached to the name of Sumbo. He places his narrative within the context of the

BISHOP'S KILLER ESCAPES AT VIC FALLS



ALBERT NOUBE

Mail Correspondent: BULAWAYO

THE 'TERRORIST' who admitted killing seven people, including Bishop Adolph Schmitt, a Catholic priest and a nun, escaped from custody at Victoria Falls yesterday morning.

Sounds of shots were heard in the town soon after 8 a.m. as Albert Sumbo Noubé ran through gardens and jumped over hedges wearing a pair of red underpants and an orange shirt.

A visitor at the Victoria Falls Hotel said a soldier ran to the pool area shouting: "Everybody out — there's been a contact at Peters." Peters Motel was the scene of a killing on October 30 when a gang of terrorists murdered Mr Robert Calvert.

This was one of the killings admitted by Noubé when he appeared in Bulawayo Magistrates' Court on December 31, and it is understood he was taken to Victoria Falls in connection with this case.

A massive manhunt was launched immediately after Noubé's escape and it is understood footprints, possibly his, were found on the banks of the Zambezi River.

When they were asked about the incident Police both in Bulawayo and Salisbury said "no comment"; but a Bulawayo man who returned from Victoria Falls yesterday said the whole community was talking about the escape.

When he appeared in Bulawayo Magistrates' Court, Noubé admitted having had terrorist training in Tanzania.

He also admitted:

- The murder of Mr Calvert;

- The murder of Victoria Falls farmer Mr Arthur Rosa Cunningham at home, Franco Farm, November 8;

- Placing and detonating landmines on the Victoria Falls railway line Masul Bridge on November 2 and December 1;

- A robbery at Gwaleng store and the attempted murder of John Hartley on November 27;

- The murders of Bishop Adolph Schmitt, Father Possenti Weggärtner and Sister Marja Francis at Lupane December 5 and the attempted murder of Sister Eriensried Kauer on same date;

- The murder of Lunenburg Corporal Charles McLennan at Umhambi Cocktail Bar and of Mr Austin Nyoni at Ikhwazi Club, Bulawayo, on December 11;

- The attempted murder of Mr Antonio Camacho and the robbery of 11 Park Store, Bulawayo, December 22.

aggressive Rhodesian propaganda campaign against the liberation movements (p81). In its oral recreation of Sumbo as hero, the proletariat ignored material that did not fit its purposes (p81), and in so doing evolved an oppositional form of propaganda in support of the liberation struggle. Mavule remembers the sources of the Sumbo core-images (pp77-78), and tells how the Rhodesian government-controlled newspaper articles provided the vital building blocks, pieces of 'real' information, which, through repetition in discussions, became fashioned into the Sumbo folk hero (pp79-82). Mavule remembers the events in detail, from newspaper articles read twenty-one years ago, but he only recalls the information about the escape and the unsuccessful search for Sumbo. He remembers the heavy rain (p77) which is reported in the headline "Rain hampers manhunt" (*Herald Correspondent 1977c*), the spotter plane landing on a road to refuel (*Herald Correspondent 1977d*) and Sumbo's footprints at the edge of the Zambezi (*Mail Correspondent 1977*). The newspaper representations of Sumbo as a criminal are ignored.

The work environment at Supersonic (p77) in the 1970s, where these discussions took place and where radios were manufactured, would have been a male space since it was then unusual for women to be represented in significant numbers in the manufacturing workforce. The political discussions which took place at home would also have taken place amongst men. It is in repeated tellings of Sumbo's escape that liberation ideals were fused with the information selected from the newspapers, until what evolved became a

BIG MANHUNT FOR ESCAPED KILLER

Herald Correspondent: BULAWAYO

ARMY, AIR FORCE AND POLICE combed the south bank of the Zambezi at Victoria Falls yesterday for mass killer Albert Sumbo Neube.

The security forces used helicopters, spotter planes and dogs in the manhunt, but Neube, the terrorist who has admitted the murder of seven people, was still at large last night.

Neube escaped from his cell at Victoria Falls Police Station on Saturday morning when he was being given breakfast by two African policemen.

A Police source said one of the jailers was armed and stood guard while the other, unarmed, unlocked the cell door.

Neube, who had been shackled with handcuffs and leg irons, charged the door before the unarmed policeman holding his breakfast could enter the cell.

Both policemen were knocked off balance, and Neube, who must earlier have snapped the chains linking his shackles, was able to race through the Police station, vanishing in thick bush across the main Victoria Falls road.

The policeman who chased him were not able to shoot immediately, because there were some children in the line of fire.

Shots

Later some shots were fired into the spot in the bush where Neube disappeared.

He was last seen in a European's garden where the gardener gave Neube a drink of water.

According to the gardener the man had cloth wrapped around his wrists and ankles.

Police believe the cloth was a ripped off part of a blanket Neube had in his cell.

A Police source said it was not known how Neube was able to free himself from his fetters, but when he ran from the cell he was going "like a rocket".

Neube had been in Victoria Falls for about four days, describing to Police how the attack on Peter's was on Monday, December 30. He had alerted the Police to an arms cache.

The Police source said Neube was to have been brought back to Bulawayo soon.

"We are using everything we have in the search, but we are being hampered by the thickness of the bush," the Police source said.

"It is heartbreaking because our capture of this killer was a tremendous morale booster for the Police and the country and then this has to happen.

"All the normal precautions were taken and it was just one of those things.

"The hunt will continue and I still have hopes that we will catch him.

"He has had the opportunity to cross the Zambezi because there are places he could walk across, and it is a very big part of the country.

Zambia

"But I don't think he will go to Zambia; he is too much of an embarrassment to the terrorist factions there as he has admitted in court to so much, especially the murder of three Roman Catholic missionaries.

"If he goes to Zambia he will be a dead duck."

Police headquarters in Salisbury yesterday confirmed Neube had escaped but made no further comment.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Law and Order said last night: "Any comment on this subject would have to come from the Minister (Mr Hilary Squire) himself. It was, in fact, impossible to contact him today and it seems probable that no statement would be available until tomorrow afternoon."

standardised story about a man called Sumbo who was 'uncapturable'.⁵ Mavule successfully articulates the core-cliché that describes Sumbo when he explains that what concerned the men who discussed Sumbo was that he was "uncapturable" (p81). They ignored any information that represented him as a criminal: the idea that Sumbo is 'uncapturable' is present in most of the stories and in the song about him (pp68-69). It is nevertheless not expressed as a standardised formulaic construction, and narrators often assume the core-cliché to exist so strongly in the popular imagination that it can be evoked by the name Sumbo; this is what occurs in the song remembered by Gaduza (pp68-69). In Mavule's narrative, we are able to understand how Sumbo's uncapturable quality forms the basis for hero creation because it represents a defeat of the Rhodesian forces and therefore becomes a personal ideal for guerrilla recruits.

Mavule's claim that the Sumbo stories created a wave of recruitment for ZIPRA is important because one of the power struggles within the liberation movement centred on the allocation of resources according to the number of recruits attracted to each of the liberation organisations. The numbers of recruits also demonstrated the political power base that these organizations could command. Josiah Tungamirai describes how, by 1979, "the recruitment process had gone through three phases: voluntary recruitment, press-ganging and voluntary recruitment again" (1995:40). He explains that the Organization for African Unity and host countries, Tanzania and Zambia, tended to allocate funds to the liberation armies according to the number of recruits in the

⁵ Though the word 'capturable' is listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Vol II 1989:875) it is rarely used; 'uncapturable' is not listed and seems to be a coinage made either by Mavule or by some earlier narrator to whom he has listened.

Rain hampers manhunt

Herald Correspondent
BULAWAYO.

THE big manhunt for Albert Sumbo Ncube, which has swung west from Victoria Falls, has been hampered by heavy rain which fell over a wide area yesterday.

Ncube, a self-confessed murderer, has been hunted now for more than 80 hours by a combined operation of Army, Air Force and Police.

They have been combing the remote, sparsely populated area about 30 km from here, following tracks heading west near the Kazangula road, which were probably those of Ncube.

On Saturday footprints, believed to be those of Ncube, were seen on the banks of the Zambezi River which runs along the same west-east line as the road.

But it is feared the heavy rain could wash out the tracks and the

trackers and dogs will need all their skills to pick up the trail again.

Spotter planes and helicopters, out at dawn each day, had to be called back because of the weather yesterday.

Ncube (26) escaped from cells at Victoria Falls Police Station on Saturday morning, lying in wait and knocking two policemen off balance with the cell door which they had opened to give him breakfast.

He had been taken to Victoria Falls to help Police in their investigations into terrorist incidents.

Ncube ran through the BSAP African quarters, which back on to the cells, and Police were unable to fire at him for fear of hitting children and people in the area.

Ncube doubled back into the thick bush which borders the south edge of

the town and is thought to have headed west.

Roadblocks have been flung across the lonely Kazangula road as the search moves west following the tracks.

The Zambian border is a short way to the north across the Zambezi and the Botswana border, less than 20 km to the south, giving Ncube a chance to head into either country if he escapes the security forces net.

Detective Superintendent Dave Blacker, who is in charge of the CID aspects of the hunt, said from Victoria Falls Police Station, from where the hunt is being co-ordinated, that the vegetation along the river is very thick.

"But the area is very remote and sparsely populated — it is a hunting concession area — and there are very few places where he could get food," he said.

Ncube, who was due to re-appear in Bulawayo Magistrates' Court on Friday, has admitted the murder of the former Bishop of Bulawayo, the Rt Rev. Adolph Schmitt, and the two missionaries with him, and the murders of Mr Robert Calvert at Victoria Falls Motel, Mr Arthur Ross Cumming, a local farmer, Lance Corporal Charlie McLeod and Mr Austin Nyathi.

A statement concerning Ncube by the Ministry of Law and Order said an investigation was being held.

The statement read: "A full and urgent investigation into the circumstances of the escape has already been instituted and should this result in a fault on the part of any one person or persons responsible, they will be severely dealt with."



THE cell block at Victoria Falls Police Station where Ncube was being held.

training camps, thus causing the rival parties to vie with each other for recruits. This led to the abduction of children from mission schools, most notably, in the case of ZANU, from St. Albert's Mission and in the case of ZAPU, from Manama Mission (pp68-69).

Mavule also tells us that Sumbo's escape and subsequent 'disappearance' were proof, to the proletariat, that the guerrillas possessed magical powers (p78). This belief made the idea of enrolling as a guerrilla attractive to the youth because it provided a sense of safety for them and reversed the social power dynamics related to age and patriarchal control. Mavule provides a clear account of Sumbo's footprints leading into the Zambezi river, which offered evidence that the guerrillas had magical powers (p78). In his account, there is a large, very full river, which presumably could not have been crossed by an ordinary man; there are footprints - but no body.

Mavule uses performance techniques to demonstrate Sumbo's status as a hero. He adds dramatic emphasis to Sumbo's name by rhythmically drawing out the syllables. Through the performance of Sumbo's name, the appellation acquires a significance greater than that of merely identifying the person of Sumbo. Mavule further supports Sumbo's hero status by presenting to us, through the use of dramatic dialogue, the idea of the masses embracing Sumbo as a hero figure as seen in phrases like, "Sumbo is a great man, they can't find him" (p78), "well I have to go so that I must be a different man, I must do wonders" (p78) and "Sumbo, the Great, Sumbo is a hero" (p80). This dialogue enables Mavule to "quote" the proletariat and adds a sense of authenticity to his



REFUELLED, the Cessna takes off to resume the search for the prisoner.

HUNT FOR KILLER HAMPERED BY STORM

Herald Correspondent
VICTORIA FALLS.

THE HUNT, on the ground and from the air, for escaped murderer Albert Sumbo Ncube (26), concentrated in an area more than 30 km west of Victoria Falls, is now in its fourth day.

Conditions in the area are not helping members of the large Army, Air Force and Police net that has been cast over it.

On Monday heavy thunderstorms in the vicinity washed out tracks believed to be those of Ncube. The rain continued during part of yesterday.

PEACEFUL.

Victoria Falls itself is as peaceful as ever, with tourists from all over the world hardly aware of the manhunt going on in the isolated north-western corner of Rhodesia.

The size of the security forces contingent has not diminished with every available man engaged in the hunt to track down Ncube. It is thought he is still wearing the leg irons he somehow broke to escape from his cell at the police station here on Saturday, and these could slow down his movements.

Ncube escaped while helping Police in their inquiries into terrorist incidents.

The area in which he is thought to be hiding is inhospitable, with little available in the way of man-made shelter or food.

Ncube appeared at Bulawayo Magistrate's Court on December 21, on various charges of murder — including those of Bishop Adolph Schmitt and two missionaries — and other acts of terrorism.

He admitted the various charges in statements

placed before the court and was remanded until Friday.

Mr Robert Vinsen, manager of the Victoria Falls Hotel, yesterday denied Sunday newspaper reports that soon after Ncube escaped a soldier ran to the pool area of his hotel shouting: "Everybody out, there's been a contact at Peter's."

"I have made inquiries about this and it is completely untrue," said Mr Vinsen. "The first news we heard of the escape was three or four hours after it happened. Somebody who had gone into town was told about it."

A spotter plane of the Police Reserve Air Wing landed on the Kazananga Island on Monday after taking part in the search for Ncube.

The pilot of the air-

craft a Cessna 172, there were high winds the landing strip and instead of circling—he had 30 minutes of left — he put the down on a long, straight stretch of burning road.

It was guarded all the night by troops. The plane was refuelled yesterday morning and took off safely.

narrative.

* * *

Paul Nyathi's interview begins with an extended conversation about Sumbo in which he confirms that the Sumbo story arose from an oral tradition based on the newspaper reports of the escape (p84). Nyathi also confirms that Sumbo's escape proved to the proletariat that the guerrillas possessed magical powers to disappear (p85). He tells how the Sumbo story raised the consciousness, amongst the urban proletariat, of the liberation struggle, and he gives Sumbo the credit for the recruitment from urban areas into ZIPRA (p91). Nyathi was amongst those young men inspired to join the liberation struggle because of the Sumbo story, although he admits that political consciousness also played a part in this decision. Some political consciousness would have been necessary for him to respond to the Sumbo story and join ZIPRA. His interview demonstrates the power that the Sumbo figure held for him. Throughout the interview he defends Sumbo's hero status and provides details of events in the camps in Zambia, which further support the Sumbo core-image and quality of uncapturability

The interview begins with a conversation in which it is established that the Sumbo core-image was fixed in his imagination while he still lived in the Bulawayo township of Njube. He expresses Sumbo's uncapturable quality in the core-cliché – "they said he was fast, fast as a bullet" – and performs the core cliché with dramatic vocal energy. This is the only moment in the interview when Nyathi seems overtly to use a performance register. He qualifies the phrase further by adding, "he just disappeared and they couldn't apprehend him any more" (p84). The gun was a powerful symbol for

guerrillas, their recruits and for the rural communities in which they operated. Nyathi has used the imagery of the gun to form his core-cliché. Sumbo was “fast as a bullet” and he now returns to the imagery of the gun to explain that Sumbo was a hero because he was successful even when robbed of his power. Nyathi says, “[y]ou know, to escape from someone who is carrying a gun, it definitely makes you a hero, because he was not armed by then. They had taken his gun” (p85). If for Nyathi the gun is a symbol of power, then magic is a metaphor for even greater power. It provided a sense of safety to the young men contemplating joining the ZIPRA army.

Nyathi tells us that the belief in the guerrillas’ magic led him and others to become skeptical about the reports of guerrilla deaths in the newspapers. The oral forms of oppositional propaganda created by the proletariat ran deeper than just the representation of Sumbo as a hero. He explains that the people around him simply rejected the Rhodesian government’s propaganda, especially the reports of guerrilla deaths, and replaced it with their own belief that guerrillas could not be killed. Frederikse quotes the comments of Bob North, who worked in the Rhodesian intelligence corps, regarding the efforts of the Rhodesian government to convince the rural population that guerrillas were being killed:

[Body displays were a] nasty but effective operation. See, the locals were told by the *terrs* that they were immortal, so we’d leave a few bodies lying around of *terrs* that we’d killed in contacts, in the locals’ huts and kraals. If we had a high hill which could be seen for miles

around, we'd stick a body up it. Good deterrent. Or a helicopter would fly over kraals carrying a net full of dead bodies for everyone below to see. (1982:126)

The belief that the guerrillas had magical powers was strong enough for Chas Lotter, a Rhodesian territorial soldier, to say that the body displays were only effective if shown at the deceased's village, to people who knew the dead (Lotter in Frederikse 1982:128).

In Nyathi's interview, the belief in the magical powers of the guerrillas does not lead to Sumbo's escape being predictable; rather the escape is a glorious affirmation of the guerrillas' magical powers. Nyathi only begins to add narrative detail to the Sumbo core-image when he tells two stories of Sumbo as a successful escapee (pp88-90). Nyathi's information about Sumbo, that he was an undisciplined soldier, concurs with Moyo's description of Sumbo, yet both completely accept Sumbo's status as hero (pp88 and 91; 93 and 98). Nyathi is sympathetic to Sumbo's frustration in the transit camps in Zambia and critical of the ZIPRA officials' doubts about his escape at the Falls. His total belief in Sumbo as a hero reflects the division between the fighting guerrillas and the ZIPRA officials. His two stories are presented in defence of Sumbo's hero status.

The first narrative recounts a story he heard of how Sumbo, who was in prison,

jumped a high Durawall to escaped a bombing raid by the Rhodesian forces on Nampundo camp. This story proves to Nyathi that Sumbo is indeed a hero and is uncapturable. In the later story, the Rhodesian forces also recognize Sumbo's heroic status, as is evidenced by their note threatening him. When pressed, Nyathi admits that he did not witness this incident but implies that it was a matter of general belief.

* * *

Ernest Moyo supports the idea that Sumbo is a hero because his escape was an heroic act and the stories of his escape mobilized people to support and join the liberation struggle. Unlike the previous interviewees, Moyo knew Sumbo as a recruit before the heroic stories about him were created. In his narrative, he sees Sumbo on the one hand as an undisciplined and disobedient soldier, and on the other, after his escape, as a successful trickster and folk hero. Interestingly, in Moyo's mind Sumbo's mischievous behaviour threatens to undermine the authoritarian power of the ZIPRA leadership. Moyo, like Nyathi who met Sumbo in Zambia after the escape, also portrays Sumbo as an undisciplined soldier during the training in Zambia and Tanzania and when operating in Rhodesia (pp93,98). Moyo knows Sumbo, and this sets up an interesting tension within the narrative: his personal knowledge of the man prevents Sumbo from becoming an important figure in the narrative until after his escape, when Moyo accepts the popular representation of him as a hero figure.

The power of Sumbo's name lies in its effect on the public and in the fact that it is widely known, and as a result Moyo speaks it with great care. In the

following statement Moyo uses Sumbo's name as the core-image for remembering him as a hero, whilst still remembering him as a problematic recruit:

The memory of him, it was Sumbo, because if you are thirty and this man come to be known more than other people, you cannot forget him. Even if somebody tells you "do you know who-who-who?" – "Oh, that one we saw sometimes being punished", always punished, you know. He was sometimes punished. (p93)

He returns to the theme of Sumbo the undisciplined soldier towards the end of the interview, when he tries to reconcile Sumbo's attack on the missionaries, his desertion from the ZIPRA army and the ZIPRA high command's suspicions about the escape with the popular representation of Sumbo as a hero (p98). Moyo finds that the contradiction between the official ZIPRA perceptions of Sumbo and the popular perception of him amongst the rank and file guerrillas highlights the division between the proletariat and the politicians and commanders (p98). The division 'guerrillas/strategists' seems valid both in the historical context of the story and in the present context of the telling. It reveals the unresolved divisions of status and power evident in the various present day conflicts between a 'ruling elite' and a large, excluded group of ex-combatants (Bhebe and Ranger 1995b:21).

In Moyo's story, there is no 'safe place': both the transit and training camps outside Rhodesia and the operational areas inside the country are dangerous, and survival requires both mental cunning and physical fighting skills. The

dangerous places of the liberation war are an environment in which trickster behaviour seems most appropriate for survival. The omnipresent danger of the war makes it necessary for the proletariat at the Falls to construct the Sumbo hero figure. Moyo's narrative demonstrates how for them the name Sumbo, as a core-image, became an emblem of personal survival and triumph over colonial oppression. He does not externalize the core-cliché that Sumbo is uncapturable; instead he is always adding to the meaning of Sumbo's name through the variety of ways in which he performs it.

Hofmeyr suggests that if oral historical narrative is to be considered an oral literary genre, it must be argued that it contains aspects of performance, even if these aspects are not found consistently in the stories (Hofmeyr 1993:106). In the light of this suggestion, I think it is important to notice the extensive use of performance that Moyo draws on in his narrative. As in the case of the other interviewees, Moyo is performing for both the small audience, comprised of the interviewing team, and a wider envisaged audience. His speaking styles move between clear explanation of a situation, as for example when he discusses Sumbo's hero status in relation to his desertion of his unit (p98), and the presentation of events through rapid fragments of word images, the creation of dialogue, and the different rhythmic presentations of Sumbo's name. He repeats the name rhythmically, for example, when recounting how he heard of Sumbo's capture and later escape at the Victoria Falls (p97). Moyo seems to be grabbing at fragments of information and images partly because he is 'seeing' and remembering very vivid experiences, and partly because he is

attempting to select from them for public presentation. He is also speaking in his second language, English. The effect is a dramatic high speed presentation of word images rather than a structured monologue. The listener is left grabbing at the implications that surround the images, with Moyo providing little explanation. These sections are easier to listen to than to read. The use of character and dialogue are common storytelling and performance devices, and Moyo draws on them more frequently and easily throughout his narrative than do the other interviewees.

Moyo's use of performance techniques, word images, dialogue and the special rhythmic values he gives to Sumbo's name lends authenticity, immediacy and character to the narratives. His use of call and response techniques holds audience attention and builds consensus between himself and his listeners. These performance techniques combine in the climax of his story, his account of the public reaction to Sumbo's escape (pp97-98). He uses plenty of dialogue, conjuring up characters from the local community who speak: 'Sumbo' is the most important word they speak. Finally, he leaves off his use of dialogue and jumps to an image of people from the local community who wear T-shirts with Sumbo's name printed on them. He shows, rather than explains, that the Sumbo name was acquiring great currency.

Moyo needs us to understand that many people are speaking Sumbo's name, and as a solo speaker he realizes that dialogue will not serve his purpose. He then shifts to use a register associated with group communication, singing. An

example of this occurs when he presents to us the images of many young men, inspired by the Sumbo escape, wanting to become ZIPRA recruits. He first speaks the dialogue of a character in hushed tones, " I want to go there". Then, to indicate that many people are saying they want to be like Sumbo, Moyo sings, "I'm Sumbo, I'm Sumbo", followed rapidly by speech, "[i]t spreaded, so other people, we take them, other people we recruited, other people" (p98). Moyo performs for us the people literally singing Sumbo's praises.

Another performance device Moyo uses is the call and response between the performer and the participating audience. Although the use of this device is more stylised at big public events, because a larger audience requires more energy and structure, the device appears in Moyo's story in a subtle form. Moyo's version of call and response is more than a rhetorical question and serves the purpose of emphasising a point, shaking up the listener and building consensus.

Moyo uses this technique to make us understand and agree that the attack on Peter's Motel had a political agenda. He explains that tourists spending money at the Victoria Falls were supporting the Rhodesian government and says, "if they come here they are sponsoring what? The Rhodesian government" (p95). Rhythmically, his question requires an answer, because he pauses after it. He then supplies the answer just as his listeners are about to speak, making it slightly more participatory than the usual rhetorical question. If we are quick, we can get the response in before he does. He may even evoke a gesture of

agreement from his listeners. He uses the form “what” when phrasing his question in English. At other times, as for example in his discussion of the ZIPRA officials’ suspicion of Sumbo (p98), he uses the siNdebele words “*antsho*”, meaning “isn’t it”, or “*uyabo*”, meaning “you see”. As we have seen in the example of his use of singing, the performance techniques build on each other. When Moyo tells us of Sumbo’s capture and arrival at the Falls, he says of the captured guerrilla, “It seems that guerrilla who’s captured, otherwise he’s giving them what? Information. Helicopters up and down, helicopters up and down, the whole day”. (p97). Moyo adds to the answer dramatic images of the Rhodesian air force helicopters, and uses repetition to make us fully understand the implications of giving information.

Despite the fact that he has difficulty in reconciling the man he knows and the hero figure, Moyo accepts, finally, that Sumbo deserves his hero status. In fact, all the interviewees conflate, at times unconsciously, the two figures. They believe that Sumbo owns his own name and succeeded in escaping; he is therefore synonymous with the hero created in the popular imagination. They claim that from Sumbo, people derived a new level of consciousness concerning the liberation struggle, which led them to enlist in the ZIPRA army. Levels of recruitment were important at the time because the liberation struggle had been disrupted during 1974 and 1975 by the détente agreement between South Africa and Zambia (1995:42). After 1975, recruitment began to increase again because with Mozambican independence, a large and accessible front opened up for the liberation war. Tungamirai reports that the growing impetus

of the revolution caused the ZANU camps in Mozambique and south-eastern Zambia to become flooded with refugees (Tungamirai 1995:42). As the numbers of ZANLA recruits grew, ZAPU continued to recruit volunteers from refugee camps in Botswana and Zambia and from nationals working in South Africa. The growing enthusiasm for revolutionary activities amongst ZAPU supporters and the increased recruitment is probably the result of a general growth in political awareness, but in the narratives this growing political awareness is emphasised as being centred on the Sumbo hero figure.

III

Interviewee: Matheus Chibya Nyoni

Approximate age: Elderly
Place: Bulawayo
Date: June 1998
Present at the interview: Christopher Hurst, Andrew Nyathi
Language/s used: English

Notes: This extract concerning Sumbo is part of a longer interview in which Nyoni told his own liberation story. Nyoni, who was unwell during this interview, died later the same year. He was born in Mhondoro, a rural area near to Harare. Ethnically, he can be categorised as Shona. His first language was chiShona although he spoke siNdebele and English well. Prior to the ZANU/ZAPU split he was politically active in the townships of Harare and Dsvaresekwa, and later joined the liberation struggle. When ZANU was

formed as a break-away group from ZAPU in 1963. Nyoni continued to support ZAPU. He had a strong Marxist ethic and did not support divisive ethnic divisions, preferring to focus on broader issues of race and class. Nyoni was one of the first ZIPRA officers to be trained in the Soviet Union, in January 1964, along with Achim Ndlovu, the late Robson Manyka, Brigadier Ambrose Mtiniri, Wilfred Mvaya and the late John Moyo. He was arrested inside Rhodesia, successfully escaped from police detention at Centenary and returned to Zambia. He was captured a second time and as a terrorist sentenced to death. This sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. He continued to be politically active inside prison, setting up educational structures and an underground newspaper. After 1980, he worked in the co-operative movement, was founder and chairman of *All is One Co-operative*,⁶ and played an active role in community development.

Hurst: How in prison did you get to hear about Sumbo's escape?

Nyoni: In fact, what was happening in prison – the way we were getting this information is that – first of all, newspapers were censored, terribly, you could not find any item that relates to political activities of any kind.

Hurst: They were cut out.

Nyoni: Ja, they were cut out by officers and it was next to useless to have to worry yourself to read the newspapers. So what was happening is that, all the parties that were in prison had their

⁶ *All is One Co-operative* was a supermarket co-operative formed by ex-combatants, some of whom had been detained at Khami Prison.

own supporters, warders. So we were the strongest one with warders supporting our party. So what was happening was that, when we realised the censoring of news, we sat down and I was appointed editor of an underground paper, *The Voice of The Sentinel*. Now what was happening was that papers were brought in, particularly on Friday night, by our warders who supported us, and I would spend the whole night writing news on a toilet paper. Our people were sacrificing, contributing toilet papers, because each one was being given a toilet paper. So I would get about five or six, of this length toilet papers, to write and then make comment, editorial on that. So you must realise that when the news, even before we got the paper, it was spread all over the prison by some warders saying, "Albert is dangerous ja – and he is wonderful." The way how, he could, imagine a person leg-ironed and so on, cuffed and so on. He managed to how he could run away, escape from prison, police cells. Now we got the news, the newspaper was brought in, and I wrote the news item as it was and then made some comments. I must tell you it was a morale booster.

Hurst: For all the people in prison?

Nyoni: For all the people in prison. Really we felt he was a hero, as far as we were concerned; we were only fearful that perhaps they might capture him. Then later information filtered in to say that he was already in Zambia and we were very, very happy.

Hurst: And you were happy. How did they show they were happy?
How could you read that morale had been lifted?

Nyoni: By the way they were commenting and some could not eat that day, you see that. Because they were very much excited that it has happened that way. As for me, I then felt we are nearing now, the end of the struggle. And it was just like that because there was not that much time from his escape, and the attainment of independence.

Hurst: But you didn't know that then, but you felt it?

Nyoni: I felt it.

Hurst: But you felt it because of his escape?

Nyoni: Yes

Hurst: So his escape inspired you to believe the war was finishing, why? How did it do that?

Nyoni: First of all, we felt that, when Albert escaped we put the whole guerrilla force in front of our mind and saw that. They were convinced that their skills are very now sophisticated. You know the way he escaped.

Hurst: How did he escape, tell us?

Nyoni: We were told that, in the paper, that he was being taken from the cell and he had policemen escorting him. I think perhaps, they wanted to take him to the office and so on. So from there he managed to escape. They were firing on all sides, but he managed to run away from them.

Nyathi: Right, there that raises a very important situation. There is Albert escaping and you are there [in prison] and you are in charge of the politics there [in prison] and there is this myth that the guerrillas can disappear and so on. Can you say something around that? How the rest of the other people who were not trained feel?

Nyoni: Yes, yes, although I was not free at that time, my belief is that. It so happens that during our stay in Harare I happened to pass by the post office and I found people commenting on the whole situation because it was before Smith had what? Had declared UDI.⁷ And he was saying he was going to declare UDI. And those people were say "Ah, yes, he will do that, but he won't last too long, because the guerrillas are so mysterious, they can disappear at any time, they can reappear at any time, where they are least expected." So I felt that we ourselves as trained guerrillas, when it happened, I felt that we were not alone in the praising of what had happened. The whole country, those who had access to the news, both press and radio, you see. We even heard people who were visiting their relatives, unfortunately I did not get [any visitors]. Because my relatives would only come during Christmas. So they were making those comments.

Hurst: What comments?

Nyoni: That it has been wonderful. Everybody feels that the struggle is coming to what? To the end. Because of his training, no one,

even Smith's soldiers can do that, what he has done - to escape when his legs are ironed, you see. So that part, really when we looked at it ourselves, we felt that he had a contribution to the whole saga in Zimbabwe. We look at Albert as an individual who had volunteered to join others, for the same cause. And we felt that, really, that spirit that has led him to do what he has done, is the same spirit that everybody, you remember there were what were called 'protected villages' Those people imagine, we were in prison, imagine, an old man who had had his home destroyed by fire by the Smith regime, when he hears that, the excitement to it. Silent excitement, you see.

Hurst: So even for the people in protected villages?

Nyoni: Yes, it was wonderful. So, you know, Albert's escape inspired quite a lot of people to be with the rest of the masses, trying to reach an end.

Hurst: To be recruited. You found this out after you came out?

Nyoni: Yes, yes.

Hurst: You never met him

Nyoni: No I never met him.

Hurst: If you met him what would you say to him?

Nyoni: [Nyoni gives a slight laugh] If I meet him I would have no language, expression, but to salute him. You see now. Because if you are fully convinced, you really see the truth and the cause in the person who is acting on your behalf. Rather perhaps my

⁷ The Unilateral Declaration of Independence made by the Rhodesian government in 1965. 117

expression would be to say, thank you comrade and weep tears. [a pause] You see now, because really, when he did escape hundreds of people were being butcher. People being sent to protected villages. Some who were not armed were shot trying to cross the Botswana border, the Mozambique border, to go and join the struggle. All those things were happening. Young men joined us in prison who really wanted to go and join the armed struggle. All those things you know, when someone carried out a heroic act like that, you feel he has done it on your behalf.

Nyathi: I think this happened when the Smith regime was saying, look you go out in your tens we'll kill you, go out in your thousands we'll kill you in your thousands and so on and they're register every day through the media that they are making this victory that and that victory and that victory. But yet now, here is somebody who brings about an event which turns around everything that they have said before.

Hurst: And it's a thing that was done by one person not tens of thousands of people. Because its done by one person it gives each individual courage.

Nyoni: Yes.

Hurst: Is that right... Did it ever enter your minds that this was a trick by the Rhodesian government to send him back?

Nyoni: No, his case was quite clear.

Hurst: Explain that?

Nyoni: Albert – in it, we saw a true patriotism fired by the suffering of his people in the whole country. If there is anybody who felt that way, differently, I think they were two hundred percent wrong. Two hundred percent wrong.

Interviewee: Joseph Ngwenya

Approximate age: late fifties or early sixties

Place: Bulawayo

Date: December 1998

Present at the interview: Christopher Hurst, Andrew Nyathi

Language/s used: English

Notes: Ngwenya is a well known ZIPRA ex-combatant and political prisoner. He works as a caretaker for the Bulawayo City Council at the City Hall.

Hurst: Just establish who you are and where you were in 1976 when you heard of Sumbo's escape.

Ngwenya: I was in prison, maximum prison...

Hurst: What is your name?

Ngwenya: My name is Joseph Ngwenya.

Hurst: And in 1976 during the liberation struggle where were you?

Ngwenya: I was in maximum prison at Khami.

Hurst: And it was political?

Ngwenya: Political, yes

Hurst: What is your memory of Albert Sumbo's escape and the effect it had on you guys in prison?

Ngwenya: Actually I don't know Sumbo myself. I only read about Sumbo when I was in prison '76. That he operated between Hwankie, Kamativi, he was only a guerrilla, as far as I read about him. So I read that he was arrested. And was put at Hwankie prison. Further I heard that he had escaped from prison and went to Zambia.

Hurst: Tell us the story about the shop.

Ngwenya: Well, when I read, I read that Sumbo invaded a shop, a white man's shop. Around there, there were people, then this man [the shop owner] ran away and Sumbo went to the till and took the money, I think some coins, and just threw some coins and told the people to pick some coins.

Hurst: Why did he do that?

Ngwenya: I don't know. I think maybe he was thinking that, that white man was exploiting those people and maybe people should enjoy to picking some cents and that day they were going to be happy because they have got some money which they were given by Sumbo. I don't know the idea, but as far as I'm concerned, I think those people were saying Sumbo was invading that shop, the white shop, because the white man was an oppressor or was exploiting them.

Hurst: Did the prisoners talk with each other about Sumbo's escape?

- Ngwenya: Yes, of course. We used to talk but not only about him but all that was happening outside.
- Hurst: Do you consider him a hero?
- Ngwenya: As far as I'm concerned, besides not knowing him, but I'm talking about what I heard about him, I'd say he is a hero. The heroism comes from what we used to do. During his operation there was a lot of stories about him. When you are operating and the young guys hear about your operation and they hear that you succeed they will be encouraged to go to Zambia and fight.
- Hurst: So he promoted the consciousness of the liberation struggle.
- Ngwenya: As far as I'm concerned, yes I think so.
- Nyathi: At that time did people think the fighting was just for the rural areas?
- Ngwenya: No, no, it's not only Sumbo that fought as the urban guerrilla. There are a lot of guys that fought here. He's not the only one as far as I'm concerned. There are numbers of people who operated here.
- Nyathi: Do you think his activities highlighted the struggle?
- Ngwenya: Yes, like any guerrilla if operate within the urban area the young guys in town will feel that the struggle is going very well.

* * *

In their interviews both Nyoni and Ngwenya recount that Sumbo's status as hero amongst the political prisoners originates from the newspaper reports of his escape. Nyoni's narrative describes how the reports of Sumbo's escape in the newspapers had been censored by the prison authorities but were later

smuggled in by prison guards who were sympathetic to ZAPU. The newspaper reports were preceded by verbal reports of the escape from the prison guards. Finally, the story was circulated through an underground newspaper of which Nyoni was the compiler. Nyoni reports that the news was a great boost to the morale of the prisoners.

Nyoni had been arrested twice by the Rhodesian forces and brutally interrogated by them. He had once successfully escaped back to Zambia and was imprisoned at Khami Prison after his second arrest. He was sentenced to death for his 'terrorist activities' but the death sentence was commuted to a life sentence as part of the political concessions surrounding détente. This biographical information explains why Sumbo in his narrative so strongly represents political idealism. One feels it is Nyoni's, not Sumbo's, political idealism that is revealed in this narrative.

The narrative style he uses is very different from that of the other interviewees, who are all first language siNdebele speakers, and it may be that this is indicative of his different cultural and ethnic background. While Sumbo remains a hero figure in Nyoni's narrative, he does not call upon the name 'Sumbo' to evoke the hero figure as a core-image, nor does he concern himself with the core-cliché, that Sumbo is uncapturable. Rather, Nyoni's narrative style seems to show the influence of his political career and Marxist philosophy. He does not perform Sumbo's name the way the other interviewees do; he calls him by his first name, Albert, and in so doing,

establishes Sumbo as junior to himself, the older liberation fighter. Marxist ideology influences Nyoni's narrative in that he addresses the historical and social context of the Sumbo story, which he then uses to construct Sumbo as a hero.

Nyoni constructs Sumbo as a symbol of justice for the Zimbabwean proletariat, and this produces the passion that informs his narrative. Nyoni links Sumbo's escape to an aspect of *ubuntu*⁸ through the notion that one person can stand for all. He then uses the idea of the spirit of the revolution to link Sumbo's escape to the imprisoned guerrillas and the Zimbabwean proletariat who felt themselves victimised by unjust laws and denied a voice, either to protest or to ask for change in colonial Rhodesia. The details of Nyoni's narrative do not primarily serve to glorify Sumbo as a hero figure, but rather to justify his own social and political beliefs. Sumbo nevertheless emerges as a hero as he is used to symbolise the values to which Nyoni is committed.

Nyoni does not really engage with the notion that Sumbo had magical powers. He finds in Sumbo's successful escape the image of a well-trained guerrilla and the promise of a successful resolution to the war (p115). Andrew Nyathi, also a ZIPRA ex-combatant, introduces the topic of the guerrillas' magical powers into the interview. He asks Nyoni how the "other people" who were not trained felt. Nyoni acknowledges that there was a belief that guerrillas had the

⁸ *Ubuntu* is often translated as humanity. It is a much broader concept which acknowledges the social inter-relationship between people, and links humanity to deeply moral and social inter-dependencies.

power to appear and disappear but he ascribes this belief to the proletariat and not to trained guerrillas. According to Nyoni, the trained guerrillas praised Sumbo's superior military training, while the proletariat praised his magical ability to disappear.

Nyoni's narrative is dramatic but not because he uses many performance techniques; he speaks with the confidence and energy of someone used to public speaking. The impact his narrative makes lies in his ability to match content with emotionally powerful images. He does this to great effect when he attributes Sumbo's heroism to the spirit of the revolution and describes Sumbo's escape as happening on behalf of the guerrillas in prison and the rural population who were confined in "protected villages". His point is given further impact by his image of an old rural man's "silent excitement" at the news of Sumbo's escape (p117). Again, Nyoni creates a powerful image of his feelings for Sumbo when he says that if he met Sumbo he would salute, thank him and weep (p118).

* * *

I have included Ngwenya's interview because his Sumbo narrative is very different from the others. Like Nyathi's narrative, Ngwenya's story demonstrates that the Sumbo hero figure is able to attract to itself other stories; but unlike Nyathi's narrative, Ngwenya develops his Sumbo narrative around one particular incident, the robbery of a trading store. This one incident appeared as a small item in a list of guerrilla and bandit activities attributed to Sumbo in the newspaper articles that reported his arrest for killing the

missionaries (*Herald* correspondent 1977a). The way in which imprisoned guerrillas selected this small item and expanded it into a story of heroism, is a further example of the selective reading which Mavule describes on page 81.

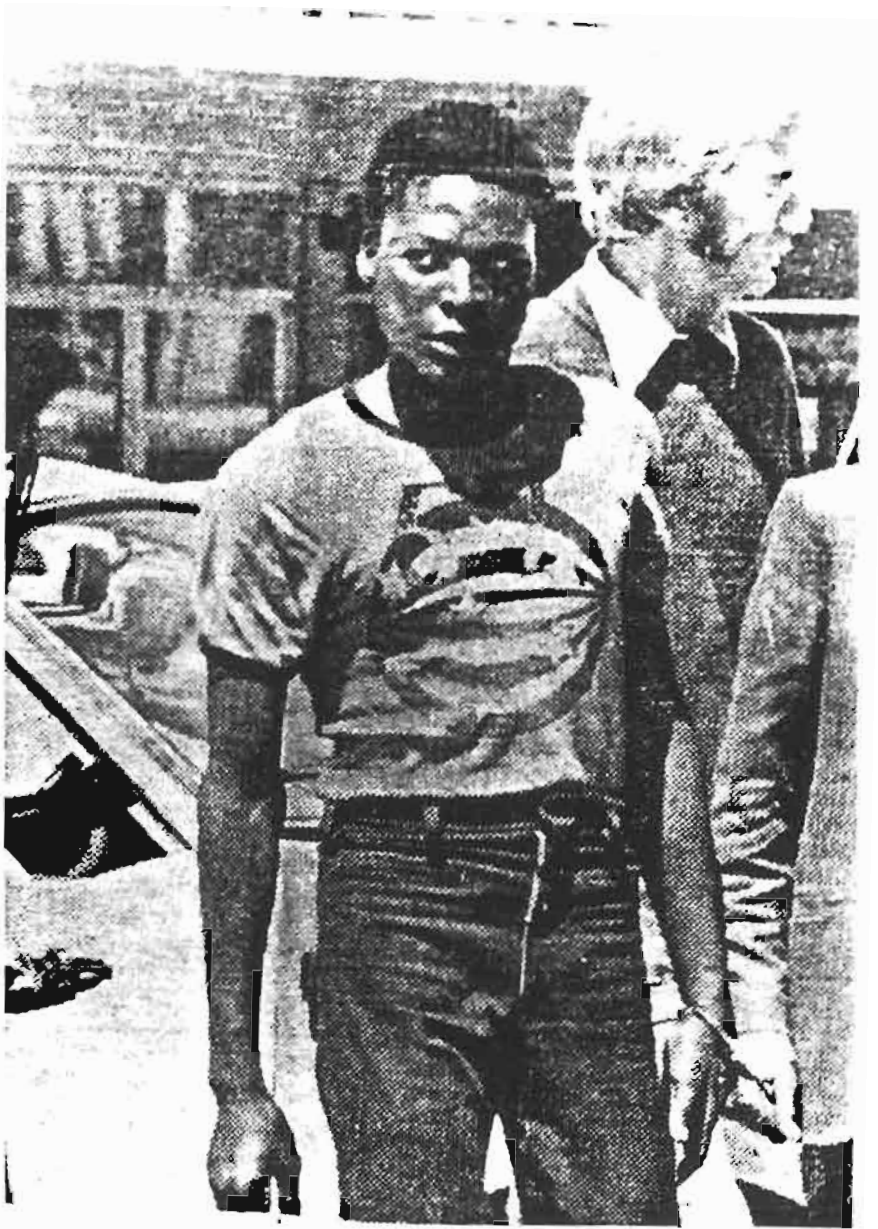
While Nyoni interprets the details of the escape to express broader political concepts that then represent his own political idealism, Ngwenya uses the details of the robbery and attributes specific motivations to Sumbo's actions so that the Sumbo figure personifies Ngwenya's own political ideals. For Ngwenya to create his narrative, he must build on the Sumbo core-image already present in the popular imagination. Ngwenya's narrative creates a different kind of folk hero, much closer to the noble robber or Robin Hood figure described by Hobsbawm (1972:41-57). Throughout the story, Ngwenya attributes political motives to Sumbo's actions. What is clear in the narrative is that Ngwenya uses the Sumbo hero figure to recapture his own political idealism in the liberation war.

Conclusion

This thesis has dealt with representations of Sumbo as a hero figure. It has also acknowledged that other representations of him exist. It has not attempted to establish factual information about the 'real' Sumbo, and given the purpose of my study, which is to investigate and discuss the characteristics of oral historical narrative in Zimbabwe, this has not been necessary. However, the different representations of Sumbo that exist inevitably raise the question, what of Sumbo the man? I can only offer a very brief account of the 'real' Sumbo that our research revealed.

From his sister and mother we established that when Sumbo was very young, his father and mother separated, at which time he went to live with his father's relatives (Interviews, MaMoyo 1998 and MaNcube 1998). He was a poverty-stricken child, who attended junior school at Regina Mundi, where Father Possenti financed his schooling. At school he was considered to be badly behaved and accused of stealing cash from registered letters sent to Father Possenti which contained school fees (Interviews, Ncube 1998). After leaving school, Sumbo worked as a gardener in Hwankie before going to work in South Africa (Interviews, African Rhodesian Police 1998). Whilst in South Africa, he was recruited and in July 1975 joined the ZIPRA army. He trained as part of the ZIPA force and survived the fighting in the Magorogoro camp in Tanzania between ZANU and ZAPU supporters, which caused the ZIPRA faction to return to Zambia. In late 1976 Sumbo entered Rhodesia and was part of the

unit that attacked Peter's Motel. After this, he deserted from his unit and seems to have operated as a bandit (Interviews, Moyo 1998 and *Herald* correspondent 1976a). On 5 December 1976, he ambushed, shot and killed Bishop Adolf Schmitt, Father Possenti Waggartner and Sister Maria Francis van den Berg, and wounded Sister Ermenfried Knauer (Herald Correspondent 1976b). Later, during the Christmas holidays, he returned to his mother's house in Bulawayo where he was arrested. His mother and stepfather were imprisoned in 1977 until the end of the war in 1980, for harbouring him (Interview, MaMoyo 1998). After Sumbo's arrest, he was interrogated and charged with a variety of crimes, including the murder of the missionaries. In early January 1977, he escaped from custody in the police cells at the Victoria Falls, where he had been taken by the Rhodesian police to assist with 'on site' questioning about the guerrillas' activities. He succeeded in returning to Zambia via Botswana (Interviews, Policeman 1998 and Ndlovu 1998). In Zambia, the ZIPRA high command interrogated him again because they were not convinced of the authenticity of his escape; their findings were inconclusive. After this, Sumbo was placed in a series of refugee camps and was treated with suspicion until demobilised in 1980 (Interviews, Ndlovu 1998). On his return to civilian life he worked for a while as a personal security guard to Stephen Nkomo (Joshua Nkomo's nephew). After being dismissed from this job, he worked for a while driving emergency taxis. Finally, he found work transporting marijuana into Botswana, for which he was arrested and served a prison sentence. While he was in prison, his wife and



Albert Sumbo Ncube being led into
Bulawayo Magistrate's Court December 14 1976.
Photograph courtesy of *The Chronicle*.

child died and he contracted tuberculosis (Interviews, MaMoyo 1998). He was released from prison in June 1999.

The real Sumbo seems to have been wily and resourceful; these are trickster characteristics. If we are to attribute heroism to the real Sumbo, it must relate to the fact that despite the superior power of the Rhodesian forces, he was able first to conceive of escape from them, and then to enact it. Sumbo's escape was not the impulsive act of an opportunist who sees a gap and goes for it: the fact that he had spent the previous night breaking out of his manacles and fetters and had dug through the prison wall suggests planning and premeditation (See Appendix).

What is remarkable about the recreation of this brave but problematic figure as a 'hero' in the popular imagination is that people entirely without access to the technology and resources that the Rhodesian government had at its disposal were able to create an effective figure of oppositional propaganda. The form in which they created and transmitted this oppositional hero, the oral historical narrative, allowed their propaganda to be transmitted easily by them during the period of the war, and has survived in the memories of some individuals for more than twenty years. These narratives exist and continue to be transmitted amongst people who have been willing to select and exclude according to their interests from the data available. Those who work in *written* texts who consider the incidents in which Sumbo was involved, either are politically obliged to take account of what is discreditable, or wishing for their own

purposes to do so, and remain dismissive or unaware of these narratives of heroism.

Barber and de Moraes Farias, in the Introduction to *Discourse and its Disguises* (1989:1-10), describe the discipline-specific fragmentation and the selective appropriation of aspects of oral literature that have characterised academic writing on the topic. They argue for a more integrated approach. In this study, I have accordingly felt free to speculate about the psychological needs of a particular group to create a folk hero who successfully defies the law and the authorities who seek to apply it; even though my primary emphasis has not been psychological but performative, I have preferred to understand the myth-creation process through its cultural dynamics. My study of the ex-combatants' interviews indicates an individual psychological and collective cultural process whereby each narrator recreates an ideal self, from selected material surrounding this exceptional event, Sumbo's escape, appropriate to his social context during and after the liberation war. The ideal recreation, that is to say the Sumbo of their narratives, gives meaning to the narrators' further actions.

I have examined the ex-combatants oral historical narratives and investigated both the cultural act of creating a popular hero, and the characteristics of the narratives in which the 'hero legend' is transmitted. I have also considered the sources of these narratives and their endurance through the changing contexts of the liberation war of the 1970s and the post-independent period of the 1990s.

Equally important, I have claimed and, I hope, demonstrated that significant formal and performance skills occur in this type of narrative, which takes place within apparently informal conversations.

Appendix

An Interview with an African Policeman

Interviewee:	The interviewee requested that his name not be disclosed
Approximate age:	Elderly
Place:	Bulawayo
Date:	December 1998
Interviewer:	Christopher Hurst
Language/s used:	English

Notes: The interviewee has now retired from the Zimbabwean police force. He worked earlier for the Rhodesian police. He was reluctant to discuss his story with the ex-combatant members of the research team present.

Ex-Policeman: I was a policeman at that time.

Hurst: Just tell us about Sumbo's escape.

Ex-Policeman: When Sumbo escaped it was in the morning at about 8 o'clock.

It was after Christmas towards the New Year, I'm not sure now. I was with another police officer. We went to the cells where he was detained, where we had left him overnight. We were going to feed him with some porridge or to give him breakfast in the morning. My colleague, the other police officer, opened the cell, opened the bottom part of it. He removed the key, the padlock and the key, when he opened the top one. All of a sudden the door was pushed and banged outside. It made this other police officer to fall and he fell over me. Albert Sumbo

escaped through the door. He fell. I had a P-One myself.¹ When he got up he had two bricks, he hit me with one brick on my chest and missed me with another one. So he ran towards the children who were playing with the swing. So I couldn't fire a shot because that shot was going to be directed to the children who were playing, in case I was going to miss him and shoot a child. He went through to the Chinotimba Township, we gave a chase. It was so sandy, he was not fast, we chasing were not fast. But we started firing on the air alerting other security officers who were around the Victoria Falls area. In the police station, and outside the police station there was a lot of movement and people moving up and down going for work, that time. So much again that it was difficult for anyone to fire, you know. He ran, always he was running towards the people, he knew we could not fire. And we couldn't. So the security forces gave chase. He ran towards the Bulawayo Falls road across to the motel hotel where he disappeared. There was an ambulance which missed him. This ambulance was going to Hwankie, very fast. He nearly hit him but he stopped because he didn't know that this person had escaped. There was a lot of firing in the area. As they recognized [Sumbo]. Because when I was chasing I said "Sumbo has escaped. Sumbo has escaped". Everybody gave chase, like that all the police officers from the

¹ A pistol.

police station, gave chase. When he was running there Sumbo was naked, he had only an under-pant and a yellow T-shirt, if I still remember very well, yes. He had broken some leg-irons, into two, and handcuffs, into two, and he had bandaged them with a rag of blanket, I think, which he was using. We'd given him only one blanket for that night, nothing else. And those handcuffs, we couldn't see them, leg-irons, we couldn't see them, but he was running freely. He disappeared in the bush, that was after, after Peter's Motel. But just because the other security forces were – they were behind him, chasing him. We were now a distance away from him. We went back to the police station while they continued searching for him. Because he ran towards the Zambezi river, I would say near the crocodile's farm, on that side. From there he disappeared. Then we came back. We went back to the station, started giving the report as how he had escaped, whilst others did a follow-up. So myself and this other police officer, we were together, were told to remain at the station and give some statement how he had escaped. We told how we had locked him in the previous night, that we had locked him in, we took off his trousers and other clothes, locked them outside. He was tied within the cell and what we noticed after he had escaped when we went back to the cell again, we realized that he had dug the wall, taken about – this old cell, it was made of mud, that cement, so he had taken

about two layers. Even if he didn't go that morning at eight o'clock, by nine or ten he'd have gone out.

Hurst: He'd taken bricks out of the wall.

Ex-Policeman: He'd take the bricks out. That's why he used two bricks to hit us, to hit me in fact. Because he heard us. When we opened there he knew people were coming to open, he knew it was me and Mike, other police officers, because it was only the two of us who were feeding him, so he knew it was so and so, and so and so who were coming. So he was ready. Because when he pushed the door also he lost balance and fell.

Hurst: Now tell us about the cells they kept him in because there were new cells and old cells?

Ex-Policeman: There were new cells but in those cells there were – the officers in Victoria Falls said they didn't want him to go into those cells. I think they thought he was going to influence other prisoners who were there. And they decided to take him to the old cell, that was very old, it had no security whatsoever. But just because they thought the cell was going to be guarded overnight and that did not materialize, the cell was never guarded.

Hurst: Did everyone get into trouble for the escape? Did you get disciplined? Did the soldiers get disciplined? What happened?

Ex-Policeman: Ja, I did. After about two weeks statements were recorded from us and the leg-irons were taken, we were told that they were taken to Harare, to the maximum prison. And the leg-irons,

then I was told by the big boss of CID at that time, that it was not our fault, this had happened before. That prisoners had broken some leg-irons and some hand-cuffs. So of course I was made to sign a memorandum with the other white guys [policemen] who were there because we should have not been there for eight, nine days. So I think they thought those people were loitering there, otherwise we had finished our job there we should have returned in time. But just because it was Christmas time the white guys there I think they started enjoying themselves.

Hurst: Did they get into trouble?

Ex-Policeman: They got into trouble as far as I am concerned. They were made to sign some memorandum.

Hurst: What's your memory of Sumbo? What sort of person was he?

Ex-Policeman: Well to me – I wouldn't say – Sumbo was not all that clever. He was only lucky on that day. Whether it could have been the training that he received from where – I don't know where he had got that training. He was just lucky because he had been in that cell for too long, eight to nine days, so he was studying this. He was lucky that he managed to break those leg-irons from there and when he broke the hand-cuffs, he used them on that wall and it was easy to dig that wall. So he could be there for Saturday, Sunday for the whole day he was never disturbed. He was only being fed. He was not very brave, he was only lucky.

He was only lucky to escape.

Hurst: Do you think he's a hero?

Ex-Policeman: Not me as such. I wouldn't say he's a hero. He was of course, cause when he came out on the newspapers, you know, people, you know, they made him to be a hero. Of course. I must say he's a hero because no one had escaped after given such a security, of leg-irons, kept by himself, no clothes there, because we thought if we left him with clothes he could commit suicide. He was the talk of the whole world, otherwise you know. Geneva conference they were talking about the killings of Bishop and so forth. So the members of the public in Rhodesia they took him as a hero.

Hurst: You were there when he was arrested?

Ex-Policeman: I was present when he was arrested. I was amongst the other officers.

Hurst: So tell us about his arrest?

Ex-Policeman: When he was arrested it was at – so Albert Sumbo was arrested at around twelve midnight. Prior to that I had visited a hotel in Bulawayo. Because I was afraid that if I could go and sleep no one would awaken me in time to go and carry out these raids. So I was going to be sober. So I thought of going to a hotel, fortunately in the same hotel where I was, Sumbo was there. I didn't know him, he knew me very well.

Hurst: Where did he know you from?

Ex-Policeman: He knew me from Dete, where I was a police officer in Dete.

He was a garden boy for 400 metres away from the police station. So I was a big man, he was a young man, so I couldn't recognize him any more because there were so many garden boys in that area. Being a young man he remembered me very well. But I would say after he was arrested when I asked him he said he knew me that I was so and so, so he mentioned my name. I said, "where do you know me from?" He said, "we were even together in that hotel", I laughed. It was that very same night, at about twelve midnight, we did some raids there.

Hurst: Where did you pick him up?

Ex-Policeman: We picked him up from his mother's house, yes. In Bulawayo in this suburb. He had just arrived like us because that hotel I think they'd closed at twelve midnight, so we got there after twelve. So he had just arrived.

Hurst: Had you been told to go and pick someone up from that house?

Ex-Policeman: Yes, there were quite a number of houses going to be raided on that day, I think it was on Friday, that was Saturday morning, if I'm not mistaken. So when we raided him he was in. We didn't know his name in fact. We were never told who he was, whether our senior police officers knew whom we were going to raid there. We were told to go and raid somebody like blah blah blah, with these names. So he came to the truck, we were many of us in that truck. When we were in the truck, we asked him

who he was. He said he was from South Africa. He said he was working in South Africa in fact. So I personally said to him so can you speak Afrikaans. He became so rude and say, "I'm not a boer, that I can speak Afrikaans." Then I said to him, I now realised what a character, during those days you wouldn't say to a white person, 'a boer', before the police officers. Now I said to others, definitely I said to others, "ah, ah, ah, this person is a dangerous person, he be a terrorist." You know, in a joking manner because I was not sure. By that time, when he said I'm not a boer, we had not yet hand-cuffed him or put him [in] some leg-irons.

Hurst: And your guns were lying around

Ex-Policeman: Lying around, lying around in the vehicle there. Then I said, "just put this man some hand-cuffs." Did put hand-cuffs. He looked me very strange. Then everyone picks up all his weapons. We drove back to the station. When we got to the station we met our white guys, officers, our senior men there. They said, "we've brought him, we've brought him." I think because our senior members had seen his photographs initially. When we brought him to the office they came and greeted him with his name. He didn't answer them, they greeting him again with Albert Sumbo. No, they said, "Hello Albert Ncube." He got astonished, he was surprised. They said, "are you not Albert Ncube." He didn't answer. Then they produced a photograph.

They showed me a photograph. I was quite amazed, cause he said "where did you get this photograph?" Asking a white police officer. They said, "why?" He said "I was never taken a photograph in Rhodesia and I was never arrested in Rhodesia, there's no way where you could have got this photograph. So you got this photograph in Botswana?" That's what Albert said. Now from there then he was asked by a white police officer to tell us exactly. He said we now know you, we know what you've done. I want the truth from you Albert Sumbo. I want everything. He freely and voluntarily elected to make a statement by himself. When he wanted to say the statement then the police officer said, "no, no, no, I don't want it verbally I want you to write it down. Can you write, Sumbo?" He said, "Yes." So my senior man, police officer, he ran to the younger office he brought some papers, a ruler, a pen. Now somebody was supposed to remain there. Then he refused and said, "no, I want this one," meaning me, he said, "I can only talk to this one." In fact he was mentioning my name, he remembered me.

Hurst: Now can we just stop for a second. So once he saw the photographs he knew that they knew he was a guerrilla.

Ex-Policeman: He knew they knew everything about him. He started crying, in fact, he shed tears of anger, you know, he was very cross. Then they gave him some papers. I think it was now about three a.m. in the morning. Roughly three a.m. in the morning. We were

given an office, we were now being only two that was in the security cells where he could not run away from me. There was heavy security there but nobody knew that Albert Sumbo had been arrested and it was Albert Sumbo. He started writing his own story in Ndebele, finished the whole foolscap, gave it to me I started translating while he was writing, taking some papers that he had finished, until the morning, late in the morning.

Hurst: And did he talk about the shooting of the missionaries?

Ex-Policeman: On those papers, yes, yes.

Hurst: What did he say about it?

Ex-Policeman: He started mentioning from the time – I think. Because he was asked to write the whole history from when he went out, I can't remember everything. I was translating from paper to paper, just going to there and they were taking the papers.

Hurst: You said to me he was sorry about killing the Bishop.

Ex-Policeman: He was very sorry about killing the Bishop.

Hurst: How do you know? What did he say?

Ex-Policeman: It was him because I asked him. Getting to that story where I started translating of the matter the Catholics, I asked him, he said he knew Father Possenti. He was afraid, he killed them because of his identity. He was afraid that he was going to be identified by Father Possenti especially. He mentioned him as Father Possenti.

Hurst: And was he sad about killing them?

Ex-Policeman: He was sad.

Hurst: How was he sad? How do you know?

Ex-Policeman: When he spoke about it he started touching his cheek and shaking his head. It appeared he felt sorry. I wouldn't know whether he was pretending cause he was under arrest. He could have done anything, he was a person who was trained. Now from there I started translating all his papers relating everything what came out from the newspaper.

Hurst: And afterwards, after the war when everything was over, you've met him around in town.

Ex-Policeman: Yes, I first met him in Hwankie, I think it was 1981 or '82. He had a relative in Hwankie, under the government. And we assisted him with another police officer to get a class two [driving] licence. It was after war so much that we were not against them.

Hurst: How did you behave when you met each other?

Ex-Policeman: No, it was so good

Hurst: You were friends

Ex-Policeman: Ja, we were friendly. He knew quite a number of members of the force there. We just laughing about his escape and he was laughing, he said you people made me to – I was punished more than here in Rhodesia when I got to Zambia. We were just laughing.

Hurst: He talked about Zambia?

Ex-Policeman: Ja, he is the one who told me that he had been arrested there.

Nobody could have told me that, it was him. He said they said he could not escape from Rhodesian cells never. So they thought he was an informer so they let him to escape.

Hurst: Is there anything more you want to say?

Ex-Policeman: Generally apart from that I would still add that Sumbo is just a criminal. To me he was just a criminal. To me he was just a criminal because if he came out from the prison after independence he continued committing the criminal activity. After 1980. He was not interested, I don't think he ever tried to join the army. He was never integrated,² I doubt.

Hurst: In your dealings with him, even when he was in prison, was he very politically aware?

Ex-Policeman: Never, no, no, no.

Hurst: What do you think excited him about the war then?

Ex-Policeman: That one I think, when he ran away from his group, I think he wanted only personal things, to have money and drink, women, things like that. Because he had a chance to join others, he had a chance to join others but he just wanted to operate by himself, as a bandit, I would put it in that way.

² In 1980 some of the members of the guerrilla forces were integrated with the existing Rhodesian forces to create the Zimbabwe National Army.

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Interviews:

These tape-recorded interviews are in the possession of the author of this thesis, at the University of Natal, Durban.

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- Dube, Sister. 1998. Recorded at St Luke's Mission Hospital, Lupane.
- Gaduzi, Makhathini. 1998. Recorded at Bulawayo.
- Krnamur, Sister Ermenfried. 1998. Recorded at Minda Mission, Kezi.
- MaDlamini. 1998. Recorded at Bulawayo.
- MaDube. 1998. Recorded at Bulawayo.

MaMoyo. 1998.	Recorded at Tsholotsho (translation by Andrew Nyathi).
MaNcube. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo (translation by Andrew Nyathi).
MaNgwenya. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo (translation by Andrew Nyathi).
Mapala. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo.
Mavule, Nkhosana Mavule Sibanda. 1998.	Recorded at Nkayi.
Moyo, Ernest. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo.
Mwasire, Teriary. 1998.	Recorded at Victoria falls (translation by Andrew Nyathi).
Ncube, Bishop. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo.
Ndolvu, Swazin. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo.
Ngwenya, Joseph. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo.
Nyathi, Paul. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo.
Nyoni, Christopher. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo (translation by Andrew Nyathi).
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Nyoni, Matheus Chibya. 1998.	Recorded at Bulawayo
Peter's Motel residents. 1998.	Recorded at Victoria Falls.
Tsholotsho Elders. 1998.	Recorded at Tsholotsho. Interviewees Nduna Tshuma, Saimon Peter Ndlovu, Sindi James Mazalu (Headman), and Makhathini Gaduza (translation by Andrew Nyathi).