

# ZIMBABWE

Three EAAF members participated in a mission at the request of the AMANI TRUST to teach forensic anthropological techniques to local personnel, and to conduct exhumation and analysis of remains from five graves in Matabeleland South

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE AND POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

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Between 1970 and 1987 thousands of Zimbabweans died in political violence, first during the war against the white settler Rhodesian government (1970-1980), and then during a period of internal conflict (1981-87) following liberation<sup>1</sup>. The suffering inflicted upon black Africans during the colonial period and the liberation war is well recognized and documented, and Zimbabwe's government has made major efforts to assist the survivors. By contrast, most of the massive human rights violations that occurred after 1980 were not investigated or even officially recognized by the Zimbabwean government. Nationally and internationally, their existence remained virtually unknown, except to those who experienced them, until 1997 when the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and The Legal Resources Foundation in Zimbabwe published a detailed report on human rights abuses in Matabeleland and Midlands during the 1980s.

The independence war (1970-1980) against the white settler Rhodesian government was waged by two separate forces. The larger of these was the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) and its armed wing, the Zimbabwean African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). The other was the Zimbabwean African People's Union (ZAPU) and



Between July and August of 1999, EAAF conducted the first work related to forensic anthropology in the region of Matabeleland South. One member of the Magumbo community explains the excavation process to relatives of the victims.

*photo by EAAF*

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<sup>1</sup> A few international organizations and media publications investigated these human rights abuses: a handful of journalists provided coverage of events as they occurred, Amnesty International documented rights violations, and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights published a report entitled "The Wages of War." However, none of these documentary efforts succeeded in focusing international attention on this issue.

its armed wing, the Zimbabwean People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). While the two forces cooperated in the struggle against the white settler government, there was also considerable animosity between them. This was due in part to the fact that the ZANU emerged from a split within ZAPU during the 1960s. It was also partially a consequence of differences in training and outlook: ZANLA had been trained by the Chinese, and ZIPRA by the Russians, and the two armies employed somewhat different strategies and tactics. Finally, ZANU-ZANLA was associated with Zimbabwe's Shona-speaking majority, and ZAPU-ZIPRA with the Ndebele-speaking minority, although each force included large numbers of members from both ethnic groups. In some cases, the tensions arising from these differences led to armed clashes between the two armies.

By April 1980 the liberation armies had decisively defeated the white settler government. In the subsequent national elections, the ZANU gained a large parliamentary majority in a national vote that fell predominantly along ethnic lines. ZANU and ZAPU entered into a coalition government, and efforts were made to join their armed forces into a single army. Relations between the two groups rapidly deteriorated, however, and the political situation in the country became increasingly tense. In 1982 a number of so-called "dissidents" began staging attacks and robberies in a number of areas in the country. According to the CCJP report, these "dissidents" were not a unified group: some were former-ZIPRA combatants who felt they were not

well treated within the new, integrated army; others had been secretly trained by South African agents to destabilize the new independent government; and still others may have been "common" criminals. There is no conclusive evidence suggesting that the various dissident groups were part of a large-scale, organized plot to overthrow the Zimbabwean government. Nor were the "dissidents" numerous; according to the CCJP report probably no more than 400 of them were active at any one time.

The ZANU-dominated Zimbabwean government, however, responded as though the dissidents were mounting a major insurrection. It directed state security forces to take counter-insurgency measures, and to repress the Ndebele-speaking civilian population in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions of the country, where the dissidents were most active. The government justified the repression of civilians on the grounds that Ndebele-speaking civilians supported the dissidents, although there was very little substantial evidence to support this claim.

Various dissident groups allegedly committed a number of serious human rights violations, including rapes and murders of civilians. According to CCJP report, however, the human rights violations committed by the state security forces vastly exceeded those committed by the "dissidents." Security forces, particularly the notorious 5th Brigade, reportedly carried out arbitrary executions, forced disappearances,



During excavation in July, 1999 it was determined that the site of Magumbo was a common grave of two individuals; both were handcuffed. Evidence of multiple blows to the skull in both cases suggest likely cause of death.

*photo by EAAF*

beatings, rapes, and torture of thousands of civilians. Zimbabwean and international human rights organizations estimate that between 3,000 and 5,000 persons were killed or 'disappeared' by state security forces during this period. Zimbabwean human rights organizations have compiled a database of names of almost 1800 victims known to have been killed or 'disappeared' during the conflict in the 1980s, and another, larger database of unidentified victims. They have also identified sites of a number of mass graves that allegedly contain the remains of victims of human rights violations.

The period of massive violence finally ended in 1987 with a general amnesty and the signing of a "unity accord" between ZANU and ZAPU leaders. The Zimbabwean government, however, has never officially recognized the crimes committed by state security forces during this period.

Among the many consequences of the violence of the 1980s for residents of Matabeleland and the Midlands, one of the most significant is the fact that survivors of human rights violations could not find or properly bury and mourn the dead. In some cases this happened because the victims were buried in unofficial mass graves. In other cases the victims were 'disappeared', and the survivors never learned their fates, or state security forces killed victims in the presence of their relatives or neighbors and then refused to allow the survivors to bury or even mourn the dead. The 1997 CCJP report states:

"It was a characteristic of 5 Brigade to insist that there should be no mourning for the dead. In some cases, the family of dead victims were themselves shot because they wept. In other cases, burial of any kind was forbidden: families had to watch the bodies of their loved ones rotting in the sun and being scavenged..."

In some cases, survivors have experienced serious practical difficulties because they do not know the fate of their loved ones, or cannot prove to government authorities that their relatives are dead, leading to the loss of inheritance rights or other benefits.

Moreover, the survivors have experienced strong psychological suffering because they have not been able to bury and mourn their dead according to local customs. The CCJP report states:

The dead play a significant role in the well-being of the living in Ndebele culture, and the unburied dead return as "a restless and vengeful presence, innocent yet wronged, aggrieved and dangerous to the living".

Not only those whose final fate and burial place is unknown are considered "missing." People in mass graves are also culturally regarded as having aggrieved spirits, or as being in an unhappy state of "limbo". It takes the tears of the living, shed properly through a decent period of mourning, to release the soul and allow it to be at rest.

#### THE 1999 MISSION

In 1999, EAAF conducted the first work related to forensic anthropology in the region of Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe, on a mission that encompassed both teaching and research. This mission was conducted at the request of the AMANI TRUST, a non-governmental organization involved with assisting victims of human rights violations with an office in Bulawayo. Additionally, it was supported by the Archbishop of Bulawayo, Rev. Pius A. Neube, and the Executive Director of The National Museums and Monuments, Mr. D. Munjeri. Two members of the EAAF, Luis Fondebrider and Anahi Ginarte, along with Dr. Gustavo Politis, an archeologist affiliated with the University of La Plata, accomplished the mission between July 25 to August 16, 1999. The names of victims, relatives, and participants are withheld in the following report in the interest of their privacy.

Mission objectives were interrelated. They included teaching forensic anthropological techniques to local professionals in order to facilitate their own research in the future, and conducting investigations of five grave sites selected by AMANI TRUST in the region of Matabeleland South. Exhumations were conducted



Shari Eppell and Jameson Mayo from AMANI TRUST explain EAAF's work to members of Mapane's community.

*photo by EAAF*

with the participation of ten local professionals involved in the training program, and were a useful way to make the learning process more effective.

EAAF conducted forensic anthropological training course in the Shalom camp, Matabeleland South. Participants attended from different parts of Zimbabwe and included professionals from the fields of medicine, environmental health, law, and international human rights. For two days (July 26-27), EAAF discussed the three steps of forensic anthropology: preliminary investigation, forensic archaeology, and laboratory analysis. The team also discussed missions they had conducted in other parts of the world. Since archeological work

was the first research phase that attendants would participate in during the excavations, a particular emphasis was placed upon archeological training. Dr. Politis of University of La Plata contributed to the training course by lecturing on the principles of General Archeology.

Excavation sites were selected by the AMANI TRUST. Site 1 was an individual grave near Mapane Primary School; Site 2 was a common, unmarked grave near the community of Simbumbumbu that was thought to be the resting place of two people<sup>2</sup>; Site 3 was an individual grave located inside a large ant-bear hole located north of Site 2; Site 4 was a common grave of five or six individuals in Sitezi that was located on a stony

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<sup>2</sup> This site was not excavated due to complications involving unforeseen authorization obstacles and time constraints.

hill; and Site 5 was a common grave of two individuals in the neighborhood of Magumpo Dip Tank in the locality of Sigombe. Laboratory work was conducted at AMANI TRUST facilities in Bulawayo.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE 1999 MISSION

Site 1 was thought to be the grave of a 22 year old man who had been reportedly killed under particularly cruel circumstances by "Gukarahundi" (5 Brigade) in Matabeleland South in February 1984. According to witnesses, villagers were rounded up and because of their alleged support of ZAPU and because they spoke Ndebele, they were accused of being dissidents. Both men and women were subsequently subjected to

beatings and intimidation. The victim later buried at this site was singled out, at random, for particularly cruel treatment during the course of his murder. With his cousin, who remains missing, he was hung upside down from a tree and beaten with guns and boots for several hours. He was eventually dragged by his feet to the school playing field and shoved into an existing hole made by an ant-bear. The villagers were warned to leave him there under threat of death, even when village dogs scavenged his remains. Especially for the victim's mother, who had not been able to properly bury her son and mourn his passing, but for other villagers as well, the grave was a source of great concern.

Forensic work at this site began on July 29. The planning and execution of the excavation were performed in collaboration with the local



EAAF conducted a forensic anthropology training course in the Shalom camp, Matabeleland South. Participants attended from different parts of Zimbabwe and included professionals from the fields of medicine, environmental health, law, and international human rights. Above, Dr. Politis of University of La Plata discuss in the field with local professionals.

*photo by EAAF*

participants in the training course. Before archeological work began, the Archbishop of Bulawayo led a religious ceremony with over 100 participants from the community to bless the tomb, as well as the work that was going to be accomplished. A member of the AMANI TRUST explained to the community how the work was going to be done and its relevance.

At this site, as well as the others, the work included prospecting, using global positioning system (GPS) to determine geographic location, sketching the site, laying out a grid, photographic documentation, sieving the sediment, the exposition of the remains, drawing and photographing the remains, and the exhumation of bone remains, among other things. The first bone remains found at site 1 were in non-anatomical positions, and were placed in bags along with other evidence found. The skull was found at 95 cm. deep with its mandible displaced, and the bones farthest below the surface were found at 115 cm. deep.

The conclusion was that the remains were those of one individual, with clear signs of perturbation consistent with those of humans and animals, which caused the alteration of the anatomic position of the remains. The remains correspond to a male individual, approximately 28 +/- 4 years old and approximately 1.66 +/- 3 m. tall, which are consistent with information about the young man thought to be buried at the site. Although cause of death could not be determined, general anthropological information was consistent with pre-mortem information regarding the young man. Additionally, the v-shaped perimortem fracture on the right scapula, whose sides were 19mm. and 14 mm. long and of posterior-anterior sense, was consistent with reports about the manner in which the victim was killed. His funeral took place on August 11 at his family kraal. Many members of the community attended, as well as members of AMANI TRUST and EAAF.

As mentioned above, Site 2 was not excavated due to complications involving authorization issues. Site 3 was located in Simbumbumbu, where the victim was arrested by ZIPRA during the war of liberation, accused of

failing to cooperate with the guerilla forces, and taken to an unknown place. Subsequently, villagers informed the victim's family that he had been killed and inhumed in a large ant-bear hole at the south edge of a nearby watercourse.

The archeological work was performed on August 14. The layout of the grid as well as the definition of the excavation strategy was achieved with the trainees. The team and trainees marked a grid surrounding the hump formed by the ant-bear hole, and dug an approaching hole in its central section until surface level was reached. Since no bone remains of evidence of human action were found, they extended the approaching procedure to the sides of the ant-bear hole but did not find any evidence. Unfortunately, no human bone remains or evidence of previous exhumation was found. The team recommended that members of the AMANI TRUST speak with witnesses of the event who would be able to help locate the grave.

Site 4 was located at Sitezi, where the 5 Brigade unit was based at a detention center in North Gwanda district during the curfew of 1984. AMANI has taken many accounts of torture and murder that took place here during this time, and EAAF's own knowledge of the site and the acts of violence committed there began when one of AMANI's clients in Mapane described how he had climbed alive out of a mass grave. His survivor's account revealed that he and many others had been held at Sitezi Camp, where they were accused of being dissidents, tortured, and forced to dig a pit intended to be their own shallow grave. The soldiers then ordered the other men to identify this survivor as a dissident but they refused, and were subsequently beaten and shot to death. On a whim, the soldier who killed the others allowed two of the eight men to get out of the grave and run away before shooting the remaining six people one at a time. AMANI's client has had serious emotional disturbances ever since, and believes the others died because they refused to label him a dissident. AMANI discovered that the other survivor was the father of the principal at Mtshabezi Bible College, who eventually died as a result of injuries sustained during this incident. Many other people came forward to speak about how their loved ones were killed during this incident, for instance a

woman working as a nurse whose father had been murdered at a mass grave at the camp. She wanted to know if there was any chance of getting his remains back, and wept as she talked about how his spirit returns to her at Christmas every year, looking unhappy.

After the site of the grave was located, the five families who believed their loved ones were buried there were keen for exhumations to begin, and they suspected that in addition to the five local people, others were buried there as well.

They began to screen all the sediment and to collect the materials, including the sediment presenting signs of a fire. The remains were in non-anatomical position, blackened and burned. The excavations were temporarily interrupted by the police, but resumed on August 14 after they had given re-authorization to do so. The team sieved the sediment to extract the entire quantity of bone remains, and later classified them. The non-identifiable remains were categorized in fragments of long and miscellaneous fragments, and were inventoried.



Burned remains recovered from the Sitezi site suggested that fuel may have been used to assist in the destruction of the corpses. Photo on the left: other personal belongings recovered from the Sitezi site, such as keys and watches.

*photo by EAAF*

Excavation began on August 4, 1999 and was concluded on August 14. The local participants in the training program participated in the layout and beginnings of the excavation. The shallow, unmarked grave was located 200m from the abandoned camp. After laying out a grid encompassing the hollow and the hump of earth, participants began by digging an approaching hole in the central sector of the grid to determine the depth at which the remains were found. At approximately 50cm, many fragments of burned bone remains were discovered, a few hand bones, and a gun cartridge. From that point, the team

EAAF concluded that the remains belonged to six adults. Some of the bones and pieces of charcoal had the characteristic light coloration associated with particular kinds of chemical fuels. Evidence observed in the recovered burned remains thus suggested that fuel may have been used to assist the destruction of the corpses. Although individual identifications and cause of death could not be determined, because the remains were so badly burned and mixed together in non-anatomic arrangements, the materials suggested that the destruction of evidence was intentional.



Archbishop Pius from Bulawayo Mapane during a religious ceremony with relatives of the victims and other community members.

*photo by EAAF*

The families who believed the remains of the six victims belonged to their loved ones agreed to have a common burial. More than 500 people attended the funeral on September 3, whose religious ceremony was conducted by Rev. Pius A. Neube. Ministers from other religious groups also attended.

Site 5 was thought to be the grave of two men killed during the War of Liberation in November of 1978. The elder man was the father-in-law of the younger man, and the two had been working for a white farmer in the area when they were accused by ZIPRA forces of being "sell outs". According to witnesses, the two were handcuffed by ZIPRA in front of their family before being beaten to death and then thrown into the Magumbo dip tank, a concrete construction used

for disinfecting livestock. The ZIPRA forces threatened to kill anyone who removed the bodies, which lay in the dip tank for more than a month until Rhodesian forces found them. The latter ordered villagers to remove and rebury the remains, which remained handcuffed together. The eleven year-old grandson of the older victim helped to drag the bodies to a shallow grave to bury them. The Rhodesians then reportedly beat people in the area for not having reported the murder and the presence of "terrorists" in the area. The widow of the eldest victim was taken away to Gwanda for questioning and beatings.

Excavation began on July 30. The grave was marked with a circle of stones, and was located 31 m. from the dip tank in a glade surrounded by trees. Skeleton 1 was located at 98



cm. deep before skeleton 2 was discovered at the same depth. Both were lying prone on their right sides. Skeleton 2 had both legs stretched out under the feet of skeleton 1, and its arms were under the thorax and pelvis. When the remains of skeleton 1 were excavated, it was possible to observe a couple of rusted metallic handcuffs located around the wrists of each victim.

In conclusion, it was determined that the site was a common grave of two individuals, primary and synchronic. Skeleton 1 was a male individual aged 38 to 48 years old, 1.79 +/- 3 m. tall, and skeleton 2 was a male individual aged 24 to 34, 1.77 +/- 3 m. tall. Evidence of multiple blows to the skull in both cases suggest likely cause of death. Findings are consistent with reports of the man and his son in law thought to be buried at the site, and with the violent manner of their deaths. Their funerals took place on August 10 and August 14, 1999.

#### ASSESSMENT OF THE 1999 MISSION

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EAAF's 1999 mission to Zimbabwe was quite successful: the EAAF members who participated oversaw the exhumation of three clandestine graves, established possible cause of death in some cases, and trained a group of eleven doctors, archaeologists, nurses and others interested in creating a Zimbabwean forensic team in the future. The recovered remains were returned to the victims' families and communities, and were reburied in public ceremonies.

Due to the success of the mission, the AMANI Trust has invited EAAF to return to Zimbabwe for a longer, two-month mission in 2000 during which it would exhume a larger number of graves dating from both the War for Independence and the repressive period that followed. As during the 1999 mission, throughout these investigations EAAF would continue to provide training to Zimbabwean professionals interested in developing their own forensic anthropological

projects in the future.

At the reburial ceremony for the young man whose remains were recovered at site 1, Senior Kraalhead conveyed a sense of the importance of this work for the community:

"You know Zimbabwe was liberated by an armed struggle. Well the people buried in the wrong places have also to struggle from down there where they lay until they are liberated. So today [this young man] is liberated and is brought to be witnessed by others. We are thankful for this... Today we know that he is living here in a way that is acceptable to humankind. Let us all agree that we all should be where we are supposed to be. That is an excellent thing.<sup>3</sup>"

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<sup>3</sup> Speech by Senior Kraalhead given at a reburial ceremony, August 1999.

# EAAF EUROPEAN TRIP

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1999

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EAAF members Luis Fondebrider and Silvana Turner traveled to various European countries in the fall of 1999. The purpose of this trip was to present EAAF's work to human rights organizations and foundations and to seek financial support for 2000-2001. The trip lasted from October 14 to November 25.

During this trip, EAAF participated in the following meetings and activities:

10/14: London. Conducted seminar in the headquarters of the International Secretariat of Amnesty International (AI). The seminar was organized by AI's medical department and was attended by 30 people. EAAF also had meetings with Ms. Ingrid Massagé, the director of programs for Sri Lanka, and Ms. Kerry Brogan, director of programs for East Timor and Indonesia. Ms. Brogan contacted us several days later to request that EAAF travel to East Timor to give a seminar. (See East Timor section in this report).

While in London, EAAF also met with Mr. Osmar Trayung of the Sumatra Human Rights Network, and with AI's directors of programs for Honduras and Central America.

10/18: Berlin. Meeting with the Heinrich Böll Foundation. EAAF met with Ms. Iciar Oquiñena, the coordinator of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Heinrich Böll Foundation has decided to contribute to the support of EAAF's photography exhibition. (See further information about this project in this report)

10/19: Copenhagen. Meeting with Danida, the Danish governmental international aid agency. EAAF met with Mr. Caspar Nervil, section coordinator.

10/21: Stockholm. Meeting with Swedish Non-governmental Organizations Fund. EAAF met

with Ms. Rose Marie Asker, among others. EAAF also met with Mr. Staffan Smedby of SIDA, the Swedish governmental international aid agency.

10/23: Meeting with Justice and Peace, Sweden. EAAF met with Sister Madeleine Freddel, general secretary.

10/25: Oslo. Meeting with the Norwegian Human Rights Fund. EAAF met with Mr. Tale Longva, in charge of programs for Latin America and the Middle East.

10/28: The Netherlands. Meeting with Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), which has supported EAAF's work since 1995. EAAF met with Mr. Enrique Gilhuis, one of the directors for Central American programs, and with Mr. Roel Aalbersberg. EAAF then met with the Dutch organization Solidaridad. Those present included Mr. Rinske van del Bij and Ms. Henriette Endan from the organization Linking Solidarity. EAAF also met with Solidaridad's director of programs for Colombia, Mr. Jan Gilhuis.

10/29: Meeting with Bilance, the Netherlands. EAAF met with Mr. Eric Bloemkok, the director of Central American programs.

Meeting with Novib. EAAF had a preliminary interview with Mr. Ale Dijkstra, who is in charge of Central American programs. EAAF then met with Mr. Jan Tuit, in charge of programs for Africa.

11/1: Meeting with Mr. Teunis Kamper of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

11/3: Brussels. Meeting with Mr. Ben Schonveld of Organization Mondiale contre la Torture (OMCT) a non-governmental network that represents other NGOs to the European Community.

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11/4: Meeting with Mr. Jorge Cabaco of the European Human Rights Fund (now a part of the European Commission).

11/5: Paris. Meeting with the foundation France Libertes.

Brussels: Also, meeting with Mr. Ronald Elkhuisen from the office of Ms. Daniela Napoli, director of Human Rights for the European Union.

11/8: Geneva. Meeting with the World Council of Churches. EAAF met with Mr. Clement John, executive secretary. The WCC is currently supporting the blood bank project in Argentina.

11/9: Geneva. Meeting with Ms. Anne Laurence Lacroix of Organization Mondiale contre la Torture (OMCT).

11/10: Geneva. EAAF gave a seminar at the United Nations for members of the High Commission on Human Rights. EAAF also gave a conference at the University of Geneva, sponsored by the Groupe de Solidarité of the University of Geneva and by Memoria Viva.

11/12: Bern. Meeting with the Swiss Ministry of Cooperation.

11/15: Vienna. Meeting with the Renner Institute. EAAF met with Mr. Erich Froschl, the director, and with Ms. Lisl Kauer, who is in charge of Global Affairs. EAAF's photographic exhibition was the main topic of discussion. EAAF also met with Mr. Manfred Nowak of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights to discuss the photographic project.

11/16: Meeting with Ms. Lys Mayrhofer of Missio. Missio co-financed EAAF's 1999 mission to Zimbabwe and will continue its support in the year 2000. EAAF also met with Missio's director of programs for El Salvador.

11/18: Ulm, Germany. EAAF gave a press conference organized by Ms. Nancy Ayala Lorenz y Dr. Rossing from the Argentinean support group. EAAF then gave a presentation in a community center.

11/19: Hamburg. Opening of the EAAF photography exhibit.

11/20-21: Hamburg. EAAF participated in "From El Salvador to Kosovo," a seminar of German NGOs.

11/22: Hamburg. Meeting with Ms. Cornelia Berens of the International Study Group for Trauma, Violence, and Genocide.

11/23: Frankfurt. Meeting with Mr. Dieter Müller of Medico International.

11/24: Stuttgart. Meeting with Diakonisches Werk, which has supported EAAF's work since 1994. EAAF met with Mr. Bodo von Borries and Mr. Werner Lottje.

11/25: Munich. Meeting with O. Peschel of the Legal Medical Institute of Munich. EAAF also gave a presentation at this Institute.

EAAF also met in Aachen with Misereor, which supported EAAF's work in Guatemala and Zimbabwe. The meeting included the directors of Colombian, Central American, and African programs. Misereor will probably support EAAF's in El Salvador in 2000 and will continue to support work in Zimbabwe.