Violence Against Holy Objects in Zimbabwe's War of Liberation: Selected Experiences from the Catholic Church

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Abstract

Zimbabwe went through an armed liberation struggle from 1966 that culminated in the attainment of African majority rule in 1980. Part of the violence of that liberation struggle was directed at remote mission stations scattered throughout rural areas. While many studies have focused on the murder and brutalization of missionaries and other mission workers, there remains a knowledge gap on the damage and destruction of church buildings, images and other objects considered holy. The purpose of this paper is to discuss material cultures which were destroyed and the effects with special reference to the Catholic Church in wartime Zimbabwe generally, and Mapiravana (St Theresa) Church of Chirumhanzu and Berejena mission of Chivi in particular. The paper is within the broader context of closure to some horrific aspects of the armed struggle since Zimbabwe has not established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to deliberate on wartime violence. Furthermore, the paper widens our understanding of the forces behind the tearing of shrines and Christian Churches historically and to date. Although secondary sources were used, the research benefited primarily from oral interviews with parishioners of the time, relics of destruction which could be observed and press coverage of the same incidences. It is important to bear in mind that church buildings constitute sacred spaces which are set aside from the secular world and its laws. This constitutes enduring legacies of Catholicism in the present day.

Key words: images, iconoclasm, material culture, sacred spaces, idolatry.

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1.0 Introduction

This paper is a study of violence against church landscapes during Zimbabwe's war of liberation, commonly known as the Second Chimurenga, which was fought for 14 years leading to independence of 1980. Throughout the war, guerrilla liberation movements of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) were defined by the Rhodesian white minority regime as anti-Christ. Therefore, acts of violence directed at churches were often alleged to have been committed by any of the two. The intention of the research is to extend knowledge on the significance of religious objects in Catholicism and how their attacks impacted on the belief system of those who venerated them. We drew our literature from medieval Europe and Rwanda, before focusing on Zimbabwe. The paper uses iconoclasm as a lens through which we could understand wartime violence against the Church. The historical background given in this paper situates violence against the Church within a global context and also explains driving factors behind this form of violence perpetrated by armed assailants. After discussing iconoclasm in Zimbabwe's war of liberation generally, we provide detailed explanations of the same acts using Berejena and Mapiravana missions. The article concludes that driving motivations for these two attacks appear to have been attempts to smear ZANLA guerrillas and discredit the Zimbabwe African National Union, a nationalist political party that was led by Robert Mugabe and fighting for majority rule.

2.0 Methodology and data collection methods

The study is exclusively qualitative in nature. Interviews were undertaken between 2021 and 2022. In October 2021, we visited Berejena Mission and carried out interviews with people who lived either on or around the mission. Our respondents still had memories of the war and how it impacted on the church. All of them were interviewed either in their homes except for 2 who were interviewed at work. The attack at Berejena mission took place in February 1980 as Zimbabwe was preparing for elections. We also conducted some telephone conversations on attacks at Mapiravana (St Theresa) in the Chirumhanzu area which was stripped and ultimately occupied in 1978. Battles at St Theresa and the eventual occupation of the church building and priest's house by armed men were critical to our understanding of iconoclasm. In addition, we were also able to use information from interviews which had been carried

out earlier by one of the researchers. We also benefited from knowledgeable people whom we came across from many parts of Zimbabwe.

3.0 Conceptual Framework

We use the concept of iconoclasm to explore damage to buildings and attacks on what was considered holy during Zimbabwe's war of liberation. Mary Vincent (2020, 147) forwards that in its strictest sense, iconoclasm means image breaking. According to Spicer (2017, 1012), the term iconoclasm is derived from a Greek word *eikon* (image) and *klastes* (breaker). Owing to the multiplicity of items that are destroyed in violence against religion, there is a wider definition to iconoclasm. It is a broader assault on the church and included ripping off crucifixes from nuns. There is no universally agreed definition of what these objects maybe. During the Spanish Civil War, things which were targeted included but were not limited to furnishings, altars and statues. Combustibles, retables, confessionals, benches and doors were sometimes targeted for burning. Sacristy cloths and vestments were shared between women who repurposed these by making cushions and curtains from chalice cloths and vestments, 'espadrilles, trousers and shirts from other church fabrics and underwear and heavy woolen petticoats from white religious habits (Vincent, 152). All these which were destroyed had religious significance to those who made or used them. Elsener (2012, 368) has highlighted that studying iconoclasm has the challenge that it is largely couched in theological or hagiographical language. We define iconoclasm as a form of activity involving damage to images and buildings at any time and place in human history. In other words, it is a physical attack on images and holy objects. Since we are focusing on the Church, attack on holy objects take a center stage in our discussion of iconoclasm. What must be borne in mind is that historically and to date, humanity's search for the sacred was often connected to physical sites such as a temple, shrine or any physical feature. A sacred space has been defined 'as an essential category of human experience which emerges and persists as both an experienced and physical location and an imagined set of cognitive associations' (Nelson, 2010, 320). During the Reformation, the bulk of Protestants rejected sacred materiality and thus turned towards iconoclasm and asceticism as attempts to foreground the importance of immateriality and spirituality (Miller, 2010, 71). This is in contrast with Catholics who have retained the belief that grace could work in special

locations and through physical objects and also in saints and holy places as affirmed in the Council of Trent in 1563 (Tingle, 2018, 90-91). Therefore, it is important to understand the relationship between Catholicism and sacred landscapes. When these landscapes are polluted through acts of violence (shedding of blood, homicide or other public acts of filthiness such as Becket's murder), rite of reconciliation was followed from around 1000CE (Hamilton, 2021, 23). The Church building which had been violated through violence had to be reconsecrated in a ceremony which was presided over by a bishop. For this study, sacred landscapes go beyond the building to include the priest's house, convents, and the Church grounds and so on. These are places of refuge from secular law (Shoemaker, 2010). Naturally, these landscapes contain holy objects which can be violated during times of instability as demonstrated in this study. The religious are close to these objects and therefore, they are usually violated together with them.

4.0 Historical Background

Although iconoclasm has taken place in different phases within the history of the Church, 10 August 1566 is taken as groundbreaking to the study of the subject. On that day, the Reformed preacher, Sebastien Matte delivered a sermon at the village church in Steenvoorde in the Westkwatier (west quarter) of Flanders, in Belgium. Following the sermon, some congregants attacked religious images, paintings and other items at a nearby religious house of Saint Laurent (Spicer, 2017, 1007). The attack heralded the beginning of *beeldenstorm* (image storm) or iconoclastic fury which spread through the Flanders, Habsburgs and Netherlands. At first, iconoclasts targeted objects associated with the celebration of Mass. They damaged paintings, attacked sacrament houses and overturned altars (Spicer, 2021, 1008). With time, they went beyond images and items associated with mass to include relics, books, manuscripts, vestments and sometimes altar pieces. Spicer (2017, 1008) has added that measures were taken by the Church as well as local authorities to protect these objects. Some important paintings were removed to safety; altar pieces were dismantled and hidden.

Historically, iconoclasm had widespread repercussions on the church community. For example, on 29 December 1170, Archbishop Thomas Becket was assassinated in the Canterbury Cathedral by four knights with close ties to the then King (Graffiths and

Magill, 2021, 5). His murder led to the closure of the church and the suspension of liturgical services there for almost a year. Services resumed 357 days later on 21 December 1171 as the building needed to be ritually cleansed and restored from the violence which had taken place inside (Hamilton, 2022, 23). Becket became a martyr of both the Catholic and Anglican Church. He had died defending papal supremacy over English Royal authority and thus in the 16th century, King Henry VIII ordered that the Archbishop's memory be wiped out. As such, laws were passed prohibiting the mentioning of his name and banning his image. Libraries were searched and royal officials scrapped or inked over all mentions of Becket in books and manuscripts (Hamilton, 20222, 23). Also destroyed or whitewashed were his paintings, frescoes, statues and vestments. Finally, his shrine in Canterbury Cathedral was also destroyed (Hamilton, 2022, 23). This shows that iconoclasm is also a political move bent on disgracing alleged enemies. Dismantling the shrine of St Thomas Becket under King Henry VIII was part of dis-martyring of the former Archbishop identifying him as a disobedient, rebel and traitor to the King's ancestor (Spicer, 2017, 1010-1011). It was part of an attempt to throw Becket to historical and religious dustbins.

Iconoclasm is not a dead subject. Destruction of things considered holy continued thereafter. During the French Revolution, the images of Louis XI and Francis II were destroyed. In 2001, the 16th century mausoleum Buddhas of Bamiyan were dynamited by the Taliban. Mausoleums and shrines at Timbkutu were torn down or damaged by Malian forces linked to al Qaeda in July 2012 while ISIS has targeted Christian Churches as from 2014 (Spicer, 2017, 1012). Saddam Hussein's statue in Bhagdad was destroyed during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. On 5 March 2023, the Uganda Martyrs Church of Zimbabwe's Gokwe Diocese had to be reconsecrated following its desecration by a woman alleged to be suffering from mental health disorders (Atemanke, 2023). The woman is said to have gone in and destroyed sacred vessels including the tabernacle and two ciboria which contained Holy Communion. According to the report, "the woman also attacked and pulled down Stations of the Cross and everything that bore the image of Jesus while she profaned the altar by scattering altar clothes (Atamanke, 2023). As a result of these activities, the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese, Bishop Rudolf Nyandoro presided over the reconsecration of the Catholic Parish making it open for public worship. It is against this world-wide rich background that we sought to trace the dimensions of iconoclasm during Zimbabwe's

war of liberation. We intend to identify the people behind, their motivation and how those who venerated these objects were affected. We also seek to explain how the church as a community reacted.

Iconoclasm has not been a preserve of the Catholic Church only. The Anglican Church too was a victim. During the English Civil War, the cathedral at Lichfield was severally attacked and destroyed (Ellis and Atherton, 2009, 233-245). In March 1643, the attackers were parliamentary troops which was a clear indication that iconoclasm was centrally organized. This is contrary to the situation finding in Zimbabwe's war of liberation were either guerrillas or government forces denied that they were responsible for attacking churches and destroying property. The pattern however is consistent. With regards to the 1643 attacks, several church items such as monuments, carved work, windows, church records and so forth were destroyed. The troops also defiled the church with their excrement (Ellis and Etherton, 2009). Reasons for iconoclasm in Western Europe have generally been researched on while the same are difficult to establish in Zimbabwe because alleged perpetrators usually deny responsibility.

The African continent has had its fair share of iconoclasm particularly in times of violent conflict. The most striking aspects come from the Rwandan genocide against Tutsis and moderate Hutus of 1994 where the attack on objects was peculiar. The most vulnerable were religious objects, and in particular statues which in the minds of the attackers bore 'the marks of a Tutsi body' (Korman, 2014, 232). Militias broke the nose off the statue of the Virgin Mary at Kibeho which was an important site of the Catholic Church in Rwanda. Others decapitated the statue of Christ on the cross inside the church at Nyaruuye (Korman, 232-232). Another feature of iconoclasm was the attack and killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus who had taken refuge in church buildings. For many, these are regarded as holy places and therefore not spaces for violence. During the mass killings of Tutsis following the 1959 revolution, those who had taken refuge in churches had their lives spared (Nwebury and Newbury, 1999, 297). According to one survivor from the Rwandan genocide at a massacre at Ntarama on 14 Aril 1994, soldiers made holes in the back of the church and threw grenades through the hole and then Interahamwe militias entered with machetes to finish off the surviving. When African Rights arrived at the scene after two months, the church was

still full of decomposing bodies (Meredith, 2011, 514). Therefore, instead of being places of worship, in 1994, churches became slaughter houses. We are not insinuating that this level of violence in and to what is considered holy took place during armed conflict in Zimbabwe, but only to highlight that the level of violence against holy objects can extend to human beings.

During the Rwandan genocide, members of the clergy were killed mostly in church buildings and church premises. The Catholic Church lost a third of its clergy. In the process, places of sanctuary were violated. According to Hoyweghen (1996, 394), more Rwandese died in churches and parishes than elsewhere. By the summer of 1995, 200 priests were in Rwanda, 60 in Goma- all that was left of the initial 400 (Hoyweghen, 395). The church was accused in the aftermath of being an accomplice to the genocide despite having been a loser itself given that the bulk of Rwandese belonged to the Catholic Church. It comes therefore as no surprise that in defence, the church saw these attacks as unwarranted, an international plot against the church as a community and accusations as a world-wide project of defamation to discredit it (ibid, 295-296). In a letter addressed to Pope John Paul II by 29 priests on 29 August 1995, there is an impression that the problem was not the genocide but a vast anti-Catholic movement (Dennis, 2018, 300).

5.0 Iconoclasm in Zimbabwe's Armed Struggle

The Church was not spared by wartime violence in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia). In particular, missions and their personnel located in rural areas were among the worst recipients of that violence and murders were not uncommon. Foreign white missionaries were the main targets. In this section, we discuss violence which was meted out on the church and then we move on to examine attacks and destruction of Church property including things considered holy. The intention is to document dimensions of violence in relation to iconoclasm. As such, by the time Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, some Church buildings lay in ruins, expatriate missionaries opposed to white minority rule had been deported by the Rhodesian regime, while the surviving had retreated to urban enclaves or were imprisoned. Attacks on mission stations as well as deportations were not uncommon. For example, on 23 March 1977, Bishop Donald Lamont, then 65 years old Bishop of Umtali Diocese was stripped of his Rhodesian citizenship and deported (Lamont, 1977, 5). On 6

February 1977, Musami mission lost 7 missionaries who were shot dead by armed assailants. These were Fr Martin Thomas (45), Fr Christopher Shepherd Smith (34), Brother Conway (56), Sisters Magdala Lewandouski, Epiphany Scheider (78) Ceslaus Stiegler (59) and Pauline Wilkinson (MacLaughlin, 1996, 149). Elsewhere in Gwelo Diocese, Fr Desmond Donovan was also killed in on 15 January 1978 and his body was not found. The main reason for these onslaughts was that the Catholic Church was accused by the Rhodesian government of being riddled with communism yet at the same time missionaries were brutalized by armed *guerrilla* assailants (Chakawa, 2011, 1). In the Sinoia Prefecture (now Chinhoyi Diocese), missions that were attacked included St Albert, St Rupert, St Boniface and Kangaire. The escalation of the war saw St Rupert, Kangaire, St Albert and St Boniface closing between 1978 and 1979. At St Rupert, the two German missionaries present were killed and a German priest was murdered at Kangaire. St Boniface mission lost its African catechist and closed as well (ibid).

Experiences from St Ruperts and a few other missions demonstrate that there was no widespread conspiracy or motivating ideology in church attacks. St Rupert and Kangaire were ransacked by local people while the closure of St Albert led to its plunder by local commercial white farmers. St Alberts had no Jesuit missionary killed though the mission closed. Following the deaths of the two Jesuits at St Rupert in Magonde, locals looted the mission. According to Mr and Mrs Shumba (interview, 30 November 2010), 'people thought that whites were departing forever so it was time for " chaos. Locals, some of them members of the Church, grabbed whatever they could lay hands on'. Through the same mentality, it was deemed that Church properties had lost ownership since the white missionaries had been killed. The desire to loot by African members of the community changed white catholic missionaries into aliens and this new thinking justified ransacking the mission. Historically, church attacks have been linked to wider violence against religion (Marcon, 2016, 169-196). The destruction of the church building at St Ruperts defies ideological motivations and demonstrates that these were community ad hoc decisions driven by poverty and not directed by the so-called communist guerrillas.

There were however widespread and enduring consequences against some church attackers in the aftermath of the war. Accordingly, 'one lay mission worker was heavily

involved in the looting of the church property at St Rupert's. Ashamed of his activities, he had no choice but to migrate from the area when the war came to an end and the mission was supposed to reopen. He could not return to Makonde because members who had not participated in stripping the Church were demanding that he returns all he had taken purportedly for *safekeeping*.' This shows that looting from abandoned properties, including the Church was part and parcel of what could be defined as primitive accumulation. The poor took this as an opportunity to at least pilfer something that could probably improve their livelihood. According to Mr Dhakwa, 'people collected all they could lay their hands on in wake of missionaries' deaths. These included pupils' trunks, window frames, doors, roofing sheets, fences, blankets, beds, and mattresses. They also went into the Church building and took everything inclusive of objects considered holy leaving it a shell (interview with Mr Dhakwa, 4 June 2022). After the war, locals were encouraged to return what they had taken. Not sure about what would happen to them, Mr Zvidza (Interview, 5 June 2022) added that the majority of community members chose to throw mission property into the nearby Mupfure River rather than risk being arrested. Such therefore was the end of the Jesuit investment. As was usual with most missions, the school re-opened at independence and so did the hospital.

The attack of Kangaire mission in part was driven by opposition to religion and also local hatreds. Fr Gerhard Pieper was shot on St Stephen Day (26 December 1978) at Kangaire Mission. His body was riddled with bullets (Bary, 2015). One attacker is said to have tried to unveil one local nun and implored upon her to go and get married. In the same incident, another assailant also tried to take off a cross she was wearing. Attempting to unveil a nun and insulting her can be interpreted as having been motivated by open indifference to Catholicism. Following the death of missionaries, like St Rupert's, the next to be looted by people from the surrounding area were church properties including the church and its holy objects. Mr Gasva (interview, 27 April 2014) recalled that following the murder of Fr Pieper, the mission was looted by members of the surrounding rural Kangaire community. In a great way, the death of Fr Pieper discredited the image of the ZANLA group operating in the area. For that misdeed, the whole group was withdrawn by its leadership. However, before leaving, they were involved in a running battle with Security Force Auxiliaries [SFAs] an irregular military unit belonging to Bishop Muzorewa. The battle took place at the

alleged sellout's home. ZANLA guerrillas were attempting to take the man who had lied to them about Fr Pieper for ' execution, while SFAs quickly decided to protect him against what they called guerrilla violence.

Another phenomenon almost found everywhere where missions were destroyed is that of those who tried to strip the church off its roof getting injured in the process. That analogy is difficult to separate from those who advance it. There is no doubt that dire consequences of church stripping are comfledged in strong religious beliefs. Statements of negative consequences of iconoclasts were generally coming from Christians. According to Mr Gasva (a catechist in the Catholic Church in Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe), falling and injuries served the Church in Kangaire from total destruction. Strangely, almost the same story crops up in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chegato where one man attempting to strip it off the church roof fell and well badly wounded (Bhebe, 1999, 210). These statements emanated from respondents with strong religious convictions and therefore an extension of the belief in the objects which they venerate. Events at St Rupert's and Kangaire demonstrate active involvement of locals in destroying the church which had been set courtesy of German Jesuits, but do not point to any ideological influence as drivers. St Martin Church and primary school under in Chundu under St Paul's parish in Karoi was similarly vandalized. According to Lina Simakani (interview, 13 April 2011), the community was ordered to destroy the school by ZIPRA combatants because going to school was not compatible with the war effort. Within a day all the asbestos sheets had been removed. The church building was then converted by Rhodesian soldiers into some sort of mortuary to keep dead bodies waiting to be transported to the small town of Karoi for further evidence taking by members of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and Special Branch (SB). The altar was similarly destroyed through acts linked to security forces and only had to be rebuilt after the war. Such activities as advanced by Strother (2020, 929) targets emotions. The lock to the tabernacle was lost hence it remained locked two decades after the end of the liberation war. At St Boniface Mission in Hurungwe district, ZIPRA guerrillas are remembered for refusing parishioners permission to attend mass. According to a wartime resident of the mission area during the war, Mubazangi, ZIPRA compelled Fr Zinkann to abandon the mission station. The catechist Mr Berebvende tried to keep the church running and he was shot dead allegedly by ZIPRA guerrillas. The body of the catechist, Mr Martin

Bverebvende was found near St Boniface Mission murdered on 2 February 1979 (Padbury, 2022, 376). This act was blamed on ZIPRA guerrillas because the mission continually remained open under the protection of SFAs (Padbury, 2022, 360). Unlike other missions, St Boniface was therefore not looted in part because ZIPRA guerrillas did not have strong support hence the closure of the mission did not draw support of the local people.

Contrary to the above destructions by African communities, St Albert's in Mashonaland Central province of Zimbabwe was ransacked and destroyed by white commercial farms who saw the school as a breeding ground for future guerrillas. When we talked to Fr Walter, he thought that relations with guerrillas deteriorated from the time the school had accepted Rhodesians military protection. That protection was also at the instigation of the local white farming community who held the missionaries suspect. To guerrillas, the mission was a military target. In June 1979 and October, the same year, it was attacked and forced to close. Neighbouring white farmers who harboured their own differences with the Jesuit community ransacked the mission and robbed it of its building material. They auctioned some of the material in Harare. The mission was only re-opened in 1984 by the then Zimbabwean Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe.

6.0 Attack at Mapiravana and Berejena Missions

When it comes to desecration of the church building and things in it considered holy, two missions from Gweru Diocese, Mapiravana and Berejena Missions provide good examples. Mapiravana mission suffered violent setbacks during the closing years of the protracted war. The mission was relatively big with a primary and secondary school during the 1970s. The school head was killed allegedly by ZANLA guerrillas under unclear circumstances. Following his murder, there were several exchanges of firepower between guerrillas and Security Force Auxiliaries (SFAs). With a view of displaying military superiority and to prove that they were defenders of the church, SFAs occupied the mission and chased away the resident white priest. SFAs decided not only to stay at the priest's house, but converted the church building itself into their base. They also dug trenches in the church yard and around the mission. As part of disrespect for items considered holy, they stripped the church of its objects including the cross. Sometime in 1979, there was a heavy exchange of fire between SFAs and ZANLA guerrillas and the church building itself was riddled with bullets (interview with

Dr Ephraim, 22 January 2022). There was even a mortar attack intended to bring down the building but this was not successful. It was only after the war that the church was repaired and the trenches around it were covered.

As a result of wartime violence, the term *ecclesia* could no longer be applied be applied to the church building as a place set apart from the secular world. It should not be forgotten that the church building had been made holy through the rite of church dedication and that rite was contaminated by this violent act where men under arms decided to occupy and defile the church building and the priest's house. Materials such as used cartridges can still be picked from the mission premises. What we could not establish was whether the rite of reconciliation was undertaken when the war came to an end. However, what we were able to ascertain at Mapiravana was that Catholics generally hid their religious objects as the war peaked roughly from around 1976. Rosaries, crucifixes, scapulars, bibles, church uniforms and other holy books were hidden. Some of them were put in odd locations such as granaries and under beds as others were dug into the ground because some guerrilla groups openly denigrated Christianity and harassed those who carried religious objects. It was abundantly clear that none of our respondents decided to burn or destroy any of these objects or books suggesting a deep religious conviction.

During the run-up to the elections, there was every effort to tarnish the image of guerrillas in the eyes of the church and the public in general. These are the circumstances which should guide us to understand the desecration of the church at Berejena in February 1980. Peter Baxter (2020, 231-232) talks of a series of explosions which occurred in and round Salisbury (now Harare) that appeared to target churches. These incidents that were not immediately linked to a Renault 12 sedan that erupted in a huge explosion near St Mary's Anglican Church in the then Harare Township, killing the occupants and destroying the vehicle. It later came out that one of the two blasted victims was Selous Scout Lieutenant Edward Piringondo, a recipient of the Silver Cross of Rhodesia and nominee for the Grand Cross of Valour, the highest Rhodesian award for bravery. The other one was Corporal Morgan Moyo on attachment to the Selous Scouts (Ellert and Anderson, 2020, 232). It was later proved that Piringondo was one of 8 Selous Scout members carrying out the attacks. On 24 February 1980, Selous Scouts and South

African Recces broke into the Gwelo premises of the Catholic publication, Mambo Press. They detonated a large explosive device which destroyed the printing press and *killed a white male* discovered to have had loose South African change in his trouser pocket. As a disguise, this dead body was a planted in order to prove that the attack had been carried by communist guerrillas (Ellert and Anderson, 2020, 232). Such guerrillas were supposed to be portrayed to the world as anti-Christ. Robert Mugabe was severally presented as a communist and anti-Christian, despite him being a devout Catholic. One of the reasons for church attacks was therefore to tarnish his image ahead of elections so that he would lose the vote from Christians. Whilst religious symbols are on the physical realm, in reality, they symbolize and represent the metaphysical and transcendental realities (Mudyiwa and Mokgoatšana, 2021, 1). As a result, the desecration of these symbols carried lasting memories because of the meaning which they convey. Killing and abuse of missionaries was closely assumed to be connected to religious objects. Naturally, the objects were targeted after the killing of missionaries.

Fr Killian Huesser, a Swedish Catholic priest was shot at Berejena mission on 19 February 1980 while Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) was gearing up for elections (Frederikise, 1982, 316). On the other extreme and as part of propaganda, it was claimed that at 2am on 19 February 1980, Fr Killian Huesser was shot dead in front of terrified students and stabbed 10 times. It was further asserted that he died as a result of these wounds. (The Herald, 21 February 1980) Assailants were dressed like guerrillas but all respondents interviewed more than 4 decades after the war thought that the killers were Rhodesian operatives who disguised themselves as guerrillas. Selous Scouts were known for personating guerrillas. Chipo Vhezha (interview, 19 October 2021) who worked at the mission hospital when the events unfolded thought that Selous Scouts carried out the attack. The students at the mission school confided in their teachers and nuns that one of the attackers had addressed them a week earlier against supporting guerrillas (Frederikise, 1982, 316). He was however identified by students as a *tamed or turned* guerrilla now working for Rhodesians. Mr Charumbira (interview, 19 October 2021) whose home is about twelve kilometers from the mission which is located in Chivi District recalled that the church itself was ransacked and only repaired after the attainment of independence. Mrs Mariose lived close to the mission during the war years. One night, her sister reported to her that Mr Madusise who

worked at the mission had been taken away by armed men. It came out that he had successfully escaped from the armed men and informed Brother Rudolf and Fr Killian who were at the mission to escape (interview with Mrs Mariose, 19 October 2021). Fr Killian refused to leave the mission and was subsequently killed that night. The incident at the mission represented iconoclasm in many respects. According to Mrs. Mariose, the armed men broke church windows, scattered holy objects for the sacristy, shot at the cross in the church building. Prior to these shootings, all pupils, teachers and other mission staff including nuns and priests were called to the assembly point better known as Gato (interview with Mrs. Chifamba, 19 October, 2021). They were harangued with slogans and verbally insulted. Prefects were then ordered to collect bibles from hostels and the church as well as other books used by priests in the church. The armed men forced pupils to start a big fire where the holy books were burnt to ashes. The men also tried to shoot at the cross on top of the church building but they missed it. By these acts, the attackers were passing on ZANU-PF as an organization opposed to Christianity. Given that a reasonable majority of African people in Zimbabwe were Christians, the act was supposed to tarnish the image of the party and contribute to electoral loss. That failed because ZANU-PF dissociated itself from the murder.

The attack at Berejena Mission should be understood within the whole context of the war as it was fought in the district of Chivi. Church paraphernalia had generally become dangerous to carry or to be found with during the last years of the armed struggle. Although guerrillas relied on the mission for drugs and food items, they were also somehow indifferent to Christianity at times. One priest from Switzerland stationed at the mission remembered only as Father Paul Egli was known for regularly supplying guerrillas with clothes through an agent/*mujibha* known as Paradza (interview with Mr Vengesai, 19 October 2021). For doing this, the priest was sentenced to 5 years in prison which was wholly suspended and he was subsequently deported (The Chronicle, 13 February, 1977). This did not stop guerrillas from barring people to go to church. According to Mr Mugombi (interview, 19 October 2021), it was dangerous to be found carrying a bible, rosary or scapular. Practicing Catholics had to hide these at home. This is similar to iconoclasm during the Spanish Civil War when Catholics were forced to hide religious objects which they greatly valued and treasured. Iconoclasm is always driven by clear reason. As indicated in the historical

background, the need to tarnish the church has been one of the motives. Pseudo guerrillas were therefore tagging on the state of the war in Chivi. The attack happened at a critical moment during Zimbabwe's transition from war to peace.

7.0 Conclusion

The study discussed attacks on the church and its holy objects during Zimbabwe's war of liberation and demonstrated that such studies remain a grey area that requires further academic enquiry. This paper has provided a general dimension of iconoclasm in as far as it impacted on the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. Iconoclasm during the liberation war was linked to the actions of armed men. This study has found that it was local communities both Catholic and non-Catholic who following the murder or expulsion of missionaries, descended and looted church properties. At the same time, Catholics themselves hid their religious objects to insulate themselves against armed assailants. The research has shown that iconoclasm was one of the worst consequences of Zimbabwe's war of liberation and greatly compromised the open and uninterrupted practice of Christianity. There was no evidence that the religious took efforts to secure objects considered holy. We also established that that attacks on churches, their personnel and objects was not something centrally organized by backers of liberation movements but was rather shaped by the behavior of each armed group. Iconoclasm did not extensively destroy the belief system and as such, churches re-opened and believers were able to resume their religious practices openly.

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