Land, Agriculture, and Struggles for Belonging in Colonial Zimbabwe: A Case of Buhera, 1960-1970.

By

Lloyd Hazvineyi & Antonio Santos Marizane

Abstract

The article explores the dynamics of belonging in Zimbabwe using the belonging matrix. The study uses the case of the Gwebu area in the Sabi Reserve and covers the period between 1960 and 1970. The Gwebu area of the Sabi Reserve was home to a community of descendants of Ndebele migrants who migrated to the area in 1925. This group was led by Chief Daniel Fish Gwebu, and this resulted in the whole community being referred to as the Gwebu people. The study uses agriculture as a lens to explore various dynamics of belonging during the period between 1960 and 1970. Carefully balancing oral traditions and documentary evidence, the study sets off by identifying the agricultural prowess of the Gwebu Ndebele speakers as one of the major factors that allowed them to establish a semblance of independence from their neighbouring Shona speaking chieftaincies; the Makumbe (also known as the Njanja), as well as the Nyashanu. It also argues that the agricultural prowess of the Gwebu Ndebele people was a result of several historical factors. One such factor given special emphasis in this study is the evident historical interactions between white commercial farmers and the Gwebu people. These connections are traced back to the early years of settler rule in the Matabeleland region of the then Rhodesia colony. The study concludes by arguing that the agricultural success of the Gwebu people over the neighbouring Shona enabled them to build a Ndebele enclave, an aspect that allowed them to sustain their sense of particularism over time.

Keywords: *belonging matrix, Gwebu people, agriculture*

Introduction

The coming of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) to the Zimbabwean plateau in 1890 effected colonial rule. The granting of the colonization Charter to Cecil John Rhodes' BSAC resulted in the territory being subsequently christened Southern Rhodesia. Events that followed saw the massive expropriation of land which started with the creation of reserves in the southwestern tip of the country in 1897.1 Internally, this resulted in the reconfiguring of the social, economic, cultural, and political landscapes as communities of diverse historical backgrounds were brought together in the reserves. Reserves became the theatre of new multi-cultural interactions in Southern Rhodesia. The multi-cultural outlook of the reserves is well illustrated in the case of the Sabi Reserve, which covered the southeastern mainland to the eastern border with Portuguese Mozambique.

In 1925, the Sabi Reserve which covered Charter and VuHera areas saw an influx of Ndebele evictees following forced removals from Fort Rixon, Douglasdale, and Hope Fountain areas of Matabeleland at the hands of the colonial government. The Ndebele-speaking evictees who migrated under the leadership of their chief, Daniel Fish Gwebu, began to be referred to as the Gwebu people.2 They settled in an area that was traditionally administered by the Makumbe or the VaNjanja/Njanja people under chief Makumbe in the Sabi Reserve.3 Their settlement ushered in a new era of first-comer and late-comer relations and struggles over belonging.

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1 Reserves were vast tracts of land, often inhabitable and less productive, that were set aside for Africans in order to pave the way for white settler commercial farming. The first reserves to be created in Zimbabwe were the Gwai and Shangane Reserves in 1897.

2 This was after they had settled in the Sabi Reserve. They were referred to as the Gwebu people because they were under the leadership of Chief Gwebu. This however does not imply that they were entirely from the Gwebu family. There were some households which were not related to the Gwebu. These included the Nkomo family.

3 The Makumbe people belonged to the majority Shona speaking group while the Gwebu belonged to the Ndebele group. The two communities shared different linguistic, cultural and political backgrounds altogether. The Ndebele are comprised of at least three groups including descendents of the Khumalo, a group of Nguni people who migrated from Nguniland during the Mfecane disturbances of the 19th Century. The other two groups, the 'Abenhla' or northerners were coopted into the Ndebele nation on their northward migration and included people of Sotho origin and the 'Amahole' who were incorporated into the nation

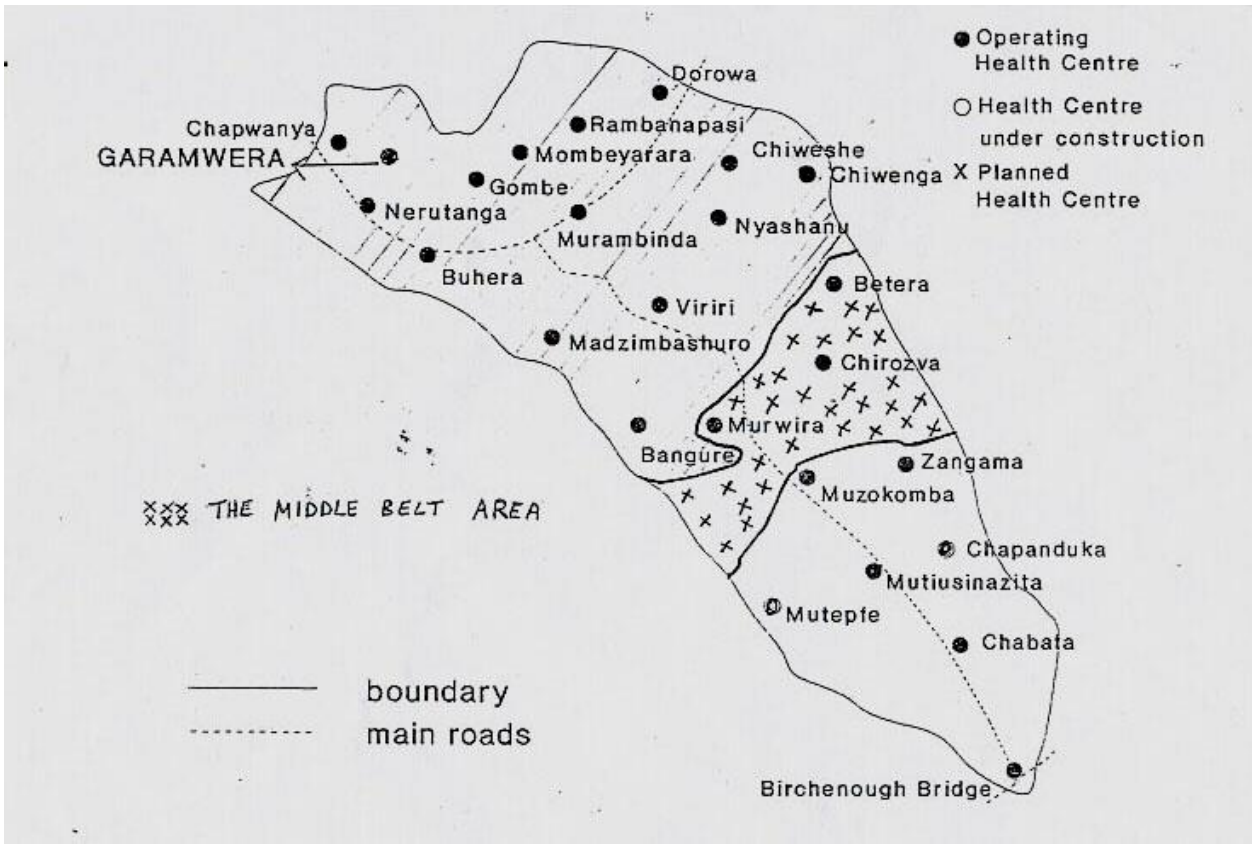

Fig1: Map of Buhera District.4

The economic cultures of the Gwebu and the Njanja were different. With a particular focus on agriculture, the Gwebu practiced a form of farming that was interpreted by the colonial native commissioners as 'modern'.5 The neighbouring Shona communities, the Makumbe and the Nyashanu practiced agriculture based on rotational crop cultivation. They specialised in the production of drought-resistant small grains, particularly sorghum and millet. These differences manifested themselves in the number of yields. The Gwebu became dominant in terms of agricultural production which included cattle rearing and crop cultivation. The Shona groups (Makumbe and Nyashanu) pursued their rotational farming which allowed them to rotate their farmlands seasonally.

when it was established in the south west of Zimbabwe and it comprised some local Kalanga and Shona groups.

4 Friends of Murambinda Hospital, **https://fmh.org.uk/about-2/location/** accessed 21 January 2017.

5 NAZ/4/32/48/5 Office of the Native Commissioner Buhera District, 28 June 1950.

The success of the Gwebu Ndebele speakers is a result of several historical factors. First, the Gwebu had interacted closely with the earliest crop of white settler farmers in the Matabeleland region. They had witnessed white settler farmers attain good harvests in such soils. Secondly, the Gwebu community included individuals who had worked in the white-owned commercial farms in Fort Rixon and Mzingwane and had been introduced to different aspects of western agriculture. These and other reasons allowed the Gwebu Ndebele speakers to enjoy agricultural success at the expense of the surrounding Shona speaking communities

Among other issues, agricultural success played a pivotal role in differentiating the Gwebu Ndebele speakers from their neighbours; the Njanja Shona speaking people. This article examines the centrality of agriculture in shaping the Ndebele Gwebu's particularism within the trajectory of belonging. The central argument put forward here is that; through agricultural success, the Gwebu people managed to establish a Ndebele enclave in the Sabi Reserve. Whilst the Gwebu was in the process of establishing their particularism as a form of belonging, the Njanja embarked on a crusade of denying the Gwebu agency through naming and renaming.

Chibhande: Agriculture and Gwebu agency in Buhera in Zimbabwe, 1960-1975

The climatic and geographical factors, coupled with the Gwebu's agricultural expertise enabled them to achieve success in the agricultural sector. Chief Gwebu and his people settled in the grasslands between the Mavangwe Hills and Mharabwe hills, an area which was administered by the Njanja people led by Chief Makumbe.6 The area was, in the words of the locals, a land of *isidhaka*/*chidhaka*, meaning it was characterised by the red and black heavy soils.7 Despite the Gwebu people's interest in the red and black heavy soils, it should be noted that they did not have other options considering the political climate during the colonial era. The colonial government was on a massive land grabbing exercise which left most Africans with limited or no choice at all as far as settling was concerned.

6 Interview with Nichodemus Gwebu, 58 years Old, 8 March 2015, Gwebu Village, Buhera.

7 Ibid.

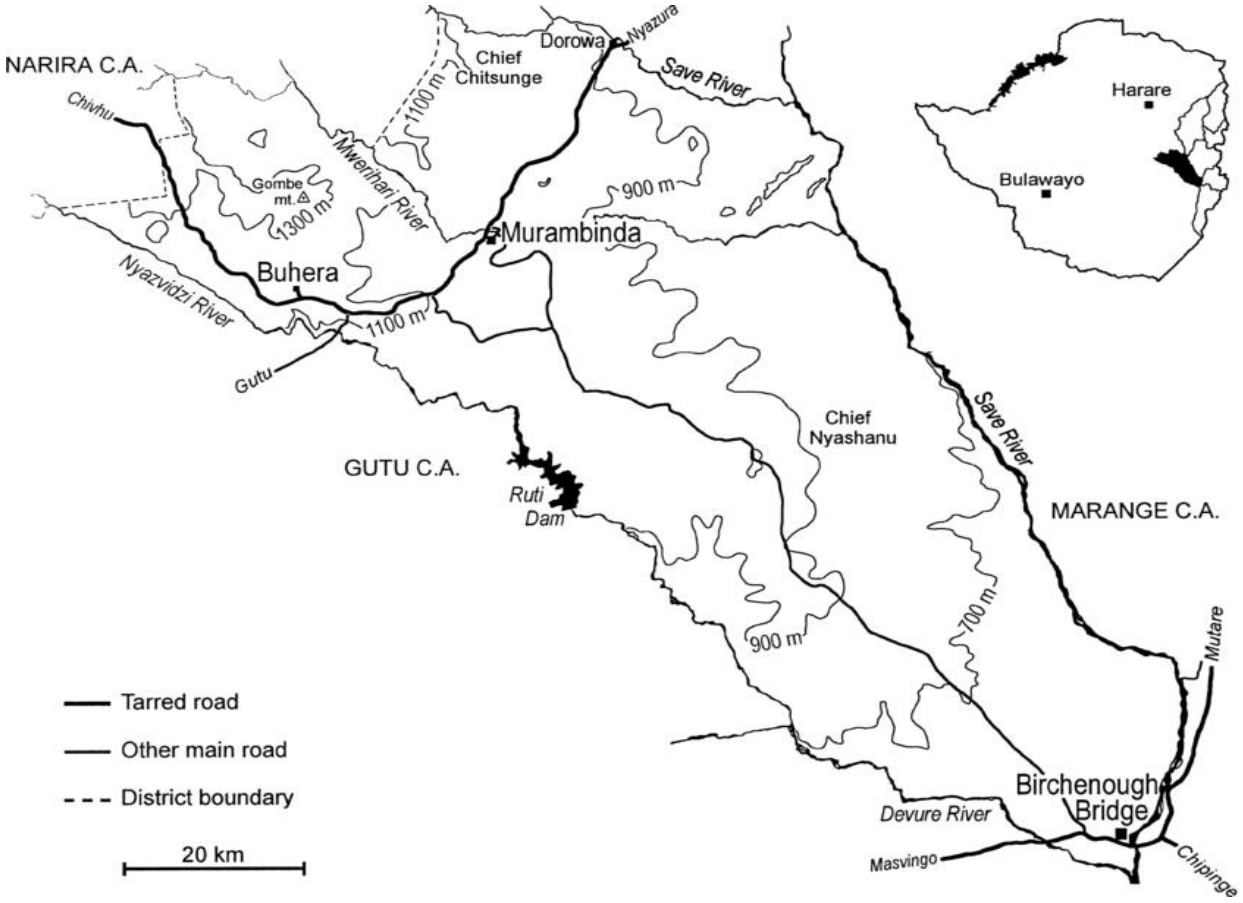

Fig 2: Map showing Buhera District.8 NB: The Gwebu area is located on the northeastern side between Mwerahari and Nyazvidzi rivers.

These heavy soils were previously shunned by the surrounding Njanja communities due to their adhesive effect on farming tools such as hoes and ploughs. In the words of the Njanja people, the area was shunned because it was labour intensive. Furthermore, it was difficult to work on and people often protested that; "...*ivhu racho rine tsvina uye rinonamira*..." meaning the land was "dirty" and "sticky".9 Besides the fertile black and red soils which the Ndebele got, the area received fairly good rainfall.10 It was characterised

8 J.A., Andersson, "Administrators' Knowledge and the State of Control in Colonial Zimbabwe: The Invention of the Rural-Urban Divide in Buhera District, 1912-1980", *Journal of African History*, 43, 2002.

9 Interview with Nichodemus Gwebu, 58 years Old, 8 March 2015, Gwebu Village, Buhera.

10 Information gathered from the Buhera District Administrator's Office revealed that the area is classified under region 2B making it an area with the highest rainfall patterns. The information was provided by Mr Madondo who is the District Officer for Buhera (as at March 2015).

by areas with thick grasslands dominated by thorny grass referred to by the locals as *Madungambeva*, abundant water sources, referred to as *jeke*, and good vegetation; all these factors were believed to be signs of an agriculturally productive area.

Evidence deduced from Gwebu's ethnography indicates that each household had more than a one-grain storage facility.11 Although it is difficult to get the actual quantities of grain production, the availability of multiple storage facilities coupled with oral narratives indicate that every household harvested quite huge surpluses at the end of each farming season. In contrast, the Njanja people in Buhera had traditionally preferred the sandy light soils.12 Oral traditions from the Njanja indicate that the locals were concentrated along the hilly and rocky terrain of Chapwanya, Gosho, Chatindo, and Garamwera.13 These areas were characterized by fairly sandy light soils, locally referred to as *Mukwarani.* The areas had accumulated fertility through the rotational farming style.14 This provided them with a good environment for the cultivation of drought-resistant crops such as millet and sorghum. The Njanja used their farmlands on a rotational basis to ensure that the previously tilled lands would swiftly regain fertility after a few years, thus they had a dynamic agricultural system.15 In addition, there are also claims by the Gwebu Ndebele speaking people that the Njanja people in the area could not afford to till the heavy red and black soils because they did not have adequate machinery such as ox-drawn ploughs.16 The few who had ox-drawn ploughs despised the red and black heavy soils due to their tacky effect on tools.17

11 Interview with Nichodemus Gwebu.

12 F. Musoni, "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to
the late 1960s", pp. 62-72.

13 Interview with Peter Wasarirevhu, Malombo Village, 10 March 2015.

14 Interview with Nichodemus Gwebu, 58 years old, Gwebu Village, 8 March 2015.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

The period from the late 1960s for the Gwebu-Njanja relations marked an important turning point. This is explained by two major factors. The first factor is that it witnessed the last wave of Ndebele migrants coming into the area from Mzingwane.18 This phenomenon undoubtedly helped in further strengthening what historian Musoni terms a unified Ndebele identity.19 Despite the impact on identities, the incoming of this wave of Ndebele migrants enabled the Gwebu to consolidate their possession of the black/red heavy soils, the fertile grasslands, and the so-called "green belt" lands which were now also being targeted by the neighbouring Njanja. Thus, the developments in the late 1960s ultimately left all agriculturally productive black and red soils in the hands of the Gwebu people.

Secondly, the 1960s was a period of a significant agricultural boom for the Gwebu people. Archival sources indicate that the Gwebu had, by this time, attained a fair amount of security regarding land tenure.20 The native commissioner of Buhera district was negotiating with the Native Affairs Department to allocate the Gwebu to their tribal area. This amplifies an already established view that the Gwebu were good farmers and therefore needed the support of the colonial government.21 In addition, they had also managed to clear large tracts of land by this time after years of settling down, acclimatising to the area, as well as identifying the best soils for agriculture. The process of clearing the lands had taken them several years due to the geographical and climatic conditions of the area; thick indigenous forests coupled with thick *madungambeva* grasslands.

The low-lying areas occupied by the Gwebu people began to be descriptively referred to as *Chibande;* a word in the local Shona language used to refer to a particular geographical

18 F., Musoni, "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un) Making of Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe", p. 85.

19Ibid.

20 NAZ/CHK5 Gwebu, Vol. 1, Minutes of Meeting Held to discuss the problems of Ndebele Kraals living outside Chief Fish's Area, 25 April 1967.

21NAZ/S4/32/48/3, NC Buhera to PNC Gwelo, 18 January 1949.

belt or area. In this case, the area occupied by the Gwebu people was referred to as a belt of red and black soils. Oral narratives indicate that the name *Chibhande* emerged specifically from the Shona speakers from the neighbouring Garamwera areas since the area occupied by the Gwebu had become a distinct 'green belt' in the Sabi Reserve because of Ndebele farming activities.22

For the Shona speaking Njanja, the term *Chibhande* carried a deeper meaning superseding geographical overtones. Prior to the coming of the Ndebele people in the area, the area was just a forest that was not inhabited and was also not ploughed. It thus became a good area for the thriving of a variety of wild game. Njanja oral narratives indicate that hunters would go into the area for hunting and would bring different types of game meat.23 In as much as they did not use the *Chibhande* area for agricultural production, they heavily relied on it for other livelihood activities such as hunting which was a key pillar in the Shona communities' well-being.24 Thus, the Njanja had very close socio-economic links with this area which they called *Chibhande*. Although the name *Chibhande* continued to be used even after the settlement of the Gwebu people, its use during the period from the 1960s was coupled with the Njanja's claims to the area through re-enacting these historical links.

Furthermore, the use of the name *Chibhande* particularly by the Garamwera people, who were part of the Njanja, had the effect of denying the Gwebu people of their agency concerning agricultural success. In this regard, the coining of the name *Chibhande* can be situated in the broader agenda by the first-comer community to deny the agency of the Gwebu in their agricultural success. In his case, the meaning of the name *Chibhande* placed emphasis on agroecological factors; the red and black soils, and the favourable rainfall patterns. Thus, the Njanja attributed the success of the Gwebu people to the geo-climatic conditions of the *Chibhande* area. Thus, the use of the name *Chibhande* falls in

22 Interview with Nichodemus Gwebu, 58 years old, Gwebu Village, 8 March 2015.

23 Interview with Peter Wasarirevhu, 67 years old, Malombo Village, Garamwera Area, Ward 3, 11 March 2015.

24 See G. C., Mazarire, "Reflections on Pre-colonial Zimbabwe", c850 -1800s, in B. Raftopoulos and S Mlambo, (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe, History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*, Weaver Press, Harare, 2009, pp. 1-38.

the broader belonging context in which the Njanja people gave agency to the geographical area; the favourable climatic conditions in the region as well as the rich black heavy soils, *isidhaka*/*chidhaka*, rather than to the farming activities of the Ndebele. Denial of the Gwebu agency by the Njanja was part of the local politics of belonging which sought to downplay the role of the former in agricultural progress which had been witnessed between the 1960s and 1970s. For the Njanja, admitting to the view that the Gwebu had achieved considerable agricultural success was bound to sustain the latter's quest for belonging in the area. As far as agricultural success was concerned; the name *Chibhande* was 'empty' of the Gwebu agency because it placed emphasis on favorable rainfall patterns as well as the red and black soils. The study argues that the name *Chibhande,* which emanated from among the Njanja people and was used to refer to an area settled by the Ndebele speaking Gwebu people was a way of contesting the latter's belonging in the Sabi Reserve.

According to one of Chief Gwebu's surviving grandsons, Nicodemus Gwebu, soon after the settlement of the Gwebu people in the late 1920s, the area began to be known as "*nyika yekwaGwebu"*, a Shona phrase referring to the area as the land of the Gwebu people.25 This name carried in itself a sense of Gwebu agency. The name Gwebu also made it clear that the Gwebu people had assumed a semblance of ownership of the lands on which they had settled. Thus, the resuscitation of the name *Chibhande* by the Njanja underplayed the Gwebu's knowledge in agriculture as well as years of work on the red soils which had enabled them to turn a previously 'idle' *Chibhande* area into an agriculturally productive area. The name *Chibhande* was rendered empty of Gwebu agency in its meaning and this was consciously perpetuated by the Njanja in their bid to disconnect the people from their success in the agricultural sector. This disentanglement of the Gwebu from their lands would automatically deny them belonging to the Sabi Reserve.

Archival evidence from the 1960s to the 1970s points to the agricultural success of the Gwebu's green belt referred to as *Chibhande.* Although it is difficult to quantify with

25Interview with Nichodemus Gwebu, 58 years old, Gwebu Village, 8 March 2015.

statistics, there is indeed evidence to substantiate the assertion that Ndebele speakers had indeed established a triumphant trend in agricultural production. It was around the 1970s when the colonial officials began to emphasise the need for a fixed grain storage facility in Chief Gwebu's area.26 The need for a grain collection centre in the area was a confirmation of the fact that general agricultural production had increased. In contrast, the period prior to this was characterized by subsistence farming in which people concentrated on food for consumption and surplus in barter trade.

There are several reasons which contributed to Gwebu's agricultural success. Prior to his coming to Buhera, Chief Daniel Fish Gwebu had been exposed to various forms of 'modern' farming in South Africa in the 1920s.27 He had vast knowledge of various soil types and this was cascaded down the lower ranks of his Gwebu community. Whilst in Mzingwane, he had also managed to acquire top-of-the-range agricultural equipment which included two-furrowed ox-drawn ploughs which were uncommon among Africans during this time.28 In addition, most of the Gwebu family men had worked as farm labourers in the earliest settler commercial enterprises in areas such as Fort Rixon in Matabeleland.29 They also had a lot of livestock, which enabled them to till the heavy black soils. It was after these observations that the colonial officials had to report that;

> Chief Gwebu Fish's people have always been very industrious and very good farmers and are at present farming very good land. They are in a very small enclave surrounded by the VaNjanja...30

It was in the late 1970s when the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) commissioned a grain storage building at Gwebu Centre in the heart of the Gwebu territory. This development altered how the local Njanja perceived and interacted with the Gwebu people. On the surface, it presented the assumption that the Gwebu community had progressed ahead

26 NAZ/CHK5/Gwebu PER5/Fish/11/CHK/37, Provincial Commissioner Manicaland, 8 July 1976.

27 Interview with Nichodemus Gwebu, 58 years old, Gwebu Village, 8 March 2015.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 NAZ/CHK5/Chief Gwebu, Vol. 1, PER/5/Chief/Gwebu Fish People, Buhera District, 26 March 1980.

of their Njanja counterparts. This was because the grain collection point was located at Gwebu Shopping Centre, an area surrounded by Ndebele villages under Chief Gwebu. This had the implication of attributing the agricultural success of the area to the Gwebu people at the expense of the Njanja people. Furthermore, the establishment of the grain storage depot also made it clear that the Gwebu had not only become part but had assumed control of agricultural production.

This was further complicated by colonial stereotypes, which in different cases referred to the Gwebu as "...very progressive..." and "...outstanding..."31 In this regard, the colonial government deployed its divide and rule politics, which was characteristic of colonialism elsewhere in Africa. This it did by viewing the Gwebu as superior and progressive. On the contrary, the Shona communities which included the Njanja, Nyashanu, Chamutsa, and Nerutanga communities which composed the bulk of the Buhera district were described in reductionist terms. These biases are best testified in the words of the Native Commissioner of Buhera, E.C Gutridge, who described the Shona speaking communities as "...unsophisticated, indigenous village atmosphere centred on beer parties and the dance."32 He further claimed that;

> The people appear content with their own life, and well-meaning endeavors to stimulate enthusiasm for other educative interests to meet with an anemic reception that rapidly damps the original ardor of the would-be organizer.33

These assumptions are loaded with reductionist assumptions which portrayed the people as 'backward' and 'primitive'. The role of the colonial government in shaping belonging dynamics should thus not be overlooked. It was the government that perpetuated the notion that the Ndebele were more progressive and their presence in the area was supposed to be protected. Written correspondence between the Native Commissioners of Buhera and the Native Affairs Department confirms this argument. The colonial officials

31 NAZ/4/32/48/5 Office of the Native Commissioner Buhera District, 28 June 1950.

32 NAZ/S2827/2/2/4 Vol. 1, Report of the Native Commissioner for the District of Buhera For the Year Ended 31 December 1956, Compiled by E.C Gutridge.

33 Ibid.

lobbied for the Gwebu people to be granted their tribal territory because they were practising "...good methods of agriculture and good work has been done in conjunction with community demonstrators."34 Chief Gwebu in particular was referred to as ".... the only progressive chief in the district."35 These colonial perceptions had the effect of sanctifying and legitimizing Gwebu belonging to the Sabi Reserve.

Agriculture undoubtedly played a pivotal role in Gwebu's quest for belonging in the Buhera district. The Gwebu had exhibited prowess in agricultural knowledge, livestock production, and generally higher agricultural output than any other community in the district. For the colonial government, the Gwebu was a people who had managed to embrace European civilization. For the colonial administration, the Gwebu people represented a peculiar group that had embraced the most important aspects of colonialism which included Christianity, western education, western medicine, and European agricultural methods.

Under the leadership of chief Daniel Fish Gwebu, the Gwebu people had initiated the establishment of a school in their community which was pioneered by the Gwebu family and other Ndebele speaking households. The establishment of Gwebu Primary School in 1935 signified that the Gwebu had taken over from their Njanja counterparts the mission to westernization and 'modernization' which were fundamentally important for the colonial machinery to institute its dominance over Africans. In addition, the Gwebu people had embraced western medicine with the establishment of a clinic at the chief's residence.36 The clinic was given adequate recognition by the authorities and it even received supplies from government hospitals in Buhera.37 Furthermore, the Gwebu had fairly embraced

34 NAZ/4/32//48/3 NC Buhera to PNC Gwelo 29 Dec 1948.

35 Ibid.

36 Interview with Peter Wasarirevhu, 67 years old, Malombo Village, Garamwera Area, Ward 3, 11 March 2015.

37 Ibid.

Christianity as seen by the presence of the Dutch Reformed Church at Gwebu School.38 The church was also responsible for the construction of Gwebu Primary School.39

For these reasons, the Gwebu people were deemed progressive. It should be noted that the colonial government deployed diverse strategies in its quest to gain the loyalty of Africans. These strategies included colonial education and Christianity, which were key in making Africans easy to administer. Thus, the Gwebu had embraced colonial values faster than any other community and this made them a 'progressive community in the eyes of the colonial officials. To this end, one can therefore assert that success in agriculture by the Gwebu made the Gwebu's quest for belonging in the Buhera district tenable. By showing that they had more advanced knowledge in agriculture than their Njanja counterparts, the Gwebu had set something straight; they had shown their ability to capitalize on the previously shunned black soils. They thus based their belonging on successfully tilling the red and black soils, (*isidhaka/chidhaka)* which were previously shunned by the Njanja people. For the Gwebu, this breakthrough in making use of the previously despised black soils allowed them to have a semblance of ownership of the lands historically owned and controlled by the VaNjanja people, hence it became a fundamental aspect of their quest to belong.

The study can draw similarities from the Basotho case in the Gutu Purchase Areas of Zimbabwe during the colonial period.40 The Basotho people in southeast Zimbabwe began to be viewed as "progressive farmers" due to their Christian faith, links with the Dutch Reformed Church Missionaries as well as ownership of property. In comparison, the Gwebu in Buhera had exhibited high agricultural skills and knowledge and this distinguished them from the rest of the community which was generally viewed as

38 F., Musoni, "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to
the late 1960s", p. 34.

39 Ibid.

40 J., Mujere, "Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists, And Progressive Farmers: Basotho Struggles For
Belonging In Zimbabwe 1930s-2008'', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012, p. 68.

primitive and “content”.41 By creating such notions of progressive communities and backward communities, it can be argued that the Rhodesian government sowed seeds of ethnic competition and violence along ethnic lines. Scholars such as Aningi and Salihu point to these colonial legacies which were to haunt post-colonial Africa.42 The Rwandan genocide has been used by most historians to illustrate the long-lasting legacy of colonialism in Africa. The Rwandan genocide was to a significant extent a result of the colonial legacy of magnifying the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi and initially favoring the latter as superior.43 In the case of the Gwebu area, such notions by the colonial state played a pivotal role in polarising the Gwebu and the Njanja people.

Agricultural success by the Gwebu community had several ripple effects on the relations with the Njanja. There was a massive inflow of neighbouring Njanja communities who flocked to the Gwebu households in search of maize and maize meal (which the local Njanja did not produce in large quantities), sorghum, and millet. This was more pronounced during the cropping seasons when the grain is perennially in short supply.44 Furthermore, small-scale grain dealers would come from as far as Nerutanga, Gosho, and Makumbe areas in search of grain to buy. Narratives indicate that most of the Njanja communities who came looking for grain preferred sorghum and millet as opposed to maize. This was because maize was not common in the semi-arid districts of the Sabi Reserve. The Njanja opted for small grains because they were easy to process using the available indigenous tools such as grinding stones (*huyo*) and grinding drums (*maturi)*. The majority were not familiar with maize meal and there were no mechanised grinding mills in the area to process the product into a fine meal.

41 S2827/2/2/4 Vol. 1, Report of the Native Commissioner for the District of Buhera for the Year Ended 31 December 1956. Compiled by E.C Gutridge.

42 K., Aning and N., Salihu, "Northern Problem, Postcolony, Identity and Postcolonial (In)stability in Ivory Coast and Congo in S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and B. Mhlanga (eds), *Bondage of Boundaries and Identity Politics in Postcolonial Africa, p.* 105.

43 See G., Prunier, *The Rwandan Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 2005.

44 Interview with Chafa Chigwende, (early 70s), Garamwera Village, 9 March 2015.

These sharp differences in agricultural production between the Gwebu and their neighbours reinforced the creation of a Ndebele enclave. Words such as the green belt, *Chibhande, and chidhaka,* which were used to refer to the Gwebu territory, testify to this notion. With only four villages (Gwebu, Malombo, Mutava, and Gwibila), the Gwebu community became distinct from the rest due to their good agriculture which was celebrated by the colonial officials. The Gwebu's agricultural practices perpetuated the notions of ethnic othering by the Shona. Narratives of this period put emphasis on how the Njanja had seen themselves as marginally different from the Gwebu due to their higher maize yields. Different Njanja narratives indicate that the Gwebu had become markedly distinct in various ways. Such narratives which are emphasised by both the Njanja and the Gwebu indicate the notion of othering. This othering was done through the magnifying of small differences: historical as well as imagined.

By the early 1970s, the colonial government had increasingly become clear in its support for the Gwebu at the expense of the other communities. Their success in agriculture had earned them a superior position in the colonial order's bifurcated system. It was also a time when the war of liberation in Rhodesia was beginning to take a more militant stance after the signing of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence earlier in 1965. The political hype of this era saw the emergence of political identities as a way of negotiating belonging.

Conclusion

It has been argued here that the success of the Gwebu people in the agricultural sector was not only necessitated by the black and red soils; rather, the Gwebu people were proactive in turning the *Chibhande* area into an agriculturally productive area. In addition, their acquired farming knowledge coupled with their access to farming implements enabled them to overtake the Njanja in agricultural production. Through agricultural success, the Gwebu managed to build and economically sustain a Ndebele enclave in the Sabi Reserve. Agricultural prowess and dominance allowed them to enjoy prowess in other regards. It cultivated a sense of Ndebele particularism among the Gwebu households. Furthermore, the idea of re-establishing the name *Chibhande* which emanated from among the Shona can be understood as a way of contesting Gwebu

belonging in the Sabi Reserve. The name *Chibhande* coined by the Njanja was empty of the Gwebu agency. In all these developments, the colonial government was visibly present. The colonial government, through the Native Affairs Department, played a key role in polarising the Gwebu and Njanja. This it did by establishing cordial relations with the Gwebu Ndebele people and also labelling them as a 'progressive community while creating and perpetuating the notion that they were far ahead of their Njanja neighbours if agricultural production was anything to go by.

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