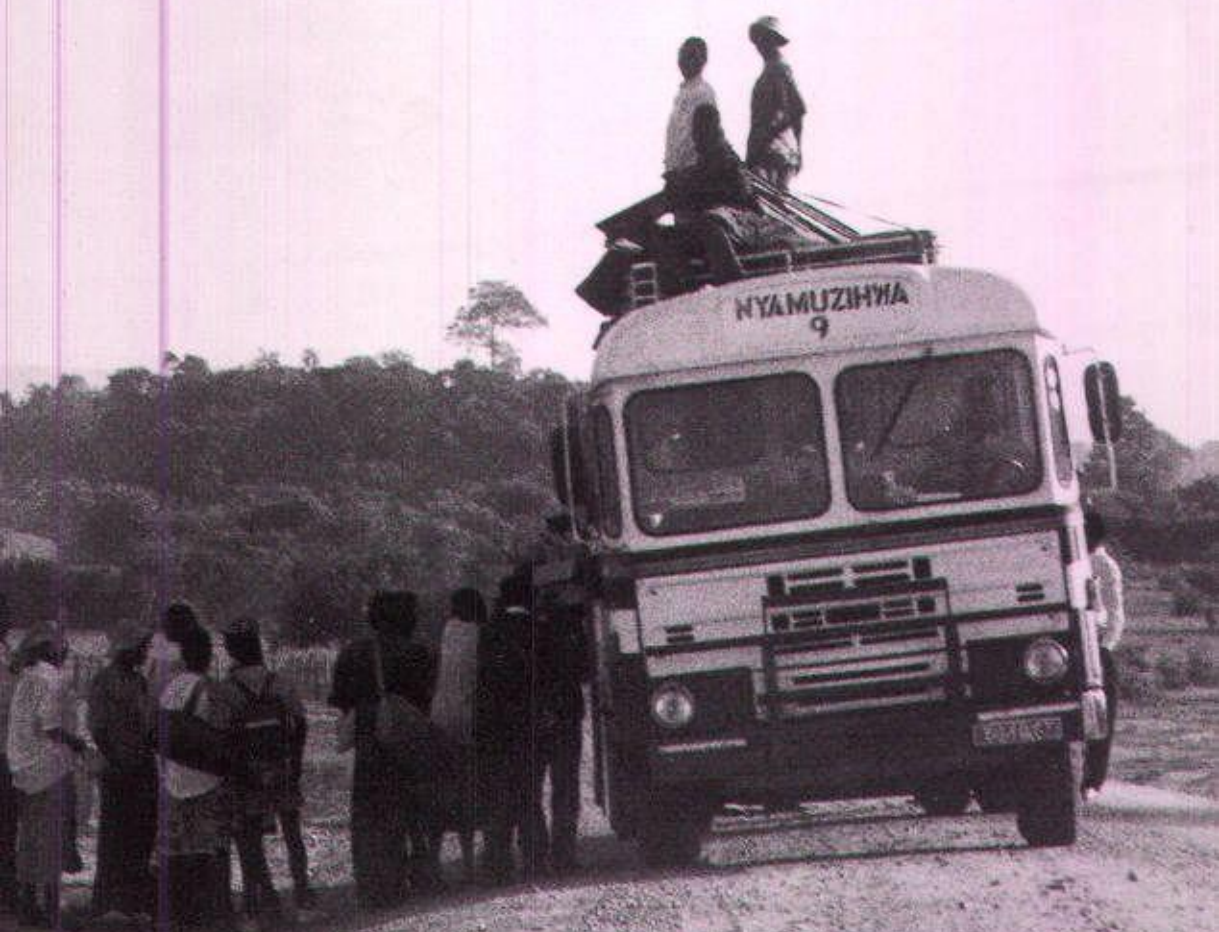


Going places, staying home

**Rural-urban connections and the significance
of land in Buhera district, Zimbabwe**



Jens A. Andersson

Stellingen

1. The fact that rain ceremonies in Zimbabwe are held at full moon has less to do with the relationship between rainfall and the position of the moon, than with the need to find one's way to the site of the ceremony. (*with thanks to Alex Bolding*)
2. A heavy reliance on the colonial state's archival sources has contributed to a hegemonic view of the colonial state in Zimbabwe historiography. (*this thesis*)
3. Interpretations of Zimbabwe's current crisis often confuse people's 'interest in land' with an 'interest in farming'. (*this thesis*)
4. Social scientists preoccupied with theoretical and methodological issues should realize that in 'science as in love a concentration on technique is quite likely to lead to impotence.' P.L. Berger (1963) *Invitation to Sociology: a humanistic perspective*. (*with thanks to Joost Beuwing*)
5. Urbanization studies have too easily conflated spatial differences between rural and urban areas with socio-cultural differences.
6. In channelling funds to researchers, one has to bear in mind that many good researchers do not hold academic positions.
7. Dat hoogleraren projectverantwoordelijken zijn in onderzoek is een politiek-administratieve constructie.
8. De portretten van collegevoorzitters in de Aula van de Wageningse Universiteit laten een verschuiving van een academische naar een management-identiteit zien. (van toga naar kostuum)

Stellingen behorend bij het proefschrift: *Going places, staying home: Rural-urban connections and the significance of land in Buhera district, Zimbabwe*, te verdedigen door Jens A. Andersson, op vrijdag 4 januari 2002.



Going places, staying home

Rural-urban connections and the significance
of land in Buhera district, Zimbabwe

Jens A. Andersson



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np02201, 3124

Going places, staying home

Rural-urban connections and the significance
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Jens A. Andersson

Proefschrift

Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

Op gezag van de rector magnificus van Wageningen Universiteit

Prof. dr. ir. L. Speelman

in het openbaar te verdedigen

op vrijdag 4 Januari 2002

des namiddags te een uur dertig in de Aula

im 1636138

Andersson, J.A.

Going places, staying home: Rural-urban connections
and the significance of land in Buhera district, Zimbabwe

ISBN 90-5808-553-8

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Note on names used

Except for names of cities, towns and districts, the names of families, persons and villages have, in some cases, been altered.



Acknowledgements

In contrast to anthropological fieldwork, writing a PhD thesis often seems a lengthy and lonely process, not least towards the end, when social isolation seems to be the only way to finalize it. While struggling to find the right words, I often wondered why I had decided to write journal articles instead of chapters, as this only seemed to prolong the project. The reviewers of academic journals may take their time, and once you receive their comments on your submitted article, you are already working on the next one, having forgotten about the ins and outs of the previous one. Forced to produce a revised version of your submitted article, the progress on your new article slows down.

In hindsight, I realize there are distinct advantages in writing articles. One is that journals impose restrictions on length, and this trains you in the art of being concise and to the point in developing an argument. As a consequence, this thesis is not that lengthy – a fact that I hope readers will appreciate. More importantly, writing articles that can be read independently from one another enhances people's willingness to read at least one. Having had many people willing to do so, I realize now that my academic life has been far less lonely than it could have been. For this reason, and for the fact that they gave valuable comments and suggestions on one or more articles, I wish to thank: Nettie Aarnink, Greg Bankoff, Prof. Franz von Benda-Beckman, Joost Beuving, Alex Bolding, Prof. Michael Bourdillon, Dr. Mark Breusers, Prof. Peter Geschiere, Gemma van der Haar, Flip van Helden, Prof. Norman Long, Dr. Ismael Magaisa, Dr. Emmanuel Manzungu, Dr. Jan den Ouden, Edwin Rap, Frans Huijzendveldt, Bridgit O'Laughlin, Judith de Wolf, Pieter van der Zaag, Paul van Zwieten, and the anonymous reviewers of the journals in which the articles are published. To this list I should also add Catherine O'Dea, who exceeds the role of language corrector. Her sharp eye has prevented me from making many mistakes and her comments and suggestions have improved my writings considerably. It is a pleasure to work with her.

The struggle of getting the right words on paper is, of course, alleviated not only by helpful comments on the contents of one's work: of major importance also are those people and organizations that enable you to start a PhD project and to make it work. I am grateful to the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) for granting the funds for this project. Prof. Norman Long, whose scholarship has had a great influence on everybody in the Department of Sociology of Rural Development (myself

included), created the space for me to further my own project – to twist an often-used quote of his. I consider myself privileged to have been educated in the anthropological research tradition he represents. Dr. Jan den Ouden deserves many thanks for a number of reasons. He found the money for short-term contracts enabling me to publish an article and to submit a PhD proposal; he commented upon my work and visited me in the field. He also involved me in education, enabling me to teach courses and supervise MSc students – most useful activities for anybody writing a PhD thesis, as they also make you think about how to put your message across.

My colleagues at the department I thank for their hospitality and support. In particular I would like to mention Jos Michel, and my fellow PhD researchers Flip van Helden, Gemma van der Haar, Edwin Rap, Volkert Beekman, Nelson Mango and Doortje Wartena, who all made the struggle with the word processor more bearable. I thank them for their (usually well-timed) interruptions, coffee and invitations for a beer and food outside the Leeuwenborch building. Mark Breusers deserves special mention, as he not only gave stimulating comments on all my articles but also proved a pleasure to work with while we were editing another book. It was also very inspiring to help Joost Beuving start a new research project at a time the one who brought us together was missing.

Whereas the writing phase may have seemed long and lonely at times, the fieldwork for this thesis never was. Although I spent an extensive period in 'the field', it never seemed too long. This is, of course, largely due to the people I met and worked with in Zimbabwe. I was lucky that I could team up with the researchers of the ZIMWESI programme, an inter-university collaboration between the University of Zimbabwe and Wageningen University in the fields of Women's Studies, Extension Science, Sociology and Irrigation. Thanks to Prof. Michael Bourdillon, I became affiliated to the Department of Sociology of the University of Zimbabwe. I also owe him my gratitude for his valuable (literature) suggestions during my fieldwork.

Although the focus of the ZIMWESI programme was on smallholder agriculture in irrigation schemes in the Manicaland province – a topic rather different from mine – I have benefited a lot from the exchanges with my ZIMWESI colleagues brought together on a regular basis by Pieter van der Zaag, the programme's initial co-ordinator. I thank him for the numerous discussions we had, and for pointing me to the value of aerial photographs for social science research (see chapter 4). Pieter and his wife, Marlou Bijlsma, also created a very hospitable environment to retreat to once in a while. 'Gate crashing' at their house never seemed to be a problem – a fact that I very much appreciated. Discussing issues with Emmanuel Manzungu, who came to succeed Pieter as a dedicated project co-ordinator was, and is, a pleasure.

Through ZIMWESI I also got to know *mukoma* (later *baba*) Alex Bolding, with whom I spent many hours exchanging ideas and emptying bottles, often as a result of his efforts to come and visit me at my house at the 'Seaview Road' of Murambinda township (lots of sand, no sea). Perhaps it is telling that in a society in which closeness is often expressed in kinship terms, people often thought we are brothers.

In Buhera district, I found a great place to stay in the 'location' of Murambinda growth point. I wish to thank Mr. K.K. Matsinde, and the staff of the Buhera Rural District Council, for their assistance, both in finding accommodation and, later, in my studies. Agritex officers in Buhera district have also been equally kind in introducing me in the Murambinda area and helping me during the fieldwork, especially Mr. Mundeiri in Buhera, and the late Mr. Mudiwa at the Murambinda office. The Buhera District Administration and the Murambinda police station, I wish to thank for their assistance in obtaining the data I was looking for.

Living in the Murambinda township, where I had my 'base-camp', was an experience I would not like to have missed. This may give the impression that every day was highly eventful, but this was by no means the case. In contrast to the stories I heard from my ZIMWESI colleagues, life in the Buhera district often seemed extremely uneventful. Yet, being an easily recognizable stranger, I very much enjoyed participating in normal village life. I enjoyed the daily 'gossiping' with my neighbours, the visits to the Murambinda shops, and the late afternoon conversations with friends at Tsime bottle store. It was also a pleasure to participate in the occasional social gatherings organized by the staff and visiting doctors of the Murambinda hospital, particularly Dr. Monica Glenshaw and Martin and Sue Dennis. I have great admiration for their work. Meeting Nicolas 'Mboyi' Mazhande was another stroke of luck. Nick worked for a Dutch NGO in Buhera district, and he and I spent many hours discussing both Zimbabwean and Dutch culture, much to my advantage, but hopefully also to his. I owe him for the good times we had together, and for introducing me to Zimbabwean music.

Amai Florence Bishi and her children and Ranga 'Chirandu' Manzvanda deserve many thanks for their help and friendship. The latter also introduced me to his *tezvara*, Alwin 'Murambwe' Revesayi. In many ways, he has been my *mudzidzisi* (teacher), explaining to me about life in Zimbabwe and the Shona language. I admire him for his capacity of not merely adapting to the strange habits of a *murungu* like me – such as eating bread and drinking coffee all the time – but actively engaging in such habits as well as my research project. I am greatly indebted to Alwin for his assistance to this research. This holds also for my other *mudzidzisi*, Trust B. Mujiri. His thorough knowledge of the Murambinda area and its people has been invaluable. I often regret that, due to his untimely death, Trust is unable to see what has come of it. Through

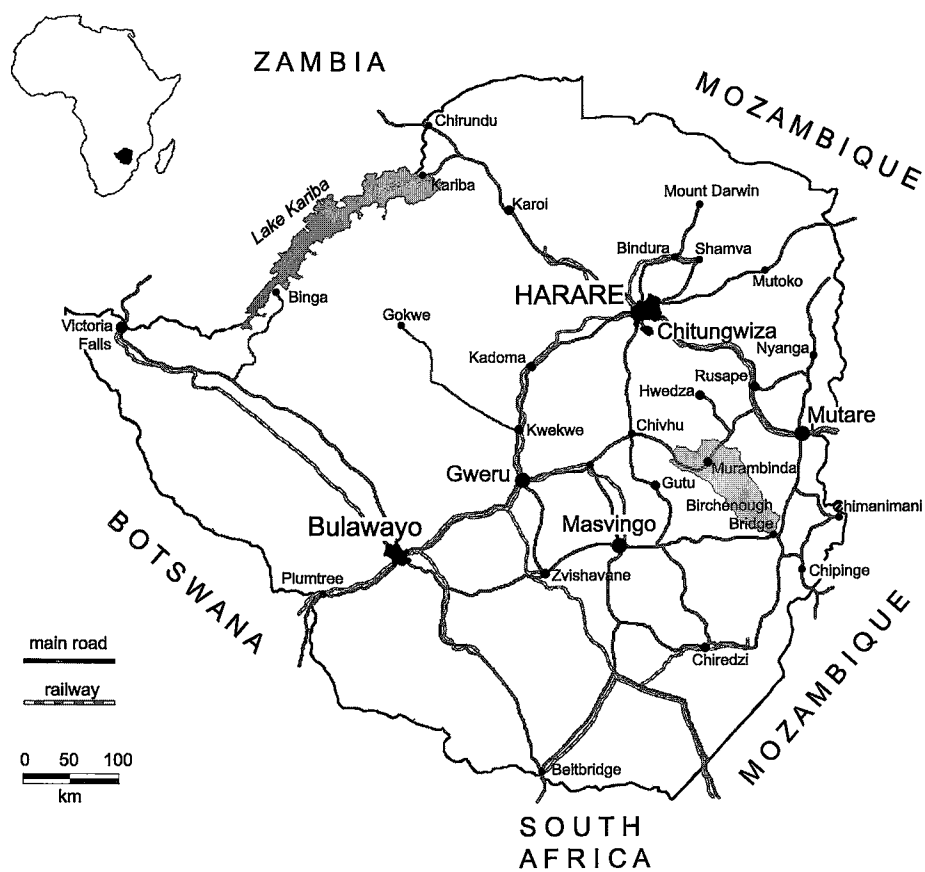
xii Acknowledgements

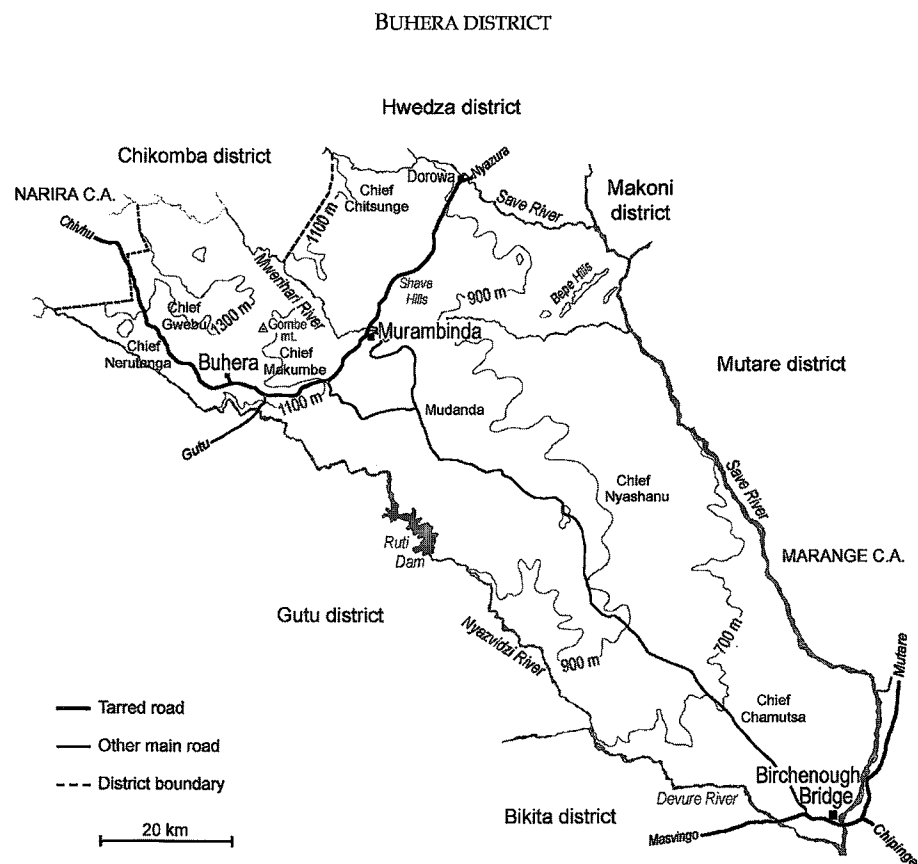
Trust I got to know about Buhera social life. I have been warmly welcomed at every Buhera *musha* and Harare house I entered. I wish to express my thanks to all the people of the Murambinda headmanship for this hospitality, as well as for their willingness to open up their lives to me.

This thesis, and my academic career in general, owe much to the continuous support and guidance of JanKees van Donge. His scholarship and teaching skills have benefited me since the early 1990s, when he agreed to supervise my MSc thesis on Tanzania. Since then I have often been impressed by his knowledge of African issues, the sometimes scary precision with which he can direct you to an article 'that may be of interest to what you are trying to argue', and his capacity to get me to write more clearly. Over the years, JanKees and Aafke Justesen's home – be it in Malawi or The Netherlands – has also turned into a favourite destination of mine, to which it is good to return. Restricting myself to the academic side, however, it is perhaps less JanKees' scholarship than his infectious passion for ethnographic research for which I thank him the most.

To end, I thank those closest to me, my parents, Ton Andersson and Marjan de Jong, my brother Sven, Indra, Judith, Ad and Brigit for their support throughout, but especially during the last year of this project when life has not always been that easy for us. Not being near Judith de Wolf was, undoubtedly, the greatest difficulty during this whole project. Air tickets did some good, but could not solve the underlying problem; and each time she returned from her own fieldwork in Cameroon, she often had to endure this project. In good Zimbabwean fashion, I can only say: 'I do apologize, any inconvenience caused is sincerely regretted'. She has more influence on my well-being, my thinking, and the content of this book than she will be willing to admit.

ZIMBABWE (BUHERA DISTRICT INDICATED)





1. Introduction

This book is about people who spend many hours of their lives on buses, travelling between the rural district of Buhera and Harare, Zimbabwe's capital. Such people are usually designated 'migrant workers' and, in Southern Africa, their movements have often been studied in demographic terms from a macro perspective. In contrast, the present book comprises detailed studies of the lives of a relatively small group of people. An obvious question, then, concerns the wider relevance of these studies. This problem of generalization is, of course, inherent in any academic enquiry as the popular saying suggests: 'the academic is somebody who knows a lot about very little.'

The central premise of this book runs counter to this point of view, since it maintains that the intensive study of the particular – here, the lives of 'travelling' people – can indeed provide important general insights. This does not mean that the understanding of the particular can be generalized, or be considered representative of a wider social world. Rather, it means that the perspective developed in the study of the particular enables us to critically review received understandings, and interpret better the nature and constitution of the wider social world. This introductory chapter aims to do exactly this. It elaborates on how the detailed ethnographic studies that make up this book challenge pervasive dichotomies in our thinking about development. The oppositions to which I refer relate to the rural and urban geographical spaces connected by 'travelling' people; the contrast between urban and rural geographical spaces is often associated with dichotomies such as modern-traditional, progressive-conservative, change-continuity, etc. (Ferguson, 1999; Kearney, 1996). Though such oppositions have been strongly criticized by anthropologists, they seem to appear time and again, both in popular and academic thought. At the same time, these oppositions present us with a common development perspective on the relation between the urban and the rural – i.e. that of state-directed modernization. It is with this conceptualization of the rural and the urban in common thinking about development that the ethnographic studies presented hereafter take issue

The perspective put forward in the following chapters does not merely deconstruct the common oppositions associated with the rural-urban distinction, challenging academic and developmental understandings of social life in Buhera (see for instance: Holleman, 1952a; Ranger, 1985): it also leads to a different perspective on a wider social world – on events and situations that were not the immediate object of study. Here I refer to the political and

economic crisis that Zimbabwe faces at the turn of the 21st century. The symptoms of this crisis – i.e. urban food riots, occupations of commercial farms and political violence – focused international media attention on the country after the fieldwork for this book had been completed. In the final chapter of this thesis, it is discussed how the interpretative framework developed in the following chapters can also be used to challenge existing political and academic discourses on Zimbabwe's crisis and its origins. However, to understand how the study of a small group of people leads to such a different interpretative framework, it is first necessary to elaborate briefly on the specific methodological approach adopted.

Understanding a society of 'travellers'

To understand the lives of people who move up and down from Buhera to Harare requires travelling through widely different landscapes. It means travelling in a rural district where homesteads are scattered in the landscape, only connected by sandy tracks and footpaths that are difficult to negotiate with any motorized vehicle. It entails travelling to Harare, on smoothly tarred roads passing through large stretches of commercial farmland, where relaxed driving is only disturbed by racing buses in competition for passengers. Then, one has to travel in Harare's so called 'high-density' areas; township-like neighbourhoods in which the roads are full of people, potholes and puzzlement, as the streets never seem to appear on the map one is carrying. And, lastly, it involves travelling back in time, into Zimbabwe's colonial records, in search of where these travelling people came from.

A consequence of this method of enquiry – 'travelling' – is that this study is neither a rural nor an urban study of migration. It therefore differs from conventional anthropological studies of rural-urban migration and urbanization. These have generally examined either rural or urban social situations – analysing respectively the consequences of out-migration for the rural society and its agriculture-based economy, or the adoption of urbanized lifestyles in cities.¹ Furthermore, such studies have often assumed that rural-urban migrants make behavioural shifts when moving between these different social situations (Gluckman, 1960), almost as if they had a split personality, living in two worlds. For some time now, anthropologists have criticized these conventional studies, disarticulating the geographical opposition between rural and urban spaces from the dichotomies associated with it. Influenced by discussions of post-

¹ A vast body of literature has developed on these issues. For analyses of the impact of labour migration on rural areas, see, for instance: Richards (1995 [1939]), Watson (1958), van Velsen (1960; 1964a), Murray (1980), Potts (2000a). For urbanization literature see for instance: Epstein (1981; 1992); Stopforth (1971); Mayer and Mayer (1974), Mitchell (1956; 1961; 1987), Møller (1978). For an overview see: Hannerz (1980)

modernity and globalization, the focus has shifted away from 'island-like' views of culture – as stable, closed and geographically situated in a particular place – towards conceptualizations in which cultures are seen as less unitary and more fragmented (Clifford 1988: 10). Thus, attention is drawn to: (1) the multiplicity of cultural spaces, styles or repertoires; and (2), more reflexively, to the role of anthropologists localizing 'others'.² Hence, the notion of cultural difference is increasingly becoming deterritorialized, challenging the usefulness of concepts like 'local' and 'location' for our understanding of culture (Olwig and Hastrup, 1997; Lovell, 1998: 5). Nevertheless, polarities associated with rural-urban oppositions often re-appear in different forms: in popular classifications people use to distinguish themselves or in anthropological distinctions such as cosmopolitan or localist cultural styles (Ferguson, 1999).

The studies in this book, though featuring people who have been travelling between Buhera district and numerous other geographical spaces for generations, do not present an image of a culture fragmented by mobility or moving between different – rural and urban – cultural spaces. To the Buheran migrants studied, distinctions between rural and urban social life did not seem to be important, let alone problematic. From observation, it appeared that being in Buhera is something different from being a Buheran. It emerged that 'Buhera' referred more to an identity than to a geographical space. Not confined to a particular area, this society of migrants was understood as translocal, spanning different geographical spaces, while at the same time constituting a single cultural space. Buhera as a geographical space remained nevertheless important, albeit not as the context of social life, constituting a cultural space or territory, but rather as a point of identification, evoking a sense of belonging. It is upon this 'being Buheran' that the analyses in this book focus, revealing its significance for the ways in which people organize their livelihoods, thereby reproducing their Buheran identity.

Hence 'travelling' did not involve the mapping of different cultural spaces. Neither did it serve to visualize macro-level articulations of rural and urban economic sectors at the level of individual economic decision makers whose daily lives could be observed by an anthropologist. What emerged was not a

² Often, as in the case of Buheran migrants, the geographical boundedness of cultures constituted merely an 'invention of tradition', just as 'customs' and 'ethnicities' could indeed be products of colonial administrators' and anthropologists' codification (Ranger, 1983; 1989; see also chapter 2). Hence, Gupta and Ferguson (1997a: 35) have drawn attention to the way in which the anthropological discipline constructs (fieldwork) locations in 'fields of unequal power relations.'

'microcosm'³ (Douglas and Ney, 1998: 24), in which the micro-level – the livelihood pursuits of individual actors – could be analysed in the same way as the macro-level – where different economic sectors, or modes of production,⁴ are seen as functionally linked. To be sure, focusing the analysis on (economic) interests proved of limited value in understanding specific migration practices, fights over pieces of land, or – for that matter – the witchcraft practices (discussed in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively) in which people engaged. To be able to understand (*Verstehen*) these practices⁵, and to grasp their possible instrumentality in the attainment of specific (economic) ends, it does not suffice to ascribe to the people involved what Max Weber has ideal-typified as an instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*). It also requires a comprehension of the ends Buheran migrants value (*Wertrationalität*), i.e. how their practices reflect specific value orientations.⁶ This became most apparent in the attempt to understand seemingly 'irrational' behaviour such as that of the young Buheran worker who suddenly leaves a well-paid and secure job in order to avoid a marriage with a non-Buheran 'town-girl' he has made pregnant; or that of the urban worker from Buhera who becomes (financially) deeply involved in a conflict over an agriculturally poor piece of land in his home village; or that of the Buheran who exchanges a secure urban job for a 'poor' existence as village leader in Buhera district. Understanding these situations requires in the first place an actor oriented research methodology, looking at social change as constructed 'from below' (Long, 1977: 105-43, 187-90; 1984). Yet, the social and economic practices of actors cannot be understood outside a cultural framework in which they are produced and have meaning. Therefore, understanding the

³ Douglas and Ney (1998: 24) define a 'microcosm' as 'a powerful analogy that replicates itself in a series of concentric circles', and argue that the model of *homo oeconomicus* acts as such in much contemporary social science research.

⁴ In economic thinking, two sector models are often associated with the work of Lewis (1954). See also: Gugler (1971). Analyses of modes of production and the articulation thereof is generally associated with Neo-Marxist scholars. In the context of Southern Africa such thinking is most prevalent in the work of Wolpe (1972), Arrighi (1973a), Bundy (1979), Palmer and Parsons (1977), Palmer (1977b), Phimister (1977).

⁵ As Giddens has argued (1977: 182), Weber's concept of *Verstehen* is problematic. No act is directly understandable – as Weber's concept of *aktuelles Verstehen* seems to suggest – but always has to be contextualized in order to be comprehensible. Hence, the method of *Verstehen* is always *erklärendes Verstehen* (explanatory understanding), as the interpreter situates 'the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning' (Giddens, 1977: 182).

⁶ Using Weber's distinction between value-rationality and instrumental-rationality does not imply that this study perceives historical processes as a progression from value-driven to interest-driven motivations of social action or as progressive rationalization. Rather, following Douglas and Ney's (1998) analysis of the dominant model of the rational actor in western thought, instrumental rationality is understood as part of a specific cultural orientation. See also Sahlins (1978: 205).

social situations in which Buherans find themselves entails not only an identification of the ways in which knowledgeable and capable actors devise strategies or 'create space' for pursuing their various goals (see Giddens, 1984; Long, 1984; 1992: 27, 36-7), but also, at the same time, an exploration of what goals Buherans value and, more broadly, how their social practices are grounded in, and constitutive of, specific cultural frames of meaning. It is upon this mutual framing of culture and social practice that the studies in this book focus. Thus, culture is seen as a vital part of social processes and as the grounds of agency and intentionality in ongoing social practice (Ortner, 1999: 11). However, such a focus neither presupposes, nor searches for, some unified, bounded notion of culture. Boundaries are increasingly hard to draw in the globalizing world in which we live. Hence, the approach is much more modest, building upon Bourdieu's notion of cultural dispositions in exploring how Buherans' social practices are culturally configured (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990; 1998). Such an exploration requires a historical reconstruction of the cultural dispositions that give meaning to contemporary Buherans' social practices. After all, as Geertz (1993: 4-5) has argued, culture cannot be reduced to a symbolic structure giving meaning to action, but rather, should be conceptualized as historically situated social practices that produce meaning.⁷ Hence, the use of *socio-cultural* dispositions – they are (re-)produced and transformed in social practices. To understand these 'meaning-making' practices thus calls for 'historical imagination'; an interpretation of past practices building on the limited sources available for such an endeavour (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992). In the case of the Buhera migrants studied, this meant the interpretation of oral accounts and the records of the colonial state, giving due attention to the fact that these sources are produced within their own specific frames of meaning.⁸ Thus, the ethnographic enquiries in this thesis extend beyond the directly observed in two ways: they ground 'subjective, culturally configured action in society [i.e. a wider social world] and history' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 11).

Hence, the method of following Buheran workers from rural Buhera into the city of Harare resulted in viewing Buheran workers as 'whole' persons

⁷ With Geertz, this study views culture as 'webs of meaning' people themselves have spun and encoded in symbolic forms (in language, artefacts, rituals, customs, etc.) that have to be understood through interpretation (Ortner, 1999: 3; Geertz 1993: 4-5). This does not mean that such 'spinning', or 'meaning-making', is an uncontested, power-devoid process. See, for instance, the debating of 'custom' in the case study presented in chapter 5, p.121.

⁸ Ethnographic inquiry in itself is no different in this respect. Like oral histories or written accounts, it ascribes meaning to situations, be it observed fieldwork situations, or texts produced by colonial administrators writing reports for their superiors. Hence, there is, in this respect, no essential difference between historical and anthropological modes of interpretation.

(Douglas and Ney, 1998) in three respects. First, it became possible to see that they were not split persons, living in two separate – rural and urban – social worlds. Second, it facilitated looking beyond rural-urban migrations as outcomes of specific actor strategies, intentions and decision-making, understanding the social organization of such movements also in relation to a specific organization of – intersubjective – meaning, as expressions of specific cultural patterns. Third, by understanding people's instrumental rationality as culturally framed, while viewing culture as a product of social practices, the interpretation of the social situations in which they operate involved at the same time the interpretation of past practices. Thus, the Buheran workers studied became people with a history.

The rural and the urban in development thinking

The initial interest for this study was informed by the 'logic' of World Bank and IMF promoted Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that numerous African governments have been forced to implement since the early 1980s. Singling out African governments' economic policies as the major cause of economic decline, the perspective on rural-urban relations underpinning these programmes is that of economic sectors in competition. African governments' policies are seen as 'urban biased' – i.e. overprotecting urban industry while simultaneously holding back agriculture (Bates, 1988: 346–7; de Haan, 1999: 13). This urban bias argument, which has its roots in the 1970s (Lipton, 1977), thus stresses the distorted terms of trade between rural and urban sectors, while viewing these as government induced. Consequently, the redressing of these *structural* imbalances in the economy became a dominant theme in development policy debates in the 1980s and 1990s (see World Bank, 1981: 4; 1994). It was expected that, as a result of this shift in economic policy, the balance between urban and rural sectors of the economy would turn more in favour of the latter, thus enabling African economies to return to the path of economic growth and development. Adopted throughout Africa, the World Bank and IMF supported adjustment programmes put into effect a policy package of trade liberalization, removal of state subsidies, and trimming of government budgets, often accompanied by retrenchments in the civil service sector.

Within a migrant labour economy such as Zimbabwe's, the adoption of structural adjustment policies implied that smallholder agriculture would gain in significance as a source of people's livelihood. Hence, the idea of this study was to investigate the effects of adjustment in a situation of rural land scarcity, as is the case in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas.

Adjustment, modernization and urbanization studies in Southern Africa

The theoretical underpinnings of adjustment policies are not difficult to discern. They are to be found in neo-classic economics and modernization theory in which rural and urban are ordered in terms of historical succession, as stages of the development process (Hoselitz, 1952; Rostow, 1953). Development is first situated in the rural area: increased labour productivity in agriculture generates a labour surplus. Thereafter, the locus of development shifts to the urban area where the labour surplus generated in the agricultural sector is absorbed in the developing urban industry.

A similar modernization perspective on rural-urban relations can be discerned in studies of labour migration and urbanization in Southern Africa. Closely associated with economic growth, urbanization has featured as a major characteristic of the modernization process, turning demographic changes into indicators of the progression of the modernization process (Mitchell, 1987; Ferguson, 1990; see also chapter 3).⁹ This holds also for the ideologically opposed, neo-Marxist analyses of migrant labour societies. As in modernization theory, these studies often view the rural and the urban as instrumentally and hierarchically linked, reducing the rural area – i.e. an agricultural existence – to a social safety net for the urban dweller (see, for instance: Wolpe, 1972; Potts, 2000a, b; Zinyama, 1986a). In other words, the city is viewed as the centre of capital accumulation requiring a rural hinterland.

Tied up with this pervasive perspective on the relation between the rural and the urban is a centralist perspective on development, focusing on the role of the state. In structural adjustment programmes, the state is seen as distorting the balance between rural and urban economic sectors, thus influencing rural-urban population movements and hampering development. Paradoxically, the liberalization policies promoted again assume a strong state presence in the economy, whereas in many cases African states' control over the economy was or has proven to be limited (see: van Donge, 1994). Studies of labour migration and urbanization in Southern Africa, on the other hand, have often stressed the restrictive legal framework of colonial states, regulating population movements between rural and urban areas (see a.o.: Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990; see also chapter 3).

The two premises of economic structural adjustment and urbanization studies in Southern Africa – (1) government control; and (2) the idea that the land is the source of livelihoods and development – proved problematic, however, in the field.

⁹ Taking a longer-term perspective, the World Bank (2001: 130) has recently labelled the African situation as unique, finding a 'negative correlation between urbanization and per capita income'.

Studying 'travellers' livelihoods: an emergent perspective on land & the state

The idea of following people, resulting in multi-sited ethnographies (Marcus, 1998: 79-104), may seem anthropologically sound, yet it does not solve the major practical problem encountered in studies of people who are geographically dispersed: Where to be at what time? Indeed, the feeling of not being where 'interesting things' were happening was a major reason for my frantic travelling in the early months of the fieldwork. In an attempt to become a familiar face in the Murambinda area of the Buhera district, I had decided to attend the sessions of the local headman's court (*Dare*) that – if there were cases – were held on Thursdays.¹⁰ This appeared a rewarding strategy, as most interesting cases were discussed at this court (see chapter 4). Consequently, on the promise of an upcoming court case, I would interrupt my enquiries in Harare – in the National Archives (see chapter 2) and in high-density areas (see chapter 3) – in order to attend the Thursday court. Thus, I would find myself driving back to Buhera district in the darkness of Wednesday evening, making sure not to miss that one court case that might prove to be crucial for my understanding of this society of 'travellers'. (On Thursday morning I would, of course, often find that the particular court case was postponed until the following week.)

However complicated in practice, the method of 'travelling' made me aware of the relevance of urban connections for sustaining Buhera livelihoods, as well as the significance of rural connections for the ways in which Buherans organized their livelihoods. When trying to meet a particular migrant for the first time in Harare – where most Buheran migrants work – I found that it was easiest to meet at their workplace. Specific Harare companies were generally easier to locate than the house or room the specific Buheran migrant was occupying. Thus, I would often find myself waiting at a Harare factory-gate for that one migrant who had agreed to an interview when in Buhera, only to end up with a whole group of Buherans interested in talking to me after a day's work. Hence, it became clear how Buherans clustered together in particular industries and neighbourhoods. And while I was trying to keep track of whom I met – in order to reconstruct the ways in which rural-urban connections were socially organized – the Buheran migrants often used such occasions to solve more practical problems. For them, my car presented a transport opportunity. As a consequence, it became increasingly clear that the idea of the urban migrant being supported by his/her rural kin needed revision.

Meanwhile, the court cases at the local headman's court directed me to a different perspective on the (colonial) state and its agencies. In the numerous

¹⁰ Court sessions were held on Thursdays because in Buhera district this day is known as *Chisi*, the day on which the ancestral spirits do not allow people to work in their fields.

and lengthy land cases that were discussed at this court, people time and again referred to maps of the area, drawn by government administrators and *madhomeni* (agricultural demonstrators) during the colonial era. These maps, it was alleged, would reveal the 'real' boundaries between villages, and thus be of help in solving land conflicts in the area. Initially, the fact that land conflicts were brought to this headman's court instead of the Rural District Council was a surprise. Communal Land management was a government task, the books had told me, and here it seemed government was hardly involved at all in land issues, but, as people kept referring to 'the maps', I felt pressurized by the acting headman and his councillors to help find these maps. After all, I was in possession of a car and also known to be working in the National Archives in an attempt to write a history of the area. Thus, four old men, my research assistant and I, squeezed ourselves into my small old car, and drove to the Agritex¹¹ district offices at Buhera, some thirty kilometres away. In vain, it appeared. Agritex did not have the kind of maps we were looking for, but suggested the Buhera Rural District Council at Murambinda might have them. Hence, we drove back to Murambinda, where an understanding local administrator did his best to help us (there was no reference, however, to the fact that the headman's court was actually dealing with cases outside its jurisdiction). He suggested consulting the tax register – as it is organized by village (*bhuku*) – to establish the boundaries of the two villages entangled in the land conflict. Thus, seven pairs of eyes stared at the tax register, only to find out that it gave little insight into who was living where.

Many people did not appear in the tax register, many others had been dead for years, and numerous others had been classified in the wrong village. Moreover, those appearing in the register seemed to be notorious tax-defaulters. While it transpired that this local government institution had little clue as to who was living within its administrative borders, the kind administrator suggested that we return to Buhera, to the District Administrators's offices. Perhaps they would have the maps we were looking for. Instead, we gave up. (On a later occasion I did raise the matter with the District Administrator who promptly presented me a file, ironically claiming it contained 'all historical data on Buhera'. The file was empty.)

Searches in the colonial state's records were equally disappointing, and if it had concerned only the maps it would not have been too bad. In the eyes of my colleague researchers occupying the reading room of the National Archives in Harare, I must have looked an odd guy at times. While it appeared they found interesting information on every page of the file they had in front of them, I

¹¹ Agritex is the state's agricultural extension agency. For an overview of its history, see Bolding (forthcoming); Drinkwater (1989); Mungazi and Walker (1998).

could spend days requesting file after file, without finding anything on Buhera or the people originating from this district. Moreover, the material on Buhera I finally did manage to scrape together provided me with a far less hegemonic view of the colonial state than the academic literature usually presents (see chapter 2).

Rural-urban connections and the value of land: an ethnographic perspective

The enquiry method of 'travelling' adopted in the studies that comprise this book yields a different understanding of the relation between the rural and urban, and the significance of rural land in sustaining livelihoods. Furthermore, the analyses presented provide a different perspective on the role of the (colonial) state in structuring rural-urban relations. This is not to say that rural-urban distinctions have been unimportant in (colonial) Zimbabwe, or (colonial) policy discourse, for, as the analysis in *chapter 2* makes clear, they have. This chapter deals with the emergence of the distinction between rural and urban in colonial policy discourse, problematizing the construction of knowledge resulting in such distinctions. It argues that the power of the (colonial) state to impose its own self-produced categories of thought poses a major problem for the historiography of Zimbabwe. Relying heavily on the archival sources of the colonial state, historians have often reinforced a hegemonic view of that state, treating as unproblematic the relation between knowledge about, and control over, African societies as presented in these archival sources. My analysis challenges this hegemonic view of the colonial state, presenting an alternative interpretation of administrative reports on Buhera district. It explores past practices of Buhera people, discussing the historical dynamics of their multi-occupational livelihood pursuits – combining livestock, crop cultivation, trade and (temporary) labour migration. In this exploration, the invention of the rural-urban divide in colonial policy discourse becomes apparent. While Buhera society became increasingly represented as the traditional, rural end of a rural-urban divide in colonial policy discourse, social life in the area became more intimately linked to the urban economy of Salisbury (now Harare).

Although focused on the state, the analysis in chapter 2 draws attention to the historical dynamics of Buhera societies independent of the colonial state. As in the chapters that follow it, the analysis diverges from prevailing perspectives in Zimbabwe studies. These have generally focused on state-peasant relations, either looking at how colonial state intervention met with increased opposition – as in historical studies of upcoming nationalism – or focusing on the ways in which the (colonial) state directs social change.

Chapter 3 focuses on the migration practices and rural links of contemporary Buherans who have gone in large numbers to Zimbabwe's capital Harare, in search of work. As is implied by the term labour migration, economic forces have always been regarded as a major determinant of migratory behaviour. Yet,

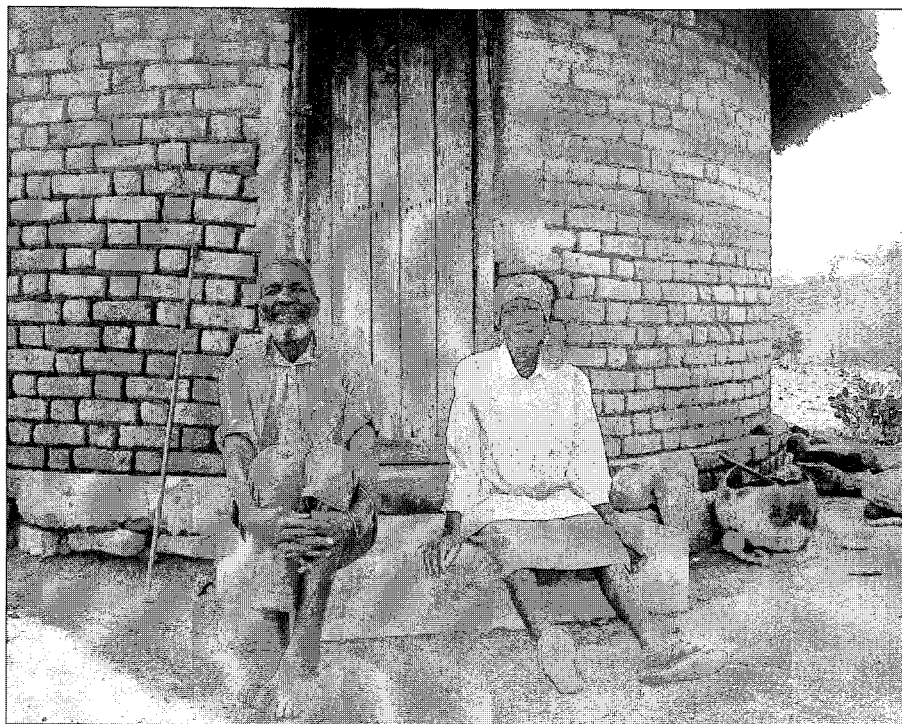
state-centred perspectives have dominated studies of rural-urban migration in Zimbabwe, where a restrictive legal framework regulated migration to urban centres during the colonial era in an attempt to prevent large numbers of Africans becoming permanent town dwellers. The analysis of Buheran migrants in this chapter, however, shifts away from perspectives that reduce migratory behaviour to an effect of state intervention and economic forces. Instead, it focuses on the social organization of rural-urban connections, analysing the significance of Buheran migrants' networks that encompass both rural and urban localities. Clearly, these rural-urban networks are of major economic importance; they are constitutive of Buhera livelihoods, rather than the rural land. But rather than being simply economically motivated, individual migrants' participation in these networks is understood as an expression of a socio-cultural pattern in which rural identification and kinship ideology are of major importance. In other words, the organization of – economically motivated – rural-urban connections is understood as an expression of a specific value-rationality of people living in a society that is translocal in nature.

Viewing people's livelihoods as dependent on rural-urban connections rather than situating these livelihoods rurally, in an agricultural existence, implies a different perspective on the significance of land in people's livelihoods. *Chapter 4* further probes this issue, exploring the different meanings attached to land. It analyses the numerous conflicts over land in the Murambinda area of Buhera district, where the agricultural potential of the land is – as in many Communal Areas – limited. It is shown that, where land is scarce, disputes over land are not necessarily economically motivated. The situational analysis of a single case of land dispute clarifies this: land conflicts in the Murambinda area are predominantly political power struggles. The litigation of land cases is dominated by village leaders (*vanasabhuku*) and largely takes place outside the state's legal arena. Consequently, local state institutions responsible for land issues have a limited understanding of, and exercise little control over, land issues. The findings of this chapter thus direct us to a different view on the ongoing debate concerning tenurial reform in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas, for they challenge the state's administrative capacity to enforce any such reform.

Chapter 5 turns attention towards the ways in which people in this migrant society, which spans rural and urban localities, deal with arising tensions and existential insecurities. It presents a case study of witchcraft allegations in an era in which HIV/AIDS threatens livelihoods. It shows that, in contrast to conventional studies which have analysed witchcraft in relatively closed societies, the domain of the occult in this migrant society is not geographically localized, but translocal in nature. Witchcraft travels as well. Buheran migrants in Harare are not safe from the witchcraft of their rural kin – the domain of the occult is situated in this society's strong patrilineal kinship ideology. Thus, the

analysis once more shows the inseparability of the rural and the urban in Buhera social life.

In *chapter 6*, we return to the issue raised in this introductory chapter, which is the wider relevance of detailed ethnographic studies. Taking international press reports on Zimbabwe as another example of the pervasiveness of rural-urban distinctions, prevailing discourses on Zimbabwe's current economic and political crisis are critically examined, building on the ethnographic perspective developed in the foregoing chapters.





2. Administrators' knowledge and state control: The invention of the rural-urban divide, 1912-80*

Dr. Holleman spoke well and clearly [to the African welfare workers], and not at all in the patronizing way that is so common to white officials... 'Now gentlemen,' he said... and I could see how the listening Africans liked his politeness... 'The theme of my lecture, gentlemen, is the community. The African community. And the basis of community, which is the tribe.' And with this he drew on the blackboard a circle – the tribe. 'And the unit of the tribe is the kinship group.' And with that he divided his circle into neat portions – the kinship groups. 'And what gives the feeling of homogeneity in the village is the way these units are shaped.' The Africans were listening very intently, and I was, too; for it was difficult for me to see the tribe as a circle and the kinship groups as segments of it. Dr. Holleman was explaining how these units were broken into and scattered by the young men going into the towns to work... 'But [when] the fabric of the tribe is broken, gentlemen, the fabric of the community is destroyed; and it is you who must rebuild it.' (Lessing, 1996: 151-3; originally published in 1957).

Doris Lessing's brilliant irony brings out the theme of this chapter, the role of the state in colonial Zimbabwe. Confident that they knew 'African society'¹, white officials saw it as their task to guide it into the modern world. By capturing it in symbols such as the 'segmented circle', they categorized African social life into an intelligible and malleable social order. This power of the state and its representatives to impose their self-produced categories of thought (Bourdieu, 1998: 35) poses a major problem to the historiography of Zimbabwe, which has attributed to the state a dominant role in directing social change. This is noticeable in the perspective of Holleman, as Doris Lessing so clearly illustrates. Here, the state features as an agent of modernization, guiding Africans' incorporation into an urbanized, industrial society. Equally, a similar causality between policies and outcomes can be found in more critical materialist analysis. For instance, historians like Arrighi, Phimister and Palmer have perceived the (Southern) Rhodesian state as the architect of an institutional framework which transformed African peasant societies into

* A shorter version of the argument developed in this chapter will be published as: J.A. Andersson. 2002 'Administrators' knowledge and state control in colonial Zimbabwe; the invention of the rural-urban divide in Buhera district, 1912-80', *Journal of African History* vol.43.

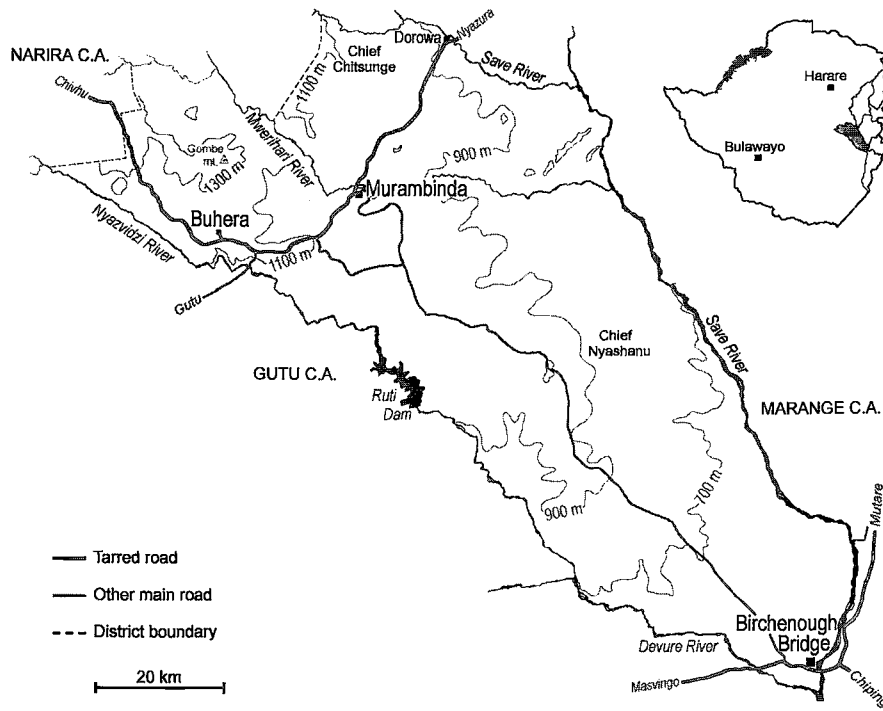
¹ 'African' and 'African society' are, of course, highly problematic terms for they homogenise numerous different peoples in and beyond Zimbabwe's borders. In this thesis they are used in a general sense, to denote indigenous peoples of Zimbabwe.

exploited proletarians in a modern, class-based society (Arrighi, 1973a: 180-234; 1973b: 336-77; Palmer, 1977b; Phimister, 1988). Hence, although representing opposing historiographical positions on the state, both perspectives present a hegemonic view of the state that is often based on an uncritical adoption of its categories of thought.

More recently, the hegemonic view of the state in colonial Africa has been deflated by authors who have pointed to the conflicting interests within colonial administrations, their limited resources, and the contradictory processes that shaped them (Berry, 1992: 328; Berman and Lonsdale, 1992). The present study, which also highlights the limitations of the colonial state's administrative capacity, does not, however, focus on factionalism within the state apparatus. Instead, it focuses on administrators' production of knowledge on African societies and its consequences for state control over those societies. It may seem paradoxical to challenge a hegemonic view of the colonial state, and its categories of thought, with sources on an area that can be considered rather untypical of Zimbabwe's colonial history. For, unlike many other districts, Buhera (see Figure 2.1) was never the scene of large-scale land alienation and eviction of Africans from their ancestral lands. As white settlers had little interest in its dry and sandy soils, the area comprising present day Buhera was left to its inhabitants and became known as the (southern) Sabi Native Reserve.² Sources on this district-sized 'Native Reserve' are therefore largely limited to the settler state's records. Nevertheless, these records are of interest to historical inquiry for two reasons. First, they allow for a different interpretation of the role of the state in development. At one level, it may be seen that the reports of the administrators in Buhera district often merely reflect the shifting biases in the state's policies towards Africans, and the subsequent categories of thought which these preoccupations educed. Yet, while following these biases in state policies, the analysis presented in this chapter will reveal that this archival material also contains observations from local-level administrators which challenge the order and (illusion of) control which these same administrators presented in their reports. Thus, this chapter aims to build an alternative interpretation that may stimulate the development of alternative views on the impact of the settler state's policies in other areas.

² On the formation of African reserves, see Palmer (1977: 57-60). Formed in 1895, the Sabi district became part of the Charter district in 1899. In 1912, a sub-station of the Charter district office at The Range, was opened at Buhera, in what was by then already known as the Sabi Native Reserve: NC (Native Commissioner) Charter annual report 1912, National Archives of Zimbabwe (hereafter NAZ) N9/1/15; Baxter (1969: 99). In 1943, the Sabi Reserve was made a full Native Commissioner's district, and in 1945, the southern part an independent district, known as Buhera district. NC Buhera annual reports 1944 and 1945, NAZ S1563.

FIGURE 2.1: BUHERA DISTRICT, 2000



Second, the case of Buhera district is of interest as a powerful image of 'traditional African society' was modelled on it in the 1950s. J.F. Holleman, who selected the area for an anthropological inquiry in 1945, took the inhabitants of Buhera as a people 'whose traditional way of life had not yet been profoundly influenced by regular contact with Western society' (Holleman, 1958: 1). His representation of Buhera as a traditional, closed rural society, was well-attuned to the categories of thought of colonial policy discourse in the 1950s. Holleman's study was seen as recording,

the life and customs of the African people, because as civilization as we know it touches more and more of the population, and as greater numbers gravitate to the towns and industries, as they are bound to do in the march of progress, so will it become more difficult to obtain authentic information of the customs and structure of the tribes (Foreword of the Chief Native Commissioner Powys-Jones in Holleman (1952: vii)).

Preoccupied with (agricultural) modernization and African urbanization, the settler state's policies increasingly built upon a classification of African social life in terms of a rural-urban dichotomy. Holleman's book, *Shona Customary Law* (1952a), which became influential in circles of the Southern Rhodesian

administration³, represented Buhera social life along these lines – as the traditional, rural side of this rural-urban divide. However, as the historical analysis presented in this chapter will reveal, this representation of Buhera district as a traditional, closed rural society is incorrect. Already in the early colonial period – and probably long before – the Buhera people were strongly incorporated into wider networks of economic exchange. When in the 1950s urban centres became increasingly important destinations for migrants seeking work outside their home district, Buhera social life more and more contradicted its representation as the rural end of a rural-urban divide. Hence, this chapter argues that the rural-urban divide constituted another colonial invention of tradition (Ranger, 1983: 211-62; 1989: 118-50), albeit largely an imaginary one – situated in the minds of colonial administrators and an anthropologist.

Building upon the historical analysis of Buhera district, the chapter concludes with an exploration of the hegemonic view of the colonial state in Zimbabwean historiography. It suggests that the scholarly focus on areas that experienced dramatic confrontations between Europeans (settlers and administrators) and Africans – areas for which sufficient and well-classified archival material is available – goes a long way to explain why this dominant role was attributed to the settler state.⁴ However, a focus on areas that were more marginally incorporated into the colonial state may help us not only to develop a more regionally differentiated view of the role of the colonial state, but also enable us to look differently at African opposition to the colonial state.

Colonial administrators and the mobilization of labour, 1898-1926

The early colonial history of Shona-speaking Zimbabwe has generally been described as a period of peasant prosperity, preceding a decline in independent African farming. Colonization and the emerging white mining industry led to an expansion of markets for both labour and agricultural products such as grain and cattle. African societies actively responded to these new market opportunities, which coincided with the state's imposition of taxes that forced people to generate a cash income (Phimister, 1974: 217-28; Palmer, 1977a: 221-54; Palmer, 1977b: 71-3). A preoccupation with labour mobilization, taxation and the systematic supply of (forced) labour to the white settlers' mines and farms were two prongs in the state's policy towards Africans. A common assumption in the historical analyses of this period seems to be that Africans'

³ The book became part of the inventory of all district stations as well as the curriculum of the training programme for new personnel in the Internal Affairs Department. Personal communication, Mr. C.J.K. Latham, former District Commissioner (DC) Buhera and training officer.

⁴ For instance, while it was the absence of settler interference that made the area and its peoples of interest to the anthropologist J.F. Holleman, the dearth of archival sources for Buhera probably explains the limited interest of archive-oriented historians for the area.

participation in markets for agricultural produce and labour was mutually exclusive and followed one another chronologically. As Palmer has put it, 'it proved possible, and obviously preferable, for the Shona to meet their tax commitments through the sale of foodstuffs and cattle rather than by becoming migrant labourers' (Palmer, 1977b: 71). But when, from 1908 onwards, the state-subsidized expansion of European agriculture increased competition in agricultural markets, and independent African farming is seen as entering an irreversible process of decline, in which state intervention is perceived as having been a major force (Phimister, 1988: 50; Palmer, 1977b: 71).⁵

Labour mobilization in Buhera sub-district

Based on the flawed assumption that colonialism and capitalism spread simultaneously, the perspective on Zimbabwe's early colonial history outlined above views African participation in (labour) markets as state-induced.⁶ However, Africans' participation in labour markets was probably neither new, nor much controlled by the small, newly-established administration.⁷ Letters of the Native Commissioner (NC) of Charter district show that even before the turn of the century, inhabitants of the southern Sabi Reserve – where there was no significant internal demand for labour – had taken part in the movement of labour between districts. Although compulsion may have played its part in mobilizing the Buherans, the NC Charter was confident that the supply of African labour could also be generated by means of taxation.⁸

Gaining control over Africans' labour was also a major motivation for the establishment of a sub-station in the remote southern part of Sabi Native Reserve. NC Charter wrote:

I should like to establish a substation about sixty miles South East from here [i.e. Charter district headquarters]. This would facilitate the work of the district and obviate long journeys for the natives in connection with the [working] Pass and other regulation.⁹

⁵ A similar perspective on the peasantry of South Africa has been developed in Bundy (1979).

⁶ As Wolf (1982) has argued, African societies were incorporated in wider networks of economic exchange long before the colonial era. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, it is likely that Buhera labour migration also preceded the establishment of settler control.

⁷ To be sure, with the establishment of the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) in 1903, the colonial state institutionalised forced labour (*chibaro*). However, the impact of this labour policy on local African societies was limited – the vast majority of the African workers involved originated from outside Southern Rhodesia. For an analysis of the function and operation of the RNLB and its forced labour, see: van Onselen (1976).

⁸ NC Charter letters 1898-99, NAZ NSK 1/1/1; NC Charter report on 1900-01, NAZ NSK 1/1/2.

⁹ NC Charter to CNC 5 Aug. 1909, NAZ N3/8/4.

GRENDA'S COUNTRY

Chief of Grenda

Chief of Maghys

MAGHYS COUNTRY

Chief of Tshetjunges

TSHETJUNGES COUNTRY

Chief of Nerutanga

NERUTANGA COUNTRY

Chief of Nyamandos

NYAMANDOS COUNTRY

MARIRA RESERVE

SABI RIVER

SABI RESERVE

MAMBOZ

NYATITSA RIVER

GOMBE

MULI

BUHERA

Scale about 5 miles to the inch

DISTRICT EXTENDS ABOUT 50 MILES IN THIS DIRECTION

Buhera sub-station (established in 1912)

¹⁰ NC Charter annual report 1912, NAZ N9/1/15. See also Baxter (1969: 99).

As Figure 2.2 suggests, state control over the southern Sabi Reserve was limited in the early colonial period. Scattered water sources and the few roads towards the southeastern end of the sub-district seriously hampered the surveillance of its inhabitants (see: Cripps, 1920: 29-33).¹¹ As a consequence both collecting revenue and establishing the number of men liable for tax must have been difficult. Tax patrols were infrequent and could be evaded relatively easily, enabling people to resist tax pressure for some time. Furthermore, village headmen, made responsible for tax collection, occupied an intermediary position between their people and the administration. They could misreport the number of men eligible for tax, the ones present, or the tax due. Some men may have managed to evade the tax system altogether, thus escaping from the administration's (and historians') view. Rather than constituting an attempt to meet one's tax obligations, moving away from home may sometimes have served to escape tax collection, as 1920s annual reports reveal. Thus in 1922 it was noted, 'Arrear tax is mostly owed by those who remain away at work. In many cases they remain undetected for years until they lose their registration certificates.'¹² And again, in 1924, 'Very often it is reported that young men have gone out to work and subsequently it is found that they are visiting or loafing in other parts [of the district].'¹³

Nevertheless, Buhera district reports of the early colonial period continuously present 'the necessity of paying tax... [as] about the only reason why natives work.'¹⁴ However, this direct link between taxation and labour migration is challenged by other observations of the same colonial administrators. They also noted that '[m]ost of those who took out [working] passes went in search of work during the month of March'¹⁵, and that many migrants 'returned during October and November to plant their crops' (see Figure 2.3).¹⁶ The resulting seasonal fluctuation in the labour supply suggests

¹¹ This problem persisted even in the 1950s: 'The Mwerihari is a big river and during the rain it cannot be crossed for months on end. This means that a third of the district is cut off from the station of Buhera for four to six months on end. This makes consistent supervision of any development and administration in general, in the country north of the Mwerihari river, impossible at the most important time of the year.' NC Buhera annual report 1952, NAZ S2403/2681.

¹² ANC Buhera annual report 1922, NAZ N9/1/25.

¹³ NC Charter annual report 1924, NAZ S235/502.

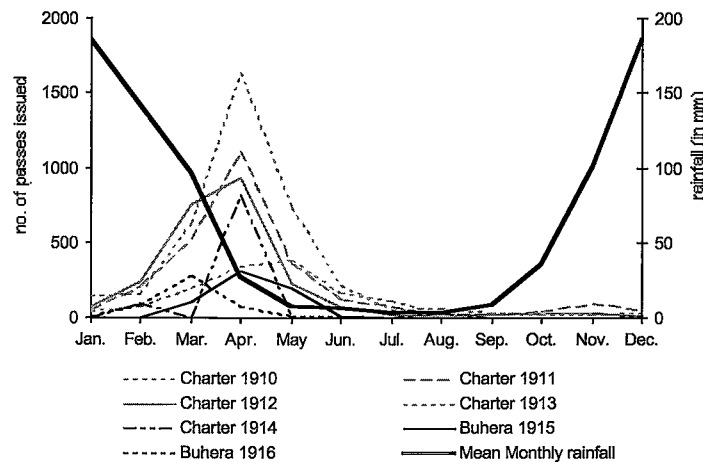
¹⁴ ANC Buhera annual report 1922, NAZ N9/1/25.

¹⁵ ANC Buhera annual report 1916, NAZ N9/1/19. Seasonal fluctuations in the labour supply were common for Southern Rhodesia as a whole. See: CNC review of Sept. 1915, NAZ N9/4/29.

¹⁶ ANC Buhera annual report 1925, NAZ S235/503. See also: ANC Buhera monthly report Dec. 1915, NAZ N9/4/29. A similar perspective on workers' motivations to seek employment can be found in the then popular concept of the 'target worker'. Based on the prevailing idea that the more a worker is paid, the shorter he will work for a wage, this concept portrayed African workers as irrational economic actors and was used to justify a low wage structure (van Onselen, 1975: 237-8).

that the labour-mobilizing capacity of the tax instrument was limited. Rather than being a response to the state's tax demands, the labour supply was a function of changing labour demands in African agriculture.

FIGURE 2.3 : MEAN MONTHLY RAINFALL AND WORKING PASSES
ISSUED AT CHARTER DISTRICT OFFICE AND BUHERA SUB-OFFICE, 1910-16¹⁷



Of course, African agriculture itself the major threat to the presupposed relation between taxation and labour supply in colonial policy discourse. As has been well documented in the literature, African farmers' market production could easily generate the cash required for the payment of tax (Palmer, 1977a; Phimister, 1974; Ranger, 1985: 19-49; 1999; Arrighi, 1973a: 208). Nevertheless, in Buhera, labour migration already constituted an important element of peoples' livelihoods in the early colonial period (and probably before). But before exploring this, let us briefly consider the administrators' understanding and representation of Buhera's involvement in the migrant labour economy. Their reports, which present statistics on working passes issued, suggest an understanding of, and control over, the migration process that was largely non-existent. Other observations of district administrators, scattered through their reports, can illuminate this. First, the working pass statistics did not adequately reflect the number of job-seekers involved, nor the length of their absence. Indeed, the administrators sometimes recognized that their own figures were largely an administrative construct:

¹⁷ The 1910-14 figures for Charter district incorporate the working passes issued to inhabitants of the Buhera sub-district. Mean monthly rainfall at Buhera was calculated on the basis of rainfall figures for the period 1915-95, obtained from the Meteorological Department, Harare. Working pass statistics originate from the NC Charter and ANC Buhera monthly and annual reports 1910-16, NAZ N9/4/23-31 and NAZ N9/1/19.

Three passes only to seek work were issued during the month. I am aware that a number of natives have gone out to search for their taxes since tax collection started and have not worried to come to the office for passes.¹⁸

From a statistical point of view the figure of 469 [passes issued] may be disregarded, as it does not give a true idea of the number of natives who left the Reserve to work. They are not compelled to take out passes to seek work and many go without them.¹⁹

Still, unreliable or not, the working pass statistics featured in the administrators' reports up to the mid 1920s.

A second problem with the statistical order presented in the Native Commissioners' reports is that these cannot cope with the complex ways in which labour migration practices linked Buhera society to the wider economy. Migrant workers' adjusting their departure and return to the agricultural calendar gives the false impression that they all belonged to a single category of seasonal migrants. But here again, other remarks in the colonial reports allow for a different interpretation. For instance, the ANC Buhera's complaint of 1916 that 'natives more or less in permanent employment outside the Reserve ... are among the worst tax payers', suggests that not all migrant workers returned home for the agricultural season.²⁰ Apparently, Buhera people were also involved in migration practices which were other than seasonal. Reports from the early 1920s are revealing in this respect. Besides seasonal migration to nearby labour centres, they mention that numerous migrant workers were going further afield for longer periods of time. Different patterns of labour migration could co-exist:

Some small proportion of the workers finds employment on the neighbouring farms, a very large number wends its way to the larger labour centres of the country and yet others travel South to the Northern parts of the Union of South Africa... Many of this last category, initially at any rate, seem to engage themselves through the medium of labour organisation as farm workers for a long period at a wage rate of about 30/- a month... It is worthy of remark that in order to reach this farm work... these men have to pass by a large area of this country where it is reputed that there is a shortage of farm and ranch labour - an area, be it observed, in which the nominal rate of wage offered labourers appears to vary from 8/- to 15/- a month.²¹

This observed diversity in migration patterns is relevant for two reasons. First, it points to yet another weakness in the presupposed relation between taxation

¹⁸ ANC Buhera monthly report Sept. 1916, NAZ N9/4/31.

¹⁹ ANC Buhera annual report 1916, NAZ N9/1/19. Similar remarks about the inadequacy of these statistics can be found in: ANC Buhera monthly report Sept. 1916, NAZ N9/4/31, and the annual reports of the NC Charter, 1912-1924. See: NAZ N9/1/15-22; NAZ S235/502.

²⁰ ANC Buhera annual report 1916, NAZ N9/1/19. The Native Commissioner of Charter district - of which Buhera was sub-district - already writes about longer-term labour migration before the ANC Buhera. Another indication of the importance of longer-term migration from the area is the system of Tax Advice Forms (TAF), discussed below.

²¹ ANC Buhera annual report 1926, NAZ S235/504.

and labour supply in colonial policy discourse. Colonial state policy was unable to channel the movement of local African labourers.²² Rather than regulating a national labour market, the Southern Rhodesian state operated in the wider regional labour economy of Southern Africa (Paton, 1995). Second, the observations of the ANC Buhera on the different migration practices and migrants' knowledge of the labour market direct us to the role played by migrant workers themselves. Rather than being subsumed under state regulation, Buhera migrants were active participants in the labour market, giving shape to different migration trajectories – differentiated according to wages obtainable, distance from home, and length of absence.

Labour migrants and Buhera livelihoods

If, as argued here, the colonial officials' portrayal of the tax-labour order exaggerates state control over African labour, how must we understand Buhera peoples' involvement in labour migration? After all, to recall Palmer's argument, Africans preferred 'to meet their tax obligations through the sale of foodstuffs and cattle rather than by becoming migrant labourers' (Palmer, 1977b: 71). Yet, as the NC Charter observed in 1912, it was not merely an issue of either or, but a combination of labour migration and agricultural production:

There is a gradual decrease in the number of natives going out to work. This may be assigned to two reasons. (1) A large number remain in continuous service for periods of 12 months and more and do not figure in the returns as having gone out. (2) Many have earned sufficient to last them for some years to come. Others are well off in stock and realize good prices.²³

For the inhabitants of Buhera sub-district, especially those in its remote and dry southeastern end, market production meant predominantly the sale of cattle:

Tax is coming in exceptionally badly. The excuse put forward by the natives is that buyers of stock – large and small – have not been so numerous as in previous years... It is unfortunate the Chiefs Nyashano's and Mambo's districts are closed to the exit of cattle [because of an outbreak of disease in a bordering district] as the natives of these parts depend a lot on the sale of stock to secure their tax money.²⁴

The above remarks of the ANC Buhera suggest that changes in the cattle market and veterinary restrictions on the movement of cattle from the area influenced

²² This inability to channel the labour supply is also evident in the recurrent labour shortages within the Charter district in the 1910s and 1920s. The poor conditions of service (wages) on European farms encouraged African workers to seek employment further afield. NC Charter annual reports 1913, 1917, 1918, 1924, NAZ N9/1/16, N9/1/20-21, S235/502.

²³ NC Charter annual report 1912, NAZ N9/1/15.

²⁴ ANC Buhera monthly report Sept. 1915, NAZ N9/4/29 vol.1.

Buhera people's income-generating capacity.²⁵ Equally, it was surely not always tax pressure that made people sell their cattle. In the drought-prone southern Sabi Reserve, cattle were primarily used as an insurance against recurrent food shortages. For instance, during the 1916 drought Buhera stock owners bartered away some 2,480 cattle to European traders alone, receiving 5,000-6,000 bags of grain in return (Iliffe, 1990: 60).²⁶ Trading cattle for grain and cash was, in fact, a rather common business in Buhera sub-district. Besides supplying European traders, African farmers' from the better-watered northwestern part of the sub-district supplied grain to the southeastern end where recurrent crop failure had made people specialize in cattle production. John Iliffe has related these crop failures to the colonial state's segregationist land policies that concentrated Africans in reserves and pressed them into marginal areas such as:

The lower eastern section of Buhera whose administrator reported in 1918 that... 'I have never yet seen a normal crop in the Reserve and although acreage cultivated increases, there has never been sufficient food produced to carry the population from season to season for the past three years' (Iliffe, 1990: 62).

However, until the 1920s, the colonial state's land policies probably neither caused, nor aggravated food shortages in Buhera, as forced population movements into the sub-district were small.²⁷ Rather than forced immigrations, the observed increase in cultivated area resulted from the expansion of plough agriculture, enabling farmers to cultivate larger fields. The southern Sabi Reserve had long been occupied, its lowveld being the centre of Hera dynastic power long before the establishment of European rule (Beach, 1994b: 36-43). Crop failure was a recurrent feature in Buhera, but selling or bartering stock for grain could usually mitigate grain shortages. For those without a herd, labour migration provided the means to build one. Hence, rather than being a Pavlov-like reaction to the colonial state's tax demands, the Buhera labour supply was probably more dependant on herd sizes, stock being the major source of wealth. The ANC Buhera once recognized this relation:

It is anticipated an increased number of natives will be forced out to work during the coming year owing to the loss of their accumulated wealth during the past drought which was used up to keep themselves and families in food.²⁸

²⁵ A further explanation for the drop in cattle sales is that 'prices offered are 40 to 50 percent below last year'. NC Charter monthly report September 1915, NAZ N9/4/29 vol.1.

²⁶ In total, the administration permitted the removal of some 8,000 cattle from the sub-district. ANC Buhera annual report 1916, NAZ N9/1/19.

²⁷ Few Africans were evicted in the Charter district as 'since the financial position is becoming acute, the large landowners who were inclined to oust the natives from their Estates, are now encouraging them to remain and settle so as to benefit by collecting as much rent as possible'. NC Charter annual report 1915, NAZ N9/1/18.

²⁸ ANC Buhera annual report 1916, NAZ N9/1/19.

Once a substantial herd was built up, the occasional sale of stock could raise the imposed taxes and supplement the relatively small cash incomes obtained from crop sales. Obviously, not everybody could regularly sell a beast and, besides its monetary value, keeping stock was also significant in other spheres of social life. Young men of marriageable age, in particular, had to build up a herd – both for bridewealth (*roora*) payments and farming purposes. Hence, engaging in migrant labour was not just – as Palmer seems to suggest – a last resort of peasant producers whose crop production or marketing efforts had failed. Labour migration could be a deliberate strategy to accumulate wealth. It formed an integral part of the career of many Buhera men, as the following observation of the ANC Buhera reveals:

A very considerable proportion of the able bodied male population has been away at work during the year. Some opportunity of testing the accuracy of such a statement was afforded by the collection of the population at different centres for vaccination purposes... 13,500 people were gathered together in October, amongst this number an able bodied young man of working age was very rarely noticed. During November a further 6,000 people were assembled, amongst this number was a higher but still remarkably small proportion of young men of working age; the increase in proportion observed during November may have had some connection with the fall of early rains and an influx of workers returning home.²⁹

To conclude, in the early colonial period – and conceivably long before – Buhera livelihoods were already strongly incorporated into markets for labour and agricultural produce (grain and cattle). This market incorporation was, probably, not matched by an equal incorporation into the colonial state. Despite the major preoccupation with African labour in colonial policy discourse and the controlled social order which officials presented in their reports, the archival sources also allow for another interpretation. Observations suggesting that the state impinged very little on social life in Buhera can equally be found in these sources. Rather than being purely state-induced, Buherans' participation in the labour market may also be understood in relation to their other livelihood practices – crop and stock production. Recurrent droughts, particularly affecting the southeastern end of the sub-district regularly depleted its inhabitants of their wealth, turning (temporal) wage labour into another option to sustain their livelihood.

From labour to produce markets: the state and African agriculture, 1926-39

Moving on from a preoccupation with the mobilization of African labour, colonial state policies in the 1920s and 1930s witnessed a growing interest in African agriculture. Marked by the appointment of E.D. Alvord as Agriculturist for the instruction of Natives in 1926, African farming became the object of

²⁹ ANC Buhera annual report 1927, NAZ S235/505.

government planning. Nevertheless, in Zimbabwean historiography the 1920s and 1930s have been regarded as the stage of the 'dominant theme of Rhodesian agricultural history', which Palmer has typified as 'the triumph of European over African farmers (Palmer, 1977a: 221). Labour mobilization policies, unable to curb independent African farming in the early colonial period, were 'increasingly supplemented by attacks on African land holdings and participation in produce markets (Phimister, 1988: 47). These 'attacks' were closely linked to the emergence of a – heavily state-subsidized – white farming sector which felt increasingly threatened by African producers' competitiveness. Aided by the crisis of the 1930s which decreased agricultural prices, these state policies have often been regarded as effecting the collapse of independent African peasant farming in the 1930s. From the 1930s onwards, Arrighi has maintained, a situation of 'unlimited supplies' of African labour prevailed, removing the need for extra-market forces – that is, state intervention – to generate a labour supply (Arrighi, 1973a: 226).

Although the crisis in African agriculture is widely accepted in Zimbabwean historiography, the 'de-peasantization' thesis has also been challenged (Döpcke, 1989: 173-94; Mosley, 1983: 71). Ranger, for instance, found that although 'peasants of all sorts became more aware of the role of the state' (Ranger, 1985: 84) during the 1930s, by the end of the decade 'African agriculture had survived everywhere' (Ranger, 1985: 78).³⁰ Hence, the 1930s crisis in African agriculture did not mark the completion of a process of proletarianization of African peasant farmers. While focusing on peasant resistance, Ranger thus started to question the dominant role attributed to the colonial state by scholars of political economy schools of thought. Nevertheless, the 1930s did witness an increased state control over both Africans' participation in labour and produce markets. In the labour market, this extended control has gone largely unnoticed in the academic literature. Yet, the system of Tax Advice Forms (TAF) enhanced colonial administrators' understanding and control over labour movements as well as the state's capacity to raise tax from Africans working outside their home district.³¹

The growing attention paid to African farming in colonial policy discourse was equivocal. On the one hand, state intervention attempted to enhance Africans' agricultural practices, but simultaneously sought deliberately to

³⁰ In addition, Johnson (1992: 112) has challenged Arrighi's thesis of unlimited supplies of labour, arguing that even after the 1930s, 'extra-economic forms of coercion remained of critical importance in securing large supplies of labour in Southern Rhodesia'.

³¹ Tax Advice Forms (TAF) were first used in 1924. They enabled the collection of tax from migrant workers in the district of employment rather than that of origin. Thus, local administrators could keep track of tax-paying inhabitants of their district and the major destinations of the districts' migrant labour force.

undercut African competitiveness in agricultural produce markets in an attempt to protect the interests of white settler farmers.³² Two lines of policies can be distinguished in this latter strand. First, the operation of these markets was manipulated. The effect of policies such as the Maize Control and Cattle Levy Acts was that African farmers received lower prices than did their white colleagues. Second, segregationist policies undermined African farmers' ability to produce for markets. The enforcement of the 1930 Land Apportionment Act led to a further removal of Africans from alienated land and squeezed them together in the reserves. Increased population pressure on land in these areas undercut individual farmers' productive capacity and caused concern within the colonial administration over the carrying capacity of the reserves.

Economic depression, market regulation and veterinary measures in Buhera

Segregationist policies and state regulation of cattle and maize markets were also important forces in Buhera. It is, however, difficult to isolate the impact of these measures from the wider impact of the economic crisis of the early 1930s. As in other African areas, declining prices for agricultural produce and a contracting labour market constrained Buherans' capacity to generate cash income. Certainly, the colonial state's policies deepened the crisis in produce markets. The Maize Control Act of 1931³³ institutionalized sales to maize depots in white farming areas, increasing transport costs for maize produced in the reserves.³⁴ Lower prices for African maize producers were the result, but in Buhera it was chiefly the northern part which was affected. Maize was not widely grown in the early 1930s, for 'the bulk of the growers reside within a short radius of the Store in the Narira Reserve.'³⁵ The ANC Buhera reported,

It is difficult to arrive at any estimate as to the amount of maize grown but what surplus there might have been was unmarketable owing to transport costs. Dissatisfied with the law traders were in any case unwilling to buy.³⁶

Similarly, the Cattle Levy Acts of 1931 and 1934 further reduced the already low prices on the cattle market and '[n]atives were disinclined to sell at the low

³² The settler state's interference with irrigation schemes in African areas is a good example of this double-edged attitude towards African agriculture. See: Manzungu (1995: 115-36).

³³ The Maize Control Act of 1931 was amended several times during the 1930s (see: Keyter, 1978; Döpcke, 1989: 265-75).

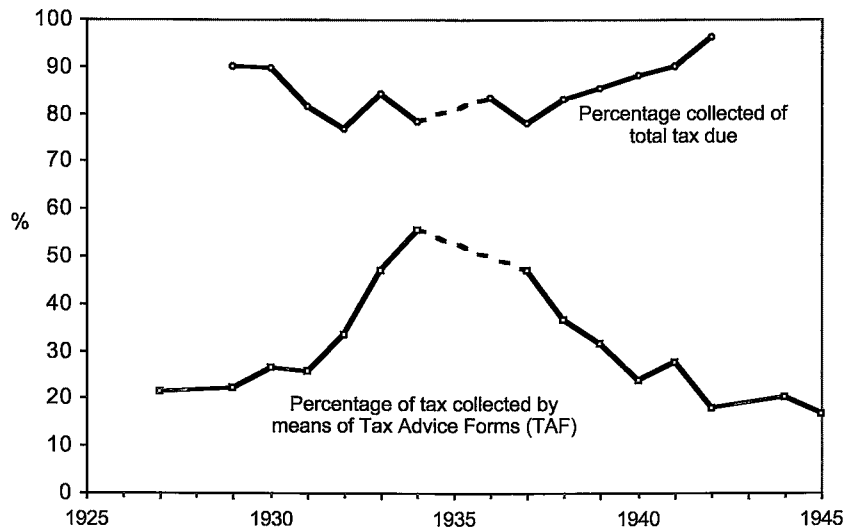
³⁴ The ANC Buhera annual report of 1934 commented: 'It is difficult to arrive at any estimate as to the amount of maize grown but what surplus there might have been was unmarketable owing to transport costs. Dissatisfied with the law traders were in any case unwilling to buy.' NAZ S1563.

³⁵ ANC Buhera annual report 1932, NAZ S235/510. In southern Buhera the main grain crops were finger millet (*rukweza* or *rapoko*) and bulrush millet (*mhunga*).

³⁶ ANC Buhera annual report 1934, NAZ S1563.

prices offered.³⁷ Hence, the Buhera population indeed faced difficult times, particularly as the 1930s also witnessed a serious drought. Cash was particularly scarce, and even the state's tax revenue suffered from the depressed markets and its own policies were hampering market production. The actual tax collected as share of the ANC's projected revenue decreased, only to reach pre-1930 levels again in the early 1940s (see Figure 2.4).

FIGURE 2.4: PERCENTAGE OF TAX COLLECTED BY MEANS OF TAX ADVICE FORMS (TAF), AND PERCENTAGE COLLECTED OF TOTAL TAX DUE: BUHERA (SUB-) DISTRICT, 1925-45³⁸



Yet, it was the state's veterinary measures, rather than its interventions in maize and cattle markets, that deepened the impact of the 1930s' crisis. Quarantine measures following outbreaks of disease regularly meant that cattle owners could not sell stock outside the district. Such measures even affected tax collections:

The unfortunate drop in tax collection is directly traceable to the position created by restriction on cattle movements consequent on the Foot and Mouth disease, aggravated by the state of famine which handicapped the greater portion of Nyashano's people [of south-eastern Buhera sub-district].³⁹

There is no doubt that the veterinary measures imposed were not, as a rule, the result of disease outbreaks in areas without cattle dip tanks. Cattle in the non-dipping zone of the southern Sabi Reserve were generally free from ticks and

³⁷ ANC Buhera annual report 1932, NAZ S235/510.

³⁸ NC Charter and ANC Buhera annual reports 1927-45, NAZ S235/505-518; S1563; S1051.

³⁹ ANC Buhera, annual report 1931, NAZ S235/509.

diseases, but subject to restricted movement for fear of disease spreading.⁴⁰ The establishment of cattle dip tanks in the area may, therefore, be understood primarily as a 'technology of control' – enabling greater state surveillance over the cattle sector through stock counts, the organization of sales and the collection of dip fees.⁴¹ Although a large part of the (sub-)district was not covered by dip tanks – which casts doubts on the reliability of stock figures presented in colonial records⁴² – state control over stock sales to buyers from outside the sub-district was probably substantial. Hence, it was mainly through veterinary measures that the state exercised control over the cattle-oriented economy of the Buhera sub-district. Although initially not designed as an instrument to undercut African peasant production, it was these measures of the colonial state that most affected the crisis-struck Buhera economy. The ANC Buhera in his report of September 1938 summarized the situation:

It is hoped that some relaxation of the restrictions on the movement of cattle from the non-dipping area will ensue. It is difficult to understand why an area which is and always has been free from disease should be penalised by such restrictions as have been imposed for the past two or three years.⁴³

Various responses to the 1930s crisis can be noticed in Buhera's colonial records. For instance, the state's veterinary measures probably caused intra-district trade to gain in significance. Such trade may well have become increasingly demonetized, as the colonial reports suggest. Cattle from the drought-prone southeastern end of the Sabi Reserve were bartered with the grain-producing northern parts.⁴⁴ Simultaneously, the scanty evidence on crop sales in the ANC Buhera reports suggests a shift in cash crop production. Whereas the market production of maize in the northern part of the Sabi Reserve and the Narira Reserve declined during in the early 1930s, sales of groundnuts increased. This adaptability of the Buhera people to changing market situations is also apparent

⁴⁰ Disease outbreaks were confined to the northern part of the (sub-) district, where cattle dip tanks were erected from 1926 onwards. In the non-dipping area in the southern part, cattle always were 'remarkably free from ticks and disease' as the NC Buhera remarked in 1945. Nevertheless, 'the chief veterinary surgeon [was] keen on this area being put under dipping.' NC Buhera annual report 1945, NAZ S1563.

⁴¹ The system of cattle regulations and dip fees probably was the state's most effective instrument of control in the 1930s. An example of its use is the forced labour imposed upon registered cattle owners in the Charter district (Cripps, 1936: 7).

⁴² The ANC Buhera acknowledged the problem of counting stock in the non-dipping areas, as is evidenced by his letter to his superior in which he explained the differences between the stock estimates for 1931 and 1932: ANC Buhera to NC Charter, 6 Jan. 1932, NAZ S138/1.

⁴³ ANC Buhera monthly report Sept. 1938, NAZ S1619.

⁴⁴ Possibly other animal products also became more important cash earners. In the early 1930s sales of sheep and fowl are noted: ANC Buhera annual reports 1932-34, NAZ S235/510-511, and S1563.

from the Assistant Native Commissioner's Tax Register. After 1931, the share of tax forwarded to the ANC Buhera by Africans working in other districts increased (see Figure 2.4). This suggests that income earned by longer-term migrants was becoming more important in sustaining Buhera livelihoods.⁴⁵

To summarize, Buhera livelihoods, consisting of various combinations of cash crop, commercial stock production and labour migration, went through a period of adjustment in the early 1930s. The relative importance of these different livelihood practices altered, and the composition of marketed crops altered. The problems of marketing did not simply result in decline; stock numbers increased substantially in this period.⁴⁶ When cattle prices temporarily picked up and restrictions on cattle movements were lifted, cattle owners quickly responded. Furthermore, towards the end of the 1930s, the economic situation improved. In the early 1940s, when cattle prices rose more substantially and cattle marketing was re-organized, sales improved.⁴⁷ Crop marketing improved as well, albeit not the sale of maize. 'This, I think, is due partly to the poor rainy season for maize and partly for the low price of maize compared with other produce of the land', the ANC Buhera reported in 1942.⁴⁸

Colonial land use policies in Buhera

Besides policies that sought to diminish African competition in produce markets, the 1920s and 1930s simultaneously witnessed a growing interest on the part of the colonial state in African land use. In order to absorb those displaced by the Land Apportionment Act, it was felt that the carrying capacity of the Reserves needed to be increased. Consequently, the colonial state sought to intensify African land use. This, as previously mentioned, resulted in the appointment of E.D. Alvord, who promoted intensified agriculture through an agricultural extension programme and land use policies such as 'centralization' – the reorganization of land in consolidated grazing and arable blocks, with a line of residential sites in between.⁴⁹ This state interference with African land

⁴⁵ The reports of the 1930s do not mention an increasing rate of male absenteeism in Buhera. This may of course relate to the ANC Buhera's deficient observations on labour migration. Both oral and archival sources do, however, indicate that in the 1930s migrations of Buhera men to South Africa were common.

⁴⁶ The estimated number of cattle almost doubled, from 30,812 in 1931 to 60,978 in 1942: ANC Buhera annual reports 1931 and 1942, NAZ S235/509 and S1563.

⁴⁷ Buhera cattle sales possibly also benefited from the installation of weigh bridges at cattle sale pens: ANC Buhera to NC Charter on slaughter cattle price order GN 18/42, 15 Jan. 1942. The number of cattle sold rose from 1,560 in 1940 to 2,681 in 1942. The ANC Buhera concluded, 'there is no ground for the belief... that among natives, the higher the price of cattle the fewer do they sell': ANC Buhera annual report 1942, NAZ S1563.

⁴⁸ ANC Buhera annual report 1942, NAZ S1563.

⁴⁹ For an overview of the extension programme, see: Bolding (forthcoming).

use was, however, not solely motivated by segregationist considerations, for the concern for the carrying capacity of the African reserves was simultaneously informed by an emerging ideology of conservation within the colonial administration. Hence, when the settler state started to extend its control over Africans' land use practices it was, from the beginning, tied up with, and justified by, a discourse of conservation (Beinart, 1984: 53; 1989: 153).

In the Buhera sub-district as well, conservationist concerns ran parallel with an idea of intensifying land use. As in other African reserves, population growth and an influx of evicted people increased the pressure on land,⁵⁰ especially in the better-watered northwestern part of the sub-district. This area, the ANC Buhera reported in 1936, was 'becoming thickly populated' and so:

The time is not far distant when it will be necessary for the preservation of the fertility of the soil to insist on the more economical use of it, and when it will be no longer possible to study the wishes of the people if they are opposed to better methods of agriculture. Having in view, therefore, that it will eventually be necessary for an agricultural demonstrator to operate in this Reserve it will be of great assistance if the part where he is to operate has already been surveyed and divided into grazing and arable land.⁵¹

The Buhera peoples, who opposed the idea of demonstrators (and centralization), were confronted with the first agricultural demonstrator two years later. Simultaneously, a start was made with centralization in a small part of the sub-district. Yet, by 1942 the demonstrator only had 25 co-operating farmers, and the enforcement of centralization proved problematic.⁵² Up to the mid 1940s, the impact of these land use policies was actually minimal.

In the drought-prone southern part of the sub-district, colonial state intervention had an equally limited influence on existing land use practices during the 1930s. In this sparsely populated area, where settlement was concentrated around water sources, the common agricultural practice of shifting cultivation remained unaltered. Hence, the carrying-capacity-minded administrators did not include Buhera in their growing list of overpopulated and overstocked African reserves.⁵³ Nevertheless, a modest start was made with the development of water supplies in the dry southern part of the district in the late 1930s, the need for this being increased by reason of an anticipated further

⁵⁰ In the early 1930s, more than 1,000 people moved into the Buhera area. ANC Buhera annual reports 1932 and 1934, NAZ 235/510 and S1563.

⁵¹ ANC Buhera to NC Charter, on 'Survey of Sabi Reserve', 28 Oct. 1936. NAZ S1542 A4 vol.4.

⁵² Correspondence on appointment of agricultural demonstrators and centralization Sabi Reserve 1934-1938, NAZ S1542/D7; ANC Buhera monthly reports May, Sept., Oct. 1938, NAZ S1619; ANC Buhera annual report 1942, NAZ S1563; ANC Buhera to NC Charter on 'Natural Resources Act', 26 Jan. 1942, NAZ S2806/1958.

⁵³ ANC Buhera to NC Buhera on overstocking circular no.29, 3 June 1942, NAZ S2384/7. It was 1952 before 'the district was declared an 'overstocked' area in terms of the Natural Resources Act': NC Buhera annual report 1952, NAZ S2403/2681.

influx of Africans into the area. On the whole, however, the growing preoccupation with African land use in colonial policy discourse had virtually no impact on land use in Buhera sub-district during the 1930s.

To conclude, the situation in which the Buhera people found themselves at the beginning of the 1930s was indeed serious. Both market production and labour market participation were becoming difficult as a result of declining producer prices, labour demand and wages. State intervention in markets aggravated the situation, but it was primarily veterinary policies that deepened the crisis in Buhera livelihoods. Yet, as Ranger has argued, it was not an irreversible process of decline in African agriculture. By the late 1930s, the situation had already improved, and the share of income generated by labour migration to other districts decreased.⁵⁴ The labour-land-cattle based economy of Buhera, capable of withstanding the colonial state interventions in produce markets during the 1930s, had adjusted itself. By the mid-1940s, the prosperity of the rural economy surprised the ANC Buhera, who commented, 'a considerable amount of grain is traded in the district. It is remarkable that the figure is so high when average distance to railhead is in the region of 70 miles.'⁵⁵

Planned modernization: the colonial state and the rural-urban divide, 1940-61

While the 1930s have been regarded in Zimbabwe historiography as the epoch of triumph of European over African farming, the 1940s and 1950s can be seen as the height of planned modernization. As the quote from Doris Lessing's book at the beginning of this chapter and Holleman's writings have already shown, the post-war period was characterized by great confidence in the planning instrument among colonial officials.⁵⁶ Government planning, seen as the vehicle of African modernization, was greatly intensified, but also met with greater opposition from African nationalists. Not surprisingly, then, growing African resistance to state planning in this period has attracted considerable attention in Zimbabwean historiography. However, with the growing attention to African opposition to the colonial state, there has also been a tendency to shift the focus from rural to urban areas, where organized opposition to the colonial state took shape from the 1930s onwards (van Velsen, 1964: 139-57; Harris, 1974: 139-61; Raftopoulos, 1995: 79-93; Barnes, 1995: 95-113). A notable exception in the literature is Terence Ranger, who has continued to draw attention to African rural areas in the post-Second World War period through his argument that state intervention in the African rural areas caused an agricultural crisis in the

⁵⁴ This does not mean that migrant incomes became less important, as considerable numbers of Buhera migrants sought employment in the Union of South Africa in the 1930s.

⁵⁵ NC Buhera annual report 1945, NAZ S1563. The most important crops sold were groundnuts and millet.

⁵⁶ See also the description of the ANC Buhera in Holleman (1958: 1-5).

reserves in the 1940s (Ranger, 1985: 105). Ranger sees the 'loss of land' – caused by further evictions from alienated lands and the Native Land Husbandry Act – in the 1950s as fuelling the peasant radicalism that shaped the rural support for the liberation struggle in the 1970s (Ranger, 1985: 137-77).

While state intervention in African land use had already increased in many areas during the 1930s, with the implementation of the 1940 Land Apportionment Act and the Natural Resources Act of 1941 this involvement was further expanded. As a consequence of the former Act, the reserves in the Shona-speaking areas had to absorb another influx of Africans evicted from alienated lands. At the same time, farming in the reserves became further restricted by the state's conservationist concerns laid down in the Natural Resources Act. The colonial state's attempt to re-organize African agriculture culminated in the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1951, generally regarded as the most ambitious and far-reaching rural intervention programme of the colonial period. Yet, confidence in state planning in the 1940s and 1950s did not confine itself to African rural areas. The rapidly expanding urban economy in post-war Southern Rhodesia spurred on the settler state to develop more comprehensive policies for African urban areas. The resulting emergence of a rural-urban divide in colonial policy discourse led, as reflected by Zimbabwean historiography, to African urban and rural social settings being increasingly treated separately, as two distinct objects of administrators' modernizing efforts.

The rural-urban divide and the emergence of Buhera as a farming society

The emergence of a rural-urban divide in colonial policy discourse is also noticeable in the reports of the NC Buhera. Remarks on oscillating labour migration gradually disappeared from his reports and the heading 'labour' in the district reports began to refer to the labour situation within the district itself.⁵⁷ But, once again, other observations in the NC reports allow for an alternative interpretation. Although not viewing them as an indication of the importance of circulatory migration, the NC Buhera also observed a growing number of omnibuses operating in the district.⁵⁸ Buhera district was no longer reduced to a mere labour reserve for the settler economy, but now became 're-invented' as 'traditional' rural African society, requiring state intervention in order to develop. This image is also paramount in Holleman's study of Buhera.

⁵⁷ NC Buhera annual reports 1940-61, NAZ S1563; S1051; S2827/2/2/1-8; S2403/2681.

⁵⁸ The number of omnibuses linking Buhera to Enkeldoorn (Chivhu) rose from one in 1955 to fifteen in 1961. Furthermore, the NC Buhera observed that accumulated wealth was invested in transport, '[p]rivate motor cars are often seen in the Reserve. Unfortunately many of these are in poor condition and must cost their owners a lot of money to keep them on the road': NC Buhera annual report 1961, NAZ S2827/2/2/8 vol.1; annual report 1957, NAZ S2827/2/2/5 vol.1.

To Holleman, Buhera represents a typical farming society, characterized by 'the *nhimbe*, the collective work-and-beer party... [that is] the pivot of all organized economic activity amongst the Mashona people' (Holleman, 1958: 16; Holleman, 1952a: 10-1). In his writings there is no mention of the Buheran involvement in the Southern African migrant labour economy, let alone discussion of its consequences for the organization of agricultural labour. In line with the dominant academic structural-functionalist paradigm of the time, Holleman describes African social life as guided by a coherent system of customary laws, not disrupted by outside influences. Hence, to planners in the colonial administration, this explanation of 'customary laws' provided the background knowledge of African society required for the administrations' efforts to modernize it.

Unlike the 1920s and 1930s, when the colonial administration's growing preoccupation with African land use had little impact upon Buhera sub-district, the 1940s witnessed a rapid expansion of state intervention. In 1943, the sub-district was accorded a full Native Commissioner status. After the end of the Second World War, its staff was increased substantially, particularly in the sphere of agricultural and community extension. White Land Development Officers (LDO) and African demonstrators' implementation of soil conservation measures, centralization and the agricultural demonstration programme started to affect the larger part of the southern Sabi Reserve. Roads were made, villages were laid out in lines, dams were constructed, a stockbreeding centre was set up, demonstration centres were established, and irrigation projects were initiated.⁵⁹ Figure 2.5 gives an overview of this expanding state intervention in the area.

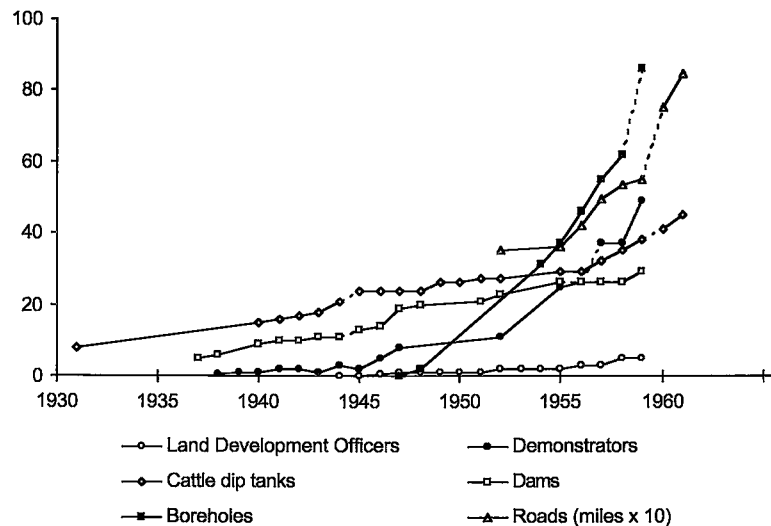
Doubtless, the state's development efforts were, as in the 1930s, partly motivated by the need to increase the carrying capacity of the Sabi Reserve for another planned influx of Africans evicted from alienated lands elsewhere. The late 1940s saw the implementation of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. On the southern part of the Buhera district, the NC Buhera remarked:

The rate of absorption of population is dependant entirely on the provision, firstly, of water by boreholes and wells... for, without water (and, of course, good roads) they are unable to conserve water by the construction of dams, which are essential for stock.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ For instance, a large irrigation project (Devuli or Devure irrigation scheme) was set up in the south-eastern end of the district in the 1940s, and another small one near Murambinda in 1956.

⁶⁰ NC Buhera to Provincial NC Gwelo on the removal of natives from European areas, 16 Aug. 1950, NAZ S2588/2004.

FIGURE 2.5: SOME PARAMETERS OF COLONIAL STATE INTERVENTION: MILES OF ROAD MAINTAINED, NO. OF DAMS, BOREHOLES, CATTLE DIP TANKS & STAFF IN BUHERA DISTRICT



Yet, the effort of the state to enhance African farmers' food production in the increasingly crowded reserves⁶¹ could sometimes be in conflict with the conservationist policy discourse underpinning other interventions in African agriculture. According to the NC Buhera, who recognized this tension, soil conservation could not be enforced by state regulation:

The Natives are exhorted to grow more food. This would be justified if all the Natives followed modern methods of cultivation and observed even the rudimentary principles of soil conservation but alas! the majority do not do so... To contend that legislation will curb the ignorant native in his destructive ways is mere wishful thinking. The only solution is to drop the price of grain and reduce the profits allowed to the grain trader. This should discourage the Native from cultivating to excess and the grain trader from making excessive profits.⁶²

Although the late-1950s seem to have produced more colonial reports on the Buhera area than all preceding periods together,⁶³ the categories of thought produced and the impact of policies such as the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 have to be critically examined. These policies considered Buhera to be a farming area from which people without farming and grazing rights could, and would, be excluded. They were to be absorbed in the urban sector of the

⁶¹ Buhera was one of the target areas of the state's Food Production Drive (FPD) Policy in the early 1950s. See: Correspondence and reports FPD policy 1951-54, NAZ S160 AGR 4/3/51 and S160 AGR 3/1E/52.

⁶² NC Buhera, annual report 1952, NAZ S2403/2681.

⁶³ See, for instance: Assessment reports NLHA Buhera 1953-61, NAZ S2808/1/5.

economy. The colonial reports show no understanding of existing land and cattle ownership arrangements or of the relative importance of labour migration, cultivation and cattle in people's livelihoods (see also: Garbett, 1963: 185-202). The information gathered served a legal-technical planning exercise that may have had little bearing on actual local situations.

Agricultural modernization: the impact of the NLHA in Buhera

In the early 1990s, Ian Phimister suggested that the impact of the NLHA may have been overestimated in Zimbabwean historiography. Not only did the implementation of the Act progress slowly and meet with enormous protest, it also did not cause massive landlessness or the end of entrepreneurial farming in the reserves. As he argued, a 'large number of better-off peasants came through the Land Husbandry Act, if not unscathed, then more or less intact' (1993: 237). Hence, Phimister suggested that the NLHA did not end independent African peasant production or diminish peasant differentiation, contending that it 'is a moot point whether the implementation of the Land Husbandry Act accelerated the process of proletarianization or merely certified its existence' (1993: 237).

In Buhera equally, where people became wealthier in the early 1950s, protest against the NLHA was substantial. Destocking, resulting in the compulsory sale of thousands of cattle in the late 1950s, was widely resented.⁶⁴ The ploy of Buhera stock owners to reduce the impact of the Act by redistributing stock among family members exposed the flawed assumption of individual stock ownership among the architects of the destocking policy. The impact of this policy was further reduced by the fact that the stock regulations (enforced at the cattle dip tanks) were never followed up, diminishing the long-term impact of the NLHA on the cattle sector. Evasions of the stock regulations, on the other hand, became firmly institutionalized as a result of the Act.⁶⁵

Opposition to land allocation under the Land Husbandry Act was mainly confined to the better-watered, northern part of Buhera. In Chief Chitsunge's area (see Figure 2.1) opposition was so strong that government officials carried weapons when visiting the area. In other areas, however, opposition was minimal, while in the southern parts of the district the Act was never implemented.⁶⁶ The impact of the NLHA was further reduced by the fact that in many areas of the district, ample land was available for allocation. The NC Buhera allocated such land, even it was applied for by absent men working in towns or on farms, as his interpretation of the Act shows:

⁶⁴ In the period 1956-60, each year more than 7,500 cattle were sold against the 1,500 to 4,000 per year in the period 1940-55. The only exception is the drought year 1947, when more than 6,000 cattle are reported to have been sold: (A)NC Buhera annual reports 1940-61.

⁶⁵ Even in the 1990s the Veterinary Dept. has few clues about the number of stock in the district.

⁶⁶ Personal communication, Mr. C.J.K. Latham.

'Cultivation' (without quibble as to what the word actually means – it might be argued, for example that it signifies 'ploughing' only and nothing more: and that as far as the prescribed date is concerned... no one at all might in fact be farming as all crops might possibly have been reaped already) is to be interpreted in the atmosphere of the applicant's bonafides. He may truly regard himself as a farmer (and grazier) only by temporary force of circumstances absent on the arbitrary prescribed date. No personal occupation of the land is necessary apparently and a married male's wife is not prevented from representing him in his absence at any time during the occupation, it seems. Thus, I am inclined to contend that an application made in good time and in good faith should be treated on its de jure merits, the only de facto restriction being the availability of land at the time.⁶⁷

Hence, the rural and urban class formation envisaged by the Act never materialized as Buhera migrant workers did not become landless. Not surprisingly then, opposition to the Act was not always directed towards land allocation *per se*, as a letter in the *African Weekly* reveals:

We appreciate land allocation but in our case, there is... [so shortly before the rainy season] no time now for us to prepare and plough fields. We would be pleased if we could be allowed to use our former fields for this year, and allocation could continue after the next harvest, or we will starve.⁶⁸

Land allocations, once made, also proved difficult to enforce with Buhera office's limited administrative capacity. People extended their plots, forcing government to make the concession of allowing plot extensions, provided that farmers dug contour ridges on these lands. Furthermore, those who had not been allocated land initially (because of their youth) were given some later, causing the issue of land rights to continue up to the early 1970s. Consequently, designated divisions between grazing, residential and arable areas became blurred. Hence, the practice of land allocation diverged substantially from the Act's intentions and the administrative order found in the archives.

To conclude, the 1950s were undoubtedly a period in which the colonial state's presence was most strongly felt in Zimbabwe's rural areas, including Buhera district. However, the wealth of archival material, and the rural interventions which the Act produced, should not lead to an overestimation of its effectiveness. Categories of thought produced by the Act, such as individual land and stock ownership, were in practice more fluid than initially envisaged, and therefore easily manipulated. This is not to say that the overall impact of the Act was limited, but rather that local differences in interpretation, implementation and appropriation of the Act (by administrators and local peoples) determined its short-term and long-term outcomes. In Buhera, the cattle sector suffered immediate losses, but crop production continued without

⁶⁷ NC Buhera to Provincial NC Midlands on NLHA 1951, 3 Mar. 1955, NAZ, S2808/1/5.

⁶⁸ W.M. Manhera, 'May Buhera land allocation please be postponed: it is too late now', *African Weekly*, 23 Oct. 1960, 14.

much disruption. The re-organization of land use had virtually no negative impact on people's access to land. Rather, it was the opposite; the practice of sub-dividing large villages into independent smaller units during the Act's implementation enabled established immigrant families to found their own independent villages. Thus, for a large number of people, the claim to land was strengthened rather than diminished.⁶⁹

The loss of control and understanding: the last two decades of settler rule

The scale of colonial state intervention in African reserves in the late 1950s was unprecedented in many areas of Southern Rhodesia, including Buhera. Never before had the lives of the inhabitants of the (sub-)district been so directly affected by the colonial administration's policies. These interventions were, however, short-lived. The implementation of the Native Land Husbandry Act met with widespread African opposition and sabotage. Protest against the Act was, in fact, so widespread that the government decided not to prosecute offenders. As the NC Buhera complained:

With lack of staff, European and African, and with the instruction not to prosecute offenders under the Act, control is fast being lost and will be very difficult to regain should we wish to do so.⁷⁰

These words reflect not only the perceived idea of the official that they were in control, but are also visionary for the opinion of his successor in the 1970s. For, in the last two decades of its rule, the settler state gradually lost all control over the Buhera area and its people; in effect, it relinquished the control it had largely gained in the 1940s and 1950s. As part of an emerging policy discourse of decentralized community-based development of the African reserves, the legal position of local-level and traditional authorities was strengthened. In Buhera, this policy of African self-government progressed slowly and did not seem to function well. When, in the mid-1970s, guerrillas started to penetrate the Buhera territory, the District Commissioner (DC)⁷¹ at Buhera realized the government had no control over the area:

⁶⁹ Thus, the NLHA fits into the long-term processes of segmentation and political struggle between communities as described by Beach (1994b: 36-43); Holleman (1949); see also chapter 4.

⁷⁰ NC Buhera annual report 1963(?), NAZ S2808/1/1 vol.2.

⁷¹ With a departmental reorganization of the state apparatus in 1962, Native Commissioners were renamed District Commissioners: Government Notice No.514, 16 Nov. 1962.

The position is, briefly, that the first terrorist incursions into this district occurred on the 6th of July 1976. Due to lack of staff, vehicles, weapons and equipment it was impossible to get into the affected areas. Army coverage here has been minimal and sporadic. ...I realise that this is a pretty sorry state of affairs, but in the past 12 months I have lost one European and 6 African members of staff killed in action or murdered by ters [terrorists]. I am not prepared to lose more in taking unnecessary risks.⁷²

Still, despite evidence to the contrary, the image of Buhera as representing the traditional, agriculture-based African society was firmly rooted in the mind of its District Commissioner. Unlike his predecessors in the early colonial period who could observe discrepancies between labour policy and practice, this District Commissioner did not recognize the increased significance of labour circulation between Buhera and Salisbury.⁷³ Although his administrative tasks would have enabled him to observe the importance of rural-urban ties, stereotypical thinking dominated.⁷⁴ In a letter to J.F. Holleman, who enquired about the importance of labour migrancy, he wrote:

I regret there are no figures available... however, all DC's in the past have reported on the reluctance of the tribesmen in the Buhera district to seek employment outside the Buhera district and this continues today.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, a survey held in 1969 revealed that there were at least four bus companies providing no fewer than seven bus services a day to Salisbury alone.⁷⁶ Buhera livelihoods, which were already firmly incorporated into the Southern African migrant economy in the early colonial period, had now become firmly tied to the urban economy of Salisbury (see also chapter 3).

Challenging the notion of the hegemonic colonial state in Zimbabwe

The historical analysis of Buhera (sub-) district presented in this chapter, adds to a growing body of literature which stresses the relative weakness of the colonial state in Africa. Focusing on its limited resources, on its internal conflicts of interest, and on the contradictory processes that shaped colonial

⁷² DC Buhera to Secretary African Development Fund, 22 Feb. 1978, NAZ records centre Mutare, ACC 16/22/2/78. Guerrillas had penetrated the area at least two years earlier. The little-patrolled district was used to hide weapons and served to prepare for guerrilla actions.

⁷³ In the early 1960s the Tax Advice Forms were abolished – this way of tax collection from absent migrant labourers was considered to be too expensive. Consequently, District Commissioners lost the sole administrative practice providing them with systematic insight into oscillating labour migration from the districts: personal communication, Mr. C.J.K. Latham. See also note 31.

⁷⁴ For instance, requests to the District Commissioner for compensation from the workmen's compensation fund reveal numerous cases of injured and killed migrant workers from Buhera in the late 1960s: DC Buhera LABOUR 4, 1967-69, NAZ record centre, box 11948.

⁷⁵ NC Buhera to J.F. Holleman, 2 Oct. 1972, NAZ records centre, box 119147.

⁷⁶ Community Advisors' reports 1968-72, NAZ records centre, box 119148.

states, this literature has challenged the 'hegemonic state' perspective in African historiography (Berry, 1992; Berman and Lonsdale, 1992). In examining the categories of thought produced by the colonial state, the present discussion has emphasized another aspect of the hegemonic colonial state picture. It has sought to show how the state's own sources allow for an interpretation in which the settler state plays a far less dominant role in directing social change than has been often assumed in Zimbabwean historiography. This of course raises the problematic question of the uniqueness of the Buhera case in Zimbabwe's colonial history. Such a question is not easily answered. To be sure, the limited sources available on Buhera could also be used to construct a historical narrative that stresses the colonial state's control. Yet, as the analysis presented here has shown, colonial officers' reports often presented an order that, in reality, was far more complex and therefore difficult to control. If a similar perspective is adopted, it may be found that colonial records on other areas also allow for a less hegemonic interpretation of the role of the colonial state in directing historical developments. Other sources, not originating from the colonial administration, may be more useful for such reinterpretation, as current historical research continues to be biased towards the colonial state's archival materials. Ranger for one has recognized this problem explicitly, explaining that he 'first identified a district in Matabeleland for which there seemed to be a great deal of archival material' (Ranger, 1999: 1). Thus, he elaborates on his selection of Matobo district in southern Matabeleland, the research setting of his monograph, *Voices from the Rocks*. Ranger sought a district 'to compare and contrast' with Makoni district, the main focus of his earlier study, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (1985), which so convincingly rectified the passive role attributed to African farmers in Zimbabwean historiography. He recognized that Makoni district 'was unusual because conditions there were particularly favourable to African peasant production' (Ranger, 1999: 1; 1985). The Buhera district is another example of such an 'unusual' district, albeit not for its favourable agricultural environment. The lack of settler interference in the area and, related to this, the limited colonial records that were produced on it, have caused the area to be one of those Reserves on which little more than administrative data exists.

It is ironic to take the work of Terence Ranger as an example to suggest that Zimbabwean historiography has perhaps been too much focused on those areas where Africans were in direct confrontation with white settlers – for which ample archive material is available. For years previously, Ranger himself warned against an undue heavy reliance on the colonial state's archival material. In a review article on Palmer and Parsons' (1977) book, he argued:

There is certainly a good case to be made for the priority of archival sources... [However,] A book so dependent on colonial documentation is bound to argue that the colonial impact constituted the crucial event in peasantization (Ranger, 1978: 107).

Furthermore, it was Ranger who made a case for the role of social actors from below in shaping protest against the colonial state. Thus, he went beyond the perspective of suppressed peasant initiative as put forward mainly by historians of political economy schools of thought. A focus on areas where Africans were not so much in direct confrontation with white settlers, as was the case in Buhera, may shed a different light on the relationship between colonial state policy and African protest. Not only may this result in a more regionally differentiated view of popular protest against the colonial state and the support for this struggle in rural areas.⁷⁷ It may also result in additional and newer interpretations of the roots of resistance against the colonial state. Such interpretations may focus less on land issues but would pay, for example, more attention to the grievances of Africans running up against the racial policies of the colonial state which were hampering their upward mobility in society.

⁷⁷ For instance, Kriger (1992: 238) has argued that in Mutoko district, guerrillas often lacked peasant popular support. She claims that guerrilla coercion is underestimated in the study of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, arguing that the evidence of popular support rests on inferences rather than on peasant accounts.





3. Migration practices and socio-cultural dispositions of Buhera migrants in Harare*

Urbanization and town-country relations have received considerable attention in the study of Southern Africa, not least because discussions on these issues are part of wider debates on modernization (Ferguson, 1990; 1999; Gargett, 1977: 37; Stopforth, 1971; Wilson, 1941). This paper on migrants from Buhera district working in Harare offers insights that are familiar in the study of African societies, such as the persistence of rural-urban links and the incidence of chain migrations¹. Nevertheless, the material presented is used to develop a different perspective on rural-urban relations. Migration practices have often been interpreted in utilitarian terms or as driven by macro-economic forces and state intervention. The case material presented here, however, points to the importance of the socio-cultural dispositions of actors in an understanding of migration practices (Bourdieu, 1990: 52-65; 1998: 79-85). The significance of these dispositions in the structuration of migration practices may be best introduced against the background of the following observations on everyday life in Buhera district.

At Chinyudze, a small business centre along the dust-road from Buhera to Birchenough Bridge, it is difficult to ignore the suggestion that close ties exist between this rural area and distant urban centres, such as Harare. Like so many of these business centres, Chinyudze consists of a small general dealer selling basic commodities and a bottle store. The latter, Chinyudze Hot-Line, is a popular meeting place for people from the surrounding villages. Every afternoon a number of men and a few women gather here to enjoy a beer. Seated on small benches in front of the two shops, they discuss daily affairs and watch the little traffic that passes by. On this afternoon before the Christmas holiday, however, the traffic is heavier than the two or three vehicles that normally pass by. A number of buses stop at Chinyudze, most of them from Harare. They bring numerous urban migrants who have come to spend their Christmas holidays in their rural home area. Most of the travellers are men, but

* This chapter has been published as: J.A. Andersson. 2001 'Re-interpreting the rural-urban connection: Migration practices and socio-cultural dispositions of Buhera workers in Harare', *Africa* 71(1), 82-112.

¹ Chain migration refers to the practice of migrating to a destination where one already has relatives or friends who originate from the same area of origin. See Heer (1996: 539).

a number of women – often with young children – also get off the bus. The descending passengers carry heavy bags laden with items such as clothes, sugar, salt, soap, meat. Occasionally, a traveller is seen carrying agricultural inputs from town. The bulk of seeds and fertilizers have, however, already been brought from town, before the first rains in November.

For the next few days Chinyudze is a very lively place. Many people visit the bottle store and enjoy themselves in discussion, dancing and consuming large quantities of beer. It is one of those few occasions Chinyudze business centre is indeed busy. After Christmas, life gradually returns to normal. Many urban workers have returned to town while others have (for the moment) adopted their rural relatives' way of life – drinking a beer after working in the fields.

In February, Chinyudze is suddenly a busy place again. The few buses from Harare that stop at Chinyudze, again bring urban migrants from Harare. Although they probably did not plan a home visit so soon after the Christmas holidays, these migrant workers have come to attend the funeral of a young schoolteacher. He is the son of a migrant worker whose rural homestead is near Chinyudze. The son, in his early 30s, died in his father's house in Harare, but – as is customary – has been brought to Buhera to be buried in the soil of his home area. Relatives who work in town arranged for a coffin and the transport of the deceased. They borrowed the mini-bus of a fellow migrant worker who originates from a nearby village. The father of the deceased is an ordinary factory worker in town. Yet he is a respected man. Buhera workers in Harare know him as a *mukoma* (elder brother) or *baba* (father) who has helped them in pursuing an urban career. Others recognize his material wealth. He owns a bottle store, has a brick-built house at his homestead, and managed to finance the teacher training of his deceased son. Since the news of the son's death, preparations for the funeral have been made at the father's homestead, for the son had not yet established his own. Many people have gathered at the homestead near Chinyudze. The mourners sit up with the deceased's family for days, leaving only occasionally for a bath at home or a drink at the bottle store.

As the observations at the rural bottle store and a local funeral indicate, urban and rural worlds are, from the actors' perspective, not separable. This contrasts with common perspectives on rural-urban relations as found, for example, in the literature on structural adjustment in Africa, in which the urban and the rural are seen as economic sectors in competition. Trade, price and exchange rate policies are seen as 'urban biased' – i.e. overprotecting urban industry while simultaneously holding back agriculture (Bates, 1988: 346-7; de Haan, 1999: 13). Thus distorted terms of trade between rural and urban sectors became a dominant theme in economic policy debates in the 1980s and 1990s (see World Bank, 1981: 4, 1994). The observations also suggest a different type of link between rural and urban areas than portrayed in current debates on democratization in Africa that stress the links between urban elites and rural

constituencies. In contrast, Buhera society does not appear to be an instrumental 'periphery' of an urban elite struggling for political power in the centre (cf. Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998; Chazan et al., 1992: 122). Rather than presenting two distinct – but instrumentally and hierarchically linked – social environments, the observations at the bottle store exhibit social situations in which the rural and the urban constitute a single social universe encompassing both rural and urban geographical spaces. Consequently, dichotomies of rural and urban economic sectors, centre and periphery, elite and mass are of little importance. In Buhera district, social life that does not encompass both the rural and the urban seems unthinkable.

Understanding Buhera societies as translocal – i.e. encompassing both rural and urban areas – challenges conventional perspectives on urbanization in Southern Africa. Building upon a sharp contrast between the rural and the urban, these have often assumed the gradual emergence of stabilized urban and rural populations, and, with this, the development of a distinct urban pattern of behaviour.² Thus, rural-urban migration is understood as part of what Ferguson (1999; 1990) has typified a 'metanarrative of urbanization' – i.e. a teleological pattern of change in migration patterns, accompanied by altering forms of domestic organization, kinship, residence, etc. However, such an assumed pattern of change is contradicted by the realities of persistent population movements between rural and urban areas and the rural-return migration of long-term urban (born) residents (Ferguson, 1999; Potts, 1995). Thus it is increasingly recognized that a commonly used indicator, such as the number of years spent in town, is not 'a reliable index of a person's "urbanization"' (Van Velsen, 1960: 268). Rather, it is the quality and nature of the social relations connecting town and countryside that count (see also Bourdillon, 1977: 24).

To be sure, rural-urban contrasts have featured prominently in both academic and (colonial) policy discourses, as well as in the daily lives of urban dwellers themselves.³ Similarly, state regulation and economic factors have played an important role in the understanding of rural-urban relations. However, such discourses, contrasting rural and urban, are not necessarily

² Urbanization studies in Southern Africa as undertaken by researchers of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute were preoccupied with the analysis of rural-urban population movements and emerging urbanized patterns of behaviour among Africans in town (see, for instance, Mitchell, 1969; 1975; 1987; see also Ferguson, 1999: 86-90; Hannerz, 1980: 119-62).

³ See Ferguson (1999) who describes the significance of rural-urban distinctions in the lives of mineworkers on the Zambian Copperbelt in the late 1980s. He found that mineworkers' discussions of rural retirement were often phrased in terms of rural and urban oppositions. Upon retirement mineworkers could even attend formally organized crash courses on 'how to adapt to rural life' (1999: 124). For a discussion of the emergence of a rural-urban divide in colonial administrators' records, see chapter 2.

reflected in social practice. State regulation and economic factors are significant forces in the formation of such practices that connect rural and urban areas, but they do not determine them. There are different responses to such forces (see Long, 1984). Hence this chapter makes a case for the role of social actors in shaping such practices from below. At this level, economic preferences do, of course, play their role in shaping behaviour. Yet we need to grasp how such economic preferences arise, i.e. how economic decision making is socio-culturally embedded (Granovetter, 1985). Therefore one needs to understand people's socio-cultural dispositions and how these are historically produced in social practices.⁴ This will first be illustrated by a critical discussion of conventional thinking in which urbanization is often seen as part of a wider process of modernization regulated by market forces and state intervention. Thereafter the differential ways in which shared socio-cultural dispositions may interact with the political economy of the region are discussed, building upon observations of two chain migrations of Buhera migrants in Harare.⁵

Colonial state regulation, urbanization and circulatory migration

It is undeniable that 'economic conditions seem to [have] set the basic conditions for the growth of towns' (Mitchell, 1987: 46). After the Second World War, when industrial growth greatly increased urban employment opportunities, cities like Salisbury (now Harare) expanded rapidly. Since then the African urban population (more than) doubled every decade, but by the mid-1970s still less than 20 per cent of Rhodesia's population lived in urban centres (Smout, 1976; Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1986). The conventional explanation of this relatively low level of urbanization is not, however, in market terms but in terms of colonial state intervention. Colonial state intervention is perceived as functional to the development of settler capitalism that sought to reduce the cost of wages by localizing social reproduction in the rural areas (Wolpe, 1972; for an opposing view see Chauncey, 1981). As in South Africa, the (Southern) Rhodesian government developed a rather sophisticated legal framework favouring the employment of single male migrant workers. Pass laws restricted urban residence to the duration of employment. There was a system of compulsory registration of employed urban Africans and the repatriation of

⁴ The important point about the concept of socio-cultural dispositions is that it views culture not as a static symbolic structure giving meaning to action but as historically situated practices that produce meaning (see Bourdieu, 1998; Geertz, 1993: 4-5).

⁵ To argue for the importance of understanding migrants' cultural dispositions is not to say that rural-urban relations are important to all categories of urban dwellers. Urban existence may also become disconnected from the 'rural home' – Harare's street children are an example (Bourdillon, 1994) – resulting in patterns of urban social life in which kinship, 'home', etc., are far less important than in the cases described in this thesis.

unregistered or unemployed Africans in town. Furthermore, urban housing policies for a long time favoured the accommodation of single men in hostels. These measures aimed to turn the urban life of male Africans into a temporary affair. The economic and legal insecurity of town life forced African urban workers to maintain links with their rural home areas where the women and children were supposed to remain, working the land. This resulted in circulatory migration movements between town and country. Thus colonial state intervention attempted to slow down African urbanization and the formation of a permanently urbanized working class (see Gargett, 1977; Mutambirwa and Potts, 1987; Zinyama et al., 1993). Migratory behaviour, then, is understood as a product of social engineering by the colonial state that operates within a framework of economic incentives triggering labour migration. Given this conventional perspective on urbanization, Zimbabwe's independence marks a historical divide. As 'restrictions on permanent and family migration to towns were lifted... it was to be expected that the nature of rural-urban migration would change' (Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990: 678). The issue to address then becomes 'how far family migration was replacing the "traditional" pattern of single, male migrancy' (Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990: 683).

The conventional perspective on urbanization, like the historical divide it presupposes, is problematic, however. It has homogenized the colonial state and its approach to urbanization, viewing urbanization policy as a consistent package of measures aimed to slow down African urbanization. However, the Rhodesian government's position on the necessity (or inevitability) of African urbanization was subject to change, and implemented policies could be inconsistent. For instance, urban influx regulations (pass laws, registration, repatriation) appear contradictory to the Land Husbandry Act of 1950. Whereas the former measures were intended to turn African town life into a temporary affair, the latter Act is generally perceived as an attempt to settle the industrial labour force permanently in towns (Phimister, 1993: 230; Arrighi, 1973: 363; Raftopoulos, 1995: 82). Hence, despite a recurrent ideological emphasis in colonial policy discourse on the migration of single men temporarily working in town, policy practice was often different. In addition, actual rural-urban migration practices under colonialism often defied both policy discourse and practice. For instance, already during the colonial period the average length of stay in town was increasing, while the number of women migrating to town also increased steadily. And although the colonial state often chose to ignore the presence of women in town, the ratio of males to females among urban Africans

dropped from 18:1 in 1904, to 3:1 in 1936, and 1.6:1 in 1969.⁶ As many women came to town as wives and mothers, the number of families living in town increased. By the 1940s urban family life was already fairly common, and workers' demands were partly inspired by the needs of urban women and children (Barnes, 1995: 96; see also Scarnecchia, 1996). Rather than a single pattern of rural-urban migration, these findings suggest the coexistence of circulatory migration of single males with other forms of migration to town. Conventional thinking about urbanization is unable to deal with such diversity in rural-urban migration patterns because of its inherent centrist perspective on social change. Thinking in terms of national urbanization policies operating within an economic framework of supply and demand for urban labour allows only uniform reactions.

Diversity in rural-urban relations and migratory movements is, however, omnipresent in post-colonial Zimbabwe, which saw the abolition of the restrictive legal framework on urbanization. To be sure, commonly used demographic indicators, such as sex ratios in urban centres, urban growth rates and the level of urbanization, suggest an increase in longer-term and family migration to town (CSO, 1994a, b; Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990).⁷ Yet at the same time it is found that – as elsewhere in post-colonial Africa (Geschiere and Gugler, 1998; Ferguson, 1990; 1999) – rural-urban relations continue to be important. Potts and Mutambirwa, for instance, have argued that, despite progressive urbanization, 'circular migration [has] remained very significant' in post-colonial Zimbabwe (1990: 683). Such findings are supported by demographic evidence. Although the sex distribution in urban centres has become more equal, substantial imbalances still exist, in particular in the economically active age groups.⁸ In urban centres such as Harare and Bulawayo

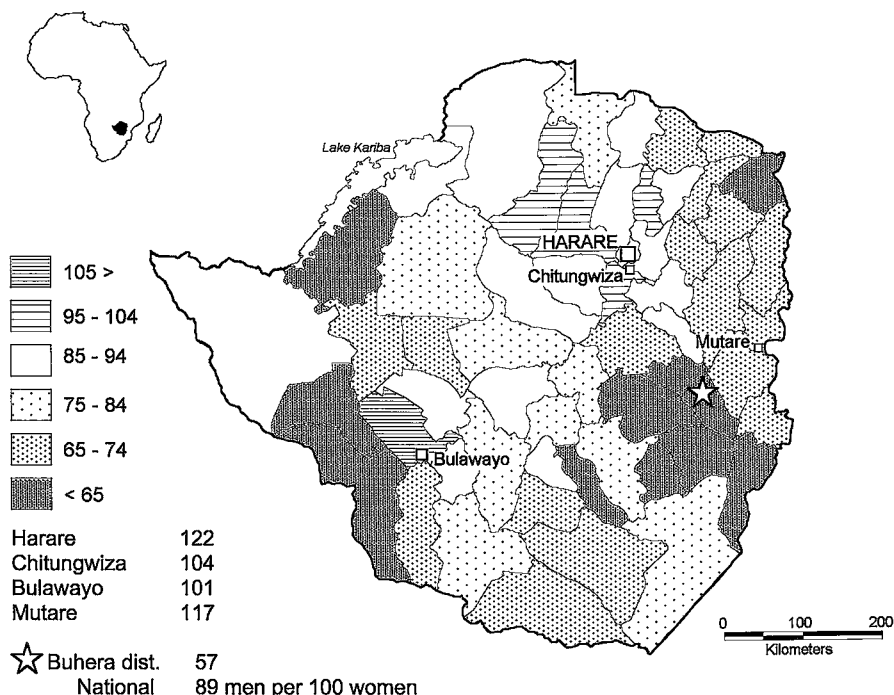
⁶ The colonial state's policy practice of not including African women 'in the provisions of mandatory pass and identification document legislation until the late 1970s' exemplifies its limited interest in urban women (Barnes, 1999: 107). The figures for 1904 and 1936 are estimates taken from Smout (1976: 87). The 1969 figure is based on an overview of the twelve main urban areas in Rhodesia (CSO, 1976: 54-6).

⁷ Urban population growth amounted to 5.6 per cent for the 1982-92 period, and Zimbabwe's urban population increased from 24 per cent of the total population in 1982 to 31 per cent in 1992. In Harare the sex distribution changed from 116.9 males per 100 females in 1982 to 110 in 1992 (CSO, 1987; 1989a, b; 1994b).

⁸ The operationalization of the 'economically active' age group is, of course, arbitrary. Here it is defined as 20 to 44 years for the following reasons: (1) since independence secondary education has become widely available, causing youngsters to enter the labour market at an older age, and (2) although there seems to be a tendency to longer-term migration to towns in the post-colonial period, migrants usually do return to rural areas. The 1992 population figures indicate that men start to return to rural areas when they are over 45, yet this process continues up to legal pension age of 65. The figure would have altered only minimally if the working age group were defined as 20 to 64.

men still outnumber women, whereas in many rural districts women still outnumber men (see Figure 3.1). Thus, instead of marking a new era in urbanization, the post-independence period shows a number of continuities with the colonial era.

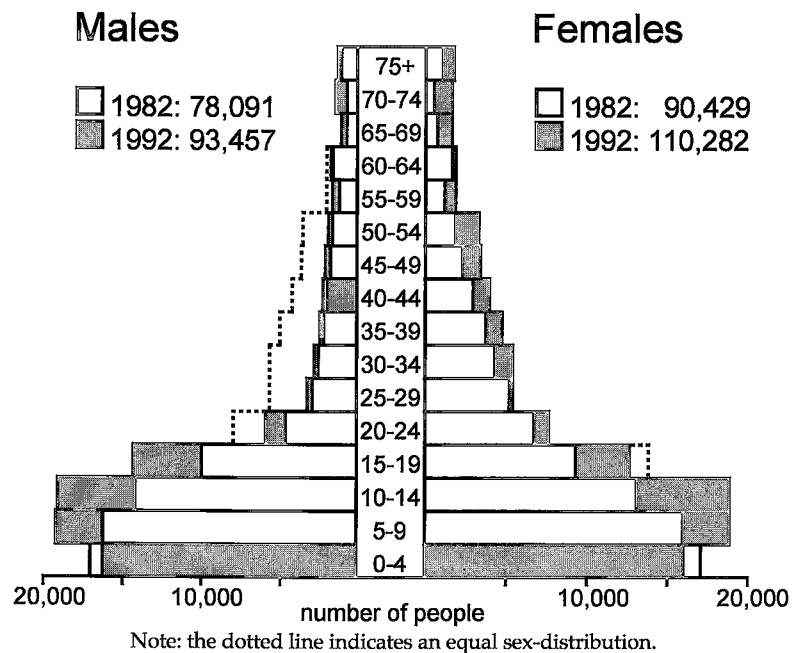
FIGURE 3.1: NUMBER OF MEN PER 100 WOMEN IN THE 20-44 AGE GROUP, 1992 CENSUS



For Buhera district, the subject of this chapter, demographic figures also reveal ambiguous developments. In 1992 sex distributions are still highly unbalanced as compared with the national figures. This suggests the continued significance of the circulatory labour migration of males. Yet there are also indications of longer-term out-migration of males. In the over-45 age group, sex distributions became more uneven in the period 1962-92 (from 94.7 to 68.3; see Figure 3.2 and Table 3.1). Furthermore, in the post-colonial period there seems to be a tendency to out-migration among women in their 20s (20-29 age group) and to the postponement of out-migration among young men.⁹

⁹ The latter trend is likely to be a result of the increased availability of secondary education in rural areas after independence. The number of secondary schools in Buhera district increased from three in 1980 to forty-seven in 1992.

FIGURE 3.2: SEX-AGE DISTRIBUTIONS, BUHERA DISTRICT, 1982 AND 1992



Source: CSO (1987, 1994b)

Table 3.1: SEX DISTRIBUTIONS (MALE/FEMALE X100) OF SPECIFIC AGE GROUPS:
BUHERA DISTRICT COMPARED WITH NATIONAL FIGURES, 1962-92

Year	Age group			Total
	0-14	15-44	45+	
1962¹⁰				
Buhera	100.1	69.8	94.7	88.2
National	101.3	108.9	120.5	106.2
1982				
Buhera	98.9	70.6	80.8	86.4
National	98.3	91.2	111.9	96.8
1992				
Buhera	98.0	73.4	68.3	84.7
National	99.0	91.1	98.0	95.4

Source: CSO (1964, 1987, 1989a, 1994a, b).

¹⁰ The 1962 figures are based on the following age groups: 0-16.3, 16.3-44.3, and 44.3 and over.

This ambiguity of demographic figures – revealing both a tendency ‘towards a greater degree of urban permanence or stability’ (MacMillan, 1993: 686) and the ‘persistence of substantial imbalances at key points in the demographic pyramid’ (Ferguson, 1994: 637) – points to important weaknesses in the conventional perspective on urbanization in Southern Africa. Besides its centrist perspective that exposes a far-fetched confidence in the regulatory capacity of the colonial state, its analytical concepts are of limited value. Indicators such as sex ratios, degree of urbanization, urban growth, duration of urban residence, percentage of urban-born urbanites, are merely elements of a common narrative on urbanization in Southern Africa. This narrative, while it may be sophisticated enough to distinguish ‘stabilization’ from ‘urbanization’¹¹ and ‘urbanism’ – the last referring to ‘the way of life characteristic of towns’ (Mitchell, 1987: 68) – continues to see the urban and the rural as distinct social worlds (see, for instance, Ferguson, 1999; Watson, 1958). Conventional associations between the urban as the site of modernization, individualization and change, as opposed to the rural as the locus of tradition, communality and continuity (Ferguson, 1997) tell us very little, however, about the content of rural-urban relations and the specific way in which they are socially organized.

The observations at the Chinyudze bottle store at the start of this chapter reveal that, from local actors’ perspective, urban man and rural man do not necessarily exist as separate entities (although they may sometimes do so in people’s narratives). This chapter therefore analyses urbanization processes starting from the actual behaviour of migrants and the ways in which migration practices may (or may not) produce specific – urban and rural – localities (Appadurai, 1996: 178-200). It tries to show that specific migration practices – i.e. chain migrations – have to be understood in relation to particular socio-cultural dispositions such as kinship ideology and identification with the land, without *a priori* assumptions as to whether to situate such dispositions spatially – i.e. viewing them as either urban or rural. Hence the present study differs from analyses such as those of Mitchell (1956) and Ferguson (1999) which have focused on the meaning of representations (or images) of rural life within the urban context.¹²

¹¹ The distinction is taken from Mitchell (1987: 68), who defined *stabilization* as the ‘demographic process whereby people spend longer and longer periods in town before returning to their rural areas, and *urbanization* as the proportion of people living in towns.

¹² For instance, in his discussion of ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘localist’ cultural styles on the Zambian Copperbelt, Ferguson stresses that ‘localism was (no less than cosmopolitanism) a specifically *urban* style’ (1999: 92). This thesis does not analyse such representations but, instead, focuses on migrants’ practices that encompass rural and urban social situations.

The inseparability of rural and urban that emerges from the ethnographic material presented in this chapter follows logically from the research methodology used. Whereas migrant behaviour tends to be studied either in an urban or in a rural setting, this study traces migrants from rural Buhera in the urban setting. A three-generation perspective is used for a historical reconstruction of the emergence of these chain migrations from Buhera district to Harare (den Ouden, 1989).

Buhera migrants in Harare

George Zvarevashe, a Buhera migrant in his early 40s, owns a house built post-independence in a high-density area in the western part of Harare. He is lucky to have this house, George says, for it is difficult to buy a house in town. George bought it in the mid-1980s when a government-financed housing scheme provided small, uniform houses in this area. Nowadays these uniform houses are, however, not so easily seen. Construction is going on all over the place, hiding the original dwellings behind newly erected walls. House owners try to supplement their incomes by extending their small houses in order to rent out the extra rooms. George Zvarevashe's house is no exception – new asbestos roof sheets are stored in the living room, next to the big television and stereo set. He intends to add three new rooms.

George has a permanent job in the chemical factory in which his father, Tinarwo, started to work in the early 1950s. Having previously been responsible for recruitment, George now works in the personnel department operating a newly introduced computer system that registers the hours worked by each factory labourer. At 4.30 p.m. he shuts down the computer and locks his office. On his way out he meets the workers who have finished their shift. Since he works in the personnel department, it is not surprising that George knows most of the workers he meets on the way out. Yet he frequently calls workers by their clan names. He knows them well, for they originate from his home area in Buhera district. The workers greet George, who in many cases also recruited them.

Unlike most of the factory labourers, who can walk to their houses on the company's premises, George takes the company bus to town after a day's work. When he arrives at his house, he may decide to have a drink at one of the bottle stores in the nearby shopping centre or, alternatively, go to Harare city council's newly constructed beer hall. While enjoying a bottle of clear Castle beer, George usually meets several of his urban friends. Among them are a few fellow Buherans, although not so many of them live in this part of town. In addition to

friends, George's *mwana* (child) – a son of his deceased elder brother (BS)¹³ – may also join him for a drink on his return from technical college. George accommodates this *mwana* in his urban house and pays for his education, just as he does that of his own children, whom he sends to urban schools the moment they are ready for secondary school. When George returns home from the bottle store, his young daughter is busy preparing the evening meal. The dinner table is already laid in the living room for George and his school-going children (*vana*). George's wife and younger children are at George's home (*kumusha*) in Buhera. As it is the planting season, they work in the fields given to George by his father. As soon as the harvest is completed in April they will join George in Harare.

This brief impression of the social life of one Buhera migrant in a post-independence, high-density area contrasts sharply with the situation of Buhera migrants living in Mbare, Harare's oldest African neighbourhood. In Mbare, one of Harare's poorest high-density areas, numerous Buhera migrants live in or near the migrant labour hostels that were built after the Second World War. The hostels are the concrete remains of colonial urbanization policies that favoured the temporary employment of single male workers. Although some hostel blocks nowadays accommodate families, many remain predominantly occupied by men. Workers from the tobacco processing companies in the nearby industrial area occupy one of these hostel blocks. The occupants include a number of Buherans. Most of them work as factory labourers in the tobacco industry – jobs that require little formal education – but some do not. In the hostels, three registered tenants share a room. Each tenant has a bed and a lockable iron trunk for his clothes and other personal possessions. In the corners of the rooms one often notices reed mats and additional blankets to accommodate relatives without urban accommodation, visiting family members – wives, children or job seekers. Years of cooking on paraffin stoves has turned walls and ceiling black, and the dirty, cardboard-covered windows prevent any excessive daylight from penetrating these ill lit rooms.

An experienced man in the network of Buhera migrants residing in these hostels is Chaka Mujiri. He is a supervisor in a nearby tobacco processing company, and a respected man among the Buhera migrants staying in the hostels. Chaka, in his early 60s, returns on foot from work at around 5.00 p.m.

¹³ It is not always possible to find English equivalents for specific Shona kinship terminology. For analytical purposes, kinship relations will therefore be specified using common categories such as B for brother, Z for sister, S for son, D for daughter, F for father, M for mother, H for husband and W for wife. Thus BS denotes brother's son. In this case, where George speaks of his 'child' (*mwana*) he is, in fact, referring to his nephew. For an elaborate discussion of the patrilineal kinship organization of the Shona, and the Vahera clan in particular, see Bourdillon (1987: 23-63) and Holleman (1949).

Together with other Buhera workers who are currently doing day shift, he sits down on his bed and sends a young worker – a *mwanakomana* ('son') – to buy beer and food. Most of the workers gathered in Chaka's room are related to one another through blood or marriage and originate from the same area in Buhera district. Together they share the two plastic containers of *chibuku* (opaque beer) that arrive a little later. Meanwhile the younger workers in the group have started to prepare food. On an old paraffin stove that produces a lot of smoke they prepare *sadza* (stiff maize porridge) and chicken. Illuminated by a small oil lamp, members of Chaka's patrilineage share the food that is served on a big plate. Other Buhera migrants have, by now, left the room to eat with their own family members who live dispersed in the hostels or nearby houses of Mbare township. Again others have already eaten and are currently at work – they are on night shift. Thus they leave hostel beds vacant for visitors or other urban workers who do not have their own accommodation. Alternating between day shift one week and night shift the next, the Buhera migrants living in the hostels work from April to December – the tobacco processing season – whereafter the elder ones return to Buhera to assist their wives, who cultivate the land. Young unmarried workers who have no interest in ploughing may remain in Harare seeking temporary employment until the new tobacco processing season starts.

These observations on Buhera migrants in Harare at first sight seem to replicate conventional divisions between townsmen and tribesmen (see Mayer & Mayer, 1974). Chaka Mujiri and George Zvarevashe appear to represent successive stages of a Smelser-like modernization process that is characterized by the technological advance, urbanization and processes of structural differentiation – in the economy, but also within the family – that accompany economic development (see Smelser, 1963: 33-5; also Long, 1977: 10). For instance, whereas the urban life of computer operator George Zvarevashe is characterized by the clear separation of public (work, the beer hall) and private (family house) spheres, in the life of manual labourer Chaka Mujiri such differentiation is non-existent. In the collective housing arrangements of Mbare hostels, migrants share not only rooms but also the food and (opaque) beer that is brought in containers from the beer hall. Whereas George may seem to have a highly individualized urban existence working in a technologically advanced department of his company, Chaka presents as part of a group of migrant workers originating from Buhera who do largely unskilled work in the tobacco processing industry.

Furthermore, the two urban situations described seem to represent different stages in a linear process of urbanization that is part of this modernization – i.e. the demographic transition, moving from circulatory labour migration towards the formation of a permanently settled urban working class (see also Ferguson, 1990). Whereas the observations on Buhera migrants residing in the hostels in Mbare township appear typical of a migrant labour phase, with migrants

circulating between town and country, the urban life of George Zvarevashe seems to signify a step further in the urbanization process. Yet, if we look at their sociogenesis, we see that similar socio-cultural dispositions – a kinship ideology and an orientation towards the land – have shaped these different migration trajectories of the Zvarevashes and the Mujiris.

Tinarwo and the Zvarevashe chain migration

George's father, Tinarwo Zvarevashe, was among the first post-World War II Buhera migrants to go to Salisbury. He went in 1947. The year is important, for it was the *gore re nzara* (year of hunger) and, because of the drought, there was little work to do in the fields. Tinarwo's choice of Salisbury was typical for the time and reflects a much wider tendency among Shona migrant workers (see Yoshikuni, 1999: 120). The expansion of industry in Salisbury after the Second World War created a high demand for labour in town. The job opportunities and relatively good wages attracted workers who had previously migrated elsewhere in search of employment. Tinarwo, for instance, had already worked in a number of places in rural Rhodesia, Nyasaland (Malawi) and South Africa before migrating to Salisbury. Colonial records indicate that the Union of South Africa was already a popular destination among Buhera migrant workers in the early 1920s.¹⁴ Then as now, however, migrants often crossed the border illegally, and thus this migration flow has largely escaped official statistics (for estimates see Paton, 1995: 117). South Africa offered good and stable wages, but the boom in Salisbury industry in the late 1940s and early 1950s made Salisbury increasingly popular among Buhera migrants, not least because of its shorter distance from Buhera and the absence of language barriers.

On arrival in Salisbury, Tinarwo stayed with his maternal uncle (*sekuru*) in one of the single men's hostels in Harari (now Mbare) township. Tinarwo needed little help to find work, as jobs were readily available in the expanding urban economy. He often changed employment in search of better pay and working conditions while regularly visiting his rural home area. After several jobs he joined a construction company in the eastern part of town. Building upon his experience in South Africa – where he also worked in the building industry – he got a permanent job. Tinarwo moved out of the hostels in Harari township as he could participate in the 'tied housing' arrangement of his new employer. This meant that, for the time he was employed, he could stay in a house in Mabvuku township, in the eastern part of town.

¹⁴ Annual reports of Assistant Native Commissioner (ANC) at Buhera repeatedly mention migrant workers going to the Union in search of work. See ANC Buhera annual reports 1923, 1925, 1926, NAZ S235/501, 503, 505, and; NC Buhera annual reports 1948 and 1952, NAZ S1051 and S2403/2681.

Attracted by the employment opportunities and good wages, an increasing number of Buhera migrants came to Salisbury. They were not the only ones. The rapidly increasing urban population caused a chronic shortage of housing. Tinarwo did his share of accommodating newly arrived urban migrants. In the same way as his *sekuru* (MB) had accommodated him, he now provided shelter for relatives and friends from the Murambinda area in Buhera district. Young Buhera men, and occasionally their visiting wives, were thus squeezed into Tinarwo's small township house until they found work and got their own accommodation. The occupational status of Tinarwo's house was, therefore, always highly dynamic. Tinarwo's 'accommodating practices' were common in town and constituted migrant workers' answer to the 'tied housing' – i.e. accommodation linked with employment at a particular company – and the chronic housing shortage in Salisbury in the post-World War II period. The mobilization of personal networks in finding accommodation made workers flexible because, as an retired urban worker explains, 'there was always someone you could stay with, if you quit a job'.

Tinarwo lost job and house when his employer wanted to transfer him to Que Que (Kwekwe). Tinarwo refused, as he preferred the urban life of Salisbury, where he had many friends, girlfriends and good entertainment. A new employer and company housing were soon found, however, at a nearby chemical factory. Tinarwo became a 'baasboy' (supervisor), supervising a group of some twenty workers. Supervising itself was rather difficult, Tinarwo recalls, for the work groups consisted of workers with very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds¹⁵ who were not very good at *Chilapalapa* – a mixture of languages commonly spoken in labour centres at that time. Therefore supervisors like Tinarwo tried to form monolingual work groups by exchanging labourers to facilitate communication. Recruitment practices in urban industry also contributed to the clustering of workers with similar socio-cultural backgrounds. In times of high labour demand, as in the early 1950s, employers encouraged their workers to bring in friends and relatives. Tinarwo, for instance, was told to bring 'his brothers'. While visiting his family in Buhera, Tinarwo informed relatives and rural friends about the employment opportunities at his company in Salisbury. However, many people in the Murambinda area preferred farming to urban employment¹⁶ and, even if they came to town, they usually resigned voluntarily and returned home after a

¹⁵ Salisbury industry attracted workers not only from Southern Rhodesia but also from Nyasaland (Malawi), Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).

¹⁶ This preference may relate to the relatively good rainfall during this decade. In the 1950s yearly rainfall at Buhera station was predominantly above average, as opposed to the 1940s and 1960s.

relatively short period of urban employment. Nevertheless, Tinarwo continued to assist both urban friends and rural relatives by providing shelter and helping them to obtain employment at the chemical factory. New workers often started in his work group, which Tinarwo considered an advantage, for 'they knew me and paid respect to me'.

By the late 1950s introducing new workers was becoming more difficult as urban employment growth declined. Supervisors like Tinarwo, however, retained influence over the recruitment of new workers. Not only could supervisors mobilize their good relations with staff, but the news that additional workers would be recruited at the factory gate was spread through them, enabling them to tell job seekers to be at the gate. The tighter urban labour market did, however, make Tinarwo more selective. He would now mainly assist kin and people from his rural home area.

Tinarwo was in his late 40s when his father, Tazviwana, died in 1968. Being the eldest in the family, Tinarwo felt obliged to return home to take over the leadership of his family as well as the village. The Tazviwana family had been given a village to rule in 1960, when the implementation of the Native Land Husbandry Act saw the creation of a number of new villages in the Murambinda area. When Tinarwo left urban employment the company offered his second son a position, his first son having already been in the company's employ since the early 1960s. Tinarwo, as his son George was later to do, had sent his sons to urban schools, as the opportunities for education in the less developed Buhera district were limited. He and his working sons paid the younger ones' school fees. George was able to finish Standard 6 education in 1974, an uncommon achievement for Buhera people at the time. The limited education opportunities for Africans in (Southern) Rhodesia during the colonial period gave those with diplomas a great advantage on the urban job market as it gradually became less racially segmented. Tinarwo's second son was soon promoted to supervisor, while George was employed as a clerk in the personnel department. Hence Tinarwo's sons could consolidate and expand the position he had built in the company. They have come to play an important role in the recruitment of new personnel, as is reflected in the large number of workers from Buhera who currently work or have worked for the company. In the 1990s, characterized by high urban unemployment, recruitment and accommodating practices like those of Tinarwo have become crucial for Buhera migrants, as their large representation in the chemical company exemplifies. In 1997 more than sixty permanent workers originated from the Murambinda area, while the total number of Buherans in the company's work force of some 400-500 workers probably exceeds 200.

Chaka Mujiri and the 'Mbare network'

Chaka Mujiri, the hub of the network of Buhera migrants residing in and around the Mbare hostels, occupies a very different position in the migrant network from someone like Tinarwo Zvarevashe. Whereas the Zvarevashe network is centralized, as its emergence results primarily from Zvarevashe family influence on recruitment at the company, the Mbare network is far less centred on one Buhera family. Chaka Mujiri, although a supervisor, is far less able to assist job seekers in finding employment at his company. Other differences between Tinarwo Zvarevashe and Chaka Mujiri can be found in their respective positions in rural Buhera. Whereas Tinarwo is the descendant of a relatively poor immigrant from Chirumanzu district, Chaka Mujiri is a member of an influential Vahera¹⁷ lineage in Buhera district. Chaka's father was a wealthy man with a substantial herd of cattle. Like Chaka's paternal uncles, he was also a *sabhuku* (village leader), a position that Chaka's elder brother (B) inherited. At present Chaka's lineage controls four villages¹⁸ (*mabhuku*) in the Murambinda area.

More than ten years younger than Tinarwo Zvarevashe, Chaka first ventured out to look for work in the early 1950s. At that time his elder brother, Fambirai, was still working in South Africa, but the promise of good wages 'near by' made Chaka decide to go Salisbury instead. As he knew no members of his patrikin in town, he relied on his *muzukuru* (ZS, i.e. nephew), a son of his sister, who was married in a village some 20 km from Mujiri village. Chaka's *muzukuru* was staying in the Matapi hostel in Mbare township, and it was from there that Chaka initiated his job hunting. Finding work was not difficult in the early 1950s, and Chaka was employed at a transport company. This meant travelling a lot in the Southern African region, which Chaka did not like very much. Towards the end of the year he returned home to take up ploughing and be with his young wife and family.

After a few years Chaka returned to Salisbury, this time accompanied by his younger brother, Kwirirai, who had just failed to get a place in a mission school in Gutu district. The two brothers, both with little formal education, again had to rely on a *muzukuru* for accommodation in town. This time they went to Tinarwo Zvarevashe, who is only distantly related to the Mujiri brothers (FFFBDSS) but originates from a neighbouring village in the Murambinda area. *Muzukuru* Tinarwo was staying in Mabvuku township, on the eastern side of town. Tinarwo also helped them find their first job. They were both employed

¹⁷ Buhera district derives its name from the Vahera clan that ruled the area when white settlers colonized Zimbabwe in the late nineteenth century.

¹⁸ In Buhera district a village is known as *bhuku* (literally book), which refers to the (colonial) tax register that had to be administered by the village leader, who is popularly called the *sabhuku* (literally holder of the book).

by the same company as Tinarwo. Both Kwirirai and Chaka changed employment and accommodation after some time. During the agricultural season they usually interrupted their urban careers in order to assist their Buhera wives who worked the land at home. Through contact with other Buhera migrants in town it was relatively easy to be such a mobile worker. For instance, Kwirirai went to work at the same company as his *mukuwasha* (ZH, i.e. brother-in-law) and was accommodated by him. Chaka got his own hostel accommodation (meaning a bed in a hostel) in Harari township in the early 1960s as part of an employment package. He was the first person from the Murumbinda area to get a job with the company, a factory processing tobacco. Chaka became a seasonal worker, as tobacco is processed between April and December. To Chaka this was a reasonably good compromise between ploughing at home and working in town. He could participate in the late planting of crops at home while being assured of paid employment on his return to town. Chaka worked for a number of years in this way – as a mobile worker oscillating between town and rural Buhera – whereafter he left his urban job in the mid 1960s, only to return to Salisbury in the early 1970s.

After the industrial boom of the early 1950s, finding urban employment gradually became more difficult, particularly for Buhera migrants who changed jobs regularly and who had little formal education because of the limited schooling opportunities in their district. Chaka's brother, Kwirirai, could not find a job and had left Salisbury disillusioned by the end of the 1950s.

Chaka, on the other hand, managed to mobilize the urban contacts he had established earlier and again obtained employment at the same tobacco processing company. Without an impressive educational background he made it to supervisor, a favourable position as regards the recruitment of new workers. Chaka was now able to help rural kin and other people from his home area in securing employment at the company. Such recruitment practices were widespread and, because employment was tied to accommodation in the hostels, a number of Buhera migrants became registered hostel dwellers in Harari township. A random survey among 150 hostel dwellers in 1975 conducted by Møller (1978: 144) confirms this trend towards concentration. She found that 8 per cent – i.e. twelve out of 150 – of the *formal* residents originated from Buhera district. Ranking districts by the number of migrants originating from each, she found Buhera to be among the four most represented districts.¹⁹

¹⁹ The other districts were Mrewa, Makoni and Gutu, represented in the hostels with respectively fourteen, thirteen and thirteen formal residents (i.e. 9.3 per cent, 8.7 per cent and 8.7 per cent). In 1969 these labour-exporting districts had African populations of respectively: 137,940 (Mrewa), 158,480 (Makoni), 151,540 (Gutu) and 128,170 (Buhera). Sex ratios where respectively: 0.85 (Mrewa), 0.93 (Makoni), 0.88 (Gutu) and 0.89 (Buhera) as compared with 1.0 in Rhodesia as a whole and 0.95 among Rhodesian Africans (CSO, 1976).

In the late 1990s one can still find a concentration of Buhera migrants in the hostels. They are either officially registered occupants, or unofficially sharing rooms (and a bed) with registered workers. Although it was not intended as permanent housing for urban workers, Chaka Mujiri has now lived in the hostel accommodation for over twenty years in total. Still he does not consider himself an urban dweller. For this reason he declined the opportunity to get his own urban accommodation through a company-supported housing scheme just after independence in 1980. Chaka's aim was to build a good house in Buhera, not to have one in town. Nowadays he regrets the decision. Although he succeeded in constructing a small house on his *musha* (homestead) in Buhera, he now realizes that an *imba* (house) in town is an asset.²⁰ Rental income could have supplemented the 'inflation-prone' pension for which he will soon be eligible.

Different migration trajectories, similar socio-cultural dispositions

The two migration trajectories outlined above make it difficult to talk of urban migrants 'maintaining rural links' in merely economic terms. Migrants' involvement²¹ in rural affairs is not simply a question of support for rural family members in return for safeguarding a claim to land as some sort of social security arrangement, for, as van Velsen (1960: 275) has argued:

a person's right to land cannot be isolated from his relationships involving other rights and obligations in the community. ... a member of this society who wants to maintain his status cannot do so only in relation to one aspect of life – he is inevitably drawn into the total life of the community.²²

Although economic necessity and social security are important aspects of the migrant networks described above, land constitutes the focal point of Buhera migrants' social security rather than being the source of it. Migration to town

²⁰ The difference in the use of the Shona words *imba* (house) and *(ku-)musha* (home) is indicative of Buhera workers' perception. Whereas *imba* indicates a house in town or a similar construction on a rural homestead, *(ku-)musha* invariably refers to the rural locality, meaning home or rural homestead.

²¹ 'Involvement' and 'commitment' are terms frequently used in the study of labour migration and urbanization. Mostly they have been used in urban contexts, indicating the extent to which an individual has built social relations in town (urban involvement) and the cognitive aspect of such involvement (urban commitment); see Mitchell (1987: 68).

²² This is also reflected in the way in which migrant workers are involved in land issues at home. Migrants show a keen interest in local struggles over land, although these are hardly motivated by (their own) economic interests. In the Murambinda area of Buhera district, land disputes are predominantly political struggles in which migrants may get involved as mobilizers of legal assistance in town (see chapter 4). The idea of maintaining rural links in order to safeguard a claim to agricultural land is also contradicted by evidence on urban women in Masvingo who generally had no access to rural land but still maintained their rural links (Muzvidziwa, 1997: 107).

and the subsequent maintenance of rural connections are inseparable. Rural connections are presupposed in *starting* an urban career. As the cases of both the Zvarevashes and the Mujiris have shown, social security has to be situated in migrants' networks; in recruitment and accommodating practices in town; and, as the ultimate goal, in having one's own house in the city. As in other countries in Southern Africa where 'urban housing is short in supply and prices are skyrocketing, absentee [house] ownership is an important hedge against inflation' (Hansen, 1997: 105). Hence, upon retirement, urban house owners retain their house in town, often putting a relative in charge of rent collection. The urban houses of migrants are usually not sold, but remain within the family after the initial owner has died.

Not only do social security arrangements have to be situated in migrants' networks, but those networks themselves cannot be reduced to a set of economically motivated links among migrants. Although the relations among Buhera migrants are instrumental to an individual migrant's career, economic and social security considerations do not determine the behaviour of these urban migrants or the organization of their networks. The difference in migrants' dealings with housing in town as opposed to the rural area is illustrative. In contrast to houses in town, Buhera migrants' efforts to establish a homestead (*musha*) in the rural area, and to construct a house on it, cannot be understood from an economic perspective. Similar to Eades' (1993) observations on Yoruba migrants in the Gold Coast whose success in trading served to build houses in their poor rural home area, Buhera migrants' investment in housing in the rural home area has to be understood in relation to their socio-cultural disposition – it reflects a strong sense of belonging (see also de Vletter, 1998: 20; Bourdillon, 1977: 7). In rural Buhera a brick-built house plastered with cement and roofed with asbestos or iron sheets reflects urban success. Besides the round cooking hut with grass-thatched roof that characterizes any Shona homestead, successful urban migrants usually develop their homestead by constructing a brick house. A survey in the Murambinda area in 1997 found that 84 per cent of the homesteads that had such a brick house were owned by (returned) migrant workers or their widows.²³ To construct such a house in the interior of the Murambinda ward, kilometres away from any major road, requires substantial capital and considerable effort – building materials are often bought in and transported from Harare. While such investment may seem irrational from an

²³ A survey of four villages (*mabhuku*, sing. *bhuku*) in the Murambinda area found that, of the 105 homesteads in these villages, forty-four had at least one brick house roofed with iron or asbestos sheets; thirty-seven (84 per cent) of these brick houses were owned by (ex-) migrant workers or their widows.

economic point of view, it is not if one acknowledges Buhera migrants' valuation of belonging to a rural home area.

Migrant networks: rural orientation, marriage relations and kinship

To understand better the socio-cultural embeddedness of Buhera migrants' economic behaviour, the case of Tinarwo Zvarevashe's second son, Daniel, is most illuminating. Like his younger brother George, Daniel at first sight seems to represent the modern individualized urban migrant whose rural ties appear to be driven by economic interests. Yet, despite living in town for most of his life and his urban career being a success, Daniel is highly involved in Buhera social life. He went to school in town while his father was living in one of the workers' houses on the company's premises. On completion of his studies he was offered a job in return for his father's loyal service when the latter left the company in 1968.²⁴

Daniel, who has a supervisory position and a reasonable wage, stays in the company house his father used to occupy, but he also has his own house in a township on the northern side of Harare. This house he rents out (to fellow Buherans). In Buhera his wealth is manifested in his *musha* (homestead), which is among the most developed in the area – a brick-built house and nicely thatched huts, all painted in the same colours. Yet neither Daniel nor his wife and children spend much time at the rural home (*kumusha*). Daniel's (second) wife is a nurse in Murambinda hospital (some 10 km away), and his children work in town or attend urban schools. Like his father and younger brother George, Daniel invests a lot in the education of his children by sending them to urban or boarding schools that are generally better than anything available in rural Buhera. To take care of his homestead, he employs two young workers from southern Buhera. Daniel pays them to work his fields and graze the cattle when it is his turn in the village's herding arrangement. Furthermore, these workers assist in ploughing Tinarwo's fields, as well as the fields Daniel has rented from fellow villagers in an attempt to grow sorghum commercially.²⁵

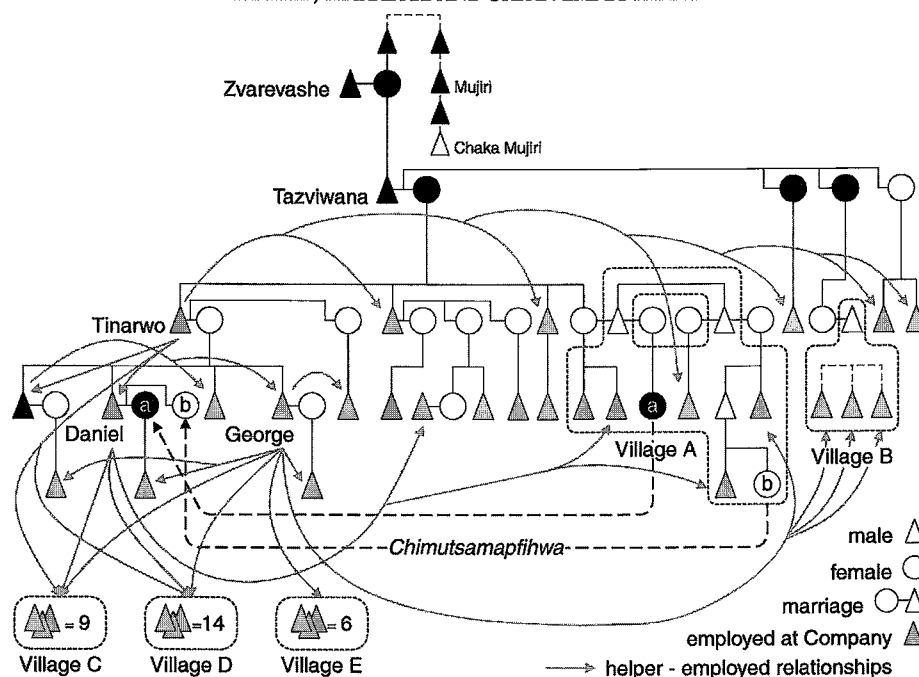
Daniel's involvement in both urban and rural life – i.e. his investments in urban housing, the careers of his children, his rural homestead, cattle and agriculture – is not simply a matter of economic calculation, however, and, despite having spent most of his life in town – in school and employment neither does he represent a modern, individualized type of urban worker.

²⁴ This recruitment practice, in which jobs are handed down from generation to generation – thus contributing to the emergence of chain migrations – is common in Southern African industry as a whole. See: de Vletter (1998: 13); Cheater (1986: 44).

²⁵ In contrast to southern Buhera, sorghum is not widely grown in the Murambinda area. Major crops in the Murambinda area are hybrid maize, groundnuts, bullrush millet (*mhunga*) and finger millet (*rukweza*), only the first two of which can be labelled as cash crops.

Daniel's career has to be understood as part of an emerging migrant network that is not confined to the urban space. His adherence to a specific marital custom exemplifies this. He married a daughter of Chiminya, a lineage ruling a village neighbouring his father's in the Murambinda area. When this wife died the Zvarevashe family accepted a daughter offered by the in-laws to replace the deceased wife. His adherence to this custom, known as *chimutsamapfihwa* ('to [re-]install the cooking stones'), signifies that for Daniel – as in this migrant society as a whole – marriage is more than a transaction between individuals. Rather, as the genealogy of Figure 3.3 also shows, marriage relationships involve *families* (see Holleman, 1952a: 190), who are often related to one another in a number of ways – as rural neighbours, fellow migrants, and so on.

FIGURE 3.3.: THE ZVAREVASHE CHAIN MIGRATION:
KINSHIP, MARRIAGE AND URBAN EMPLOYMENT

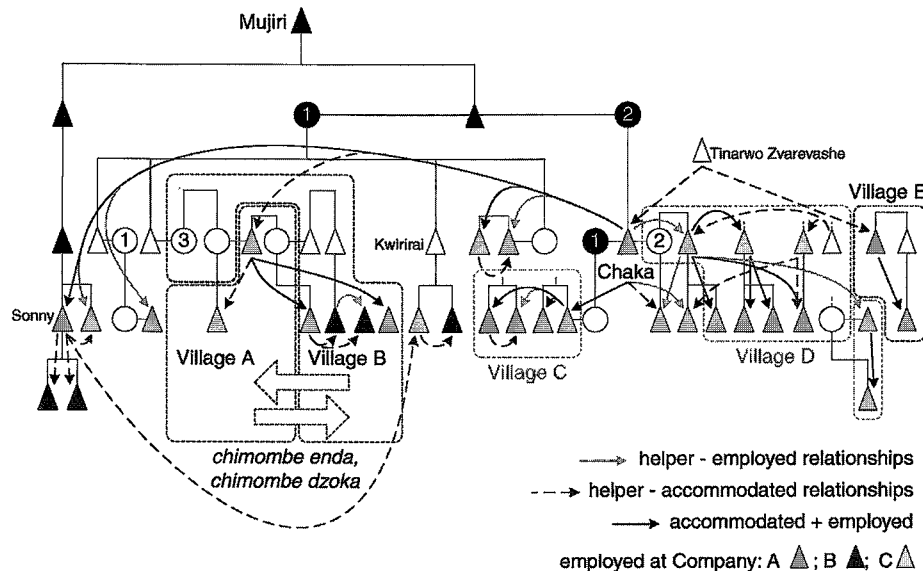


Note Not all members of the Zvarevashe family (or in-married women) are included in this genealogy. This figure only indicates a few of the numerous recruitment links between the Zvarevashe's and members of other Buhera families. The women indicated with the letters, a and b appear twice in the genealogy. The villages A to E are all located near Tazviwana village in the Murambinda area of Buhera district. (Not all marked individuals are still working at the company)

Marriage relations, rural social relations and an orientation towards the rural home area are equally important dispositions structuring the migration practices of the 'Mbare cluster' of Buhera migrants. Although less centred on

one family in the Zvarevashe chain migration, in the Mbare case one also finds multi-stranded relations among migrants who share their rural background. Relations between helper and newly employed or accommodated urban workers coincide with close ties between families and village communities in the rural area, as is exemplified by the 'exchange' marriage (referred to as *chimombe enda*, *chimombe dzoka*) visualized in Figure 3.4.²⁶

FIGURE 3.4.: THE MUJIRI FAMILY IN THE 'MBARE NETWORK':
KINSHIP, MARRIAGE, URBAN ACCOMMODATION AND EMPLOYMENT.



Note Not all members of the Mujiri family (or in-married women) are included in this genealogy. This figure only indicates a few of the numerous accommodation and recruitment links among Buhera families in the Mbare neighbourhood in Harare. Not all marked individuals are still working at the companies indicated. The villages A to E are all near Mujiri village in the Murambinda area of Buhera district. The numbers 1, 2, 3, refer to a man's first, second or third wife respectively.

Although it is long established that young men leave Buhera in search of work before they are married, marriages in which both husband and wife originate from Buhera remain common. While migrants' sexual relations in town may result in undesired pregnancies and financial commitments to the raising of extra-marital children, the marriage patterns of migrants reveal a preference for

²⁶ *Chimombe enda*, *chimombe dzoka* (literally 'The cow goes, the cow returns') refers to the payment of *roora* (bride wealth) by the husband's family to the wife's family. In the case of an exchange marriage (*kutenganiwa*, to barter) the marrying daughter replaces the payment of bride wealth (see Holleman, 1952a: 195-6). In contrast to Holleman, I did not find that people disapprove of these kinds of marriage arrangements.

women originating from the rural home area in Buhera. The Zvarevashes and the Mujiris, who represent different types of urban careers, hardly differ from one another in this respect. If we compare the marriage patterns of the Mujiri and Zvarevashe families, it is found that, of the marriages of 'brothers and sisters' of Chaka Mujiri and Tinarwo Zvarevashe, the majority brought together partners who both originate from within Buhera district. As members of the long-established Vahera clan, the Mujiris maintain marriage relations with many non-Vahera families (including the Zvarevashes; see Figure 3.3) in the Murambinda area.²⁷ Customary definitions of blood ties do, of course, somewhat restrict new marriage alliances between these families. Nevertheless, some 42 per cent of Chaka Mujiri's married 'brothers and sisters' (n = 24) engaged in marriages with partners originating from the Murambinda area, while another 46 per cent married partners from within Buhera district. Of the Zvarevashe family (n = 24), which does not originate from the area, 50 per cent of Tinarwo's generation married a partner originating from the Murambinda area, while another 17 per cent married a partner from within Buhera district. In this way, marriages contributed to the establishment of the family in the Murambinda area. The preference for marrying someone 'from a family you already know' is commonly shared, even by the generation of George and Daniel Zvarevashe (see Figure 3.3) and Sonny Mujiri (see Figure 3.4).²⁸

Migrants predominantly use kinship terminology when talking about their – multi-stranded – mutual social relations. Yet these relations may be very distant – as in the case of Chaka's kinship relation with Tinarwo (see Figure 3.3) and in some cases based merely on shared or related clan membership. A survey²⁹ of eighty-seven migrants who returned to Buhera for the Christmas holidays will illuminate this. When asked by whom they were accommodated when they first went to town, respondents almost invariably described the relations in kinship terms rather than referring to a common Buhera origin (see Table 3.2).

²⁷ Shona marriages are exogamous (see Bourdillon, 1987; Holleman, 1952a).

²⁸ 'Brothers' and 'sisters' (B, FBS, FFBSS, Z, FBD, FFBDD) of George and Daniel (n = 29) predominantly married partners from within Buhera district (65 per cent Murambinda area, 21 per cent Buhera district, 14 per cent outside the district). For the Mujiri family (n = 53) the figures were, respectively, 19 per cent Murambinda area, 37 per cent Buhera district, 21 per cent outside Buhera district. (Note: unmarried members of the families are not included in these figures).

²⁹ The survey was conducted the Murambinda area of Buhera district in December 1995 and January 1996. The vast majority of respondents were men (96.6 per cent). On average the respondents were in their early thirties, 69 per cent of them being married. The partners of 88.4 per cent of the married migrants stay (at least part of the year) in Buhera district. Migrants were asked to name the person they stayed with when they first went to seek work. They were also asked to mention the relation (in Shona) and to describe this relation (this was done because Shona kinship terms often denote different kinship relations; see Bourdillon, 1987; Holleman, 1952a).

TABLE 3.2.: BUHERA MIGRANTS IN HARARE (N=87):
SOCIAL RELATIONS MOBILIZED IN FINDING INITIAL ACCOMMODATION

Social relations ³⁰	No.	%
Members of the patrilineage	60	69
(a) 'Father' (F, FB, FFBS, FFBSS)	22	25.3
(b) 'Brother' (B, FBS, FFBSS)	33	37.9
(c) Another member of the patrilineage (Z, FZ, S)	5	5.7
Matrilateral kin	10	12
(d) 'Uncle' (MB, MFBS, MBS, MFBSS, MF)		
Relations through marriage	8	9
(e) 'Nephew' (ZS, FBDS)	3	2.3
(f) 'Cousin' (FZS, FFBDS)	4	4.6
(g) Other (WFBS)	1	1.1
Non-related persons	6	7
Unknown/not answered	3	3
Total	87	100

Table 3.2 reflects the strong patrilineal orientation of Shona society – most first-time migrants relied on patrikin for their initial accommodation in town. However, it would be a mistake to label kinship as a determinant of the social organization of migrant networks in town. Kinship and clan membership should be understood primarily as an idiom that Buhera migrants adopt to express their mutual relationships. Both constitute an institutionalized feature of migration practices that is both the medium and the outcome of those practices.³¹ After all, kinship relations – and relations through marriage in particular – are not only mobilized by Buhera migrants: relationships among Buhera migrants in town may also result in marriage relations between them. Moreover, as indicated before, kin and clan membership relations among migrants often overlap with other types of relations, such as a common origin in a particular village (*bhuku*) or ward³² (*dunhu*). Asking Buhera migrants who their friends are reveals this as well: friends are often relatives or people (you know) from home in Buhera. Hence urban-based social relations do not replace

³⁰ The kinship categories between quotation marks under (a) to (f), respectively, refer to the following Shona classifications of kin: (a) *baba*, *babamukuru*, *babamuninini*; (b) *mukoma*, *munin'ina*; (c) *handzvadzi*, *vatete*, *mwanakomana*; (d) *sekuru*; (e) *muzukuru*; (f) *muzukuru*; (g) *tezvara*.

³¹ See Giddens (1984) on structuration and the structural properties of social systems.

³² A ward (*dunhu*) comprises a number of villages (*mabhuku*) and is headed by a headman, who is known in Shona as *sadunhu*. However, in the Murambinda area of Buhera district, the headman of a ward is generally referred to as *ishe*.

migrants' rural-based social relations but, rather, the former are 'added to' migrants' social relations that span both urban and rural spaces.

In the genealogies of both the Zvarevashe and the Mujiri families the overlapping of different types of social relations is evident as well. Many workers in the chemical factory who were recruited by Tinarwo Zvarevashe and his sons originate from villages in the vicinity of Tazviwana village (headed by Tinarwo). Similarly, the Mbare network draws Buhera migrants from a number of villages in the Murambinda area. Hence similar socio-cultural dispositions regulating Buhera migrants' behaviour – such as an orientation towards the rural home and a kinship ideology – may give rise to different urban trajectories: one rather decentralized, the Mbare network, and the other more centralized, focused upon the Zvarevashe family. Such differences need to be understood in relation to the distinct features of the Mbare location and the position of Buhera migrants in the industries in which they work. In contrast to the timely education of the Zvarevashe family – George and Daniel had completed secondary education before the post-independence upsurge of diplomas – the migrant workers in Mbare have not this advantage and thus have not been able to acquire staff positions in their companies. As a result their influence on recruitment is limited. Although staff members may tell supervisors like Chaka Mujiri when new labourers are to be recruited at the factory gate, even then the chance that Chaka's relatives will be selected is small. Unlike the Zvarevashe's chemical factory, which is situated away from any major residential area (except for its own company housing in which workers live with their – sometimes job-seeking – relatives) in the eastern part of Harare, the tobacco industry is within walking distance of the large Mbare township. Competition for work is more fierce here, as there are numerous job seekers roaming around the industrial area in search of work.

Therefore, rather than representing successive phases, a process of progressive urbanization and individualization, the two migration histories exemplify different urban trajectories that share a common cultural orientation. A conception of the rural home plays a pivotal role in both migrations, albeit that the rural positions of the Mujiris and the Zvarevashe differ considerably. Whereas Chaka Mujiri is a member of a well established lineage in the Murambinda area, the migration practices of Tinarwo and his sons – providing accommodation and assisting in recruitment – depict the story of a poor immigrant family that becomes established in the Murambinda area. From being a rather marginal figure in the area, Tinarwo has become *sabhuku* (village headman), controlling land and people in a village that bears the name of his father. Hence the urban success of the Zvarevashe family has yielded them a respectable position in rural Buhera. It seems that, as a consequence, neighbouring villages do not enter into open conflict over land with the Zvarevashe's village. Yet such conflicts are common in the Murambinda area

(see chapter 4), and the Zvarevashes, like other villages, have established homesteads in grazing areas that are claimed by other villages. For instance, George Zvarevashe's homestead is in an area claimed by a village controlled by the Mujiris, who are members of the ruling Vahera lineage. The migration history of Tinarwo Zvarevashe and his sons may therefore also be regarded as an alternative trajectory whereby positions of high status can be attained (see also Garbett, 1967).

Rural identification: burial practices

Returning to the observations on the funeral of a migrant in the introduction to this chapter directs us to yet another strong socio-cultural force among urban migrants from Buhera – i.e. the wish to be buried *kumusha* (at home, on the homestead), among one's own people and ancestors.

Even after a lifetime of urban employment and urban family life, people want to be buried at their rural homestead. Thus we can also understand a migrant worker's effort to establish a rural homestead (*musha*) at some stage in his urban career. Although he may stay with wife and children in town and has no economic need to supplement urban income with agricultural production, a 'traditional' round cooking hut has to be constructed.³³ It is possible, therefore, to see homesteads that are occupied by family members of absent migrant workers who leave their fields uncultivated or, as in the case of Daniel Zvarevashe, hire people to work the land for them. Building a homestead on a plot of some few acres is an expression of a migrant worker's membership of the rural community and, subsequently, of the naturalness of being buried there³⁴.

Burial societies constitute the – originally urban-based³⁵ – organizational expression of the desire to be buried in the rural home area. Burial societies

³³ The round cooking hut or kitchen is also important during the funeral process itself. Before the burial it is customary to lay the deceased out for an evening and night in this rondavel, accompanied by female family members and in-laws.

³⁴ The funeral process itself is another example of migrant workers' continued involvement in rural affairs. Migrants not only contribute substantially to the cost, they also finance visits to traditional healers (*n'anga*) or prophets a common practice that aims to establish the cause of death. Moreover, they return home to attend funerals and rituals relating to succession in the family structure and the inheritance of property and wife/wives (*kugara nhaka*).

³⁵ Burial societies were among the first associations set up among Shona migrants in town. Initially their activities remained largely anonymous (see Yoshikuni, 1999: 115). However, in 1942 the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) requested the Labour Commissioner in Lusaka to inform him about the constitutions of functioning burial societies in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), where there was more experience of such institutions on the urbanized Copperbelt. Registrations of burial societies in Salisbury in the 1950s also suggest that these societies were organized along lines of rural background. Heads of the societies could be registered as representative of a particular chief (*mambo*), or the names of the societies might refer to specific areas. See NAZ, S2791/11.

assist in the transport and funeral of a deceased member or his family member. Through regular contributions to the society's fund, its members raise the substantial capital that is needed to transport the body of the deceased from town to the rural home area to be buried. Not surprisingly, these burial societies in town are organized on the basis of a common rural background.

Conclusion

Questions of labour migration and town-country relations have been pertinent in the study of Southern Africa for a long time. Conventionally, these issues have been framed in terms of a classic set of (ideal typical) dichotomies – modernization-tradition, individualization-communality, change-continuity, and so on – of which 'the urban' and 'the rural' constitute the geographically traceable headings. Urbanization, in this perspective, easily becomes tied into a narrative that deals with a wider process of social change – i.e. modernization – that encompasses urbanization, individualization and technological advancement. State intervention and market forces generally have been regarded as the forces regulating the movement of people from countryside to town, thus institutionalizing a migrant labour system that characterizes the political economy of the Southern African region as a whole.

This chapter has not denied the influence of the wider political economy on the organization of rural-urban relations. Literature on the Southern African migrant labour system convincingly shows the importance of such forces (O'Laughlin, 1998; de Vletter, 1998; Yoshikuni, 1999). Rather, this study aimed to show how actors mediate from below and transform such external forces. For instance, Buhera migrants' networks – encompassing rural and urban localities – (to some degree) mediate the adverse economic circumstances imposed upon them by structural adjustment policies, high urban unemployment and the rising cost of living. These networks constitute devices to secure urban employment. This may lead to excesses, such as nepotism, in formal recruitment systems, as reported in the Zimbabwean press.³⁶ Simultaneously, however, because of a lack of formal employment opportunities, these networks gain significance in the social organization of informal-sector activities such as rural-urban and cross-border trade (see Muzvidziwa, 1997). The role of migrant networks in shaping the particular pattern of urbanization in Zimbabwe thus challenges common perspectives on rural-urban relations. These have assumed that, in migrant societies such as in Zimbabwe, people's social security is

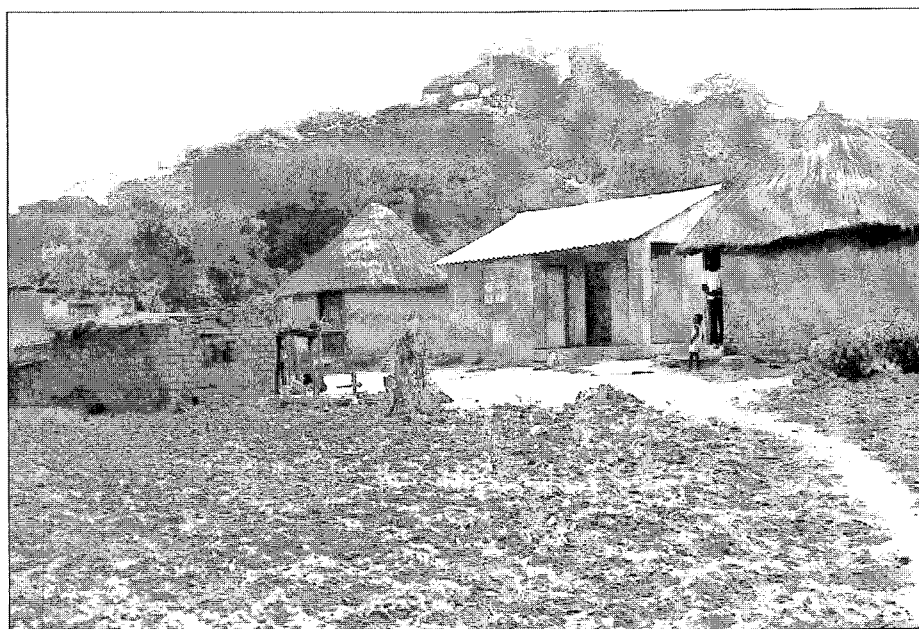
³⁶ See, for instance, newspaper cartoonist T. Namate in Beach (1994: 190). In addition, the increased dependence on social relations based on kinship and similar rural backgrounds in times of high urban unemployment may contribute to ethnic tensions in industry and government institutions.

spatially situated – in agricultural production in rural areas – whereas, in practice, such security is *socially* situated – in the rural-urban network. These common perspectives also underpin economic policies, such as the adjustment programmes promoted by the World Bank. Seeking to redress structural imbalances at the level of rural and urban economic sectors, these programmes ignore the complex nature and the persistence of rural-urban relations in Zimbabwe, thus overestimating their *structural* effects.

Despite their importance in mediating external forces, the networks of Buhera migrants linking Harare and home cannot be understood adequately if seen only as a strategic reaction to the 'volatile nature of the capitalist economy' (Alderson-Smith, 1984: 217, 229). Although strategic action plays a role, participation in these migrant networks or 'confederations of households' (Alderson-Smith, 1984) is not a matter of choice or calculation. Buhera migrants cannot escape them. As the cases presented have shown, the networks of Buhera migrants are foremost an expression of a socio-cultural pattern. The specific ways in which Buhera migrants have organized these networks that span urban and rural localities should be understood primarily in relation to the socio-cultural dispositions of people in this migrant labour society. Viewing migration practices in this way – i.e. as observable outcomes of actors' socio-cultural dispositions – enables one to understand better the preferences that motivate economic behaviour.

Shared socio-cultural dispositions do not imply a singular pattern of urbanization or modernization: they may give rise to different urban trajectories. Implicit in the behaviour of all Buhera migrants discussed, however – not necessarily in their narrative on migration – is that you cannot turn a relative away. Alternatively, one may capture this adage by borrowing a song line from the Zimbabwean singer Thomas Mapfumo: 'A person without relatives is to die in the [urban] forest' and 'will be eaten by jackals.'³⁷

³⁷ Thomas Mapfumo, 'Chigwindiri wauya, munhu asina hama'. (Chigwindiri has come, a person without relatives), from the album *Varombo kuvarombo* (From the poor to the poor).





4. The politics of land scarcity*

Land issues have been a dominant theme in Zimbabwe's history as a white minority controls the best land. Pressure on land is common in many of Zimbabwe's Communal Areas, and it is therefore no surprise that conflicts erupt over the use of the agricultural resource base in these areas. Land conflicts are not always automatically attributable to physical or economic land shortage however. They may also be socially induced, as is the case in the Murambinda area of Save Communal Land, Buhera district.¹ Here, there is still ample fallow land, notwithstanding increased pressure on land as a result of population growth combined with environmental change wrought by that pressure. Although farming is still the main activity in the area, its economic significance for rural livelihoods has decreased over the years. Only a few people can still make a living from the soil without being dependent on remittances from labour migrants working outside the district. Land has, of course, an economic value. In the context of Buhera the economic value is mainly significant for women and elderly men, for they do most of the cultivation and are the most dependent on subsistence farming, particularly if they have limited or no access to urban remittances.

Despite the limited economic significance of land for agricultural production, land conflicts are rife in the Murambinda area.² Village heads or *vanasabhuku*, (also called kraalheads) dominate these conflicts, as it is they who have the authority to allocate land that comes into dispute. Land is, of course significant for rural survival, but land conflicts do not necessarily focus on the productive value of land for land has not only an economic meaning, but combines multiple meanings. Therefore, land disputes cannot be reduced to economically motivated struggles, but have to be understood from a more encompassing, sociological perspective. This chapter discusses a specific case of land dispute

* This chapter was published as: J.A. Andersson. 1999 'The politics of land scarcity; Land disputes in Save Communal Area, Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25 (4), 553-78.

¹ The entire Buhera district consists of communal land, i.e. Save Communal Area. It was a sub-district under the Native Commissioner (NC) of Charter District from 1911 onwards, and administered by an Assistant Native Commissioner (ANC) stationed at Buhera. In 1943 Buhera became a separate district. Its boundaries have remained largely unaltered since 1946. See: District boundaries and beacons, NAZ N3/8/4; NC Buhera annual report 1946, NAZ S1051.

² Numerous land conflicts do not necessarily represent a phase in some sort of evolutionary development towards (more efficient and) more individualized forms of tenure either. Such economic perspectives on land tenure development are discussed in Platteau (1996).

and tries to unravel the multiple meanings attached to land and argues that land disputes are predominantly political struggles. The study builds upon the anthropological method of situational analysis that seeks to illuminate principles of social organization on the basis of a single social event (Gluckman, 1958; van Velsen, 1967; Garbett, 1970; Mitchell, 1983).

Although disputes may arise over the use of a particular field, conflicts between individual cultivators do not usually cause major problems. Generally, these conflicts are settled within the village-community. More common and problematic are land disputes that involve *vanasabhuku*. These cases, in which the allocation of land is disputed, can draw complete village communities into conflict. An example is the *sabhuku* who allocates fallow land that is already claimed. Alternatively, a *sabhuku* may have (deliberately) allocated land to somebody from his village in an area that is claimed by another village. In both cases, the authority of the *sabhuku* is contested, either by his own villagers, or by inhabitants from another village. In the latter situation, two *vanasabhuku* dispute the boundary between their respective villages. In these cases, it is often a *sabhuku* who initiates the political power struggle, aiming to enlarge his area of control. Land disputes may thus be used by *vanasabhuku* to (re-) establish their position as village leader. Commoners may be affected by such disputes, but they do not, as a rule, initiate them.

Although being a *sabhuku* implies becoming entangled in land conflicts, the position is, nevertheless, desirable, as the extent of people's efforts to become *sabhuku* illustrates. Within the ruling lineage of a village (*bhuku*) – i.e. the patrilineage that lends its name to the village – men compete for the position of *sabhuku*. For instance, successful migrant workers may give up their urban careers to take up the position of *sabhuku* – a position that is not subsidized by the government. Thus, relative economic prosperity is exchanged for a position of high status. Alternatively, a family may try to establish its own village. In this case the *sabhuku* and his lineage can be paid, allowing a faction from the village to create an autonomous village in the area. An example in the Murambinda area is a progressive family of teachers, headmasters and small businessmen, who have been living for a long time in the area. They have considerable economic power and own two shops there. Although wealthy, this family was also very keen to establish its own village and, after paying a number of cattle and a large sum of money to the *sabhuku* and his family, this was achieved. However, as no boundaries were agreed this created the potential for a land dispute.

The process of splitting up larger political units into smaller ones is ongoing in Buhera district. For chieftainships (*nyika*) and headmanships (*matunhu*), this process of sub-division has been interpreted as a result of political struggle in a situation of land abundance (Holleman, 1949: 28; Beach, 1994b: 36-43). Sub-divisions at the village level have attracted less attention. At this level, newly

created *mabhhuku* (villages) are only formally organized under the original village. Although these smaller units function semi-independently, their political power is limited. Nevertheless, the efforts made to establish an independent village reveal the significance of controlling one's own area. As already mentioned, the establishment of a new village requires considerable effort and money. Not only does the *sabhuku's* family have to be paid, but the new village also needs to be approved by the headman and the chief. They may also need to be 'compensated' before giving their consent. Furthermore, the approval of the District Administration (DA) is required as well as that of the Rural District Council, which has to adjust its tax-registers in order to incorporate the new village (*bhuku*).³

The value people attach to controlling a village cannot, however, be reduced to economic motivations. Although it is common knowledge that *vanasabhuku* receive money in return for land allocation, this practice can hardly be regarded as a strategy to accumulate wealth. *Vanasabhuku* do not constitute a category of wealthy people in the Murambinda area, so there is no obvious link between village leadership and class differentiation. If there is a strategy of accumulation to be discerned in Buhera, then it has to do with earnings from migration to Harare. Land allocation by *vanasabhuku* involves only small amounts of money⁴ and since there is little unclaimed land in the area, new allocations usually cause conflict. Another reason why *vanasabhuku* are unable to exploit land allocation economically is that land disputes usually do not lead to evictions of people from a disputed area.

Since the village leadership is involved, land disputes are not usually settled within the village community itself. Cases are brought before the *Dare* (court) of headman (*ishe*) Murambinda, whose area of litigation comprises some 36 villages. The *Dare*, consisting of headman Murambinda and his judicial committee, spends much time visiting disputed areas trying to settle land conflicts. When the litigants do not agree, which often happens, the *Dare* of appeal is that of Chief (*Mambo*) Nyashanu. He is the principal chief of the *Vahera* clan, which historically controls the central and south-eastern parts of the Buhera district. The initiation of a case is usually the beginning of a lengthy litigation process, as Chief Nyashanu has to visit the area of conflict. This visit can take months or even years to materialize. Alternatively, a case may be taken into the state's legal arena and dealt with by the Rural District Council. Land cases, however, do not by-pass the headman's *Dare*, despite the fact that the

³ The desire to establish one's own village is not a recent phenomenon. See: Letter of C.M. Hungwe (Salisbury) to DC Buhera on formation of new kraal, 28 Jan. 1969, NAZ Record Centre, Box 119148.

⁴ Some 200 Zimbabwean dollars, or 20 USD (in 1997).

Communal Land Act of 1982 transferred all land allocating powers to the Rural District Councils. These councils, in which public participation is provided for through popularly elected councillors and development committees, thus only play a secondary role in land dispute settlement. The development committees, organized at ward-level as Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) and at village level as Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), are simply ignored as they hardly seem to function (see also de Wolf, 1996).

The local councillor has equally little to say in land issues. On one occasion Headman Murambinda even ordered the councillor of the area to his *Dare* and reprimanded him for trying to settle a land dispute. It was made clear to the councillor that land issues were the traditional leaders' concern, not his.

Even when a land case reaches the Rural District Council, the headman's *Dare* continues to be the primary legal arena of dispute settlement. Indeed, council administrators, who largely determine the policy process at district level, generally have little understanding of the land disputes brought to their attention. In Buhera district, therefore, *vanasabhuku*, headmen and chiefs continue to dominate land issues⁵ and the litigation of land disputes reproduces power relations between so-called 'traditional' leaders and state institutions as a different form of political and jurisdictional legitimacy.

In contrast to *vanasabhuku*, headmen and chiefs do receive government allowances for settling disputes. Nevertheless, for the litigants the costs of a land conflict can be substantial. The *Dare* of both headman and chief charge 'court'-fees, and allegedly receive bribes. State litigation by the Rural District Council further increases costs, because one or both litigants may engage legal practitioners from Harare. The latter's legal advice is usually called in by migrant workers who originate from a contesting community but work in town. Migrant workers assisting their *sabhuku* and rural kin are a manifestation of the communal interest in local land struggles.

Land conflicts are not profitable for the litigants involved in a case. Nor, despite common involvement and considerable investments of time and money, do land cases usually result in lasting settlements. Therefore, the reasons why such cases are undertaken must lie elsewhere. To understand the meaning of land disputes in a labour-exporting area with low agricultural potential, one needs to appreciate the nature of dispute settlement in the area; it is also necessary to be aware of some of the common misconceptions regarding communal tenure in Zimbabwe's rural areas. These issues are explored in the following sections, which are followed by a situational analysis that illuminates

⁵ Buhera is no exception. In many Communal Areas a similar situation exists, although the actual practices concerning land allocation may vary greatly within Zimbabwe (Ranger, 1993; Dzingirai, 1995).

the highly political nature of land conflicts in Communal Areas such as the Buhera district.

Land tenure and dispute settlement in Buhera

In the Murambinda area, land cases appear to be ongoing struggles. Neither 'traditional' nor state institutions prevent land cases from re-surfacing after some years. A major reason for this is the organization of the litigation process. When the headman's *Dare* rules on a case, judgement is not made by reference to a coherent set of legal principles concerning land tenure. Although (informal) political rights (i.e. to land as an area of political control) do not structure the outcome of a dispute, land claims are made by reference to such rights, rather than by reference to tenure rights. The notion of 'communal tenure' as a legal system is therefore of limited value in understanding land dispute settlement. Nevertheless, this customary land tenure system has remained a persistent theme in the debate on land in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas.

The work of Holleman (1950; 1952a; 1952b; 1969), whose studies in Buhera district in the 1940s have been most influential in the thinking about communal tenure in (colonial) Zimbabwe, illustrates most clearly the problems related to the notion of communal tenure as a system of customary law. He described land tenure in Buhera as structured by patrilineal descent in terms of clans and lineages. According to Holleman, lineages formed the nucleus of a village, and a common ancestor of this agnatic kin group provided the name of the village. Generally, a lineage elder was chosen as the village head: known in Shona as the *sabhuku*, as he became the holder of the tax register (*bhuku*) during the colonial period. The population of a village usually consisted also of a number of other smaller families, often related to the dominant agnatic kin group through blood and marriage. Membership of a specific village community or lineage determined one's identity, and at the same time implies a right to occupy and cultivate land. Land tenure rights, in Holleman's description, were intimately linked to one's membership of the village community, but 'land is not property, it is something you use for a time and then abandon' (Holleman, 1952a: 322). The *sabhuku* was attributed a major role in the allocation of land for individual cultivation under communal tenure, although Holleman recognized differential practices in land allocation (Holleman, 1952a; 1969). For instance, fathers might allocate part of their own land to sons and others, such as wives, unmarried daughters, widowed sisters or in-laws. In such land allocating practices the *sabhuku*'s involvement might be merely a formality.

Holleman's writings on Buhera refer, of course, to a period before massive colonial intervention and this caveat must be borne in mind in any critique of his work. Land tenure, as depicted by him, was guided by a coherent set of customary rules. Shona society was perceived as a well-integrated society in which land was communally owned and vested in the headmen and chiefs, and

often worked communally in work parties (*nhimbe*). Holleman noted, however, a tendency towards individual ownership following the introduction of individual ownership of land in the 1950s (Holleman, 1969: 333). Land that was 'never regarded as individual property' increasingly became commercial property with an exchange value (Holleman, 1952a: 6).

The model of communal land tenure in (pre-)colonial Zimbabwe in Holleman's writing, however, contains a number of assumptions about the ownership of land, its value and use that do not capture the different realities of both contemporary and past land tenure practices (Cheater, 1990; Ranger, 1993: 355-7; Dzingirai, 1995: 167). First, communal and individual tenure are seen as distinct and conflicting *systems* of land tenure (Holleman, 1969: 333) which can be ordered chronologically: communal land becomes increasingly individualised and simultaneously acquires an exchange value. As acting headman Murambinda explains however: 'when you want a field from the *sabhuku* you have to pay money so that you get what you want. That has always been the case'. Nowadays, payments for land are indeed common in Buhera, yet land is not a commercial commodity. Payment for land allocation does not necessarily provide legal security to individual farmers. Communal and individual claims on land are not mutually exclusive but co-existent. Secondly, Holleman's description of communal tenure as a closed and coherent legal system ignores the dynamics of land tenure practices, as it presupposes social order. Conflicts, in such a perspective, are seen as deviations from a natural state of harmony, and it is therefore no wonder that Holleman characterized customary law in the *Dare* as an attempt to restore group consensus (Holleman, 1950). Yet there is little evidence of 'harmony' in the numerous and lengthy land cases in the Murambinda area. Last, whereas Holleman acknowledges the intimate link between village membership and land tenure rights, he did not consider the political significance of land as an area of control for village leaders.

Contrary to Holleman's descriptions of communal tenure as a coherent legal system, the interpretation of a land case by the headman's *Dare* does not involve the application of abstract rules of law to a specific situation. Instead it is treated in isolation (van Donge, 1993: 198). Rather than the application of abstract rules of law to a specific situation, the litigation of land disputes involves a struggle of conflicting interpretations of historical events. Representations of the past structure the discourse on land conflicts in the Murambinda area. Land claims are made by continuous reference to historical events, notably past settlement patterns and the conservationist land policies implemented by the colonial government. However, there is no consensus on which historical events are relevant. Nor do representations of these events necessarily depict how, in fact, historical events took place. They are part of contemporary political struggles.

Conservationist land policies and changing land use in the Murambinda area

In order to understand how the narrative of land disputes is structured by representations of the past, it is necessary to elaborate briefly on the history of (colonial) state intervention in the Buhera district.

As in so many African areas in Southern Africa, it was largely the conservationist concerns of white government officials that shaped the particular pattern of colonial state intervention in Buhera district. Although from the beginning the discourse and justification of conservation in African areas were bound up with the extension of state control over the African population and the political motive of racial segregation, rural state intervention was not merely determined by the immediate needs of settler capital (Beinart, 1984: 53; 1989: 153). From the 1920s onwards, technical and scientific ideas on the 'preservation of the soil' informed numerous interventions in African agriculture in the Native Reserves (as Communal Areas were then called). An agricultural extension programme set up by the Native Affairs Department envisaged the demonstration of modern methods of agriculture.⁶ Thus, it was argued, the destructive agricultural practices of African peasant farmers would end. Propagated (and later on increasingly coerced) measures to prevent soil erosion included rotational cropping and the construction of contour banks across sloping land in arable areas. 'Centralization', first implemented in 1928, involved the reorganisation of land in consolidated grazing and arable blocks, with a line of residential sites in between. Thus, the colonial state enforced a more rigid spatial division between land zoned for different purposes. It designated areas for settlement, grazing areas, and arable plots to be cultivated in rotation, with one crop at a time. These measures drastically reorganized existing land use practices in the Native Reserves (Beinart, 1989; Scoones, 1998: 623), but did not always have the desired effect.

In the vast area that comprises Buhera district, conservationist land policies had virtually no impact on land use up to the 1940s.⁷ This was not due to lack of effort on the part of district administrators. They repeatedly asked for demonstrators and centralization in the better watered and more populated north-western part of the sub-district, arguing that:

⁶ This demonstration was started in 1926 under the supervision of an agricultural missionary, E.D. Alvord. The demonstration programme focused not only on agriculture but also on the construction of 'improved houses', forestry and livestock, respectively dealt with by community, forestry and livestock demonstrators. See also Bolding (forthcoming).

⁷ Before 1946, Buhera district also incorporated what is currently Save North Communal Land in the Chikomba district. State intervention started to affect this (more populated) area earlier than the area that comprises contemporary Buhera district.

[I]f this [north-western] part of the Reserve is to be saved from further devastation and is to continue to support even its present population it is necessary that a more economical use of the soil must be insisted upon. I therefore ask for two demonstrators... I would add that the work of an agricultural demonstrator is facilitated if he can start his work on ground which has been divided into arable and grazing land.⁸

The administrators' efforts were unsuccessful. The Agriculturist for Natives, E.D. Alvord, wrote to the Chief Native Commissioner that the class of demonstrators was too small to allow for the appointment of a demonstrator in the Sabi Reserve. As regards centralization Alvord remarked: 'With our present limited staff it is possible that we might be able to do Sabi Reserve in 12 to 15 years from now unless emergency action is taken to expedite this work'.⁹ Alvord proved to be a bit too pessimistic. Centralization and other soil conservation measures started to have their impact following a substantial increase in agricultural staff in the 1940s. Nevertheless, even after this the NC Buhera noted that 'Over a million acres requires immediate centralization; this is an essential step towards the problem of the control of both soil erosion and grazing.'¹⁰ Until the late 1940s, the dominant land use pattern – at least in central and southern Buhera – remained a form of shifting cultivation. This land use practice had come under pressure in northern Buhera, where immigration and natural population growth had increased the number of people making use of the soil, thus shortening the regeneration period for the land after a period of cultivation.¹¹ These processes caused less fertile and drier lands to be taken into cultivation, increasing the risk of famine. (Iliffe, 1990: 62).

The occasional movement of homesteads and villages was common in the practice of shifting cultivation in Buhera. 'Traditional' villages, as described by Holleman, had no clear territorial limits (Holleman, 1952a: 3-11). After several years of cultivation a complete village would move to another area, leaving the once-occupied homesteads. People call such previously inhabited places *matongo* (sing. *dongo*). In many cases, these *matongo* can still be identified in the

⁸ ANC Buhera to NC Charter, 5 Nov. 1937, NAZ S1542/D7 vol.1. The ANC Buhera had already reported on the same problem in October 1936. At that time too, the NC Charter forwarded the matter to the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) without any success. ANC Buhera to NC Charter on Survey of Sabi Reserve, 28 Oct. 1936, NAZ S1542/A4 vol.4.

⁹ E.D. Alvord to Chief Native Commissioner, 4 Jan. 1938, NAZ S1542/D7 vol.1

¹⁰ NC Buhera annual report 1948, NAZ S1051.

¹¹ For a discussion of regeneration periods see Allen (1965). Immigration into Buhera district involved people living on estates in Charter district in the 1920s. They were forced to move to the Sabi Reserve, followed in 1927 by a Ndebele Chief and his followers from near Essexvale. See NC Charter annual reports 1920 and 1928, NAZ S2076 and S235/506; Delineation Reports 1965-67 (p. 202), NAZ S2929/1/1. In the early 1940s more people settled in Buhera arriving from alienated land in Charter district as well as from the Makoni and Mutare districts. See: NC Charter annual report 1940, and ANC Buhera annual report 1942, NAZ S1563. Another influx occurred in the early 1950s. See: Movement of natives 1950-55, NAZ S2588/2004.

landscape. The custom of burying the dead near their homesteads – for instance on nearby stone patches or in so called 'kopjes' – means graves are position-markers of *matongo*.

Population increase not only caused an expansion of the cultivated area and more settlement in the south-eastern part of the district but simultaneously contributed to a process of continuous sub-division and, therefore, increasing numbers of villages. Sections of the core agnatic kin group of villages would split off and establish their own villages. In the more densely populated parts of the district, land disputes erupted. However, such conflicts were not necessarily a result of acute shortage of arable land. The monthly reports of the Land Development Officer (LDO) stationed at Buhera seem to suggest that, as in contemporary Buhera, it was not individual plots but *village boundaries* that were disputed:

Full use is not being made of having many lands in scattered part of the district. [It] has the effect of giving an overpopulated appearance, which is by no means the case.

Much time is wasted settling land disputes, as these disputes crop up so we go out and establish boundaries between kraalheads [*vanasabhuku*].¹²

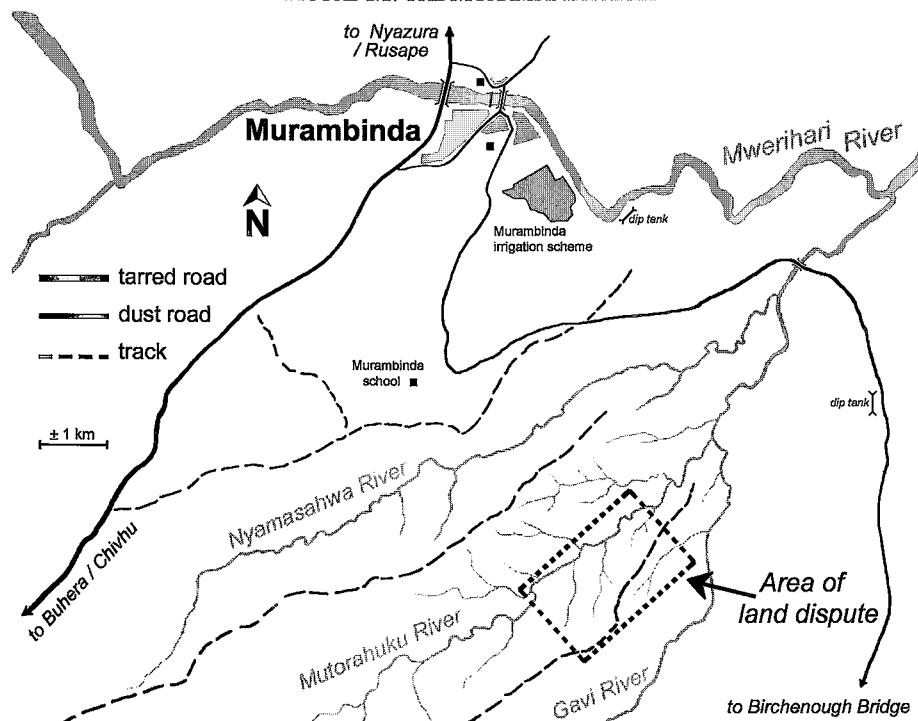
It is likely that at least some of these land disputes between *vanasabhuku* erupted as a result of the colonial government's centralization policy. Introduced as a conservation measure, the new spatial division of land and the concentration of people along a 'line' of residential sites – popularly called 'ma-lines' – simultaneously facilitated administrative control over the people in the area and confined village territories.

In the Murambinda area, centralization was implemented around 1950. Here, the physical landscape influenced the nature of the linear settlement pattern. Lines of residential sites were made on the watersheds of the tributaries of the Mwerihari River (see Figure 4.1). Cultivators with fields in the designated arable block could retain their plots, but had to move their homesteads onto 'the line'. As centralization usually did not involve land allocation to individual farmers, it did not result in a fixed settlement and land use pattern. Within the limits set by centralization, homesteads continued to be moved. New fields could be cleared within the arable areas and existing ones extended. Sometimes centralization induced the movement of homesteads and the cultivation of new land. Linear settlement along the 'lines' could result in considerable walking distances to fields. Furthermore, the establishment of the new residential sites on the watersheds between rivers meant that people no longer had access to convenient water sources. The practice of periodical movement of homesteads and fields – common in a system of shifting cultivation – thus continued up to

¹² LDO Buhera monthly reports Oct. and Nov. 1948, NAZ S160 DB 104/1.

the early 1970s when government allocated individual homesteads in the Murambinda area.

FIGURE 4.1. THE MURAMBINDA AREA



Legislating individual land tenure: the Native Land Husbandry Act

The conservationist discourse amongst officials that had informed numerous interventions in the Native Reserves up to the 1950s culminated in the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1951. This Act, generally seen as the most ambitious government programme implemented in the African areas during the colonial era, aimed:

[t]o provide for the control of the utilisation and allocation of land occupied by natives and to ensure its efficient use for agricultural purposes; to require natives to perform labour for conserving natural resources and for promoting good husbandry (Southern Rhodesia, 1951: 1).

The objectives of good husbandry, efficient land use and conservation of natural resources were to be achieved by the enforcement by an extensive set of technical and administrative measures – measures that met considerable opposition in Native Reserves as well as African urban areas where many rural people worked as labour migrants (Ranger, 1985; Raftopoulos, 1995).

Subsequently, the NLHA attracted vast scholarly interest, notably from historians and other social scientists interested in rural protest, rural planning and the socio-economic implications of the Act. (Floyd, 1963; Garbett, 1963; Holleman, 1969; Mashingaidze, 1991; Phimister, 1993). The major assumption underpinning the NLHA was that farmers' investment in good farm practices and conservation of the soil could only be successful under a system of individual land tenure (Pendered and von Memerty, 1955). Individual security of both land tenure and grazing rights was to be provided and, consequently, the power to allocate land was taken over by government. Briefly, the Native Land Husbandry Act entailed the allocation of a fixed acreage – the standard area – to all men above the age of 21 as well as (*de facto*) divorced or widowed women. The size of these individual land holdings varied between eight and 15 acres depending on climatic and soil conditions. The NLHA incorporated the spatial division of land as laid out in the centralization policy, yet the blocks of arable land in which farmers were given their own fields were not necessarily the areas as designated by centralization. Some areas had not been centralised before, others required re-centralization. Access to grazing land was not individualized. Instead, the number of stock in an area was limited to its carrying capacity and any excess compulsorily de-stocked. Stock owners were allocated grazing permits, allowing them to rear a fixed number of cattle in the designated communal grazing areas – areas that, like the arable areas, could already have been designated during the centralization of the area.

Good land husbandry was no longer a matter of demonstration, as it initially had been under the demonstration programme started in the 1920s. The NLHA forced plot-owners to dig contour ridges on their newly allocated fields in order to prevent soil erosion in the arable blocks. Contour ridges also marked the boundaries between individual fields. Consequently many people in the Reserves started to refer to their fields as 'my contours' (*makandiwa vangu*), a practice that is still common in Buhera district. In the Act, provisions were made to prevent fragmentation of these individual land holdings. Concentration of land and grazing rights was also limited as purchases of land and grazing rights were only allowed up to three times the size of an individual holding.

In legal terms, land thus acquired a commercial value. Since not everybody was eligible for a farming right and farmers could sell all their rights, the NLHA created a category of (legally) landless people. Government expected that these people, as well as 'the majority of those part-time workers in industry, who keep one foot in the Reserves, will have [to be] moved into

permanent occupation' in the towns.¹³ Hence, the NLHA was not only an agrarian reform, but simultaneously aimed to create a stabilized urban population – i.e. it envisaged the formation of a modern working class (Garbett, 1963: 193; Southern Rhodesia, 1955: 14).

The implementation of the NLHA proceeded so slowly that by 1954 only 150,000 acres of land had been allocated – less than 0.6 per cent of the projected Native Reserve area had been completed (Phimister, 1993: 226). Alarming reports on soil degradation in the Reserves made the government decide to speed up the Act's implementation. But this, 'greatly accelerated programme, which turned on determining who had, and who did not have, access to land in the 'reserves', increasingly ran up against African opposition (Phimister, 1993: 226). In fact, resistance became so strong, that its implementation was eventually suspended in the early 1960s (Birmingham and Ranger, 1983: 372; Ranger, 1985; Phimister, 1993: 227-8).

This outline of the Native Land Husbandry Act, which is well established in Zimbabwean historiography, only partly fits the realities of Buhera district in the 1950s. Here, the actual implementation of the Act diverged from its ideological underpinnings and policy practice in other areas. For instance, much of the academic debate on the NLHA has focused on the meaning of legal landlessness (i.e. its implications for class formation and the growing opposition to colonial government). According to Birmingham and Ranger, it was specifically, 'those young men who were away in the towns and who had lost land rights at the time of registration' who 'opposed implementation very strongly' (Birmingham and Ranger, 1983: 366). In Buhera, however, land allocation made few people landless as the district as a whole was not considered overpopulated. Rural kin of migrants working within Southern Rhodesia and in South Africa informed them that they should apply for land and grazing rights. Alternatively, married women were granted these rights on behalf of their absentee husbands. The interpretation of the Act by the Native Commissioner (NC) for Buhera who was responsible for the registration of farming and grazing rights, may also have contributed to this practice. On the applications for farming rights, which could only be made by those cultivating land on a prescribed date, he commented that:

¹³ It was estimated that some 25,000 male workers would enter the labour market annually. See Southern Rhodesia (1955: 14).

'[C]ultivation' (without quibble as to what the word actually means – it might be argued, for example that it signifies 'ploughing' only and nothing more: and that as far as the prescribed date is concerned... no one at all might in fact be farming as all crops might possibly have been reaped already) is to be interpreted in the atmosphere of the applicant's bonafides. *He may truly regard himself as a farmer (and grazier) only by temporary force of circumstances absent on the arbitrary prescribed date. No personal occupation of the land is necessary apparently and a married male's wife is not prevented from representing him in his absence at any time during the occupation, it seems.* Thus, I am inclined to contend that an application made in good time and in good faith should be treated on its de jure merits, the only de facto restriction being the availability of land at the time.¹⁴

Hence, absent migrant workers could also be allocated land. In the Murambinda area, people claim, the NLHA did not, therefore, create a category of landless people. Regardless of whether someone was in town or at home, all those who were eligible were given land rights. This situation may explain why references to land allocation under the NLHA still play such a prominent role in contemporary struggles over land.

The impact of the NLHA and its aftermath

That the NLHA did not create large-scale landlessness in Buhera does not mean the Act was not opposed. 'Considerable opposition was experienced... in implementing and maintaining the Land Husbandry Act', the NC Buhera reported in 1961.¹⁵ Such opposition was not, however, always articulated. For instance, after successful completion of land allocation in some areas it was found that:

As soon as the rains came, ploughing commenced and it was found that many land holders were extending their lands either into the road and drain strips or taking additional land. This has necessitated a large exercise of completely re-demarcating the area and the original measuring exercise has fallen away.¹⁶

Of the good farming practices envisaged by the NLHA, little materialised:

[T]he people do not appear to be particularly interested in improving their agricultural methods. A total of 1431 persons, Master farmers, co-operators and trainees out of a total of 20,000 cultivators is not a very encouraging figure.¹⁷

By the early 1960s, the widespread opposition to the Native Land Husbandry Act had made its enforcement increasingly difficult in many rural areas. In reaction, the colonial government instructed its native commissioners not to prosecute offenders. The NC Buhera was not very optimistic about the situation:

¹⁴ NC Buhera to Provincial NC (PNC) Midlands on NLHA 1951, 3 March 1955, NAZ S2808/1/5. Italics added.

¹⁵ NC Buhera annual report 1961, NAZ S2827/2/2/8 vol.1.

¹⁶ NC Buhera annual report 1961, NAZ S2827/2/2/8 vol.1.

¹⁷ NC Buhera annual report 1963(?), NAZ S2808/1/1 vol.2.

All land and cattle rights are being maintained as issued under the Act. It is considered that as soon as the new Tribal Trust Land Act is in force many of these rights will be relinquished. ... Ploughing is going on all over the place and only 253 persons have sought permission to plough; the remainder plough where they like. With lack of staff, European and African, and with the instruction not to prosecute offenders under the Act, control is fast being lost and will be very difficult to regain should we wish to do so.¹⁸

Thus, very shortly after the implementation of the NLHA, government lost control over land allocation. People in the Murambinda area also extended their fields and 'ploughed wherever they liked'. In addition, those people who had not been allocated land rights in 1960 occupied land. They settled in the grazing areas and built houses in their fields in order to prevent cattle from entering the fields. Such settlement in the grazing areas, it will be shown below, often had the approval of the *sabhuku* who allocated land in the grazing areas strategically, as the emerging settlement pattern reveals. The central government's policy as regards land in the African areas followed such local level developments in Buhera. Chiefs, headmen and *vanasabhuku* were increasingly involved in land issues during the 1960s. In 1967, they were officially given the authority to allocate land and supervise cultivation. To assume that this shift in policy solved the problem of land disputes is, however, a misunderstanding. New allocations of land by 'traditional' leaders, also meant new conflicts.¹⁹

Holleman interpreted the transfer of authority over land as 'giving back' the land to the 'traditional' leaders, which resulted in the complex situation of land being 'divided into two different and indeed conflicting systems of tenure' (i.e. communal and individual) (Holleman, 1969: 333). Communal and individual tenure are not mutually exclusive however, as the examination of developments in the Murambinda area reveals. While *vanasabhuku* approved new settlement and extensions of fields during the 1960s, headman Murambinda requested government assistance in another land allocation exercise in 1972. Land rights allocated under the NLHA could be extended, and those who had been too young in 1960 to be registered landowners were now officially allocated land. The 1972 land allocation, which is known as *faniro*, is commonly recognized as the moment that the government allotted homestead plots. Sketch maps, indicating the fields, acreage and contour banks to be dug, were distributed. Nowadays, many people still have these sketch maps and they are sometimes used in land disputes to claim a particular cultivator's field for a village.

¹⁸ NC Buhera annual report 1963(?), NAZ S2808/1/1 vol.2.

¹⁹ See: Letters of: Agricultural Supervisor T. Manika to DC Buhera on Investigation land dispute of kraalheads Chiminya, Charuka and Manghezi, 15 Nov. 1969, DC Buhera files, HEADMAN MURAMBINDA PER 5, and; S.S. Madyiwa (Old Highfield, Salisbury) to DC Buhera on land conflict between Ndawana and Mashingaidze kraals, 10 June 1969, NAZ Record Centre, Box 119148.

The 1972 land allocation exercise was an adaptation to what was increasingly becoming common practice in the Murambinda area: the cultivation of residential sites in addition to cultivating the fields allocated in 1960 (*mindayechishanga*), people had started cultivation on the residential sites. Possibly induced by decreasing soil fertility, the cultivation of homestead plots enabled farmers to plant after the first rains, when cattle are still grazing without supervision. In such a situation one cannot prevent cattle from entering fields away from one's residence. Furthermore, homestead plots can be fertilised more easily as cattle kraals are near.

Administrative control over the new land allocations was soon lost. By the mid-1970s, guerrillas had infiltrated the Buhera district. The relatively small government staff trying to administer the vast district soon lost all control over the area. Fear of repercussions (from either government or guerrillas) also prevented *vanasabhuku* from exercising any authority over land issues. Thus the opening up of new lands for cultivation was not sanctioned, a situation that lasted for much of the 1980s. The independent government organized villages into clusters called Village Development Committees and Ward Development Committees aiming to facilitate popular participation in government. 'Traditional' leaders were sidelined in these new institutions that simultaneously created new administrative boundaries. However, popular support for the new administrative institutions declined during the 1980s. Subsequently, chiefs, headmen and *vanasabhuku* regained much of their political power at the expense of these new institutions. In the Murambinda area, *vanasabhuku* became the major actors in the struggle over increasingly scarce land. The land dispute case discussed below illustrates this. 'Traditional' leaders dominate the litigation process. Their strategic behaviour cannot, however, be understood from an economic perspective. For them the case is not about land as a resource for agricultural production (as it may be for others). It is the political significance of having a large village territory, rather than the economic value of land, which is at stake.

Disputing land: the Mugabe-Chimanyi case

The case discussed below centres on a *sabhuku* who tries to evict people of another village from what he considers his village territory. In order to support his claim he appropriates a newly introduced environmental programme, thus reformulating the case into an environmental issue. This strategy fails however, at least partially. Instead of enlarging his area of control, the *sabhuku* ends up having to resettle some of his own villagers.

The case was presented for litigation in 1995 to acting headman Murambinda, who eventually decides to involve the Buhera Rural District Council (BRDC) and officials of the Department of Natural Resources in the settlement of the dispute. A meeting about the case in November 1997 is

described here and used as a starting point for an analysis of the political nature of land disputes. In the narrative of the meeting there is no logical sequencing of arguments, nor is there always a clear chronological reporting of events. Yet, in the presentation of the case the chronology of the discussion is retained, leaving out recurrent references to aspects of the case discussed earlier. It is important to note the shift in the definition of the problem in the course of the meeting. Whereas in the beginning the discussion focuses on land as an area of control (i.e. on the political value of land), towards the end the conflict is increasingly treated as a struggle over the use of a natural resource (i.e. grazing land).

The situation

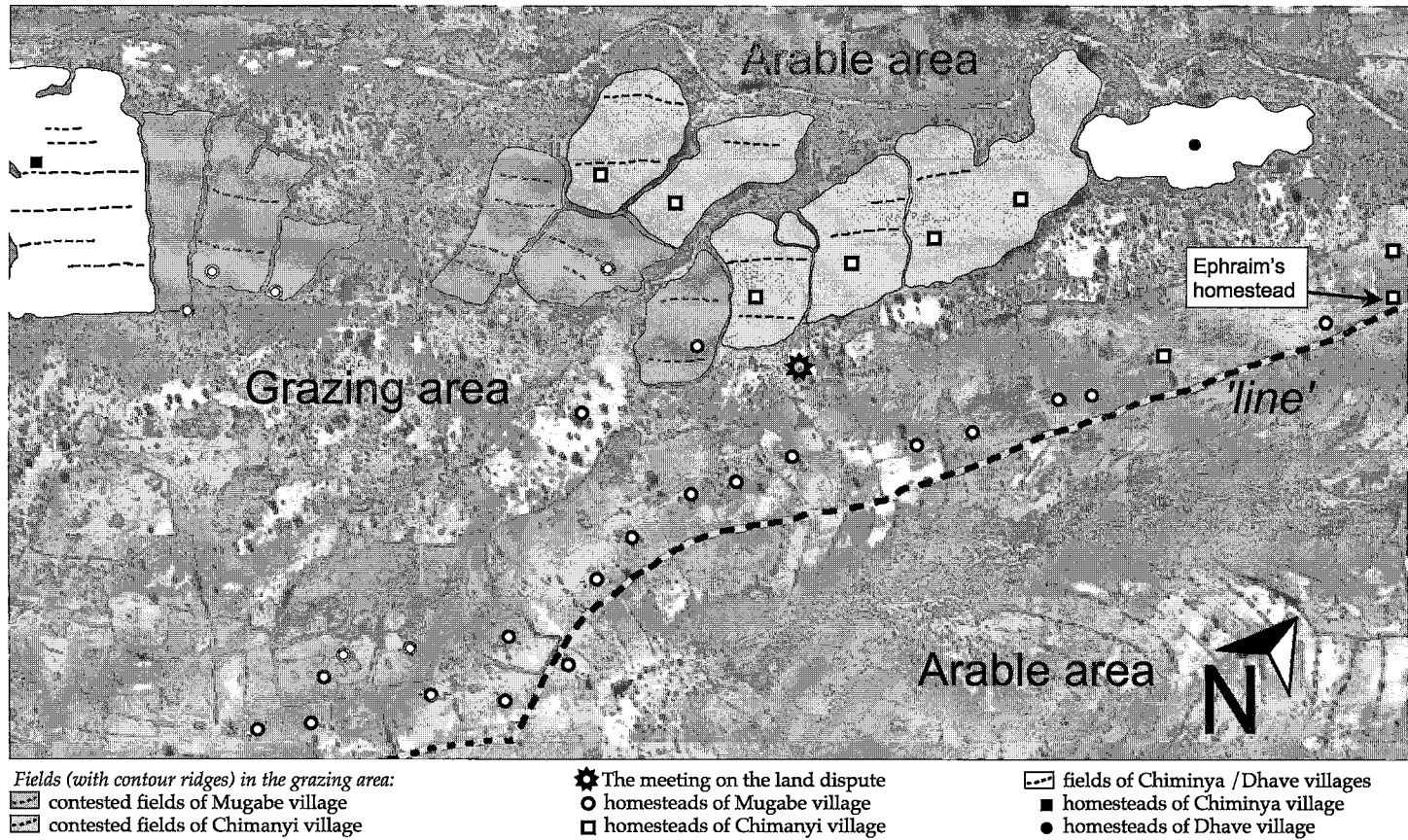
It is a Friday morning in November 1997, more than a week after the modest first rains of the season. Some 50 villagers in the Murambinda headmanship gather in the shade of a big tree in order to attend a meeting about the land conflict between the villages of Mugabe and Chimanyi. The area is used for grazing cattle, but there is still little grass on the hard white soil in which gullies have formed. A government truck, carrying two representatives of the Department of Natural Resources, arrives and parks at a nearby tree. An administrator of the Buhera Rural District Council (BRDC) accompanies them. Acting headman Murambinda arrives on foot. He wears the official headman badge of his deceased father, who was headman Murambinda until his death in 1991. He is accompanied by his messenger and his 'son' (*mwana*)²⁰ who, on occasions, is a member of the headman's *Dare*. The other members of this committee have not come.

Today's meeting has been arranged by the administrator of the Rural District Council at the request of acting headman Murambinda, who has so far failed to settle the land conflict. The headman's messenger, wearing a police-style hat and acting in a militaristic manner, has informed the litigants of the date and time of the meeting. Besides the litigants – *sabhuku* Mugabe and *sabhuku* Chimanyi – and their villagers, several *vanasabhuku* of other villages have come to attend the meeting. Two of them are the litigants' direct neighbours, *sabhuku* Dhawe and *sabhuku* Chiminya.²¹

²⁰ The headman's 'son' is actually the grandson of his father's brother. Shona kinship terminology does not distinguish according to genealogical distance but only by generation and sex (Bourdillon, 1987: 23-63; Holleman, 1949).

²¹ Note the resemblance of the names of the two villages: Chiminya and Chimanyi.

FIGURE 4.2.: THE AREA OF CONFLICT (AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH 1996)



After the *Dare* and the government officials have been given the soft drinks bought by *sabhuku* Mugabe, the headman's messenger orders everybody to sit down. Acting headman Murambinda is offered a chair. The government officials sit on small wooden benches on his right, his only *Dare* member on a bench to his left. The litigants sit on the ground just as the other people present. The members of the two villages are mixed, but men and women sit in separate groups. All face the acting headman and the government representatives.

As is customary, *Dare* sessions start with clapping hands and yelling, '*musiyamwa!*': the clan-name of headman Murambinda as well as both litigants. After this gesture of respect towards the headman and his ancestors, a prayer is said. Then the headman introduces the government representatives and explains the procedure of the meeting. The headman also recounts how he adjudicated on the dispute in favour of Mugabe and told Chimanyi that his village is on the northern side of Mutorahuku River (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). But still the conflict is not resolved.

The litigants' views

After the brief explanation by acting headman Murambinda, plaintiff *sabhuku* Mugabe is asked to narrate his version of the dispute:

Pamusoroi Vashe [excuse me headman]... The case I reported to headman Murambinda's *Dare*, is that we do not agree upon this piece of land. I know that it belongs to my area of control (*nzvimbo ndeyangu*). I told it to the *Dare* of Murambinda as well, and they also agreed that the piece belongs to me. ... [Headman] Murambinda said that Chimanyi should not cross Mutorahuku River. ... The case was tried for the last time on the 7th of September 1995 ... [Headman Murambinda] even tried to refer the case to Chief Nyashanu, but it did not work. ... In 1996, we also tried to discuss the case with the DEAP [District Environmental Action Plan]. ... That is when we agreed that the grazing area should not be ploughed. And the ploughing of the grazing area pains me a lot, and also my people. I don't want them to plough in the grazing area.

Then the defendant, *sabhuku* Chimanyi, is given the chance to speak. In his argument he refers to historical settlement patterns, and how these were altered by the NLHA in 1960 – the year that farmers were allocated individual fields on which they had to construct contour ridges (*makandiwa*).²² Chimanyi explains:

Excuse me headman ... I say this area where we are sitting belongs to me, because we were already living here when the contours were pegged [in 1960]. I had a village from the Muvee tree near that Mango tree and up to that anthill were all my houses. ... When my own fields were pegged behind there [on the other side of Mutorahuku River], this portion became the fields of my [village] and the other village. ... I left, because my fields were pegged there. I left my sons here, because fields were pegged here. So, that's why I say, this land belongs to me. ... This was my portion, there were no other villages in this portion.

²² People commonly refer to this year as 'the year of the contours' (*gore remakandiwa*).

When both litigants have spoken, *vanasabhuku* of neighbouring villages are given the opportunity to present their views. Presented as 'witnesses', they are often merely supporters of one or other of the litigants. *Sabhuku* Dhawe, who is a witness for Chimanyi, supports him by reiterating his story. *Sabhuku* Chiminya, of the other neighbouring village, is a witness for Mugabe. His statement draws attention to the centralization policy implemented in 1950. *Sabhuku* Chiminya interprets the sub-division of land and how grazing areas remained communally owned:

Excuse me headman. What I know, from 1950, is that every *sabhuku* was shown his fields and his grazing area. ... They pegged all the villages from Muoni to Dhawe. This means that boundaries were made. They used the river, trees, mountains, vleis; these were the features being used. So, in here there are Dhawe, Mugabe, Chiminya, Mushayanguwo and Muoni. I say this is our grazing area. ... I think what causes trouble is that no one is allowed to cross the river.

The meeting continues with other *vanasabhuku* and villagers narrating their view on the conflict. The headman, his *Dare* member and the government representatives listen, and occasionally ask questions. They try to establish how settlement patterns have developed and what caused this dispute to erupt. An old *sabhuku* from a nearby village draws attention to other government interventions in the area, such as *faniro* in 1972 (i.e. the individual allocation of land to people in areas that had not been allocated in 1960) and the establishment of VIDCOs in independent Zimbabwe:

Excuse me, chiefs and *Dare*. I think we are happy that we are independent. We are now in our country, we are ruling. But ... ruling itself does not mean you can force matters. ... On this side of the river, the grazing area of VIDCO 6, there is no other VIDCO that can enter [the grazing area]. When did these other people enter? Is this in 1960, when the area was pegged? And then the area was given to Mugabe? Now, what troubles us is that ... there is what was called *faniro*, in 1972. From that time there came troubles when everyone said my sons or children are grown up. Then they [government] went to peg the area that was not pegged in 1960. Then they took those [newly pegged areas] as real contours. If we ask these two who are causing this conflict: 'show us your contours, which were pegged in 1960' - this will show us the real truth.

But the issue is not that simple. The implementation of the Land Husbandry Act in 1960 involved individual land allocation, but did not force people to move their homesteads (*misha*). The problem is not simply one of fields, but also of homesteads. Chimanyi and a number of his villagers moved their homesteads closer to their fields on the northern side of the river, yet others of his village remained behind, they claim. And furthermore, the old *sabhuku*'s interpretation neglects the question of to which village the grazing area belongs. An inhabitant of Dhawe village was a guerrilla during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. He argues:

Pamberi neZANU! Pamberi nekubudirira mumatunhu! [Forward with ZANU/PF! Forward with the development of the villages!] ... The way Chimanyi and Mugabe were staying was good, but they should talk truth to each other, that will be good. ... If Mugabe wanted to tell the truth, he would say that in 1951 ... we were staying with them [of Chimanyi village] ... where Chimanyi is staying, there is no grazing area of his, he is staying in the grazing area of Chatya [village] ... Chimanyi's grazing area is this one, since it was his area, where he used to stay.

Sabhuku Mugabe, however, does not want to hear about the situation before centralization, when it was common practice for people to move their homesteads when they cleared a new piece of land for cultivation. He prefers to refer to the centralization policy in which Mugabe village was given its 'line' where it is now. His villagers, Mugabe claims, did not go and plough over the river as the Chimanyi people did. They stuck to the area allocated to them, and thus they were given both fields and stand in the area:

I think if we talk about *matongo* this will lead us nowhere. Where Chimanyi is staying, that is where my father was born. That was our *musha* [homestead], and it is our *dongo*. So, let's not talk about *matongo*, let's talk about what happened. I don't deny the fact that he [Chimanyi] was staying here when we were given this place by *mudhomeni* [demonstrator] M. who said "We don't want people to live in a scattered way but on the line" ... But we, of Mugabe village, we did not even go to plough over the river. ... When *chishanga* [at the time of individual land allocation under the NLHA] came, they were counting our *chishanga* [residential sites]. But Chimanyi was not counted for *chishanga* here. The Chimanyis' *chishanga* were counted over the river, where their fields are. Dhambe, who had his village near the school, he had houses here. Also Gwama [village] had houses here. ... All these were shifted, and also Chimanyi. So, he should not continue to argue about this area because the law removed him.

Reducing the problem: the issue of the grazing area

Mugabe's argument about the homesteads and fields, whether true or not, still ignores another issue, i.e. that of the grazing area. Both he and *sabhuku* Chimanyi claim it. Moreover, the question of what caused this land conflict to erupt is still not answered. When the government representatives interject again, *sabhuku* Mugabe's paternal uncle (his father's brother) tries to push the discussion towards the issue of grazing land:

What has caused this dispute is that our cattle have a small area for grazing because the people in Chimanyi kraal build their homes in our grazing area. When our children went to herd the cattle they used to be beaten when the cattle entered someone's field. On top of that, they forced us to compensate them. [But] the boundary of Chimanyi and Mugabe is Mutorahuku River. If all the people of Chimanyi kraal had their homes on the northern side of Mutorahuku, we could not have quarrelled with them... The reason why the people in Chimanyi came to build their homes in that area is that immediately after the war the *vanasabhuku*, headmen and chiefs had no power to control people. It was ZANU/PF committees who were settling cases. And these could tell people to build wherever they liked. If the *vanasabhuku* tried to stop them they could be beaten or killed by these guerrillas... If the people of Chimanyi had their houses on the other side of Mutorahuku and their cattle came and grazed here, we would not even quarrel with them.

Thus, as the meeting proceeds, the problem definition shifts. The problem of the boundary between Mugabe and Chimanyi village is gradually redefined as a problem of cultivation in a grazing area. A respected woman, Mrs K, who is a village community worker in the area, elaborates on the issue of the grazing land:

I can see there is no problem about the boundary... the problem is that people came and ploughed the grazing area... The problem emerged because of the children we have, maybe we were too many. Then we had to go into the grazing area, giving our children land to plough because the grazing area belongs to us... So, the problem is the grazing area.

Then the sole member of headman Murambinda's *Dare* asks whether she means that both villages have people ploughing and staying in the grazing area. This appears to be a crucial issue. Mrs K's answer structures the rest of the debate:

Yes, both of them, Mugabe and Chimanyi ... people from both sides moved into the grazing area. If they move away from the grazing area, there will be no problems.

For the government officials the case is now clear. They say it is not necessary for them to visit the exact areas, for both villages have people in the grazing area. To this problem the meeting then tries to find a solution. As it is illegal to cultivate in a grazing area, it is agreed that those people who are cultivating in the grazing area should move. Both *vanasabhuku* are asked to state the names of their people who live in the grazing area. This proves to be a time-consuming matter, as people continuously disagree on who should be mentioned and who not. For instance, on some homesteads in the grazing area married sons are staying with their fathers or mothers. Whether these should be counted as two homesteads or just one is hotly debated. Finally, *sabhuku* Mugabe is ordered by the headman to reveal the names of his people who are living in the grazing area. His paternal uncle mentions the names of five men (although there are actually six homesteads of Mugabe villagers in the grazing area, see Figure 4.2). *Sabhuku* Chimanyi, who is asked to do the same, mentions six names. Yet, the debate on who should be mentioned and who not, continues. The discussion becomes uncontrolled and disintegrates into numerous small but fierce debates in which people scold each other. In one of these 'mini-debates', *sabhuku* Mugabe's paternal uncle argues there are more than six of Chimanyi's villagers in Mugabe's area. This makes an old man very angry, and he shouts:

You [*vanasabhuku*] have been asked to name those people who were allocated their homestead in the grazing area. Not those who are not in the grazing area! They did not ask you to mention the people of Chimanyi and Mugabe who are not in the grazing! I tell you that they cannot list Ephraim because he is staying in his mother's *musha* [homestead]. You stupid *maiko!* [a Shona curse]. They do not ask you to list those with official fields! [see Figure 4.2.]

Most people, including the headman and the government representatives do not pay attention to this critique on Mugabe's paternal uncle. They do not note

that some of the Chimanyi people mentioned are not living in grazing area while others who do, are not mentioned. The headman's messenger finally succeeds in calming the crowd, and the headman and the government officials can proceed. The discussion now becomes focused on moving the people out of the grazing area, but then a woman rises from the group of women who have listened quietly to the discussion which has till then been male-dominated. She makes an emotional statement:

Excuse me, elders. I have heard my *sabhuku* [Chimanyi] agree that we must move from where we have our *misha* [homesteads]. And the *Dare* says we should have left by August 1998. My husband is dead. And my house is that one you can see, with the asbestos-roofed house. I do not think I will have the money to build a new home. I have said this because I know you will arrest me if I fail to move. I also said this because I want you to know that when you come here in August next year, you are going to arrest me because I cannot move anywhere since I have nowhere to go.

The widow is not the only one who would be forced to move. Five others of Chimanyi village, as well as six inhabitants of Mugabe village are in a similar position. The *vanasabhuku* are told by the Council representative:

Mr Mugabe and Mr Chimanyi, according to the DEAP programme we are not allowing people to settle in the grazing area. So we want to agree with each other here that you [*sabhuku* Mugabe and *sabhuku* Chimanyi] find an area to resettle your people who are in the grazing area. Do you have an area to resettle your people?

Sabhuku Mugabe answers that he has an area where his people who are presently in the grazing area can rebuild their houses. *Sabhuku* Chimanyi, who says he has no area to resettle his people, proposes not to force people to destroy their homes. 'It would be better for them to stay where they are without ploughing', he thinks. This solution is not acceptable to the officials however. There should be no houses in the grazing area. *Sabhuku* Chimanyi's complaint that he has no land to allocate to his people now in the grazing area is not accepted. One government official interprets his complaint as an obstruction of the District Environmental Action Plan (DEAP), a programme that seeks to promote sustainable environmental planning at district and local level through local people's participation (Machaka, 1997). The DEAP programme, which was introduced in this area in 1996, is supposed to benefit the people according to the official:

Since our programme touches the whole ward, let us agree ... we must have a solution so that our programme can proceed.

Sabhuku Chimanyi and *sabhuku* Dhawe (of the neighbouring village) then propose to resettle the Chimanyi people near the road in line with the other houses. But now the headman intervenes, arguing that Chimanyi should resettle his people in the area where the other people of his village have their houses, on the other side of Mutorahuku River. For *sabhuku* Chimanyi there is little left then to argue except that it is not possible for people to build new

homes now, for the rainy season has started and people are working their fields. The headman agrees that people should move after the agricultural season. It is concluded that all those currently in the grazing area should have left by August 1998. Then the meeting is closed. The officials leave in their truck, and the headman is informed that *sabhuku* Mugabe has adhered to the common practice of preparing food for the *Dare*.

In the months after the meeting the conflict continues. Although the people residing in the grazing area have been told not to cultivate, one by one they have started to plough their fields in the grazing area. People gossip about *sabhuku* Mugabe at beer parties. Mugabe is said to have allocated land to his *mukuwasha* (son-in-law), who is from Malawi. Furthermore, women in both his own and Chimanyi village are angry about his attempts to evict people from the grazing area. Yet, *sabhuku* Mugabe has reported the ploughing of the grazing area, and the Department of Natural Resources sends out summonses to the headman whose messenger forwards them to the people involved.

Analysis

At first sight, the case presented here may seem ambiguous. Two villages struggle over the use of a common natural resource (i.e. grazing land). Simultaneously, however, the conflict is political. The plaintiff, *sabhuku* Mugabe, claims the communal grazing area for his village, arguing that the piece of land 'belongs to my area of control' (*nzvimbo ndeyangu*). He wants to evict the Chimanyi villagers from the area, saying that, 'the ploughing of the grazing area pains me a lot'. However, the narrative of the meeting increasingly focuses on the spatial division of land into arable and grazing areas as enforced by colonial state intervention. The conflict becomes defined as a resource struggle – a struggle over land use – and finally it is decided that eleven families should be resettled outside the communal grazing area.

A different picture of the conflict emerges if we take a closer look at the behaviour of the actors involved in this particular social situation and the different meanings they ascribe to the land but, to understand this behaviour, it is necessary to assess the interests of the major participants and the strategies they adopt. The physical positions of the actors present during the meeting can be used as a starting point for such an analysis of interests and strategies.

Interests and positions at the meeting

The central position of *sabhuku* Mugabe – close to the *Dare* – is a clear indication of his interest in this case. He has also carefully prepared the meeting. Mugabe has made the effort to buy a crate of soft drinks for the *Dare* and the government officials. Furthermore, he has arranged for food afterwards and ordered a big chair and some small benches to be brought to this spot in the grazing area. The big chair is reserved for acting headman Murambinda, who is

recognized by all participants as the most important authority. The wooden benches are for the government officials and the sole member of headman Murambinda's *Dare*. The people of the different villages sit on the ground. As is common in all public gatherings, men and women sit separately from each other; the men more central, facing the headman, his *Dare* and the officials. In *Dare* cases it is also common that the litigants sit next to each other, each having their supporters sitting on their side, behind them. The litigants face the headman, and try – at least in the beginning – to minimize direct conversation with one another. The litigants address the *Dare*, not one another. Yet, on this occasion the situation is different. The litigants do not sit next to each other facing the *Dare*. Their respective villagers sit together and *sabhuku* Mugabe is sitting closer to the *Dare* than *sabhuku* Chimanyi, the defendant. The latter has far less interest in the settlement of this dispute and it is as if his physical position, further away from the headman, reflects this.

The mingling of the inhabitants of the two villages may be interpreted as a sign that this conflict has, so far, not really divided them. Most villagers present do not even participate in the central discussion, but discuss and comment on what the speakers have to say. Neither the ordinary villagers, nor the people who are actually residing in the grazing area, seem to be involved in the litigation process. They hardly talk during the meeting. For the men who have houses in the grazing area, this is understandable. Most of them are 'absent' because they work in Harare, but their wives, who are the actual farmers, do not participate in the litigation process either. Although this may be explained by the fact that some of them also have access to fields in the arable area (as is the case for the people of Mugabe village), their physically backward position at the meeting reflects the fact that land issues are not considered a woman's affair. Land dispute is politics and politics is primarily men's business. The only three women who do participate in the discussion have specific social positions. One is a widow. She has no husband to voice her (family's) concerns. Nor does she have any land other than her field in the grazing area. For her, the land has no political value but primarily an economic one: she largely depends on the land for her survival. The other two women who speak at the meeting have official positions – one is a village community worker, the other a government official. A similar interpretation can be made as regards the men present at the meeting. Those who speak in public generally occupy an official position. They are *vanasabhuku*, headman or government officials. (Authority is not only derived from official positions – a former guerrilla is also listened to). Commoners only moderately participate in the discussion. Their interventions must be understood from a shared perspective on the nature of this conflict. Like the *vanasabhuku* they view this land dispute primarily as a political issue. Only when politics threaten to affect commoners' livelihood – as in the case of the widow – do commoners raise their voice.

Sabhuku Mugabe: the strategic adoption of a conservationist discourse

When *sabhuku* Mugabe is asked to present his case, he states that his case is a political one. The area 'belongs to my area of control' (*nzvimbo ndeyangu*), he argues. Because he failed to win his case on earlier occasions however, Mugabe has changed his strategy. Since the introduction of the environmental action plan in the area, he has been trying to use this programme to pursue his goal: getting the Chimanyi people out of what he considers his area. One can observe this during the meeting. Mugabe adopts a narrative that resembles the conservationist concerns underpinning colonial land use policies. He strategically focuses on these colonial land use policies and does not want to talk about the pre-intervention period (i.e. the issue of *matongo*). Thus, *sabhuku* Mugabe uses a conservationist narrative to seduce the government officials. His statement, 'the ploughing of the grazing area pains me a lot', is a clear example of this strategic manoeuvring to win over the government officials, who are interested in the progress of the DEAP. While he accuses Chimanyi of allocating land in the grazing area, he avoids mentioning that he has also allocated land in the grazing area. *Sabhuku* Mugabe's strategy collapses the moment Mrs K reveals that both villages have people residing and ploughing in the grazing area. Conserving grazing land now becomes the main issue. For *sabhuku* Mugabe this shift in problem definition has the unintended consequence that he has to commit himself to the eviction of his own people from the grazing area. Instead of enlarging his area of control, he ends up in conflict with women of his own village who cultivate their (deceased) husbands' fields in the grazing area.

Sabhuku Chimanyi: go-slow tactics

From *sabhuku* Chimanyi's conduct during the meeting, it follows that he shares with Mugabe an understanding of the nature of this conflict. He too understands that this case is not about a scarcity of communal grazing land but about political control over people and land. This is not just reflected in the ideological construct – 'this is our *dongo*' – on which his claim is based. He also shows his awareness of the political nature of the conflict when it comes to listing the Chimanyi people in the grazing area. He simply mentions all his people living on the southern side of the Mutorahuku River and because, for him, the conflict is not about the grazing area, he includes Ephraim, whose homestead is not even in the grazing area. Ephraim's homestead is on the 'line', just as the house of *sabhuku* Mugabe and two of Ephraim's family members who were originally part of Chimanyi village (see Figure 4.2).

The government officials

The position and role of the government officials deserves particular attention. Seated on small wooden benches, they do not talk a lot during the meeting

although their presence is the very reason the meeting is being held. Nevertheless, they do not play a very prominent role. Their position does not reflect a situation in which the government is the recognized authority in the arbitration of disputes. Almost all speakers start by addressing the headman and his *Dare* – *Pamusoroi vashe* (excuse me, headman) – which reflects the hierarchy of authority in land dispute settlement.²³ Rather than arbitrating, the government officials are just one of the interest groups present during the meeting. Like the litigants, they have their own interests and act strategically. In the same way as *sabhuku* Mugabe, the government officials use an ideological construct of the past to pursue their goals. Their argument that the grazing area should not be ploughed builds upon the conservationist narrative underpinning intervention by their *colonial* predecessors, but the officials do not see a problem in this. They are pre-occupied with the implementation of the environmental action plan. Although they are aware of the general shortage of land on which people can settle, they do not want to consider this complicating factor. *Sabhuku* Chimanyi's complaint that he has no land to resettle his people is therefore interpreted as an obstruction of the environmental action plan that is to benefit the development of the area.

The government officials thus interpret this case as a struggle over the use of a natural resource – grazing land. The fact that they have no ear for statements about boundaries between villages causes them to fail to understand the political nature of the conflict.

Headman Murambinda

The role played by headman Murambinda is also worth considering. He has reported this case to the BRDC after failing to reach a settlement on earlier occasions. The headman does not usually take land cases to the BRDC, for he does not consider the BRDC the rightful authority on land issues. That he has now taken the initiative to involve government may, of course, be the result of *sabhuku* Mugabe's efforts. Mugabe may have tried to use the implementation of the environmental programme to his advantage. Yet the headman himself also has an interest in another *Dare* session on the conflict, regardless of its outcome.

Headman Murambinda is not the substantive headman. He only acts as such since the death of his father a few years previously. Before that he was a car mechanic in Harare while his two wives and many children remained at his rural home. When his father got old he returned from town to take over his father's duties as headman Murambinda. After his father's death in 1991 he was

²³ On one occasion a speaker who starts his address with *Pamberi neZanu!* is reprimanded for not being respectful. He is told that this is a *Dare* of elders, which causes amusement, even among the government officials.

installed as acting headman for a fixed number of years. Meanwhile, a new substantive headman Murambinda should have been selected. In 1996 this process was still in progress although the period an acting headman can rule had expired. As a result, acting headman Murambinda no longer receives the monthly government allowance for headmen that his father used to receive. Yet, the acting headman badly needs money for his big family. Without his urban income he is a poor man. Since the headman's *Dare* charges fees, it is in his interest to have many cases and few *Dare* members with whom he has to share such fees. Land cases are relatively well-paid. The requirement to visit the area of conflict tends to increase the fees levied. Furthermore, litigation in the area of conflict requires that the litigants prepare food and provide drinks for the headman and his *Dare*. Such considerations, as well as the possibility of receiving bribes, may explain the attitude of the headman towards involving government institutions in settling land cases.

The 'witnesses': Strategic alliances of vanasabhuku

To end this analysis of strategies and interests, let us briefly consider the positions of the other *vanasabhuku*, whose interpretations of colonial state interventions largely structured the narrative of the meeting. Presenting themselves as knowledgeable witnesses of past events, the *vanasabhuku* used their statements as a means to support either *sabhuku* Mugabe or *sabhuku* Chimanyi. *Sabhuku* Chiminya's support for Mugabe may be seen as based on the idea that both are in a similar position. Chiminya (to the west of Mugabe village, see Figure 4.2) also has a problem of people from the northern side of the Mutorahuku River settling in the grazing area on the southern bank of the river. However, Chiminya is, at the same time, in competition with Mugabe over grazing land, as elucidated later.

Sabhuku Dhawe's support for Chimanyi may be understood from a family perspective. The widow from Chimanyi village occupying the homestead in the grazing area is the sister of *sabhuku* Dhawe. Furthermore, Dhawe village is in a similar position to Chimanyi. Like *sabhuku* Chimanyi, *sabhuku* Dhawe lives on the northern side of the Mutorahuku River while some of his villagers have homesteads and fields in the grazing area on the southern side (see Figure 4.2). They too come into conflict with Mugabe, who argues that the area belongs to his *bhuku*.

It is important to note, however, that support for a litigant is not necessarily based on a shared legal interpretation with one of the litigants. Alliances between *vanasabhuku* are part of their political strategies; they can support one another today, but be in conflict over land tomorrow.

The politics of land allocation

The outcome of this *Dare* meeting is clearly not what the litigants had intended. Whereas *sabhuku* Mugabe's aim was to evict only the people of Chimanyi village from the grazing area, it is decided that all villagers residing there have to move. Hence, *sabhuku* Mugabe has to move his own people from the grazing area, instead of having more space for his villagers. This outcome, in which named people are actually ordered to move, is uncommon in land dispute settlement in the Murambinda area. Usually, if the *Dare* decides upon a case, this has little influence on the existing settlement pattern. The *Dare* may rule that an area belongs to a particular village, yet those who are already there are allowed to remain. It is either agreed that they should stop ploughing or, rarely, they are told to change their village membership. The litigants accept such resolutions as forcing people to destroy property without compensation is regarded as highly inappropriate. If anything, arbitration of land disputes thus only affects future settlement.

The practice of allowing people to remain in disputed areas already indicates that land disputes do not centre upon the productive value of a particular piece of land. Land conflicts cannot be understood as struggles over the use of an economic resource. Neither can the strategies adopted by the litigants be understood from a perspective that presupposes rational economic behaviour. The financial costs of litigation bear no relation to the results achieved. Land disputes are predominantly political struggles over village territories. An analysis of the emergent settlement pattern in the Mugabe-Chimanyi area can elucidate this further and reveal the political nature of these territorial conflicts.

It has been described how the defendant, *sabhuku* Chimanyi, claimed the disputed area for his village, arguing that it is the area where most Chimanyis lived before the colonial government came to enforce centralization. There is the *dongo* of Chimanyi, who had a big homestead and was ploughing in the area between the Mutorahuku and Gavi rivers. As the aerial photograph of 1949 shows (Figure 4.3), settlement was scattered and there were no consolidated arable and grazing blocks.

When centralization was enforced in the early 1950s, a line for residential sites was pegged on the watershed between the two rivers. Chimanyi's homestead remained where it was, for it was on the line. Some Chimanyi people who had been living on the northern bank of the Mutorahuku stream (where the current *sabhuku* Chimanyi lives) moved their homesteads onto the line close to their fields on the southern bank of the Mutorahuku stream. Mugabe people with fields in the area did the same. Thus evolved a sequence of villages along the line running from Chiminya to Mugabe, to Chimanyi, and ending at Dhawe village. Although settlement was now organized in a linear pattern, the fields of these villages were still scattered in the designated arable block in between the line and the Gavi River.

When, in 1960, the Mugabe and Chimanyi people were allocated land individually, it was not the residential sites but the then cultivated lands that guided the re-organization of land by the colonial government. While the division of land enforced during centralization was maintained, people belonging to the same village were now allocated fields next to each other. Most Chimanyi people were allocated their fields on the northern side of the Mutorahuku stream.

The increased opposition encountered by the implementation of the NLHA in other Native Reserves had caused the government to instruct its Native Commissioners not to take action against offenders of the Act. The 1964 aerial photograph of the disputed area reveals this as well (see Figure 4.4). Men who had been too young to be legally allocated land during the implementation of the NLHA have settled in the grazing area on the southern side of Mutorahuku River. The colonial government was unable to prevent it.

By 1974, after the second official allocation of land (*faniro*) in 1972, settlement in the grazing area had further expanded, a process that continued during the liberation war in the late 1970s. Although people claim that settlement was uncontrolled during the war, a comparison of the 1974 and 1981 aerial photographs suggests otherwise (see Figures 4.5 and 4.6). The emergent settlement pattern in the grazing area indicates strategic land allocation there during the liberation struggle. The expansion of fields of Chimanyi people who have settled in the grazing area has been stopped by new settlements of Mugabe people. This pattern of strategic land allocation appears to have wider application. On the Chiminya side of Mugabe's grazing area a similar settlement pattern emerges. The process of strategic land allocation continues during the 1980s and the early 1990s, resulting in a steady decline of grazing land. (see Figure 4.2).

A closer look at the emergent settlement pattern may help to elucidate the political nature of the new allocations in the grazing area. The Chimanyi people who settled in the grazing area have cleared fields for cultivation on the southern bank of Mutorahuku River. They built their homesteads further to the south, thus creating considerable fields for cultivation between the houses and the river that has Chimanyi fields on its northern banks as well. New settlements of Mugabe people have 'jumped' the grazing area. Only a small strip of grazing land has remained in between the new allocations and the (expanded) homestead plots along the 'line'. Thus, Mugabe has tried to stop the expansion of Chimanyi village. Settlements further to the west reveal a similar attempt. Here, Mugabe people have settled in the grazing area to stop further encroachment by Chiminya people.

FIGURE 4.3.: SHIFTING CULTIVATION (AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH 1949)



■ homestead of Chimanyi

FIGURE 4.4.: SETTLEMENT IN THE GRAZING AREA AFTR THE LAND HUSBANDRY ACT (AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH 1964)

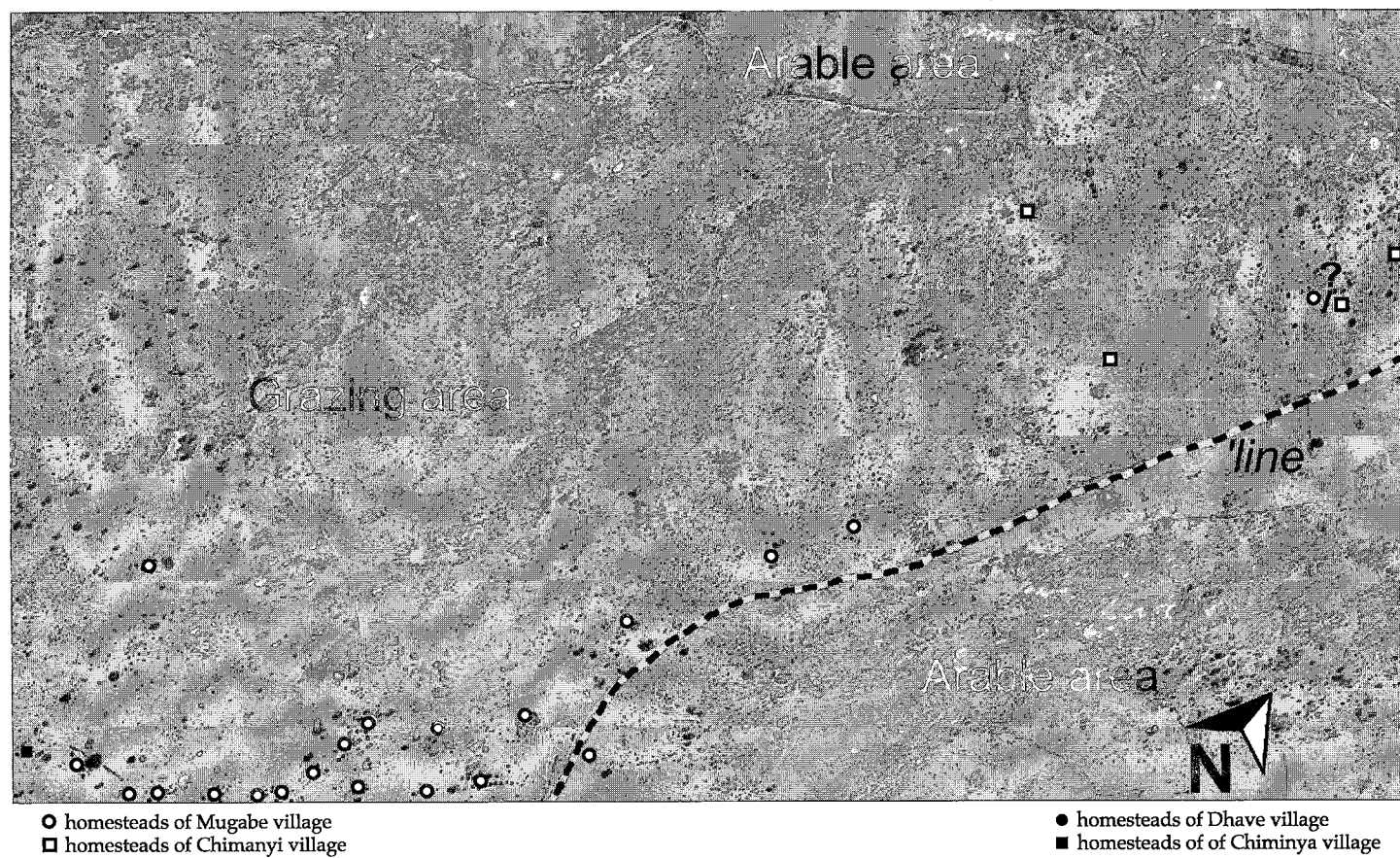


FIGURE 4.5.: THE COLONIAL STATE LOSING CONTROL: THE EXPANSION OF SETTLEMENT (AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH 1974)

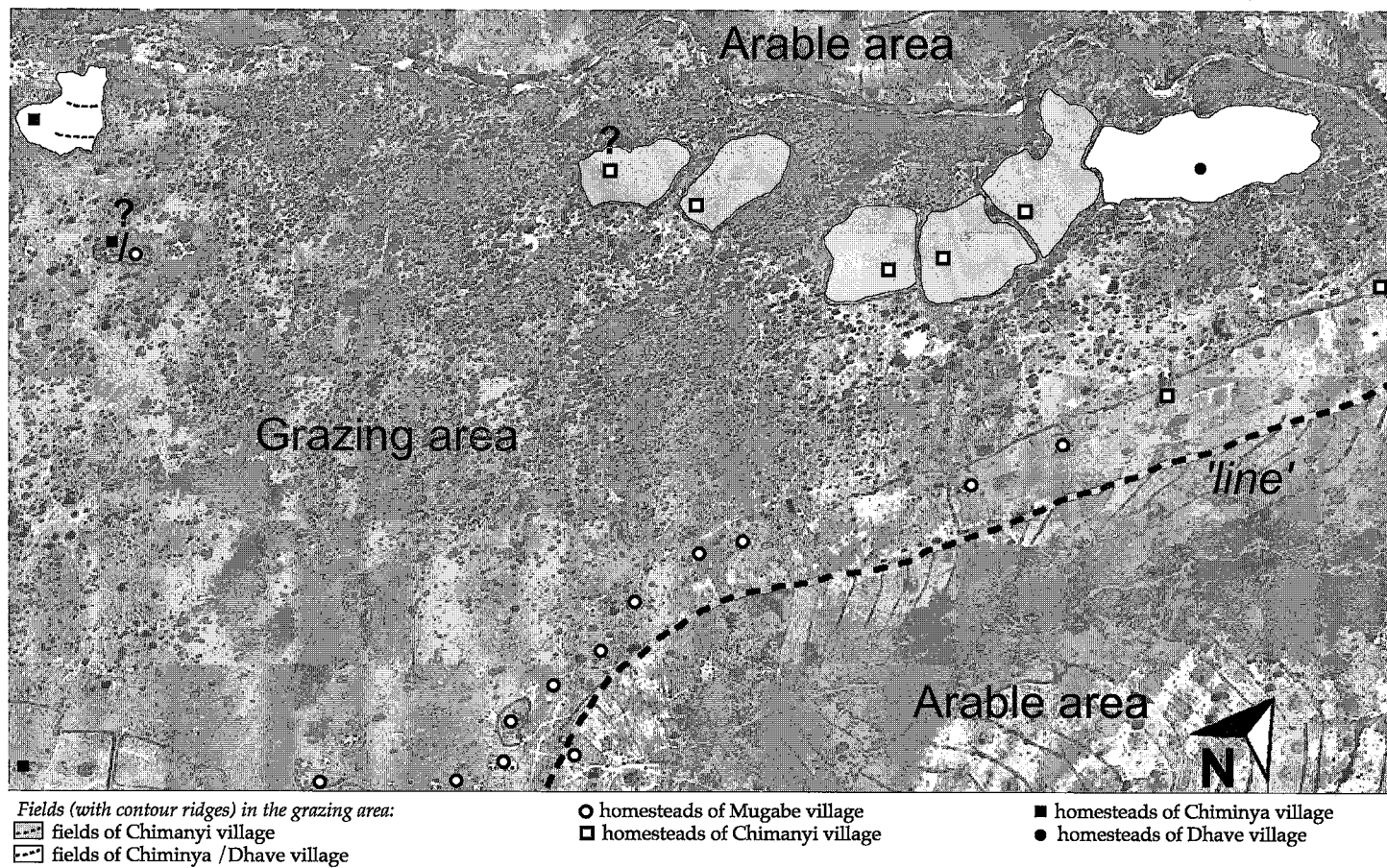
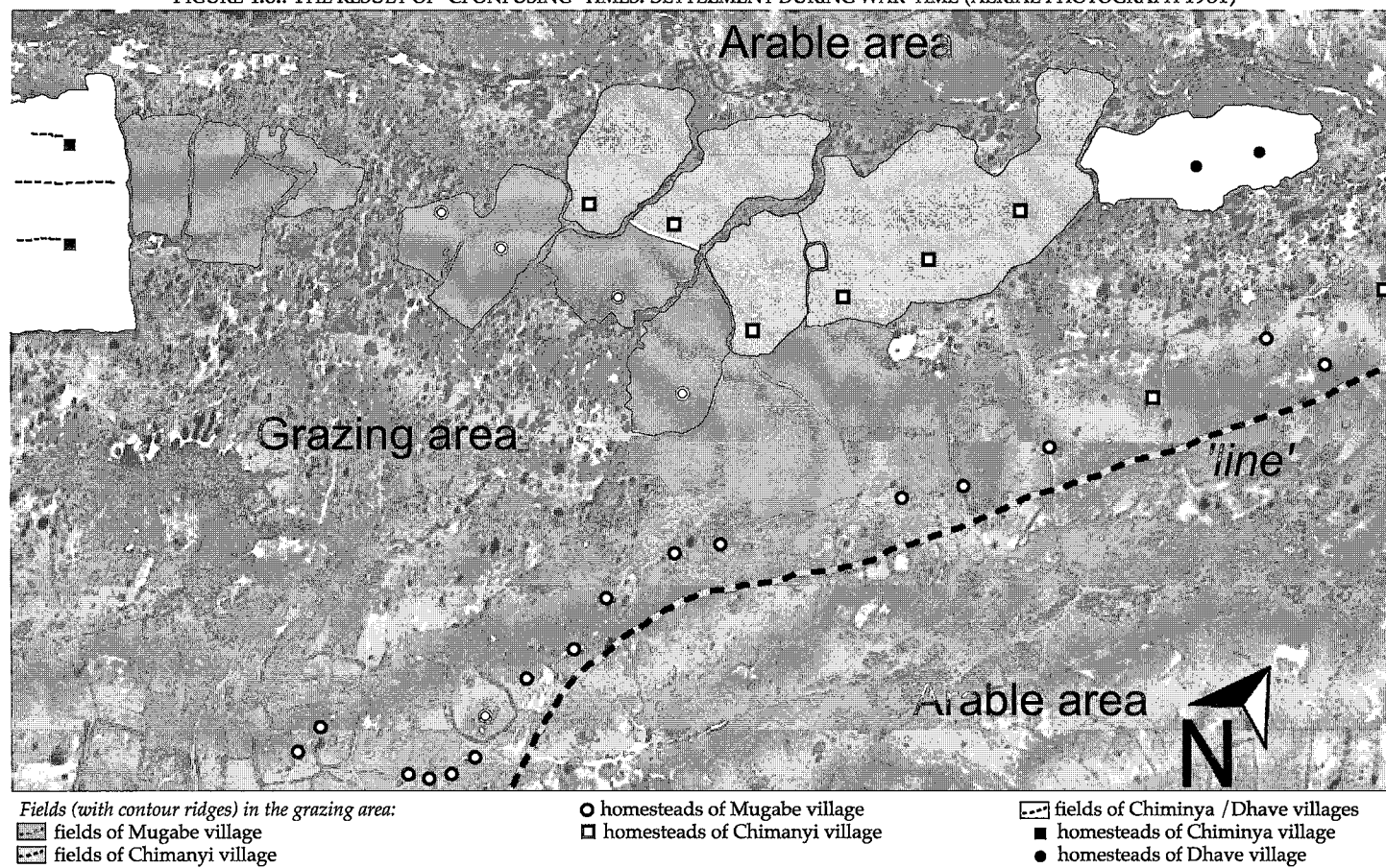


FIGURE 4.6.: THE RESULT OF 'CPONFUSING' TIMES: SETTLEMENT DURING WAR-TIME (AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH 1981)



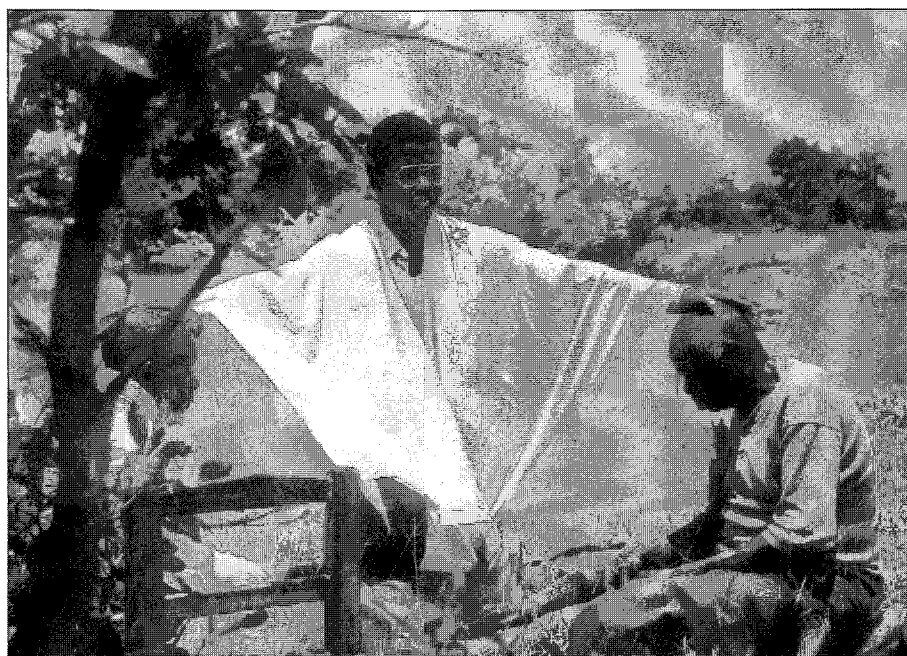
The emergent settlement pattern in the grazing area was not simply a function of land shortage in the villages of Mugabe and Chimanyi. At least for the Mugabe people, settlement in the grazing area was not induced by an acute shortage of arable land. Those living in the grazing area also have 'real contours' (fields in the arable area on the southern side of the 'line' drawn by the colonial administrators). Furthermore, in the arable area of Mugabe village one can observe a number of fields that have not been cultivated for years. *Sabhuku* Mugabe's practice of allocating land in the grazing area thus has to be understood from a political perspective.

Conclusion

The perspective on land struggles presented in this chapter has little in common with Zimbabwe's national land issue, which centres upon the highly unequal distribution of the best agricultural land. In Communal Areas like Save Communal Land in the Buhera district, land conflicts do not centre upon the productive value of the land. Because of low rainfall and poor soils, the economic value of land is limited. Land disputes in Communal Areas like Buhera therefore cannot be reduced to struggles over an increasingly scarce economic resource. Land combines a multiplicity of social meanings. To those commoners who depend on the productive value of this increasingly scarce resource, its significance is, obviously, primarily economic. The economic value of land is not, however, the driving force behind the disputes over land as discussed in this chapter.

Although land is becoming increasingly scarce in the area, land scarcity in itself does not automatically lead to conflict. This chapter has shown that land disputes may not be about the economic value of land. The prominence of *vanasabhuku*, as well as the moderate participation of commoners in the litigation process, reveals that these conflicts have to be understood as highly politicized territorial struggles. In the Murambinda area of Save Communal Land, ideological constructs of past events dominate the narrative of land disputes. Legitimate claims on land are based on these interpretations of historical events, rather than by reference to abstract rules of law – be it customary or state law – guiding land tenure. Colonial land use policies (which were strongly opposed in some areas) play a key role in these interpretations. Thus, colonial state intervention structures the narrative of land dispute settlement in an independent Zimbabwe. This does not, however, mean that colonial state interventions have determined land use in the area. In contrast to many other areas in colonial Zimbabwe, the colonial administration exercised limited control over land use in the vast area that comprises the Buhera district. Colonial land use policies usually took a long time to be implemented in the area, and their enforcement proved problematic.

Post-independence state institutions have not attained an authoritative status in land dispute litigation. Headmen and chiefs, who are not included in land administration by the state, continue to arbitrate land cases. Government institutions – if involved at all – merely participate in the litigation process in which *vanasabhuku* are the major players. Such findings challenge the policy discussion on land tenure reform in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas. Although it is recognized that 'the most serious land conflicts today are within Communal Areas' (Zimbabwe, 1994: 23) very little is known about the nature of these conflicts. Moreover, this study has shown that government institutions exercise little control over land issues. This raises questions about the capacity of the government to enforce any kind of land tenure reform in the Communal Areas if it should wish to do so.



5. Sorcery in the era of 'Henry IV': Kinship, mobility and mortality*

Tinovengana
tinoroyana
tinorevana
ndizvo tichi urayana
ndizvo saka tiri varombo!

We hate each other
we bewitch each other
we gossip about each other
that makes us kill each other
that's why we are poor!¹

The striking feature of this fatalistic statement is the acknowledgement that entanglement in occult forces is a sheer waste of resources. This is at odds with situations that have recently been documented elsewhere in Africa. Niehaus (1993), Geschiere (1997) and Yamba (1997), for instance, have described social situations in which the occult is an all powerful and inescapable discourse that dominates the mind of actors. This chapter presents a case study in which local actors contest the interpretation and narratives of the domain of the occult, and challenge its applicability. In the Murambinda headmanship in Save Communal Area, Zimbabwe, the occult is important, but not a factor determining social practice.

In the symbolic thought of Shona speaking peoples the occult is known as *uroyi*². It is intimately related to people's understandings of 'life forces' – i.e. fertility, sex, disease and death. In this respect it is similar to situations elsewhere in Africa. The analysis presented here is also similar to anthropological approaches that have viewed the discourse on the occult as a device to attribute meaning in situations of existential insecurity (Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Douglas, 1970; Yamba, 1997: 203). In the Murambinda area, these insecurities are all too real. Many people are confronted with HIV/AIDS-related illnesses and deaths – euphemistically called 'Henry the IV' (HIV).³ This study differs, however, in that it emphasizes the profane rather than the sacred

* A shorter version of the argument developed in this chapter will be published as: J.A. Andersson. (forthcoming) 'Sorcery in the era of 'Henry IV': Kinship, mobility and mortality in the Buhera district, Zimbabwe', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

¹ Interview with Kwirirai Mujiri, 23 March 1998.

² As Geschiere (1997: 14) has pointed out, Evans-Pritchard's classic distinction between witchcraft and sorcery is highly problematic in many contemporary African societies. This study, in which the distinction is not particularly relevant, adopts 'occult forces' for both witchcraft and sorcery – both translate in Shona as *uroyi*.

³ Another frequently used term for HIV/AIDS is 'TB-2', popularly known as the incurable form of TBC. It refers to the frequent incidence of TBC (tuberculosis) among HIV/AIDS patients.

in the study of the occult (see Durkheim, 1976: 37). It analyses the discourse on the occult as a symbolic language that people use to deal with tensions and insecurities that arise from particular social practices. It looks at the discourse – which simultaneously may be deployed instrumentally in a political sense – as a device to give meaning to social practices. Such a profane way of looking at the discourse on the occult in times of high HIV/AIDS prevalence requires attention to be paid to the social – rather than the bio-medical or transcendental – nature of knowledge. Furthermore, focusing on the social practices related to the occult enables us to understand how the occult is given a place relative to other social phenomena, rather than seeing it as encapsulating the whole of social life.

For a long time, the occult has been associated with tensions among people living in relatively closed communities (Marwick, 1965; Aquina, 1968). Such a restricted arena of social conduct does not exist in the Murambinda area. As far back as the early colonial period the area was already incorporated into wider networks of economic exchange, notably migrant labour networks (see chapter 2). To understand how people become entangled in occult forces, one needs to appreciate the centrality of kinship in the social organization of these networks that span rural and urban areas (see chapter 3). They constitute people's major source of social security. The pivotal importance of rural-urban connections in this society's organization goes hand in hand with a persistent identification with the rural home area. Typically, an urban career ends with a return to the land and, if possible, with the occupation of a position in the lineage-based leadership structure (see chapter 4). When illness or death strikes, returning to the rural home area is equally characteristic. To be buried among one's own ancestors is a strongly felt desire. Kinship solidarity is perceived as automatic and natural in this social universe of circulatory migration and identification with ancestral land. Understandably, then, contravention of this solidarity constitutes a major source of existential insecurity. Concurrent with the numerous HIV/AIDS-related deaths (death itself exemplifying a lack of unity within the kinship group), it fuels the discourse on occult forces. The discourse on the occult thus becomes a (contested) language in which kinship, migration and ancestral land are talked of in terms of life forces. This is evident from the analysis presented below. For instance, the alleged sorcerer in this study is said to have acquired his occult powers in South Africa when he was a migrant there. His use of occult powers is also closely related to the Shona cult of ancestral spirits. The perception is that he uses these powers to redirect a vengeful spirit of a man, allegedly murdered, and buried in Murambinda soil. The centrality of kinship, land and migration in the discourse on the occult is furthermore exemplified by the consultation of a diviner who eradicates the occult forces. His engagement critically depends on the (financial) support of the family's urban migrants, whose physical absence does not guard them from

occult forces. Hence, unlike elsewhere in Africa where an urban existence seems to provide some shelter from rural relatives' occult practices (Ferguson, 1999: 117), this chapter reveals how in a migrant labour society the occult is translocal in nature.

Introduction to the case

On an early November morning two elderly men stand silently among the usual crowd of people awaiting the visiting hour at Murambinda hospital. The two men, brothers of the Mujiri house of Murambinda (see Figure 5.1), are not usually seen together although they are neighbours in a village some twenty kilometres away. Their distinct appearances reveal their different orientations in life. The elder, Tapera, is a slender man wearing a badge that reveals his membership of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). The beer-belly of his younger brother, Kwirirai, reveals that he is not a member of this alcohol-avoiding church. The illness of Kwirirai's hospitalized son – Chanda, a recently married migrant worker in his late twenties – has brought the brothers together. Months previously, he returned ill from Harare where he was a factory worker in a tobacco processing company. A few days ago he was hospitalized. According to his 'fathers'⁴, his condition is serious. Besides the 'fathers', other relatives have gathered near the hospital entrance. Two 'brothers' (FBS) of Chanda, have come to visit their sick relative. Chanda's wife (W), Jenet, is also there. She is carrying their first born son on her back. Although she is living at her father-in-law's, as is common practice for newly married couples, she has arrived here with her mother. Although standing nearby, they do not talk much with Chanda's 'fathers' and 'brothers'.

During the following days, family members come and go, while Chanda's condition deteriorates. Chanda's father Kwirirai hangs around in Murambinda township, alternating visits to the hospital and the local beer hall. He is desperate. Not only is his son ill, his wife is also. She is currently staying with her brother in town in order to consult healers and doctors there. She does not know how bad her son's condition is. Kwirirai is both unable and afraid to inform her.

Tapera, Kwirirai's church-going brother, eventually manages to convince the drinking Kwirirai that they should consult 'prophets' – diviners associated with independent churches who explain the causes of illness and misfortune – about Chanda's illness. The vicinity of the hospital is a ready market for this kind of advice. The two 'fathers', a sister of Chanda's wife (WZ) and two 'brothers'

⁴ The category of 'fathers' (*vanababa* in Shona) includes paternal uncles and sometimes also paternal grandfathers. Similarly, the category of 'brothers' (*vakomana*) includes paternal cousins. Shona kinship terminology does not distinguish according to genealogical distance but only by generation and sex. See also note 13, p.55.

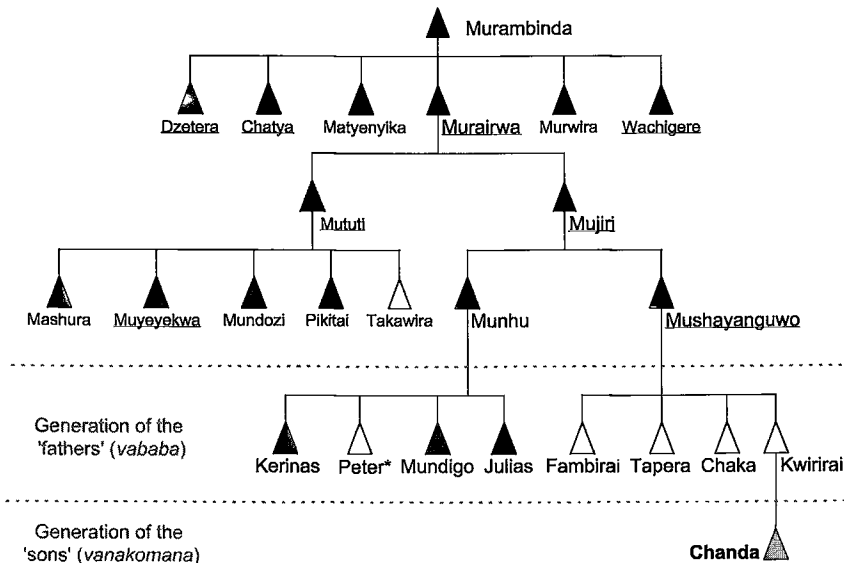
(FBS) – the latter two pay for these consultations – visit several prophets of different denominations. It is not necessary to inform a prophet about the subject of the consultation, but given the proximity of the hospital it is little surprise that all consulted prophets tell the delegation that they have come to enquire about the illness of a hospitalized relative. However, only one prophet gives an account from which they can deduce a cogent explanation of the cause of the illness. He tells the Mujiri family members that their relative is suffering from a sexually transmitted disease caused by *chikwambo*, a particular occult force said to originate from South Africa. The prophet furthermore explains that one of the ‘fathers’ of the patient possesses this *chikwambo*.

The prophet’s account confirms the fears of the advice seekers. Chanda’s illness is not new to the Mujiris – they have seen other relatives with similar symptoms – and neither is the story of occult forces in the family. The Mujiris have been told of these occult forces before by both *n’angas* (traditional healers) and prophets.⁵ Although the prophet’s account does not implicate any family member in particular, the advice seekers interpret his words to mean ‘father’ (*baba*) Fambirai, the eldest brother of Kwirirai and Tapera (see Figure 5.1). *Baba* Fambirai is also the village headman (*sabhuku*) and he used to be a migrant worker in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The particular interpretation of the prophet’s account does not logically follow from his story. Although he speaks of *chikwambo*, he does not say it originated from South Africa. *Baba* Fambirai is not the only elder who worked there. For men of his age it is common to have worked in South Africa because it used to be a popular destination for Buhera migrant workers up to the 1950s (see chapter 2). *Baba* Chandavengerwa or Peter (see Figure 5.1) – who named the ill Chanda – also once worked there. Furthermore, the prophet did not specify the category of ‘fathers’, nor that it should be limited to the descendants of the Mujiri house of Murambinda (see Figure 5.1). Hence, rather than pinpointing the sorcerer, the prophet merely provides a narrative that enables the Mujiri family members to talk about their problems. The interpretation given to the prophet’s words can only be understood in relation to earlier problems within the family. *Baba* Fambirai has been associated with the occult before. Although an old man in his seventies, his tallness and stature reveal he must have been an impressive, strong man when he was young. He is feared. Rumours in the village say he once beat a man to death. As a consequence, people’s narratives on Fambirai’s occult powers often incorporate references to what in Shona society is known as *ngozi* – an angry spirit of a deceased person (see: Bourdillon, 1987: 233; Gelfand, 1967; Crawford, 1967: 88, 260).

⁵ Not even two months previously the family had once again been told about *uroyi* in the family, when a *n’anga* was consulted over the cause of death of Kerinas, a family elder who died when he was in his late seventies (see Figure 5.1).

FIGURE 5.1. THE MUJIRI'S AND OTHER HOUSES OF MURAMBINDA



Notes: (1) A house constitutes all descendants of two parents. Underlined names of houses are simultaneously the names of villages (*mabhuku*) in the Murambinda headmanship that are ruled by descendants of Murambinda. The Chatya and Dzetera houses control two and three villages respectively. The control over five villages by the descendants of Murairwa is an indication of the political strength of this house. (2) Peter's Shona name is Chandavengerwa(*).

Ngozi spirits, sorcery beliefs and the migrant labour economy

In Shona cosmology, when a person dies, his personality is believed to become a spirit (*mweya*) that continues to play a part in the social life of the living (Fry, 1976: 19). Communicating through mediums, the ancestral spirits (*vadzimu*) are a source of advice for the living, representing ideal persons acting as guardians of morality (see: Fry, 1976; Lan, 1985; Bourdillon, 1987: 199). Within this cult of ancestral spirits, vengeful ancestral spirits may exist and these are known as *ngozi*. Although different circumstances may cause a spirit to become a *ngozi*, the spirit of a murdered person invariably becomes a *ngozi* and it turns against the family of its assassin. Hence, a *ngozi* is never a member of its murderer's patrilineage. It is always a *mutorwa* (foreigner/in-law), and it can only be appeased by the payment of compensation to the family of the assassinated person (Daneel, 1971: 133-40).

Accounts of occult forces in Shona societies yield different descriptions of *chikwambo* (for instance: Crawford, 1967: 261). Similar to a *chitokoroshi* – the distinction is often unclear – a *chikwambo* is perceived as a dwarf-like familiar that feeds on human flesh. Though small, both *chikwambo* and *chitokoroshi* are very powerful familiars. Seen as greedy and possessive, they are associated with rapid economic accumulation by their possessor. In return for its services

to its possessor, the *chikwambo/chitokoroshi* demands to be fed with meat. Initially, it is said, this meat may be beef – leaving the *muroyi* (sorcerer/witch) without stock – but eventually it demands human flesh of its possessor's patrikin. The South African origin of *chikwambo* and *chitokoroshi* is explicitly acknowledged in the discourse on the occult.⁶ Brought (sometimes unknowingly) as herbs by returning migrant workers, in Zimbabwe the *chikwambo* turns into a dwarf-sized person. It was said a *chikwambo* could be wearing an overall, smoke cigarettes and even be talked to in Afrikaans.⁷

Hence, the specific form the occult takes in the Murambinda area is intimately related to the way in which this society has been incorporated into the Southern African migrant labour economy. South Africa used to be a popular destination for Buhera migrant workers (see chapters 2 and 3). Similarly, the popularity of independent churches – such as the ZCC church – has to be understood from this perspective. They have their origins in South Africa where migrant workers came in contact with them in the early years of the 20th century (see: Bourdillon, 1987: 292; Daneel, 1970; 1971). Independent churches differ from European missionary churches in their recognition of the existence of *uroyi*. The close resemblance with 'traditional' Shona beliefs – i.e. the ancestral cult – may have been a factor in the easy acceptance of these churches in many societies. Prophets of these independent churches may be regarded as equivalents of spirit mediums or *n'angas*, and, in their capacity of eliminators of *uroyi*, they provide a valued social service (Crawford, 1967: 221-43; Daneel, 1970; 1971; Bourdillon, 1987: 283).

The death of a migrant: public accusations

As the possibilities for treatment run out, the doctors at Murambinda hospital suggest taking the terminally ill Chanda home.⁸ As his father Kwirirai is drunk, Chanda's 'brothers' (FBS) have to arrange for the transport home. Upon arrival at Kwirirai's homestead, family members are informed as well as Chanda's in-

⁶ *Chitokoroshi* and *chikwambo* are not associated with sexual intercourse as their South African equivalents – *mamlambo* and *tokoloshe* – are. Niehaus (1993: 504) describes *tokoloshe* as familiars that rape women, can change their sex and castrate men after having sex with them. But similar to the *chikwambo*, Niehaus describes a *mamlambo* as greedy and feeding on human flesh of family members of its possessor.

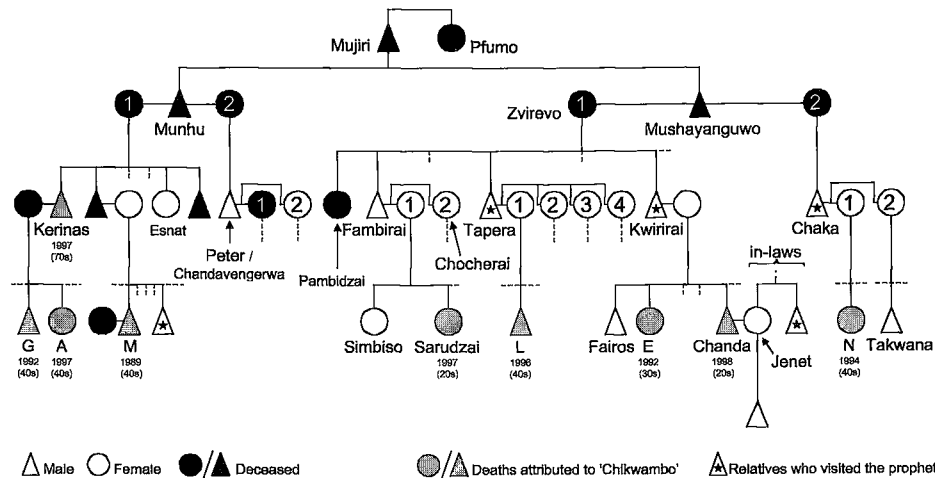
⁷ Being able to understand returned migrant workers who had learned Afrikaans while in South Africa, the author was targeted as a possible interpreter. It was suggested that he talk with the *chikwambo* and smoke a cigarette with him.

⁸ Transporting terminally ill patients home is common policy in many rural hospitals in contemporary Zimbabwe, since it is easier and cheaper to transport an ill person than a deceased. Zimbabwean hospitals and mortuaries face enormous problems as a result of the many AIDS patients and casualties. See for instance: 'Hospitals struggle to cope as 3,000 die every week; Mortuaries to stay open round the clock', *The Herald* 22 June 1999.

laws. Soon a number of relatives fill the rondavel in which Chanda is laid. One of these relatives is Chanda's *mai guru* ('elder mother'; FBW), Chochoerai, who arrives drunk from a local bottle store. She is the second wife of *baba* Fambirai (see Figure 5.2). A conflict erupts when her brother-in-law, Tapera, openly accuses Chochoerai and her husband – his own brother – of practising *uroyi*. In the hut with the terminally ill Chanda they start a fight during which Chochoerai almost bites off one of Tapera's phalanges. Other people present intervene and manage to chase her away from the homestead, while Tapera remains behind waving his hand in agony. The commotion of the scene has also provoked laughter, because Chochoerai has a reputation as a 'finger-biter' (her husband, *baba* Fambirai, is missing two of his finger tops). The commotion soon evaporates however, as Chanda passes away. It starts raining, but this does not prevent *baba* Fambirai – the alleged sorcerer – from arriving that same evening. He has heard his 'son' (BS) has died and comes to pay his respect. This time he is not accused of practising *uroyi*.

The following morning two family members go, independently, to Murambinda township. One is a 'brother' (FBS) of Chanda, who is going to phone relatives in Harare. The other is Chochoerai. She goes to the Murambinda police station to report Tapera, as under Zimbabwean law 'Any person who... indicates any other person as being a wizard or a witch shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine'.⁹

FIGURE 5.2.: THE MUJIRI FAMILY



Note Not all descendants of Mujiri (and neither all in-married women) feature in this figure. Only individuals referred to in the text are indicated.

⁹Section 3 of the 'Witchcraft Suppression Act Chapter 9:19' (Zimbabwe, 1997: 709-10). This act is basically the same as the original colonial act of 1899.

The funeral: kinship relations renegotiated

When Chanda's in-laws are informed of his death, an argument ensues over Chanda's outstanding bride wealth obligations. The in-laws claim bride wealth because their daughter has given birth to a son of the Mujiris and is staying with them. They argue they will only attend the funeral if they are given pots of beer, money, chicken and a goat. Such demands are difficult to honour however. Usually, funeral expenditures are to a large degree met by relatives working in Harare. They generally have more cash on hand than their relatives residing at home. Since Chanda's relatives in town have not yet arrived, the in-laws demands threaten to disrupt the funeral process. However, a conflict is averted as the Mujiris manage to borrow money to meet their demands.¹⁰ Negotiations over the bride wealth issue are postponed until after the burial.

The day after his death, Chanda is buried at his father's homestead. ZCC church members play a prominent role in the burial ceremony, as Chanda had become a member of this church some time previously. The church members pray, whereafter others dance and beat drums as is common practice at Shona burials. Speeches are made by several relatives and people of position, such as a ZCC-church leader, the alleged 'killer' *baba* Fambirai in his position as village headman, and acting headman Murambinda.

After the burial the distribution of the deceased's possessions and outstanding obligations are discussed. When the talk converges towards the bride wealth demands of Chanda's in-laws, a new conflict erupts. Chanda's father Kwirirai explodes in anger, labels the in-laws' demands as exorbitant and insults them. The offended in-laws leave the funeral. When in the evening the first Mujiri migrants arrive from Harare – among them Chanda's eagerly awaited eldest brother Fairos – this new conflict is extensively discussed. The following day, the in-laws are offered compensation for offending them. The conciliatory move, paid for by the returned urban migrants, makes the in-laws return to the funeral.

Although this conflict is serious, it is worth remarking that the discourse on the occult does not enter into this inter-family conflict over bride wealth obligations. Inter-lineage conflict is not fought out in terms of occult forces (see also chapter 4). The reconciliation with the in-laws, though not resolving the issue of Chanda's outstanding bride wealth, is important to the Mujiris. They have to maintain good relations with the in-laws, not only because they are neighbours in the village, but also because they need to be involved in the consultation of a *n'anga* or prophet over what caused Chanda's death. Besides

¹⁰ Money is needed not only for the in-laws, but also to buy a coffin, cement for the grave, and to cater for the mourners who may stay for days. For the occasion of a funeral a cow is often slaughtered. Hence, funerals constitute a major financial drain on the resources of the deceased's relatives.

Chanda's wife, only men are selected for this task. They include representatives of all 'houses' of the Mujiri family (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2), one of Chanda's in-laws and *muzukuru* (cousin; FZS) John Makan'a (see Figure 5.3).

Ancestral spirits, causes of death and bio-medical discourse

Consulting a *n'anga* or prophet about the cause of death is an integral part of the funeral process in Shona societies. In Shona cosmology death is not seen as something natural, but as caused by someone or something. The causes of death are sought both within the 'modern' bio-medical sphere and the so-called 'traditional' sphere of spirits and occult forces.¹¹ Some illnesses and their causes, such as malaria, may be completely understood in bio-medical terms. Other diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, may be looked upon bio-medically, as resulting from a virus infection that is sexually transmitted, but also raise questions of accountability. Questions such as 'who is responsible for him/her becoming infected?' may thus be addressed in terms of occult intervention. Hence, the discourse on the occult is less a device for understanding causes of disease and death, than a personified theory of accountability (Douglas, 1980: 51). It is therefore no surprise that, firstly, issues of illness and death dominate the discourse on the occult, and second, that accusations of the use of occult powers proliferate in an era of high HIV/AIDS prevalence. A survey held in Murambinda hospital in 1995 showed that forty-one per cent of the pregnant women there were HIV-positive, and, with estimates of nearly twenty-six per cent of Zimbabwe's adult population (age group 15-49) being infected with HIV in 1997, it is obvious many Zimbabweans confront HIV/AIDS-related deaths in their family (UNAIDS, 1998; 1999).

Hence, rather than reverting to 'traditional' epistemologies when modern ones fail, as Yamba (1997: 219) has suggested, peoples' understanding of HIV/AIDS-related deaths draws upon both. Situating the discourse on the occult in a modern-traditional dichotomy, or as a 'traditional' discourse absorbing so-called 'modern' elements, misses the point that understandings of death and illness in terms of occult forces are produced in social practices.

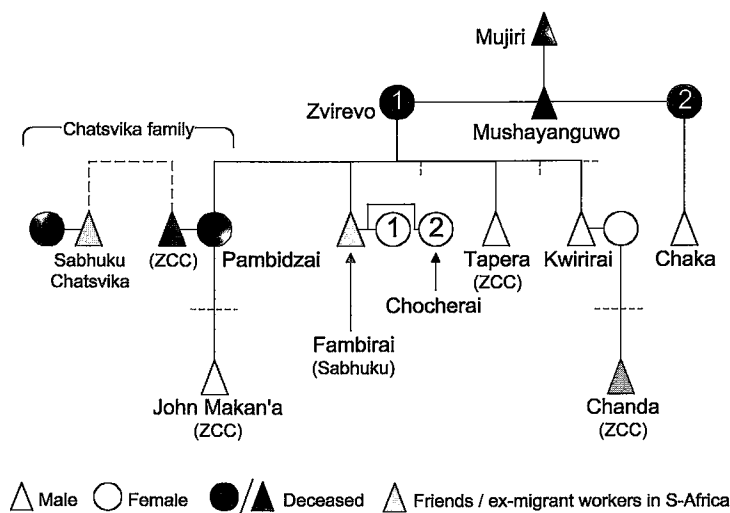
Accusations and politics: family and village leadership

Before the selected relatives of Chanda have consulted any healer, a secret visit takes place to a prophet of the ZCC church in the northern part of Buhera district, some forty kilometres away. Tapera, himself a prominent ZCC member, has initiated this visit. He wants the prophet to eliminate the *chikwambo* of his elder brother Fambirai. Tapera is not alone in this. He can count on the support of the 'sons' of the Mujiri family – especially those

¹¹ In Murambinda hospital, for instance, few relatives of deceased patients consult the doctors about the cause of death. Personal communication, Doctor Martin Dennis.

working in town – who want the problem of deaths in the family to be addressed. After all, it is particularly their generation that is affected. Tapera also involves his 'brothers', who have better relations with the alleged *muroyi*, Fambirai. Kwirirai, the father of the deceased Chanda, is an obvious participant. Tapera now regularly visits his youngest brother to organize the visit to the prophet. As part of this, Kwirirai travels to Harare to talk to the 'sons' in town who all agree to contribute so that the prophet can be called to the Mujiri villages to destroy the *uroyi*. To the 'fathers' falls the tactical task of introducing the issue to *baba* Fambirai, family elder and village leader.

FIGURE 5.3: ZIONISTS, MIGRANTS AND WITCHCRAFT: MUJIRI AND CHATSVIKA



Note: ZCC indicates individuals that are members of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in which both the prophet, John Mekan'a and Tapera occupy prominent positions.

Weeks after the funeral, Tapera and Kwirirai convene a family meeting to openly discuss the visit to a prophet. They send their *muzukuru* (ZS) John Mekan'a (see Figure 5.3), who acts as a mediator, to gather the 'sons' and 'fathers' of the Mujiri family. *Baba* Fambirai is told they want to discuss a visit to a prophet to enquire about Chanda's death. Immediately, a power struggle emerges. As is common in such situations, the narrative deployed by the actors involved does not directly address the issues at stake, but instead focuses on what is the 'customary' procedure to introduce delicate issues. Thus, 'custom' becomes the subject of debate and, consequently, an outcome of negotiation.

Baba Fambirai, who may be suspicious of what his younger brothers are up to, refuses to attend a meeting not initiated in consultation with him, the eldest of the Mushayanguwo house of Mujiri. He furthermore tells his *muzukuru* John

that any family meeting should be held at his homestead, not at one of his younger brothers'. The power struggle that thus emerges results in the *muzukuru* walking up and down between the homes of Fambirai and Kwirirai, informing the different parties of each other's views. Finally, Fambirai's 'brothers' give in, and the 'fathers' and 'sons' gather at Fambirai's homestead. Yet, politicking over 'custom' continues.

Fambirai wonders aloud why Tapera, who never comes to his homestead, has now turned up. The 'sons' prevent the conflict between the two 'fathers' from escalating. *Baba Chaka* and *baba Chandavengerwa*/Peter argue that they need to visit a *n'anga* or prophet to enquire into the cause of Chanda's death. They try to force *baba Fambirai* to co-operate. However, *baba Fambirai* argues that such visits cost a lot of money, which he does not have. This argument can be countered. The 'sons' will pay for it. Yet, a visit requires the involvement of Chanda's in-laws, who Kwirirai so thoughtlessly offended during Chanda's funeral. Hence, Fambirai concludes, the Mujiri family first needs to address the issue of Chanda's outstanding bride wealth obligations. Tapera opposes this. He argues they do not have to adhere to the 'custom' of involving the in-laws. He suggests they may as well go secretly.

Tapera's suggestion is, of course, understandable from his perspective. For him, Chanda's death has to be understood in relation to the problem of *chikwambo* in the Mujiri family, which is no concern of the in-laws. Nevertheless, his suggestion is a tactical blunder in a society where family unity and co-operation are highly valued. Kwirirai manoeuvres more thoughtfully. He argues that he does not need to pay all the outstanding bride wealth of his deceased son at once, but that an initial gesture will suffice. Nevertheless, this still means the in-laws have to be informed, and who should go is hotly debated. Finally, it is decided that they will take a vote on it. The democratic process is stopped short however, when Fambirai, who is the eldest in the house, overrules the outcome of the vote. In place of Kwirirai, who received most votes, Fambirai claims this task for himself and one 'son' (BS). But instead of informing the in-laws of the planned visit to a prophet, Fambirai secretly tries to sabotage the plan by convincing them that his younger brother Kwirirai will not keep his promise concerning the payments due to them. Fambirai suggests the in-laws should stick to the 'custom' of first settling the bride wealth issue. However, his attempts fail. The in-laws, who are aware of the conflicts within the Mujiri family and the alleged occult powers of their village headman, do not listen to Fambirai. They agree to be involved in the visit to the prophet and to settle the bride wealth issue later.

Occult forces and political action

The negotiations on the visit to the prophet suggest an underlying political struggle. The initiatives of the Mujiri family members constitute a more or less

open attack on Fambirai's family leadership. Furthermore, Fambirai's inability to mobilize support from the in-laws also shows that this attack cannot be separated from his position as village headman. This connection between occult forces and local politics is well-established in the literature. Garbett (1960: 4), for instance, found that among the Korekore it was frequently brothers who accused each other of using *uroyi*. Accusing someone of deploying occult powers may thus be regarded as part of a fierce competition for positions in the so-called traditional leadership structure, which corresponds with the general obsession with such positions in this society (see chapter 4). Nevertheless, one cannot reduce the discourse on the occult to a direct form of – instrumentalist – political action (Niehaus, 1993). Although Fambirai's succession is an element in this case, this does not explain why he should be accused at this moment. The open accusation could have been made much earlier as he has been under suspicion for some time. Chanda is not the only recent death in the Mujiri family and, furthermore, Fambirai is already an old man. Therefore, one would expect a struggle over political leadership to emerge between the two potential successors representing the two different houses of Mushayanguwo – i.e. Chaka and Tapera – rather than Fambirai. Hence, rather than being a discourse of political action, involvement in the occult is primarily a device to attribute meaning in a situation of existential insecurity.

Consulting the prophet: modernity and the discourse on the occult

More than three months after Chanda's death, a delegation of Mujiri family members (see Figure 5.2) finally goes to visit the prophet. They think they have convinced *baba* Fambirai to join and, to make sure their visit will not be in vain, Tapera has made another preparatory visit to the prophet. Yet, as the delegation sets out on its mission, *baba* Fambirai is missing. It appears he has gone off to visit his hospitalized daughter, Simbiso, in Murambinda. The family members decide to proceed without him.

The prophet lives in a remote and dry part of Buhera district, and it is immediately clear that the relative prosperity of his homestead cannot be derived from crop cultivation. Although there is no brick house with asbestos roof – as many successful urban workers in Buhera have – the two rondavels are plastered with cement. There is a well near the huts and a radio plays. It is powered by a big solar panel – a rare item in Buhera district. The prophet appears to be a small man in his thirties. He wears glasses, urban-style dress and a large, shiny Rolex-like watch on his wrist.¹² The Mujiris are invited into one of the ill-lit rondavels, where the prophet sits on a chair, wearing a white

¹² The appearance of the prophet is in stark contrast to the look of the 'traditional' spiritual leaders such as the Mhondoro spirit medium described in Lan (1985: 188-90).

sheet over his clothes. In his hand he holds a wooden stick and a cup of water. With his eyes closed he starts to pray. To those present his praying is incomprehensible however. Occasionally one picks up a few Latin-sounding words and references to Israel, Jehovah, Maria, Abraham and Christ but also to the *mweya* and *vadzimu*. In keeping with his dress that combines urban style and a white cloth such as worn by Shona spirit mediums, the prophet's praying draws from both 'traditional' and 'modern' belief systems, blurring such distinctions and imputing new meanings to both. Entering into a state of trance, the prophet acts as an interpreter for both the spirits of deceased family members as well as of Jehovah, who is treated in a similar manner and referred to as the Holy Spirit. Thus, the prophet is not merely the medium of ancestral spirits articulating their advice to their descendants, but engages in a dialogue with these spirits as well as with the Holy Spirit himself.¹³

'Prophesying': diagnosing techniques

In dialogue with the advice seekers, and through continuous statements about present and absent family members, the prophet establishes a picture of the Mujiri family and the strained relations among its members. To this end, he draws on a combination of four techniques. Firstly, like the prophet in the vicinity of Murambinda hospital who told the Mujiris they had a hospitalized relative suffering from a sexually transmitted disease,¹⁴ the prophet makes rather general statements. For instance, he says the spirits tell him that the Mujiris have come to enquire about two deaths in the family and that the parents of the deceased are not present. Such a statement is likely to be true. As has been mentioned before, obtaining information about a death is a major reason for visiting a prophet. In the presence of only one young woman in her early twenties, it is also probable that the parents are absent.

A second technique deployed by the prophet is to ask a number of questions or to make a number of (more specific) statements from which the clients pick specific elements to which they attribute meaning. For instance, when *baba* Chaka has confirmed that not all 'fathers' are there, the prophet replies,

You are not the father. There are two 'fathers' who didn't come. You have left behind the one whose child died. He is your father (*baba*). Why did you leave him behind? So how can you enquire while your father (*baba*) is not present?

Chaka, who belongs to the generation of the 'fathers', does not oppose this multi-interpretable statement for he may not consider himself the father either.

¹³ Hence, the prophet performs two roles that are often separated in 'traditional' Shona belief practices; i.e. the role of spirit medium and the role of assistant-interpreter. See, for instance, Lan (1985).

¹⁴ With nearly eighty per cent of all hospital care in Murambinda hospital being HIV/AIDS related, such a statement is a rather well-informed 'guess'.

In Shona societies, it is often the family's eldest living son who is taken as representative of the deceased father. 'You have left the one whose child died', Chaka may have interpreted as meaning Munhu, or his eldest living son Chandavengerwa/Peter (see Figure 5.1) for Munhu's son Kerinas died some months previously. Alternatively, Chaka could have concluded the prophet was simply wrong, taking the father of the deceased to mean the father of Chanda, Kwirirai, who is present. Yet, from Chaka's response it appears he interprets the father whose child died to mean Fambirai. His daughter Sarudzai died in 1997 (see Figure 5.2). Chaka explains to the prophet that he can continue the session because they failed to bring him with them as he went to see his hospitalized daughter. For a perceptive listener, as the prophet undoubtedly is, Chaka's explanation is a clear indication of strained relations within the Mujiri family. One does not proceed with something as important as enquiring about death without the house senior, unless there is conflict. Hence, Chaka's interpretation of the prophet's words helps the latter to get a clearer picture of his clients situation.

A third technique the prophet uses to 'investigate' the Mujiri family relations builds upon 'intelligence' – information he gleaned beforehand. Being descendants of Murambinda, the Mujiris are a known Hera family in the Buhera district about whom one may easily obtain information. One of his sources is, of course, *baba* Tapera who visited the prophet before, and the delegation cannot know what exactly Tapera has told the prophet. Furthermore, the ZCC church network constitutes an important source for the ZCC prophet. Members of the Mujiri family (including Tapera and the deceased Chanda) are also members of this independent church, as is the Mujiris' *muzukuru*, John Makan'a. John, who lives in the neighbouring Chatsvika village¹⁵, is a prominent ZCC church leader in the Murambinda area and probably knows the prophet quite well. He involved him in a case of *uroyi* eradication in the Makan'a family some years ago. On that occasion the prophet destroyed the *chikwambo* of the village headman of the Chatsvika village, who happens to be a good friend of *baba* Fambirai since the time they were both migrant workers in South Africa (see Figure 5.3). Hence, the ZCC church network, and Tapera and John in particular, constitute an excellent source of intelligence on the Mujiri family, enabling the prophet to make very specific remarks that yield specific answers:

¹⁵ John Makan'a mediated between *baba* Fambirai and his 'brothers' when they argued over visiting a prophet. Being the eldest son of Mushayanguwo's first born daughter, Pambidzai, John is the senior *muzukuru* of the Mushayanguwo house of Mujiri (see Figure 5.3). John is a member of the Chatsvika lineage which rules Chatsvika village.

Prophet: 'There is a name given to me: Fambirai. Can he sit here in front?'

Mujiris: 'He is the one who did not come!'

Prophet: 'In your family there is [the spirit of] a person who was murdered.

The one responsible for that death is Fambirai.'

The prophet's reference to a murder introduces a new element in the narrative on the Mujiri family problems. His accusation refers to the presence of a *ngozi* spirit in the Mujiri family. It is Chaka who interprets the prophet's question as referring to Muchenje, an inhabitant of Mushayanguwo village who died in suspicious circumstances in the 1960s (see Figure 5.4). Although Chaka himself was working in town at that time, he knows the police made several arrests in connection with Muchenje's death; all suspects were released because of lack of evidence. It is alleged that because of this incident Muchenje's brothers and sons left the village, a few years later.

The fourth way in which the prophet is able to enhance his understandings of the problems in the Mujiri family is by sudden change of subject and circular reasoning; he diverts his attention to another subject and later returns to the issue discussed earlier, phrasing it in a different idiom. Thus he creates a very diffuse narrative, in which everything seems to be connected to everything, and inconsistencies are easily overlooked. For instance, whereas initially the prophet suggests the presence of *ngozi* as the cause of deaths in the family, he later seems to deny this, saying,

...when you are wondering about the cause of death, you think it is the spirit of a deceased person [i.e. *ngozi*] but it is not. Death is caused by some spirit you looked for.

Thus the prophet suggests the presence of a sorcerer who intentionally kills people. His 'spirit you looked for' later re-appears in the narrative as a *chikwambo*, and is talked of as livestock kept secretly:

In your family there are people keeping livestock that live on the blood of people. This livestock must be removed. Then we will see whether we can talk to the spirits of the dead... Jehovah is saying that the murdered person says 'the one who killed me is still alive'. People in your family had a hand in the killing.

'Prophesying': an interpretative framework

The consultation with the prophet thus results in a more complex understanding of the causes of death in the Mujiri family. Occult and spiritual (*ngozi*) causes become interlocked into a diffuse, and increasingly encompassing, interpretative framework.¹⁶ All kinds of events are given

¹⁶ Bourdillon (1987: 177) and Gelfand (1985: 31) have made similar observations, arguing that although on a theoretical level Shona cosmology distinguishes between natural, spiritual (*mweya*), and witchcraft (*uroyi*) causes of death, on a practical level this distinction is often absent.

meaning in the prophet's narrative, such as the place where one of the 'sons' intends to build his homestead, the death of inherited livestock, or diseases like the mental illness of Chaka's son, Takwana, that occurred years previously. The prophet all relates them to spiritual and occult issues. The only explanation he explicitly excludes is an intervention by God (*Mwari*).¹⁷

Rather than diagnosing a 'disease' and prescribing a 'cure', the consultation with the prophet is more like a participatory process. The meaning of misfortune and strained family relations is not merely explained to the clients, but is an outcome of the interaction between the prophet and the Mujiris.¹⁸ There is little attempt to reduce the number of possible causes of death in the Mujiri family. Instead, the 'prophesying' narrative tends to become comprehensive. It provides benchmarks that enable the Mujiris to make sense of numerous events concerning death, illnesses, and declining wealth in the family. Hence, 'prophesying' may be understood as an emerging interpretative framework.

Ngozi spirits and *chikwambo*: the prophet's performance

The day after the Mujiris' visit, the prophet arrives late in the evening in Mujiri village. Upon his arrival, Mujiri family members (men and women) still need to be informed and gathered, although the prophet had instructed otherwise. This takes several hours as the homesteads are scattered over the landscape. Finally, towards the early morning, all family members have gathered on a spot in the grazing area of Mushayanguwo village, near the homesteads of Tapera and Kwirirai. The prophet starts the meeting explaining the reasons for this gathering: the death of two people in the Mujiri family and the family members' suspicion that a sorcerer has caused these deaths. Then he starts praying (*ndimi*) in the same manner as the delegation of Mujiri family members has seen before. He calls the 'fathers' to sit in front, and confronts *baba* Fambirai with the goats that his mother, Zvirevo, left him, saying that her spirit wants to know what he did with them. Building on the interpretation of the case established two days before, the prophet sets out suggesting a problem of both sorcery and unappeased spirits. The direct approach of the prophet impresses his public. He continues, introducing more spirit-related causes,

I am not accusing you [of killing the goats], but the spirit of Zvirevo needs to be appeased. Furthermore, your daughter passed away and you did not consult *n'angas* or prophets, did you? ... And what does the spirit of your *mukwasha* [here, father-in-law; ZHF] need from your family? How did he die?

¹⁷ Referring to Takwana's illness he says, 'The disease was not caused by God, but by evil spirits of the land.'

¹⁸ Spierenburg (2000) has made similar observations as regards the influence of the clientele on the account of Mhondoro spirits.

With his reference to the spirit of an unrelated spirit, the prophet introduces a third possible cause of death in the family, i.e. that of *ngozi*. Like two days before, it is Chaka who wants to know which *mukwasha* is meant, and again the prophet diverts the narrative towards the mental illness of Chaka's son, Takwana. He thus makes Chaka explain that when Takwana was still a child, he was once possessed by an unknown spirit that kept on asking 'Why did you kill me?'

The 'bad spirit' is soon identified by the prophet as that of Muchenje (see Figure 5.4), the inhabitant of Mushayanguwo village who died in suspicious circumstances in the early 1960s. Using the information provided by Chaka during their visit to him, the prophet turns to Fambirai asking: 'Why were you said to have murdered [your *mukwasha*] Muchenje?' Forced to participate in the discussion, Fambirai explains about the death of Muchenje, how he was suspected, but that he did not do it. However, the prophet pushes the suggestion of Fambirai's involvement in the death of Muchenje. He says Jehovah tells him the police arrested several people, including Fambirai. This makes Fambirai contest the credibility of the prophet. He shouts: 'Don't say Jehovah! You are the one who is talking.' Yet, the prophet continues his insinuations as if he were a barrister trying to influence a jury in a court of law. He claims the Holy Spirit says that, when Muchenje died, the Mujiris were said to know about it. Again, he provokes a reaction by Fambirai,

Fambirai: 'Do you want me to admit to something I did not do?'

Prophet: 'Was it not said that you were involved in your *mukwasha*'s death?'

Fambirai: 'It was just a rumour. People said that.'

Prophet: 'So why are you denying it?'

Convinced that his audience has understood his insinuations, the prophet continues on a more conciliatory note,

You are not accused. Its family members direct that [*ngozi*] spirit to your family. It doesn't matter whether you did it or not, the spirit comes and causes problems in the family it has been directed to by its relatives. Consequently, you have many people dying in your family... It is not me who killed your *mukwasha* or made your relatives die from that spirit... I am not related to you... You invited the Holy Spirit here to help you. Now it is telling you what it sees and you are refusing to accept it. Have you never heard of somebody being wrongly accused of stealing cattle and sent to jail?

Then *baba* Peter intervenes, asking for clarification of the issue at stake, i.e. that of the *ngozi* of Muchenje. Again the prophet starts praying and talks about the livestock of Zvirevo. Thereafter he returns to the *ngozi* issue. Fambirai, however, does not see the point of it. Although his interventions reveal he is not denying the existence of *ngozi* as such, he argues one cannot compensate the *ngozi* of a person one did not kill. The prophet is a skilful debater though, arguing,

Has anyone told you to compensate the spirit? The Holy Spirit said: 'If the spirit of your *mukwasha* is in your family, it means that its family members directed it to you.' You were not the only one suspected of killing your *mukwasha*. People of other families were also suspected. The family members of that spirit directed it to people they suspected.

Fambirai now becomes angry and shouts:

You are talking lies. *Musatanyoko!* (a very strong Shona curse). [The day Muchenje died] ... I spent the whole day with my young brother Kwirirai. We went to the beer party early in the morning and we came back together.

Fambirai's reaction not only shows that he understands he is accused of murder, but also reveals the central role of Kwirirai, the crown-witness in this alleged murder case. He is Fambirai's alibi. The prophet, again taking on his conciliatory role, denies that Fambirai is accused of causing *ngozi* in the family. Thus he convinces his public of Fambirai's guilt while simultaneously retaining Kwirirai's support for his argument. Yet, a fundamental problem remains, i.e. that of compensating a *ngozi* spirit that you say has not been killed by one of the Mujiris. Fambirai puts his finger on it, saying: 'You only create problems in our family by trying to compensate the spirit you did not kill.'

Adopting a practical approach: the prophet as witch-finder

Having convinced his public of Fambirai's guilt, while leaving space for alternative explanations for people like Kwirirai – who knows what happened that day in the 1960s – the prophet probably realizes there is not enough support among the 'fathers' to discuss the *ngozi* issue. Consequently, he redirects his line of argument, saying that:

Whenever there is a death in the family, you end up quarrelling, suspecting one another. Jehovah says there is something bad in your family, it may be *uroyi*.

Fambirai agrees with the prophet,

What you said, that whenever there is death in our family people suspect that someone must have caused it, is correct... When Chanda died Tapera and Kwirirai said my second wife was the one who bewitched Chanda. That resulted in Tapera's finger being bitten.

The prophet moves on, asking whether any Mujiri family member possesses strange 'herbs'. He addresses the five 'fathers' in particular, saying the Holy Spirit tells him these 'herbs' are to be found among them. When everybody present has denied possessing such 'herbs', the prophet continues,

'If you do not have herbs at your homes it means that, if we do find something, it will not belong to any family member... Yet, the Holy Spirit sees that in a granary of one of the 'fathers' there are strange herbs. I do not know at which homestead, but the Holy Spirit will lead us. Five 'fathers', two in-laws, and I, together with my assistants, will go to each homestead until we find the herbs. The rest must remain behind. We will catch all the herbs and bring them here so you'll see them before we burn them.'

From the spot in the grazing area where the meeting is held, it is easy to see where the prophet, his two assistants and the 'fathers' are going. Firstly, they

briefly walk in the direction of the homestead of *baba* Peter in Mujiri village. But before reaching his homestead, they redirect their course towards the homestead of *baba* Fambirai in Mushayanguwo village. As the granary of Fambirai's second wife, Chocherai, appears to be locked, an in-law returns to collect the keys from the wife. Some time later, the group returns to the meeting point in the grazing area and the prophet explains what happened,

We found strange and fierce things and we burnt them. It was impossible to bring them here as they would have escaped on the way. We decided to burn them first so that they wouldn't disturb our discussion. We do not say those things belong to any one of you. From the beginning we accused no one of being a *muroyi*. Therefore, when we have gone we do not want to hear that you have accused anyone amongst you. We have destroyed things that have no owner, but were killing people in your family. I am thankful you are now united on this issue.

Questions are raised concerning the nature of the 'things' found, and why the others were not called to see what happened at Fambirai's homestead. Fambirai himself feels obliged to say something,

When the prophet said that the things he caught caused disunity in our family, I agree with him. My young brothers and I were not in each others' good books. Surely, very strange things were caught and destroyed... As I told the prophet, I have no herbs. I think somebody put them in the granary. If it was my wife...or if she saw them without telling me... that's why I suggested that our wives should accompany us, so that they could see for themselves. The prophet came here to tell us what caused Chanda's death but I did not hear him telling us. Was it those herbs or was there something else? And again, I am not contributing to his payment.

Fambirai's wife, Chocherai, takes it she is accused of being a witch. The prophet assures her, however, that nobody is accusing her, for it was people of another family who put the 'herbs' into her granary. He also confirms that it was these 'things' that caused Chanda's death.

In the first encounter with the Mujiris, the prophet proved himself a skilful interrogator and listener, providing a language for talking about and identifying the family problems. In this second session his role is different. Having a better understanding of the problems and tensions within the Mujiri family, his approach is more that of a barrister, trying to influence a jury by suggestion. Although he confers with the 'fathers', as in the first session, he is in fact addressing the wider group of Mujiri family members and their wives who make up 'the jury'. He uses a narrative that builds on both 'traditional' spirit beliefs and 'modern' monotheistic religion.

Ritual practices, sacralization and magic

With the burning of the 'herbs' – the *chikwambo* – and the explanation thereof, the meeting is not yet finished. The prophet, whose performance is full of ritual practices such as the incomprehensible praying (*ndimi*), initiates another ritual that consecrates the particular interpretation of problems encountered by the Mujiri family. He asks for a chicken, a cup of water and some finger millet

(*rukweza*) and these are provided by one of the 'sons'. Meanwhile another 'son', who once was a teacher, is ordered to write down the names of all living Mujiri family members. The two house elders of Mujiri, Fambirai and Peter, are asked to sit opposite each other. The prophet, wearing his white cloth over his urban-style outfit, kneels with them, folds the piece of paper with the names on it into a small packet and puts it in the cup of water. He starts praying again. From his pocket he gets the little finger millet he was given, and starts to feed the chicken. He also makes the chicken drink the water from the cup in which the piece of paper is soaked. Then he puts the chicken in between the two 'fathers', stands up, puts his left hand on *baba* Fambirai's head, his right hand on *baba* Peter's head, and prays aloud with his eyes closed and head lifted towards the sky. The chicken, which is walking around freely, suddenly slows its pace, and drops dead. The impressed audience is told,

What I have done with the chicken is not a game. You have suspected that man [pointing to Fambirai] of causing deaths in your family. I have solved that problem. Whoever tries to use herbs that cause deaths in your family will die, just like that chicken.

Tapera, who has said very little so far, wonders who is included in this death threat. The prophet assures him it binds both husbands and wives, but that if a woman uses *mupfuhwira* – 'medicine' that diverts the husband's (sexual) attention entirely to his wife (for an explanation, see Gelfand, 1985: 42) – she will not die. People laugh, and the crowd disperses.

Strategic prophesying

After the meeting, some men of the Mujiri family talk informally with the prophet. The prophet is paid 1,700 Zimbabwean dollars for his services.¹⁹ Ensuring that *baba* Fambirai is not nearby, the prophet openly elaborates his strategy,

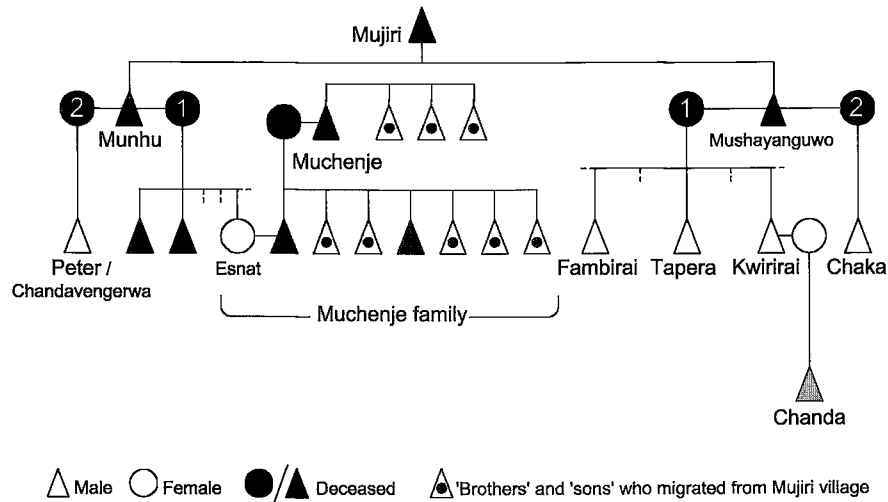
When we are trying to take herbs from their owner, we do not say that they belong to him/her. That's why I didn't point to Fambirai. He would have become angry and stopped us from going to his homestead. To succeed in catching herbs, you must follow the owner taking everything as it comes, modify it, until you come to the point where he/she agrees to have the homestead searched.'

Some Mujiris want to know about the nature of the *uroyi* eliminated. The prophet elaborates on the *chikwambo*, one of the 'herbs' he caught; how they usually feed on human flesh and that they found body parts of two people in the granary of *baba* Fambirai's second wife. A comparison is made with the *chikwambo* of village headman Chatsvika that was caught some years previously. The prophet explains that in both cases the *chikwambo* originated from 'Johani' (Johannesburg) and that the occult powers did not serve to

¹⁹In 1998, 1,700 Zimbabwean dollars was a month's salary for an ordinary factory worker in Harare.

accumulate wealth but solely to kill. He also suggests that *baba* Fambirai used the *chikwambo* to redirect Muchenje's *ngozi* spirit towards his own family members. Thus he implies that now the *chikwambo* has been caught, Fambirai himself will become a victim of the *ngozi* – i.e. he anticipates Fambirai's death.

FIGURE 5.4.: 'MURDER' AND MIGRATION: MUCHENJE AND MUJIRI



Note: ZCC indicates individuals that are members of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in which both the prophet, John Makan'a and Tapera occupy prominent positions.

The prophet's narrative could have led the Mujiris to conclude that now the *chikwambo* is eliminated, they are still left with a problem of *ngozi*. This conclusion is, however, ignored, probably because the consequences are serious. The Mujiris all know the story of the Chiminya family of a neighbouring village, whose deceased village headman was also implicated in Muchenje's death. Facing numerous deaths in the family, they compensated the Muchenje family with a number of cattle and, allegedly, are planning to donate a marriageable daughter to the Muchenjes – an established practice among the Shona to compensate a *ngozi* spirit. Hence, compensating a *ngozi* spirit involves a substantial transfer of the family's wealth to the family of the deceased: a consequence the Mujiris are not (yet) willing to face. The prophet, after his recurrent suggestions that Fambirai murdered Muchenje, realizes this. He tactically shifts the attention towards the elimination of occult forces, leaving space for interpretations of future illnesses and death in the Mujiri family in terms of *ngozi* spirit interventions.

Evading the discourse on the occult but becoming entrenched: actors' interpretations

In the weeks following the visit of the prophet, social life in the Mujiri villages appears to have resumed its ordinary course. However, this does not mean the Mujiris have united behind the particular interpretation that has emerged from the prophet's interventions. Both the 'fathers' and the 'sons' still fear *baba* Fambirai, despite the removal of his occult powers, and his anticipated death. They adopt a pragmatic approach arguing that only time will tell whether Fambirai's occult powers have been completely destroyed. As Kwirirai put it:

We are waiting to see if what has been said by the prophet is true. He said whoever uses herbs to kill, will die. This will be proved in time if there are no unnecessary deaths in the family... If there are, we will consult other prophets.

Hence, Kwirirai – who knows what happened that day in the 1960s when Muchenje died – does not fully accept the prophet's narrative. Instead, he focuses on particular elements of it. For instance, although he accepts Fambirai's *chikwambo* as an explanation for the deaths in the family, he simultaneously argues that Chanda's case was different. Kwirirai is convinced the dust in the Harare tobacco factory in which Chanda worked affected his lungs. As regards the spirits, Kwirirai also has his own interpretation,

I don't know about *ngozi* spirits, but I do know about the cattle of our *vatete* [paternal great aunt; FFZ], Pfumo. They were sold by Fambirai without informing her husband's relatives. I was told this by a prophet when I enquired about Esnet's death [Kwirirai's daughter], who died before Chanda... But later it became clear. Fambirai used the herbs to redirect the spirit [of Pfumo] to other family members.

In Kwirirai's understanding of the case, Muchenje's *ngozi* is irrelevant. According to Kwirirai it was Fambirai's 'herbs' that caused him to be suspected of the murder, but he knows he did not kill Muchenje. According to Kwirirai, the 'Muchenje murder' was, in fact, a suicide. Consequently, his understanding of the compensation of the Muchenje family by the Chiminya family (see above) differs; it was based on a misrepresentation of events.

Baba Fambirai and his 'suspicious brother'

The alleged sorcerer himself has his own understanding of what he calls 'the prophet's show'. Although he does not deny the existence of occult forces and spirits like *ngozi* – he claims not to be a member of any church because he worships his ancestors – he blames the whole affair on his younger brother Tapera. Fambirai understands his behaviour to be motivated by two things. Firstly, Tapera wants to be village headman, and therefore he has initiated all this,

That gentleman [Tapera: his brother] wants to be village headman. The prophet told me so. But I will not give him [that position] while I am still strong. When I am weak I will give it to him... or to that one, Chaka, because he is the only one [in his mother's house], while we are three in our mother's house... So, it must go to Chaka, because the people don't like Tapera. If we name Tapera as village headman, they will be against it, saying they want Chaka.

Yet, this explanation does not make clear why Tapera is accusing him, instead of his competitor for the village leadership, Chaka. Neither does it reveal why Tapera engaged the prophet at this time, and not on earlier occasions when family members died.

A second line of Fambirai's argument stresses the strained relations between Tapera and himself. They are always quarrelling, and being divided within the family like that, he argues, is not good. According to Fambirai, Tapera is just very suspicious. He always accuses someone of deploying *uroyi* when somebody in the family dies. The accused is not always the same person. He once accused Chaka's first wife. Another time he accused his sister. When his son Law died, Tapera accused Fambirai and prevented him from attending the funeral. When Chanda died, he first accused Fambirai's second wife, Chocherai. This time, however, Tapera has been able to mobilize people in support of his accusations. He attributes this to Tapera's capacity to talk in a manner that easily convinces.²⁰ Yet, Fambirai is not bothered much by Tapera's accusations. He and other villagers claim Tapera was mentally disturbed when he was young,

I don't think anything will happen to me because... he has been doing this already for a long time. Since my parents died.... aah, *anopenga* (he is crazy). But I don't hate him, because I know he is *mbenzi* (nuts).

In times of high mortality, Fambirai also realizes, suspicious people like Tapera can easily draw other family members into an understanding of death in terms of occult forces. The HIV/AIDS pandemic poses such a situation. Although people (may) accept the existence of the disease, only the witchcraft discourse provides an answer to the question of why a particular person chanced to get it.

To Fambirai, the deaths in the Mujiri family are caused by HIV/AIDS. Both prophets and *n'angas* told him when he consulted them over the illnesses of his daughter Sarudzai,

She and I went together. The prophet told her she got it from her husband... Consulting a prophet when she is dead, is no use. That's a waste of money. Like this prophet, who was given 1,700 dollars! Anyone can see if somebody has *mukondombero* (AIDS)... So, there is no need to consult a prophet or *n'anga*.

²⁰ Tapera's nickname 'Dendende' – a particular type of honey – also refers to this capacity. Allegedly, he got this nickname because he is a great womanizer.

This time, Kwirirai appears to have been particularly vulnerable to the witchcraft discourse proposed by Tapera; a few years previously his daughter died, then his son Chanda, and his wife is also ill. Although in cases of illness or death suspicions of witchcraft may arise, they do not usually result in open accusations, and if they do, conflicts do not often have serious consequences. The elders of the family generally are able to avoid this by settling such disputes in a family meeting. This time, however, the 'fathers' themselves became entrenched, resulting in an uncontrollable situation.

By providing an ambiguous and multi-interpretable explanatory framework, the prophet managed to calm the wild-running emotions within the family. However, as the Mujiris 'wait-and-see' attitude illustrates, his intervention did not stop the witchcraft. In the weeks after the visit of the prophet, accusations of witchcraft resurface resulting in new conflict. After Chocherai reporting Tapera to the police, another married-in woman faces accusations of being a *muroyi*. This time it is Chanda's wife, Jenet, who alleges her father-in-law, Kwirirai, has branded her a *muroyi* and thus contravened the Witchcraft Suppression Act. At Murambinda police station, it is often women who make such complaints although – as in the case presented here – men also may be accused of practising *uroyi* (see Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1:
CONTRAVENTION OF WITCHCRAFT SUPPRESSION ACT (CHAP. 9:19):
COMPLAINTS MADE AT MURAMBINDA POLICE OFFICE, 01/1997 – 09/2000

Year	No. of Cases	Sex of Complainant(s)		Sex of Defendant(s)		Result of the Case	
		Male ³	Female	Male	Female	Convicted	Withdrawn
1997 ¹	4	1	3	6	1	4	-
1998 ²	7	2	6	6	2	3	4
1999	2	-	2	-	2	1	1
2000	5	-	5	3	2	no data	no data
Total	18	3	16	15	7	8	5

1.) In one case there were four male defendants

2.) In one case there were two female complainants and two male defendants

3.) In only one case a man reported a woman of calling him a witch/sorcerer

Hence, although both men and women may accuse one another of *uroyi*, it is generally married women, residing in the village of their husband, who face exclusion from their husband's family and village as a result. Consequently, the state's legal apparatus tends to deal with a specific category of witchcraft cases, causing legal analysis of such cases to wrongly assume that more women than men are involved in the occult (compare: Crawford, 1967). At Murambinda police station, the officer in charge realizes that witchcraft cases pose a problem.

Accusations, he complains, 'Are difficult to prove. We handle them but it does not solve the witchcraft.'

Conclusion

The case study presented in this chapter contrasts with recent anthropological studies that have viewed the occult in Africa as an all-dominating and inescapable discourse. In the migrant society analysed above, this was not the case. The analysis has shown that some domains of social life are more prone to pervasion by occult forces than others. For instance, the numerous conflicts over land in the area (see chapter 4), as well as the conflict over Chanda's bride wealth obligations in the case discussed, indicate that the discourse on the occult does not play an important role in inter-lineage conflict. Where occult forces are implicated in inter-lineage relations – as in the case of married-in wives (Chocherai and Jenet) – this does not necessarily result in a proliferation of accusations and cleansing rituals.²¹ In situations where the discourse on the occult cannot be escaped, it is contested – as is evidenced by the women reporting to the police. Contestation of the discourse on the occult is central in the case study presented in this chapter. Despite social pressure, the accused, Fambirai, does not confess.²² He refuses to join his kinsmen in their visit to the prophet and openly challenges the prophet saying, 'you are a liar'. But it is not only the accused who refutes the discourse on the occult, other people involved in the case also contest it. For instance, the Mujiris deny the prophet's suggestion of *ngozi* in their family. Although they accept part of the discourse on the occult, they do not accept it fully. They 'wait and see' and there is no final interpretation reached. Thus, instead of dominating social life completely, the discourse on the occult is given a place relative to other social phenomena.

Since the discourse on the occult is closely linked to people's understanding of life forces, one may be tempted to regard the HIV/AIDS pandemic as the cause of witchcraft allegations. However, the upsurge in witchcraft cannot be reduced to a clash of distinct epistemologies – i.e. bio-medical versus 'traditional' – as Yamba (1997) has proposed. First, witchcraft does not simply become acute because there is a disease for which 'modern' medicine has few explanations or cures to offer. Rather, the AIDS pandemic is concurrent with the existential insecurity that fuels witchcraft allegations. Such existential insecurity and quests for witch-cleansing may also have other causes.

²¹ Another example of a situation in which witchcraft is implicated, but does not become acute, is the fire in the shop of a very successful Buhera businessman in Murambinda township in 1997. The general opinion among the spectators was that the businessman's occult powers had now turned against him.

²² This contrasts with the situation as found by Yamba (1997) in HIV/AIDS-related witchcraft accusations in Zambia, where the accused eventually confesses.

Zimbabwe's liberation war is a case in point. Like HIV/AIDS in the 1990s, existential insecurity during Zimbabwe's liberation war fuelled fear of witchcraft, resulting in numerous people being executed as witches by guerrillas. As Ranger (1987: 295) has noted, '[i]mmediately after the war's end, thousands of refugees flocked back to the countryside amidst many tensions. It has not been surprising that men believed capable of healing or absolving witchcraft have been in great demand.' Second, the open-ended character of the discourse on the occult – as exemplified by the poly-interpretable story of the prophet and the absence of commonly accepted interpretation – makes it difficult to understand it as a distinct epistemology.

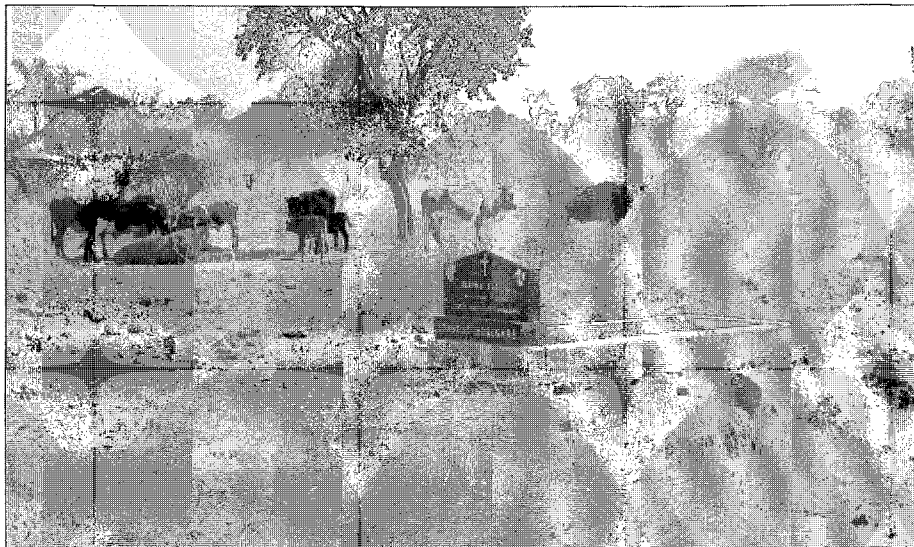
Kinship and the 'modernity' of witchcraft in a translocal society

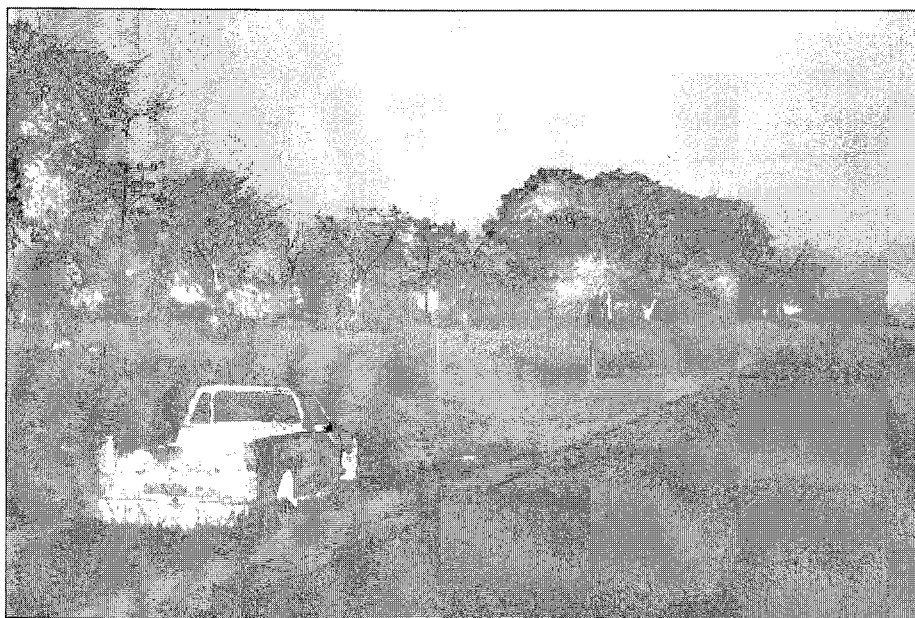
Rather than – following Foucault (1971) – focusing on the discourse's mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion, or the ways in which the discourse on the occult structures social actors' conduct, this study has centred upon the social practices in which the powerful discourse on the occult is produced. It has been shown that the discourse on the occult can be seen as a symbolic language in which tensions and insecurities in kin-based rural-urban migration networks are interpreted in terms of life-forces. Contemporary studies, analysing witchcraft in so-called 'modern' contexts such as the city, the market and state politics – thus stressing the modernity of the witchcraft discourse (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993; 1999; Geschiere, 1997) – have generally paid little attention to the relation between witchcraft and kinship (Niehaus, 1993; Green 1997). An exception is Geschiere's authoritative study of the occult in Cameroon. He stresses that even in 'modern', urban situations 'the source of witchcraft is invariably sought within the family' (1997: 212). Nevertheless, Geschiere neither analyses the kinship patterns of the different societies he studied, nor identifies the kinship relations that are particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. Although he argues convincingly that in many Cameroonian societies witchcraft originates from the tension between an egalitarian ideology and a pre-occupation with individual achievement, this does not clarify how kinship is essential to an understanding of witchcraft in these societies.

In the Murambinda area, as elsewhere in Zimbabwe, the centrality of kinship is evident from its importance in the organization of social life, notably the migration to urban areas, and the competition for positions of high status in the 'traditional' leadership structure (see chapter 4). In this migrant society, in which kinship networks span rural and urban areas, migrants in town are not safe from the witchcraft of their rural kin. Hence, the domain of the occult is not geographically localized – in a relatively closed rural society – but translocal. Witchcraft accusations become acute in those social situations where, despite a strong ethic of kinship solidarity, patrilineal kin 'cannot feel towards [one] another as society expects [them] to feel' (Mayer, 1954: 55; see also: Douglas,

1970: xvii; Marwick, 1952: 129). In Shona society, as Garbett has also found, witchcraft accusations occur particularly among brothers, and often form 'a prelude to village fission' (1960: 4). Hence, as studies of the occult in Africa often stress, the occult is not necessarily a conservative force in relatively closed societies directed at the restoration of group consensus. It may also rupture or blast away relationships (Mayer, 1954: 63; Marwick, 1952: 126).

In his Azande study Evans-Pritchard was already arguing: 'New situations demand new magic' (1937: 513). The growing body of literature on the modernity of witchcraft makes this abundantly clear. Some scholars argue that the upsurge in witchcraft and sorcery in many African countries is an expression of 'discontent with modernity and dealing with its deformities' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 1999: 284). The question of the analytical advantages of viewing witchcraft discourses as a 'modern' reaction against modernity remains however. Its penetration of so-called 'modern' situations – as in Zimbabwe's urban areas through kin-based migration networks – makes it clear that the discourse on the occult defies such dichotomies as rural-urban and modern-traditional. A continued focus on the 'modernity of witchcraft' may therefore only distract us from understanding the social situations in which witchcraft emerges.





6. Discussion: Ethnography beyond Buhera

Re-interpreting discourses on Zimbabwe's crisis

The studies presented in the foregoing chapters have addressed pervasive dichotomies associated with the distinction between the rural and the urban. Building upon the experiences of Buhera people, the problematic nature of such distinctions was elaborated. It was shown that, even in the early days of colonialism, Buhera livelihood pursuits were difficult to capture in terms of simple class distinctions between peasants and workers. Nevertheless, a powerful image of 'traditional' Shona society – a rural society untouched by outside influences – was modelled on Buhera. The district and its people became localized at the rural end of the rural-urban distinction in colonial policy discourse, while for Buherans themselves this distinction, and the dichotomies associated with it, were of little relevance (chapter 2). Thereafter, the dynamics of social life encompassing different geographical spaces – both rural and urban – were analysed on their own terms, rather than stressing the role of the state in directing social change (chapters 3 and 4). In contrast to common perspectives on the relation between the rural and the urban in development thinking, it was argued that, for Buherans, rural land has little significance as a productive value. People's existential security is vested in translocal, kinship-based networks, rather than in the land. In such a society, a break in kinship solidarity is serious indeed. It may give rise to witchcraft accusations and quests for cleansing rituals (chapter 5). Hence, the domain of witchcraft also defies classic oppositions as modern-traditional, associated with the rural-urban distinction. Buhera migrants are not free of the witchcraft of their rurally resident kin. In this society of 'travellers', in which kinship solidarity is the source of people's security, one cannot move away from the threat of witchcraft; it travels with one.

Understandings of Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis

In this chapter we return to the question raised in the introduction to this book: the wider relevance of detailed analyses of a relatively small group of people. It is argued that received wisdom about the role of the land in understanding Zimbabwe's history and contemporary politics may be limited since – as was elaborated for Buhera – it is based on the common oppositions associated with the rural-urban distinction. An illustrative example of this received wisdom is provided by a discussion of the renowned historian Terence Ranger on post-colonial Buhera (1985: 297). Quoting a report of the

agricultural extension service (Agritex) on the Chiweshe ward in Buhera: 'Although this is a long established remote community with many traditional customs or beliefs still intact, it was also deeply politicized during the war', Ranger claims that:

Peasants in Buhera shared the radical nationalism of the neighbouring Makoni District [and,] peasant aspirations were focused upon the recovery of the land lost to the whites (1985: 297, 284).

To reduce Buhera nationalism to grievances over land alienation is highly problematic, since it was never the scene of large-scale land alienation as was the neighbouring Makoni district. Moreover, one wonders whether, in a district that seems even more tied into the migrant labour economy than Makoni district, it is useful to categorize people as *peasants*. This chapter therefore challenges implicit rural-urban oppositions in different academic and political discourses on Zimbabwe, focusing on Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis at the turn of the 21st century. Both rural-urban oppositions and the land feature prominently in interpretations of this crisis, as international press reports reveal.

Revealing news reports: urban riots, farm occupations and parliamentary elections

In January 1998, while I was sorting out the history of land allocations in an area of land conflict in rural Buhera (see chapter 4), Harare seemed to be the place where history was being made. In Buhera district's major centre, Murambinda, there were rumours that food riots had erupted in Harare's high-density area in reaction to price hikes in basic commodities.¹ With a highly indebted government, a declining exchange rate, high interest and inflation rates, and massive unemployment, Zimbabwe faced a serious economic crisis – a crisis that seemed to have been aggravated rather than diminished after Zimbabwe's adoption of economic structural adjustment policies in the early 1990s. The crisis hit urban areas like Harare, where the latest increases in the price of basic commodities had triggered the urban unrest. Yet, as the buses arriving from town no longer brought in newspapers from the capital, stories were scarce. It was only later that it became clear that these urban food riots – that were concentrated in Harare's poorer neighbourhoods, where I knew many Buhera migrants lived – were a first prelude to a period of political turmoil. Although not the first expressions of urban discontent – there had been trade union organized strikes before (Alexander, 2000: 388) – the food riots were, until then, the most violent expressions of it, resulting in the deaths of several people.

¹ 'Looting as food riots hit Harare', *The Herald* 20 Jan. 1998. Food riots occurred again in 2000. See: 'Bread riots rock Harare', *The Daily News* 17 Oct. 2000.

In February 2000, in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, the occupation of large-scale commercial farms brought Zimbabwe's rural areas into the international news. The land came to dominate public debate. As the fieldwork for my studies had ended, I had to depend largely on the generally superficial European news bulletins on radio and TV. These presented me with images of violent young men in their early twenties burning down the shabby houses that white farm owners had put up for their farm workers. Foreign news reporters, immediately flown to Harare, alleged that these violent young men were war veterans, expressing their frustration over the uneven distribution of land – popularly known in Zimbabwe as the 'land issue'. They informed their public that these war veterans had fought a guerrilla war in the 1970s to end the highly uneven racial distribution of the best agricultural land in what was then called Rhodesia, but that this unequal distribution of land had continued to persist up to the present. Thus, the news reports built on dominant discourses in both academic circles and national political arenas, presenting the land as the central theme of both Zimbabwe's history and the current crisis. A case in point was the Internet site of the BBC World Service. Since the first farm occupations it featured a historical overview of the land issue in Zimbabwe, entitled: 'Who owns the land?' As in other reports, the land issue was presented as the cause of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle.

Meanwhile, it remained difficult to make sense of the press reports, for why would – often landless – farm workers be harassed? If land was the problem, surely they would be in an alliance with the war veterans. Neither did the reporters elaborate on who these people they labelled 'war veterans' actually were. I failed to see how the young men I saw on my television screen could have won a guerrilla war in the 1970s, when at the time they could only have been toddlers.² The quick explanations given by the flown-in reporters in Harare were too simplistic for other reasons also, however. Just weeks before, a new draft constitution – to which the government had added a clause on land acquisition for resettlement – had been rejected in a national referendum.³ Hence, the farm occupations were not simply a continuation of a longer historical struggle over land as a productive resource.

Certainly, land occupations were nothing new in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Thus far, the people involved had been labelled as 'squatters', and their practices as illegal, usually provoking government reaction in the form of

² Hence, the category of 'war veterans' is a problematic one. Often it is merely a – strategically used – label for those involved in the occupations of farms, game parks and urban industries.

³ The referendum was the first clear indication of the government's lack of popularity. See: 'Mugabe puts brave face to worst political defeat', *The Financial Gazette* 17 Feb. 2000.

eviction. What changed was government's attitude: 'squatters' now became 'war veterans'. The news reports failed to suggest that the farm occupations, which soon appeared actively co-directed by the state⁴, could also be interpreted as a welcome diversion from the country's economic crisis for the battered ZANU-PF government of President Robert Mugabe. As has become clear since, the farm occupations became a political strategy by which the government attempted to regain its dwindling political support, especially among the influential but internally divided category of Zimbabwe's war veterans (Raftopoulos, 2001; Worby, 2001).⁵

With the parliamentary elections of June 2000 drawing nearer, Zimbabwe remained in the international news, but the press reports gradually changed. The attacks on white farmers, relating to the farm occupations that had initially drawn all the attention of the international press, made way for anxiety over the election-related violence against black Zimbabweans. In many areas the election campaign had turned violent, including the usually peaceful rural district of Buhera. From being hardly ever mentioned in the newspapers, it was now suddenly at the forefront of national news. One reason for this media attention was that the district's major centre, Murambinda, from where I had conducted my studies, became the scene of a politically motivated car bombing.⁶ Another was that the leader of Zimbabwe's new opposition party, the MDC,⁷ originated from the district and planned to contest the

⁴ See: 'Government deploys army to direct farm invasions', *Zimbabwe Independent* 20 April 2000; 'Army brains behind Zimbabwe farm intrusions: 2,000 soldiers deployed, millions given for food', *Financial Gazette* 4 May 2000.

⁵ In the late 1990s, Zimbabwe's war veterans have proved to be a powerful interest group. In 1997, cash-strapped government had given in to their demands for compensation, paying former guerrillas war pensions of Z\$ 50,000. The founding of the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association years previously was meant (and regarded) as a direct challenge to President Mugabe, as Margaret Dongo, one of the organization's co-founders has recently stated. More recently, the organization has become an agent of the ruling party's (by-)election campaigns, yet this political alliance seems to remain tension-ridden. See a.o.: 'Govt to act on war vets as attacks on firms widen', *The Financial Gazette* 17 May 2001; 'War vets demand \$15m for Mugabe's campaign', *The Financial Gazette* 31 May 2001; 'Government attacked for pushing out real war vets', *The Daily News* 11 Aug. 2001. See also note 2.

⁶ 'Petrol bomb attack kills two MDC members', *The Herald* 17 April 2000. Although the attackers were commonly known in Murambinda, the High Court had to order the prosecution of the suspects – a member of the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) and a war veteran. 'Judge orders trial of Chiminya killers', *The Daily News* 28 May 2001.

⁷ The MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) was formed in 1999 and has a firm foundation in Zimbabwe's labour movement. Its president, Morgan Tsvangirai, was the former leader in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). See also: Alexander, 2000. The ruling party ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front), led by President Robert G. Mugabe, has its roots in the nationalist movement that fought Zimbabwe's war of independence.

parliamentary seat of his *sekuru* (maternal uncle),⁸ the candidate of the ruling ZANU-PF party in this rural constituency.

Whereas the farm occupations had diverted the earlier press attention from the economic crisis in urban areas towards rural areas, situating the roots of Zimbabwe's crisis in the land distribution, the press reports on the parliamentary elections of June 2000 were again most illuminating. These explained the (expected) voting behaviour of Zimbabweans by drawing on the common oppositions between rural and urban. Thus, I was led to believe that, whereas the more progressive urban population had overwhelmingly voted for the new opposition party MDC led by the former trade unionist originating from Buhera, the conservative rural population had remained loyal to the ruling ZANU-PF party, which had been in power since independence. The opposing political preference of rural and urban populations seemed to suggest that rural-urban distinctions, which did not seem very important in the lives of the Buhera migrants I had studied, were important after all, but, as the results of the vote became public, it turned out that matters were more complex than had been presented by the news reporters. To be sure, the ruling party, ZANU-PF, had won most rural constituencies, whereas the urban constituencies of all major cities had fallen to the opposition, but the opposition had also won in numerous rural constituencies.⁹ The political crisis deepened, as there were reports of intimidation of voters and irregularities in the counting process, raising doubts about the validity of poll results, particularly in rural constituencies, including one in Buhera.¹⁰ Clearly, the opposition between urban-progressive and rural-traditional voters was not as straightforward as presented by the international press.

The Zimbabwe crisis: contrasting discourses

The events described above illustrate how rural-urban oppositions also permeate interpretations of the emerging political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s. The press reports on the parliamentary elections are most illuminating in this respect; they repeat common contrasts between

⁸ For an explanation of Shona kinship terminology see chapter 3, p.55, note 13.

⁹ For instance, of the fifteen (mainly) rural constituencies in the provinces of Matabeleland, thirteen were won by MDC candidates. In Manicaland province (including the urban area of Mutare) six went to the ruling party ZANU-PF, seven out of fourteen constituencies went to the MDC, one to ZANU-Ndonga.

¹⁰ After the elections, the opposition party MDC contested the outcome of the vote in a number of constituencies, resulting in enduring lawsuits. See a.o: 'State loses poll case', *The Daily News* 31 Jan. 2001. In April 2001 the poll-results for Buhera-North were nullified by the High Court in Harare. 'Tsvangirai wins', *The Daily News* 27 April 2001; 'MDC wins two electoral appeals', *Zimbabwe Independent* 27 April 2001.

progressive urban workers and traditionalist rural farmers. Yet, the reports on the urban food riots and the farm occupations point to contrasting academic and political discourses on the roots of Zimbabwe's crisis. The urban food riots direct us to interpretations of the current crisis voiced in circles of Zimbabwe's political opposition, which situates the crisis macro-economically, in the (urban and commercial farming) wage labour sector, and blames the government for mismanaging the economy. The press reports on the land occupations, on the other hand, reflect the dominant discourse in both academic thought and post-colonial politics. There is a long history in studies of Zimbabwe's political economy of localizing the root of underdevelopment in the smallholder farming sector. This is the discourse used by the ruling party. It views the solution to Zimbabwe's crisis as massive redistribution of land.

Below, these contrasting academic and political discourses are briefly characterized and critically reviewed from the perspective on rural-urban connections and the significance of land in Buhera, developed in the previous chapters.

Interpreting Zimbabwe's crisis: the dominant discourse on the land

As is already revealed by the news reports discussed above, interpretations of events such as the farm occupations often draw on a political discourse which views the still unresolved land issue as the root of Zimbabwe's crisis. Voiced in circles of President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF government, this dominant political discourse stresses the importance of land as the source of wealth and livelihoods. Consequently, the recent farm occupations are interpreted as a means to secure these livelihoods in a period of economic decline.

The centrality of the land issue in the dominant political discourse has its counterpart in academic thought on Zimbabwe. Both originate from the 1970s, a time when guerrillas – supported by socialist regimes in and beyond Africa's borders – infiltrated Rhodesia's countryside, carrying out hit-and-run attacks on white settler farms, mission stations, government stations, road and railway infrastructure (see a.o.: Cauter, 1983; Meredith, 1980; Martin and Johnson, 1981). Political-economy-inspired academics identified these war-ridden rural areas as the scene of the dominant theme of Rhodesia's history – i.e. the state assisted development of white capitalist agriculture at the expense of African peasant farming (Palmer, 1977a, b; Arrighi 1973a, b). As a consequence, Zimbabwean historiography has become dominated by perspectives situating the roots of resistance against the colonial state in rural areas – where the colonial government had expropriated land for white settlers, while concentrating African peasant farmers on marginal soils. Zimbabwe's liberation struggle became interpreted as a rural struggle of African peasants fighting for the productive resource, land, which had been alienated from

them (Ranger, 1985). Not surprisingly, then, rural areas have been at the forefront of academic interest and development interventions in the post-colonial period. This is exemplified by the vast academic interest in land (re-) distribution and resettlement (Moyana, 1984; Moyo, 1994; 2000; Kinsey, 1982; 1983; 1999; Gunning *et al*, 2000; Hoogeveen and Kinsey, 2001). In development practice, this prominence is evidenced by development agencies' concentration on 'projects' in the fields of rural and agricultural development.

Challenging the dominant discourse: the land as source of wealth and development?

Although presenting a powerful image of the land as the central issue in Zimbabwean politics and history, the dominant discourse focusing on this resource is problematic. Although still of major importance as a strategy for (re-)mobilizing political support for the ruling party in the post-colonial period, the land was not an issue in the growing protest against the government during the 1990s. Rather than targeting the governments' land redistribution policies – which slowed down considerably in the 1990s – trade union organized strikes and the urban food riots targeted the government's economic policies and increasingly corrupt practices. Neither could the land issue secure a yes-vote for the governments' plans for constitutional reforms in the national referendum held early 2000. Hence, it seems cracks are emerging in the dominant discourse focusing on the land issue. In Zimbabwean politics, the discourse is losing appeal among the electorate, notably the younger voters who have little affinity with the anti-colonial struggle in which this discourse is rooted. Yet, received interpretations produced by the academic discourse focusing on the land may also be challenged.

One field of academic study to be scrutinized is the dominant interpretation of the roots of the anti-colonial struggle in Zimbabwean historiography, that is, its focus on rural areas. Although African nationalist movements – rooted in the labour movement – first emerged in Rhodesia's urban centres (van Velsen, 1964b), the roots of resistance have become associated with peasant grievances over the lost land.¹¹ However, the image of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle as being a 'peasant war' is questionable. Although support for the guerrillas was widespread, there is little evidence of an organized peasantry taking up arms against the Rhodesian state. Peasant support had to be mobilized by the guerrillas, sometimes even by force (see, for instance: Kriger, 1992). Rather than peasants, it was Africans running up against the racial policies of the colonial state, hampering their upward mobility in society, who took the initiative to fight. Soon after Ian Smith declared unilateral independence in

¹¹ The 1990s have witnessed a renewed academic interest in the urban origins of Zimbabwe's nationalist movements (Raftopoulos, 1995; Raftopoulos and Yoshikuni, 1999).

1965, the first guerrilla attacks on white power started, though up to the mid 1970s such attacks posed no serious threat to the Rhodesian state (Meredith, 1980: 41, 67-70; Martin and Johnson, 1981: 9-10; Ranger, 1997). Meanwhile, at the political level, attempts were made to negotiate a settlement between African nationalists, Britain and the Rhodesian government. At least initially, the highly uneven distribution of land was neither a dominant theme in, nor a major cause of failure of, these negotiations. It was not due to the land issue that negotiations on African majority rule failed time and again; rather, this was due to divisions within the nationalist movement, shifting popular support for these movements, and Ian Smith's undermining of the credibility of any African leader that came to an accommodation with him (Meredith, 1980).

Though land distribution was not a major issue, 'liberating the land' was a major theme of the struggle for independence from the outset. In Shona political and religious thought, the land was of major importance (Lan, 1985; Bourdillon, 1987) and – as this study has shown for Buhera – a source of people's identities and sense of belonging. In the colonial era, the land had become associated with white rule and racial segregation. Thus, cultural values of land had become translated politically. However, the land as a productive value only gained political significance during the 1970s. As the negotiations with more moderate nationalist leaders dragged on, the war intensified and more radical nationalists gained in popularity. It was these socialist-inspired nationalists who were committed to large-scale land redistribution and, subsequently, the catch-phrase of the liberation struggle – 'regaining the lost land' – seems to have become interpreted rather narrowly; as if Zimbabwe's war for independence was primarily a struggle over land as a productive/economic resource.

When the socialist-inspired nationalists of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party formed Zimbabwe's first independent government in 1980, they embarked on a policy of land resettlement in order to address the highly uneven distribution of this productive resource. As a consequence, in the first decade of independence 52,000 families were resettled on 3.3 million hectares of land (Rukuni, 1994: 31).

The 1980s also witnessed a production boom among African smallholder farmers, especially in the Communal Areas (Rukuni and Eicher, 1994).¹² Maize sales to the Grain Marketing Board increased from some 40,000 tonnes in 1980 to over 500,000 tonnes in 1990, turning the smallholder sector into Zimbabwe's

¹² Before 1981 these lands were known as Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs) and before that as Native Reserves. In general, the Communal Areas comprise marginal lands, characterized by poor soils and low and erratic rainfall.

chief producer of maize, the country's staple food (Mashingaidze, 1994: 209). Cotton production also rose dramatically, and by 1985 communal farmers sold more cotton to the Cotton Marketing Board than the large-scale commercial farming sector (Rukuni, 1994). This production revolution was not only economically but also politically significant, as it showed those sceptical of land redistribution that African farmers were highly responsive to market opportunities and capable of realizing significant market surplus.

The smallholder production revolution – for some the proof that peasant agriculture on the dry, sandy and densely populated soils of the Communal Areas could be sustainable after all – needs to be looked at critically however. The production of both cotton and high yielding maize varieties in Communal Areas – characterized by low rainfall and poor soils – requires the yearly purchase of hybrid seeds and fertilizers. In areas characterized by low and erratic rainfall – such as the Communal Areas – the relatively high risk of crop failure puts a strain on the generation of the investment capital required for sustained production. This problem of state-financed agricultural development in the Communal Areas became apparent as a result of droughts in the early 1980s.¹³ In the period 1982-85, government expenditure on drought relief was comparable to that of resettlement in the period 1980-85 (Bolding *et al*, forthcoming).

The high cost of drought relief induced government to focus more, rather than less, on Communal Area agriculture. Singled out as the major problem, the improvement of land husbandry practices in these areas became a distinct policy issue, separate from resettlement as from the mid 1980s (Bratton, 1994: 75; Bolding *et al*, forthcoming). Meanwhile, credit facilities continued to enable Communal Area farmers to finance the recurrent costs for inputs – seeds and fertilizers, but loan defaulting increased considerably (Rukuni, 1994: 31-32). Yet, as the studies presented in the previous chapters have suggested, besides government financial assistance, urban incomes also could generate the cash needed to sustain the input-demanding maize production regime. As before independence, remittances of migrant workers continued to play an important role in sustaining livelihoods in rural areas (Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990, Potts 1995, 2000a, b; chapters 2 and 3), including farm activity in the Communal Areas. Consequently, the success of Zimbabwe's smallholder farming sector in the 1980s cannot be isolated from developments in other economic spheres and the state's growing indebtedness. The production

¹³ The smallholder maize production revolution was not only based on improved agricultural credit facilities enabling the purchase of high yielding hybrid maize varieties. Other major factors were a growth in the number of cultivators and land cultivated with maize; improved access to marketing facilities and agricultural extension services (Mashingaidze, 1994: 210; Rukuni, 1994: 29; Zinyama, 1986b; Bolding *et al*, forthcoming).

revolution in the peasant sector in the 1980s seems, to a large degree, to have been financed by the state and (urban) migrant workers, rather than generated from the land alone. Towards the end of the 1980s, the serious consequences of this dependent agricultural development became increasingly apparent.

In the 1990s, especially after the severe drought of 1991/92, drought relief, grain loan schemes, and the handing out of seed packs, remained recurring phenomena, serving simultaneously smallholder farmers and the ruling party's need for political support. Equally, politicians 'seized upon the potent symbol of the land as a means to (re-)mobilize political support' for successive parliamentary and presidential election campaigns (Bratton, 1994: 80). The government's resettlement programme had, however, come under attack. In the second half of the 1980s, the resettlement process slowed down considerably to come to a virtual standstill by 1990 (Bratton, 1994: 77). Despite contrasting evidence (Kinsey, 1999; Hoogeveen and Kinsey, 2001), resettlement allegedly failed to 'have a positive impact on agricultural productivity and rural incomes' (Kinsey, 2001: 7). This was partly ascribed to the government's limited purchasing capacity, the high land prices, and the high costs of infrastructure development involved in resettlement. Another factor was the limited availability of prime land under the 'willing-seller/willing-buyer' condition set out in the Lancaster House Constitution drawn up at the negotiation table that yielded Zimbabwe's independence (Rukuni, 1994). Yet, even after passing new legislation in the early 1990s, the government failed 'to act decisively on land reform' (Kinsey, 2001: 8).

Meanwhile, where the government did acquire farms, these could be given out on lease. During the 1990s, such lease constructions increasingly led to public allegations of corruption. Instead of being redistributed to Zimbabwe's land-hungry peasant farmers, many farms appeared to be in the hands of government officials and businessmen who, allegedly, were not using the land productively.¹⁴ New initiatives on land reform, such as the land acquisition policy of 1997 that designated farms for compulsory acquisition by government, were ill informed, raising questions as regards the government's motivations for land acquisition. Since then, land redistribution has become increasingly perceived as a 'land grab' by the ZANU-PF government trying to restore its ailing political support through patronage (Palmer, 1998; Kinsey, 2001). The government support for the farm occupations initiated by 'war veterans', as well as the fast-track land resettlement programme that followed

¹⁴ In March 2000, independent member of parliament and co-founder of the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association, Margaret Dongo, circulated an 'official list of farm land bought [by the government] to resettle the landless'. The list revealed that numerous high-ranking government officials were allocated land. See: 'Margaret Dongo slams the farm invasions', *Daily Mail & Guardian* 14 March 2000; www.mdczim.com/documents/zud/dongo.htm.

these occupations, may be understood from this perspective. While adopting a political economy discourse, it builds upon the powerful symbolic value of the land in an attempt to re-ally 'war veterans' and other political supporters in the run-up to the 2002 presidential elections.

A counter-discourse on Zimbabwe's crisis: 'economic mismanagement'

Since the late 1980s, protest against government's economic policies and corruption has gained momentum in Zimbabwe. As with the emergence of a nationalist discourse during the colonial era,¹⁵ the labour movement has played a pivotal role in the articulation of this political opposition against the government, resulting in what may be typified as a counter-discourse on the origins of Zimbabwe's crisis of the late 1990s (see: van Velsen, 1964b; Raftopoulos, 1997: 55). Voiced in circles of trade unionists, industrialists and commercial farmers – organized in the MDC – this discourse situates Zimbabwe's crisis within the industrial, wage labour sector, that is, in urban industry and the commercial farming sector. Rather than emphasizing the highly uneven distribution of the country's best agricultural land, this discourse focuses on the governments' mismanagement of the economy – i.e. its inability to stimulate investment and thereby create employment; its overspending; and its corrupt practices – as the main cause of Zimbabwe's crisis. It views the political crisis – the government-supported farm occupations – that characterizes Zimbabwe at the turn of the century as rooted in the state-induced economic crisis of the 1990s. The focus on the state's mismanagement of the economy, which characterizes this discourse, makes it comprehensible why this discourse is voiced both in circles of Zimbabwe's trade unions as well as in industry and business – social categories whose class interest normally conflict.

Challenging the economic mismanagement thesis: centralist thinking

Important shortcomings of this interpretative framework stressing the government's economic mismanagement are, however, the rather a-historical perspective on the current crisis, its centralist thinking – exemplified by the focus on the state – and its economic reductionism. To understand the current economic crisis, it is necessary to look beyond the symptoms that have presented themselves in the 1990s and review Zimbabwe's economic history over a longer period, including the last decades of the colonial period. It then becomes clear how the economic mismanagement thesis exhibits a particular

¹⁵ Trade unions played an active role in the nationalist movements that emerged in the 1950s, through provision of leading individuals – such as Benjamin Burombo, Joshua Nkomo, Jason Moyo and George Nyandoro) – to nationalist parties, as well as organizational experience (Raftopoulos, 1997: 55).

perspective on the nature of rural-urban relations, viewing these exclusively in economic terms. As a consequence, this discourse is of little use in any attempt to understand the current political dynamic in which non-economic values of land play such an important role.¹⁶

In the first decade after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the economy had grown an average 3.2 per cent per annum (Zimbabwe, 1991:1), lagging behind the expectations of Robert Mugabe's democratically elected government. In the period 1965-1972, before the guerrilla war in Rhodesia's rural areas paralysed economic activity, the economy had performed better, despite the international economic boycott following Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965. Forced to embark on an import substitution industrialization strategy, Smith's Rhodesia had succeeded in beating the United Nations imposed sanctions, realizing an average growth rate of 3.5 per cent (Stoneman, 1981; Rukuni, 1994: 27). This growth was fuelled by manufacturing industry and, although Rhodesia's tobacco-based agricultural exports continued to be the most important foreign exchange earner, trade sanctions resulted in market loss and a forced diversification of commercial farming.¹⁷ Further hit by the oil-price increases in 1973 and the intensifying war in Zimbabwe's countryside, the financial position of the commercial farming sector declined steadily and 'survived the UDI period largely through government support' (Rukuni, 1994: 27; Muir and Blackie, 1994: 197).

After independence, agriculture did considerably better, notably – as was discussed above – in the Communal Areas, where public investments and intimate links with urban areas sustained agricultural production growth in capital-demanding hybrid maize production. The government's policy of national reconciliation, announced by Mugabe at independence, enabled the large-scale commercial farming sector to re-establish itself, although the number of such farms decreased from some 6,000 in 1980 to about 4,000 in 1990 (Muir and Blackie, 1994: 198). The sector flourished through increased tobacco production, the generally very good prices for this crop, and diversification into emerging export markets for horticultural products like flowers, fruit and vegetables (Muir and Blackie, 1994).

Towards the late 1980s, the problems of Zimbabwe's wage labour sector became more and more apparent; unemployment was rising at an alarming

¹⁶ Furthermore, with support among (white) industrialists, commercial farmers and workers, and with its stress on economic mismanagement, it is understandable why Zimbabwe's opposition has taken little initiative in formulating a comprehensive policy alternative relating to land distribution in the country.

¹⁷ In the UDI-period, the relative importance of tobacco in the total value of marketed output declined from 53 percent in 1965 to 20 percent in 1980 (Muir and Blackie, 1994: 197).

rate. At this time on average about 3,000 new jobs were created per annum, while some 300,000 new jobseekers were entering the labour market (Durevall *et al*, 1999: 1). The expansion of the wage labour sector was, moreover, in large part the result of an expansion of the civil service, as the new government tried to redress the racial inequalities, especially in the fields of education and health services. The emergent investment pattern in industry after the international economic sanctions were lifted in 1980 was largely beyond the control of the post-colonial government. With the move from an import-substitution oriented economy to a more liberalized situation, productivity increases in industry (including commercial farming) were realized through the adoption of new (imported) technologies, increasing labour productivity rather than the labour force. And although in total some 200,000 new jobs had been generated during the 1980s, the Zimbabwean economy was simply unable to absorb the ever growing number of – increasingly well-educated – school leavers entering the labour market each year. Meanwhile the government's indebtedness had increased substantially as a result of budget deficits throughout the 1980s.¹⁸ Hence, the government embarked on an IMF and World Bank supported policy of Economic Structural Adjustment (ESAP) in 1990, with the stimulation of employment being one of its principal goals.

At the turn of the 21st century, the adjustment policies adopted in the 1990s have yielded limited results (Dureval *et al*, 1999). Although largely implemented according to plan, the presupposed centralist control over the economy has proved to be limited. Formal employment is declining,¹⁹ whereas high interest rates, exacerbated by large-scale government borrowing on the money market, have effectively hampered the productive investment required for employment growth. With high inflation rates, massive unemployment, a highly devaluated currency and acute foreign exchange and fuel shortages, Zimbabwe's economy is in deep crisis.

Re-interpreting rural-urban connections and the meaning of land: An ethnographic perspective on Zimbabwe's economic and political crisis

Albeit limited by its single-minded focus on the state's economic policies and its limited historical depth, the above-discussed mismanagement thesis presents us with a forceful image: that of an *industrializing* economy in decline. The contrast with the dominant discourse focusing on the land is evident. This political-economy-inspired discourse situates Zimbabwe's crisis in the *rural* economy, in the highly uneven distribution of the best agricultural land.

¹⁸ During the 1980s the budget deficit was on average 10 per cent of GDP. (Zimbabwe, 1990:2)

¹⁹ In 2000, more than 50,000 people lost their jobs, and it is said that unemployment has risen to 60 percent. '54,000 lose jobs', *The Daily News* 16 Nov. 2000.

As the reader will by now have recognized, the discourses discussed above present us with the familiar, albeit problematic, perspective on rural-urban relations the foregoing chapters have challenged. The critical review of the origins and development of the discourse focusing on the land has, it is hoped, elucidated how the findings on Buhera have a wider significance. It was argued that the significance of the rural land as *the source* of Zimbabwean livelihoods, wealth and development is perhaps overestimated, as agricultural development has been highly dependent on state assistance and is intimately linked and dependent on (urban) industrial development. Rural-urban *oppositions* may thus be far less significant than is usually believed for our understanding of contemporary Zimbabwe; economic crisis in the industrially organized sectors of the economy immediately affect farming in Communal Areas.

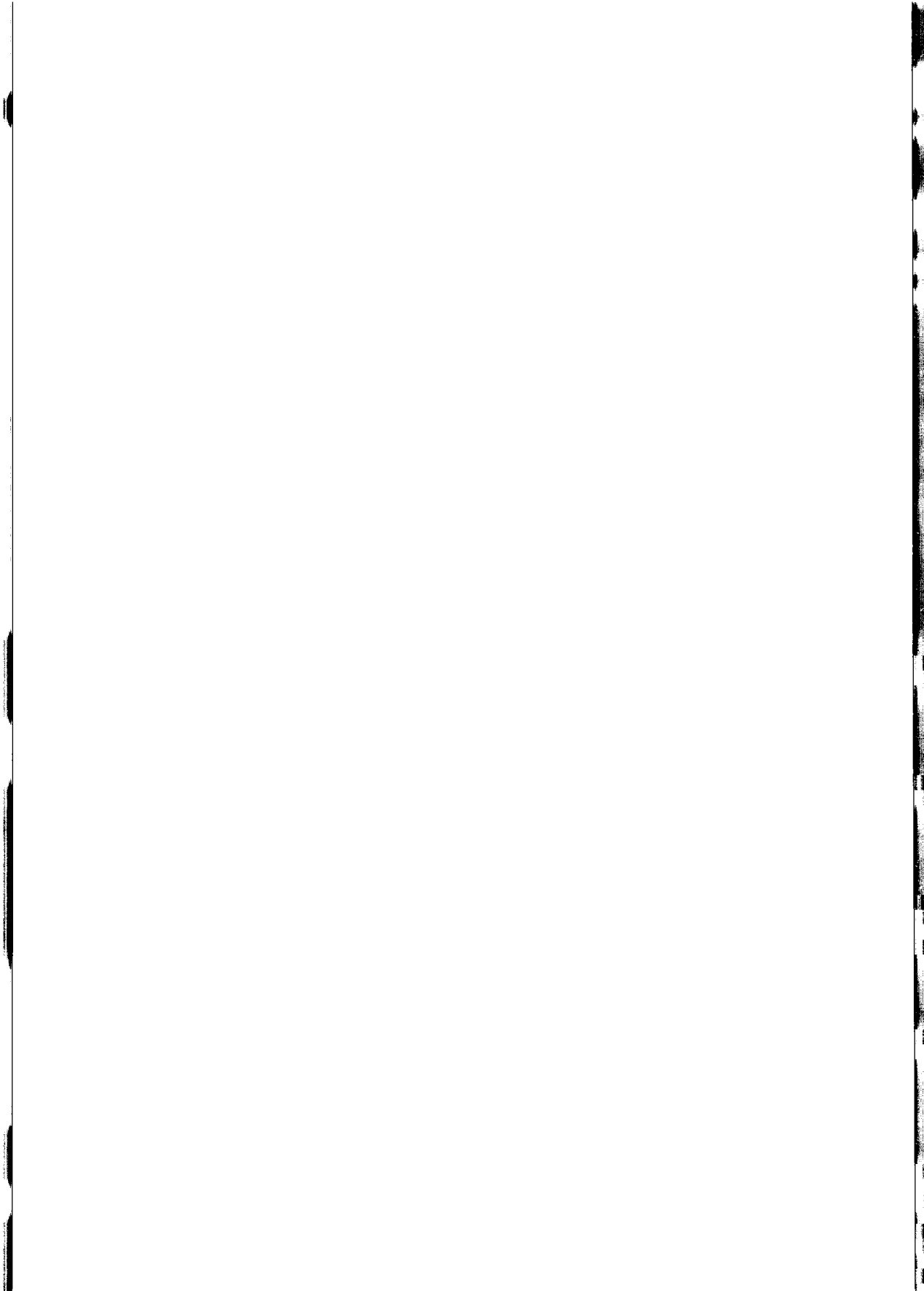
This conclusion was reinforced by a brief return visit in September and October 2000 to some Buheran migrants living in the Mbare neighbourhood of Harare. Complaining bitterly about the skyrocketing prices for consumables (such as maize meal, cooking oil, sugar, salt, etc.) and the cost of transport, they said their urban existence had become very hard indeed. However, returning home to make a living from the land – as conventional perspectives on rural-urban relations would suggest – was considered no alternative. Farming requires seeds, and where would one get the money from, if not from working? Better to plant half the quantity of hybrid maize seeds and use artificial fertilizers, as they had just done, than not be able to grow food at all.

Zimbabwean politics and the meaning of land

Over and above its productive value, land is – as the studies on Buhera have shown – highly significant socio-culturally in the constitution of people's identity and sense of belonging and, thereby, for the way in which economic life is organized. As the discussion in this chapter has revealed, the same socio-cultural values dominate political discourse. The symbolic value of land is used as a strategy to mobilize political support. The ZANU-PF 2000-election slogan, 'the land is the economy and the economy is the land', stressing the economic significance of the land, should therefore perhaps be taken for what it is – a political slogan. Though illustrative of the continued significance of land for our understanding of contemporary Zimbabwean politics, stress on the economic value of land has perhaps prevented us from understanding its socio-cultural and political values.

This is well illustrated with a last observation from Buhera. In September 2000, Buherans' interest in the governments' fast-track resettlement programme – the follow-up to the land occupations – appeared to be limited. Only few had enlisted in the programme at the Buhera council offices. A discussion with councillors on the problem of land conflicts in the district –

following a presentation of my findings in this field (see chapter 4) – was most illuminating. Although land scarcity was unanimously regarded to be the cause of, and resettlement generally as the solution to, the numerous land disputes in the district, when asked personally, few councillors aspired to be resettled. The councillors who had no interest in being resettled argued that the area in which one was living was the place where one's parents and grandparents were buried. Hence, it was the area of the family – valued for that very reason. How could one ever abandon that area? The few councillors that did aspire to be resettlement farmers now quickly joined in, expressing their agreement and thereby revealing that resettlement would not solve the problem of land shortages in Buhera; even if the government gave them land, they would never abandon their ancestral homelands in Buhera.



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Acronyms

ANC	- Assistant Native Commissioner
BRDC	- Buhera Rural District Council
CA	- Communal Area (formerly known as TTL or Native Reserve)
CNC	- Chief Native Commissioner
DA	- District Administrator
DC	- District Commissioner
DEAP	- District Environmental Action Plan
ESAP	- Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
IMF	- International Monetary Fund
LDO	- Land Development Officer
NAZ	- National Archives of Zimbabwe
NC	- Native Commissioner
PNC	- Provincial Native Commissioner
TTL	- Tribal Trust Land (now known as CA)
UDI	- Unilateral Declaration of Independence (1965)
VIDCO	- Village Development Committee
WADCO	- Ward Development Committee
ZANU-PF	- Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (political party led by R.G. Mugabe)
ZANU	- Zimbabwe African National Union, nowadays also known as ZANU-Ndonga (political party led by the late Rev. N. Sithole)

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift bestaat uit een viertal wetenschappelijke artikelen met gedetailleerde etnografische studies van arbeidsmigranten, afkomstig uit Buhera district, Zimbabwe. Conventionele studies naar ruraal-urbane migratie en urbanisatie hebben arbeidsmigranten meestal bestudeerd in ofwel de rurale ofwel de urbane sociale situatie. Hierbij worden de consequenties van 'uit-migratie' voor de rurale samenleving en haar agrarische economie geanalyseerd, dan wel de adoptie van urbane levensstijlen in steden.

Dit heeft tot gevolg dat dergelijke studies geneigd zijn gangbare tegenstellingen te reproduceren die geassocieerd worden met het onderscheid tussen het rurale en het urbane; zoals bijvoorbeeld traditioneel-modern, conservatief-progressief, continuïteit-verandering, boeren-arbeiders. Tegelijkertijd representeren dergelijke tegenstellingen een gangbaar ontwikkelingsperspectief ten aanzien van de relatie tussen het urbane en het rurale, te weten, staatsgestuurde modernisatie. Dit proefschrift over arbeidsmigranten die op en neer reizen tussen het rurale Buhera district en Harare, Zimbabwe's hoofdstad, ondermijnt deze tegenstellingen in het denken. De in de opeenvolgende hoofdstukken gepresenteerde studies laten zien dat migranten uit Buhera niet in twee gescheiden – rurale en urbane – werelden leven. Er wordt juist beargumenteerd dat deze migrantensamenleving één enkel cultureel universum vormt, dat zich uitstrekt over verschillende geografische locaties. De Buhera samenleving moet dus begrepen worden als zijnde 'translokaal'.

De gevolgde onderzoeksmethode is waarschijnlijk het best te vatten met de notie van 'reizen' (travelling). Buhera migranten werden gevolgd in hun 'reizen', zowel in ruimte als in de tijd – in hun reizen naar en in de stad, maar ook terug in de tijd, om hun geschiedenis te begrijpen. Door deze onderzoeksmethodiek is het mogelijk deze samenleving te zien, niet als een 'cultuur' die gefragmenteerd wordt door de mobiliteit tussen stedelijke en rurale (culturele) werelden, maar als één enkel sociaal-cultureel universum. Voor de Buhera migranten die bestudeerd zijn, is het onderscheid tussen ruraal en urbaan sociaal leven niet belangrijk, laat staan dat zij als problematisch ervaren wordt.

Buhera als geografische plaats blijft desalniettemin belangrijk, alhoewel niet als de omgeving waarin het sociale leven plaatsheeft, maar eerder als een plek waarmee men zich identificeert en zich thuis voelt. Het is deze 'Buhera identiteit' en met name haar belang voor de wijze waarop mensen hun economisch leven organiseren, die centraal staat in de verschillende analyses in dit boek.

Hoofdstuk 2

Een verkorte versie van dit hoofdstuk zal verschijnen als: J.A. Andersson. 2002 'Administrators' knowledge and state control in colonial Zimbabwe: The invention of the rural-urban divide in Buhera district, 1912-80', *Journal of African History* vol.43.

Dit hoofdstuk problematiseert de macht van de staat en zijn vertegenwoordigers om de denkpatronen, die zij zelf produceren, dwingend op te leggen. Gedurende de koloniale periode is de productie van kennis over Afrikaanse samenlevingen grotendeels in handen geweest van overheidsdienaren die deze kennis vervolgens gebruikten om de maatschappelijke ontwikkeling van deze samenlevingen te sturen. Als gevolg hiervan is een hegemonisch beeld van de koloniale staat ontstaan in de historiografie van Zimbabwe. Sterk steunend op de archieven van de koloniale overheid heeft deze historiografie de koloniale staat een dominante rol toegekend in het sturen van sociale verandering. Immers, overheidsambtenaren handelden op basis van een beeld van Afrikaanse samenlevingen dat zij zelf hadden geconstrueerd. Hun beleidsrapporten presenteren derhalve een beeld van orde en controle. Dit hoofdstuk trekt dit hegemonische beeld van de koloniale staat in twijfel, gebruikmakend van dezelfde koloniale archieven. Een historische analyse van Buhera district laat zien dat een andere – minder hegemonische – interpretatie van de koloniale staat mogelijk is.

Buhera district werd in het begin van de koloniale periode aangewezen als 'African Reserve' (een reservaat waarin Afrikanen verplicht werden te wonen) aangezien Europese boeren ('settlers') nauwelijks belangstelling hadden voor de droge zandgronden in het district. De geringe Europese interesse voor het gebied heeft tot gevolg gehad dat het historisch bronnenmateriaal voor het gebied grotendeels beperkt is gebleven tot rapporten van koloniale ambtenaren. De rapporten bevatten echter wel observaties van ambtenaren op lokaal niveau die het mogelijk maken de controle van de staat over zijn subjecten en zijn rol in het sturen van sociale verandering anders te interpreteren dan in de gangbare historiografie.

Dit hoofdstuk volgt de preoccupaties van het 'beleidsdiscours' (vertoog) van de koloniale overheid, die verschuift van een grote aandacht voor de mobilisatie van Afrikaanse arbeid naar de modernisering van het Afrikaanse landgebruik. Terwijl de staatsinterventie in het gebied toenam, werd Buhera in toenemende mate gezien als een relatief gesloten, traditionele, rurale samenleving. Dit beeld in de koloniale rapporten week echter in toenemende mate af van de sociale realiteit. Buhera werd tegelijkertijd namelijk onderdeel van een wijdere wereld, waarin arbeidsmigratie naar steden als Harare van grote betekenis werd voor het sociale leven in het district.

De historische analyse van Buhera district suggereert een afwijkend perspectief op de koloniale staat. Zimbabwaanse historiografie heeft zich in het algemeen gericht op gebieden waar dramatische confrontaties tussen

Europeanen (boeren en ambtenaren) en Afrikanen plaatsvonden – gebieden waarvoor voldoende en goed geëvalueerd archiefmateriaal beschikbaar is. Dientengevolge wordt in deze studies de rol van de staat overschat, worden regionale verschillen genegeerd en wordt de complexiteit van de oppositie tegen de koloniale staat te simplistisch voorgesteld.

Hoofdstuk 3

Verschenen als: J.A. Andersson. 2001 'Re-interpreting the rural-urban connection: Migration practices and socio-cultural dispositions of Buhera workers in Harare', *Africa* 71(1), 82-112.

In het academische debat over arbeidsmigratie en urbanisatie in Zuidelijk Afrika spelen de relaties die mensen in steden onderhouden met hun rurale gebieden van oorsprong nog immer een belangrijke rol. Zoals de term *arbeidsmigratie* reeds impliceert, zijn economische krachten altijd beschouwd als de determinant van ruraal-urbane migratie. Echter, in studies naar ruraal-urbane migratie in Zimbabwe is het de (koloniale) staat geweest, die centraal is gesteld in de regulering van ruraal-urbane migratie. Gedurende de koloniale periode was er een restrictief beleid die de migratie van Afrikanen naar urbane centra reguleerde in een poging om te voorkomen dat grote aantallen Afrikanen permanente stedelingen zouden worden. De etnografische studie van arbeidsmigranten in Harare die afkomstig zijn uit Buhera district – gepresenteerd in dit hoofdstuk – distantieert zich echter van perspectieven waarin migratiegedrag gereduceerd wordt tot een effect van staatsinterventie en/of economische krachten. De studie laat zien dat netwerken van Buhera migranten die zowel rurale als urbane lokaliteiten omvatten weliswaar beïnvloed worden door zulke krachten, maar niet gedetermineerd. In plaats van uitsluitend economisch gemotiveerd, moet de participatie van individuele migranten in deze netwerken begrepen worden als expressie van een cultureel patroon waarin rurale identificatie en de ideologie van verwantschap van groot belang zijn. Deze manier van kijken naar ruraal-urbane migratie – als observeerbare uitkomst van een sociaal-cultureel patroon – doet ons de voorkeuren die economisch gedrag motiveren beter begrijpen. Bovendien betwist zij conventionele perspectieven op urbanisatie waarin het rurale en het urbane vaak gezien worden als gescheiden sociale werelden en het urbanisatieproces als onderdeel van een bredere evolutionaire ontwikkeling naar een moderne klassenmaatschappij.

Hoofdstuk 4

Een verkorte versie van dit hoofdstuk is verschenen als: J.A. Andersson. 1999 'The politics of land scarcity: land disputes in Save Communal Area, Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25(4), 553-78.

Over het algemeen worden conflicten over land – een belangrijk thema in de rurale geschiedenis van Zimbabwe – gezien als een ernstig probleem in de dichtbevolkte 'Communal Areas', waar land in communaal bezit is. Als gevolg

van bevolkingsgroei en de politiek van rassenscheiding van de koloniale overheid, is de bevolkingsdruk op land in deze marginale gebieden groot. Landschaarste in deze 'Communal Areas' betekent echter niet dat conflicten over land altijd door economische (productieve) motieven gedreven worden. Aangezien het agrarisch potentieel van dit land vaak beperkt is, kunnen landconflicten doorgaans beter begrepen worden in relatie tot sociaal-politieke processen.

Dit hoofdstuk over landconflicten in het Murambinda gebied van 'Save Communal Area' heeft tot doel de verschillende betekenissen die aan land verbonden worden te verduidelijken. Door middel van de analyse van een landconflict wordt duidelijk dat landconflicten in het gebied politiek van aard zijn. Landconflicten worden gedomineerd door dorpsleiders (*vanasabhuku*) en hun beslechting vindt grotendeels plaats buiten de juridische arena van de staat. Dit heeft tot gevolg dat lokale overheidsinstituties, die verantwoordelijk zijn voor landkwesties, een beperkt begrip hebben van, en weinig controle uitoefenen over landvraagstukken. De uitkomsten van deze studie geven een ander perspectief op het voortdurende debat over de noodzaak tot hervorming van het eigendomsrecht in Zimbabwe's 'Communal Areas', aangezien dit hoofdstuk laat zien dat de administratieve capaciteit van de overheid om een dergelijke hervorming door te voeren ontbreekt.

Hoofdstuk 5

Een verkorte versie van dit hoofdstuk zal verschijnen als: J.A. Andersson. 2002 'Sorcery in the era of Henry IV: Kinship, mobility and mortality in Buhera district, Zimbabwe' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

Recente studies naar hekserij en tovenarij in Afrika hebben dit domein beschreven als een allesomvattend 'discours' (vertoog) dat het denken van mensen domineert. De antropologische case studie die gepresenteerd wordt in dit hoofdstuk bespreekt een situatie waarin mensen de interpretatie van ziekte en dood in termen van hekserij/tovenarij maar deels geloven en pogen te ontkomen aan de consequenties ervan. Hierbij wordt de nadruk gelegd op de analyse van die sociale praktijken waarin het hekserij/tovenarij 'discours' wordt geproduceerd. De gevolgde benadering is vergelijkbaar met antropologische benaderingen waarin het hekserij/tovenarij 'discours' gezien wordt als een middel dat mensen gebruiken om situaties van existentiële onzekerheid betekenis te geven. In een samenleving van migranten werkend in Harare, die van oorsprong uit het rurale Buhera district komen, zijn dergelijke existentiële onzekerheden zeer reëel. Veel mensen worden geconfronteerd met HIV/AIDS gerelateerde ziektes en dood, eufemistisch ook wel *Henry the IV* (HIV) genoemd. Echter, beschuldigingen van hekserij/tovenarij zijn geen *direct* gevolg van de AIDS epidemie – waarvoor de moderne biomedische kennis weinig verklaringen noch remedies heeft. De

existentiële onzekerheden die aanleiding geven tot beschuldigingen van hekserij/tovenarij dienen gesitueerd te worden in de verwantschappelijke netwerken van mensen uit Buhera die zowel rurale als urbane gebieden omvatten.

In tegenstelling tot studies waarin hekserij/tovenarij geanalyseerd wordt in zogenaamde moderne contexten zoals de stad, de markt en staatspolitiek, benadrukt dit hoofdstuk het belang van de relatie tussen hekserij/tovenarij en verwantschap. Het analyseert welke verwantschappelijke relaties het meest vatbaar zijn voor beschuldigingen van hekserij/tovenarij en hoe dit 'discours' aangevochten wordt. Daarmee wordt uiteengezet hoe het hekserij/tovenarij 'discours' een plaats heeft in het denken en sociale leven van mensen, maar het niet volledig domineert. Dit hoofdstuk maakt tevens duidelijk dat de associatie van het domein van hekserij/tovenarij met relatief gesloten rurale samenlevingen, niet houdbaar is. In deze migranten samenleving blijven zij die in de stad leven niet gevrijwaard van de hekserij/tovenarij van hun verwanten op het platteland.

Hoofdstuk 6: Discussie

Het in dit proefschrift gepresenteerde perspectief op ruraal-urbane relaties en de betekenis van land, heeft een bredere relevantie. In dit laatste hoofdstuk wordt beargumenteerd dat de centrale rol die het land wordt toegedicht in het begrijpen van Zimbabwe's geschiedenis en huidige crisis, wel eens overdreven zou kunnen zijn. Deze nadruk op het belang van land is onderdeel van de gangbare tegenstellingen die geassocieerd worden met het onderscheid tussen het rurale en het urbane, die in dit proefschrift in twijfel is getrokken.

Dit discussiehoofdstuk neemt krantenartikelen en andere nieuwsbronnen over Zimbabwe's hedendaagse politieke en economische crisis als beginpunt voor een kritische analyse van twee gangbare 'discoursen' (vertogen) over Zimbabwe's geschiedenis en de oorzaken van de huidige crisis. In het dominante 'discours' staat het land als bron van rijkdom en ontwikkeling centraal. Dit 'discours' is geïnspireerd door de politieke economie en situeert de crisis in de rurale economie; in de zeer ongelijke distributie van het meest productieve land. Het benadrukt derhalve de productieve waarde van land. Het andere 'discours', dat getypeerd zou kunnen worden als 'contradiscours', presenteert ons een behoorlijk afwijkend beeld; een beeld van een industrialiserende samenleving in verval. Dit 'discours' benadrukt het economisch mismanagement van de overheid en richt alle aandacht op de economische parameters van de huidige crisis. Daarom is ook dit 'discours' van beperkt nut om de huidige politieke dynamiek te begrijpen. Een dynamiek waarin niet-economische waarden van land een belangrijke rol spelen, zoals de studies in dit proefschrift hebben laten zien.



Curriculum vitae

Jens Anton Andersson was born on 28 April 1968 in Utrecht, The Netherlands. In 1987, he went to the Wageningen Agricultural University to study Rural Development Sociology. During his studies he undertook a practical training period at the Directorate for International Co-operation (DGIS) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he participated in a study into development related research. He also conducted research on migration and agricultural innovation in south-western Tanzania, specialised in research methodology, and followed courses in theoretical sociology at the University of Amsterdam. In 1993 he graduated (MSc) with distinction (cum laude). In 1994, while preparing courses and supervising MSc students at the Department of Rural Development Sociology of Wageningen Agricultural University, he obtained a research scholarship from the Dutch VSB-foundation. This enabled him to conduct explanatory research in Buhera district, Zimbabwe, resulting in a PhD proposal on the dynamics of rural-urban relations in Zimbabwe. This proposal was awarded funding by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) in 1995, and hosted by the Department of Sociology of Rural Development of Wageningen University. From 1995 to 1998, while affiliated to the Department of Sociology of the University of Zimbabwe, he conducted fieldwork in both rural Buhera district and the urban centres of Harare and Chitungwiza. After completing the fieldwork, he taught MSc courses on development sociology and qualitative research methodology at the Department of Sociology of Rural Development, and published in books and journals.

Main publications

- Andersson, J. A. 1996 'Potato cultivation in the Uporoto mountains, Tanzania: An analysis of the social nature of agro-technological change', *African Affairs* 96(378), 85-106.
- Andersson, J. A. 1999 'The politics of land scarcity; Land dispute in Save Communal land, Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25(4), 553-78.
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Cover: Bus stop in Buhera district, Zimbabwe (front)

Harare bound bus, Buhera district (back)

Cover design, photographs and lay-out: Jens A. Andersson

Language correction: Catherine O'Dea