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Holding Body and Soul Together:

Utilizing Women's Options in a Changing Zimbabwean Society

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Introduction

"Wise women never sit and wail their woes but presently prevent the ways to wail." This African saying aptly describes the motivation and resilience behind African women's struggle for survival and a better life. Circumscribed by traditional and 'customary' practices, and restrictions imposed by the colonial order, women responded to their needs, on their own initiatives and did not hesitate to utilize the few opportunities that did exist to improve their lives. Often their strategies bespoke the limits of their resources as well as their desperation, yet they made rational choices based on necessity. The Ruwadzano/Manyano and Rukwadzano Rwe Wadzimai, women's organizations within the Methodist Churches, were created under such conditions.

Although the historical study of African religious organizations is not new, focus on African women's religious organizations, especially in the Christian church is just beginning. This is in spite of the fact that the Christian church can be said to be a women's movement, functioning as a "Women's Lib." in Southern Africa long before the term was invented.[1] Evidence from membership rolls reveals that African women vastly outnumber African men in Christian churches all over southern Africa. And the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, at least numerically is a "women's church," the overwhelming preponderance of women is reflected in the strength of its women's organization, the Rukwadzano Rwe Wadizimai, which literally means the "Fellowship of Women".[2] Although the manyano have been described as the "heartbeat of many a local church", with the exception of Deborah Gaitskell's study and F.D. Muzorewa's

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[1] B.G.M. Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1976

[2] Arthur Fridjof Christofersen, *Adventuring with God: The Story of the American Board Mission in South Africa.* Durban: Robinson and Co. Ltd., 1967; Norman Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa 1835-1880: African Christian Communities in Natal, Pondoland and Zululand.* London: Royal Historical Society, 1978; Sundkler, 1976; Marshal W. Murphree, *Christianity and the Shona.* New York: The Althlone Press, 1969.

article, they have been virtually excluded from historical analysis.[3]

The dearth of historical research on Manyano or Rukwadzano may be accounted for by the sociological interpretation of them as static, purely religious organizations where the women in the emotionalism of Manyano meetings, are described as "having wept it all off".[4] This has tinted much of the subsequent investigation of their function and scope, emphasizing their "emotionalism, other-worldly orientation".[5] However it has been suggested that the Rukwadzano tends to provide leadership for women's activities outside the church.[6] And there are indications that the organization allowed women more freedom through their pentecostal powers.[7] It is therefore the contention of this paper that the Manyano/Rukwadzano have been underestimated as a purely "otherworldly" coping mechanism. In surveying the development of these organizations we will show that the roots of the Manyano/Rukwadzano were firmly grounded in this world.

Women in Pre-colonial African Society

Prior to the coming of Europeans to what is now Zimbabwe African women occupied positions of importance and respect by virtue of their roles as wives and agriculturalists. Their primary responsibility of providing food for the family granted them access to land rights.

Women also played an influential role in the family as the Semukadzi, Tete or Bambomukunda. She was one's sister, father's sister, grandfather's sister or great-

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[3] B.A. Pauw, *Christianity and the Xhosa Tradition: Belief and Ritual Among Xhosa-Speaking Christians*. London: Oxford University Press, 1975. See Deborah Gaitskell, "Female Mission Initiatives: Black and White Women in Three Witwatersrand Churches, 1903-1939" University of London, 1981 and F.D. Muzorewa, "Through Prayer to Action: the Rukwadzano Women of Rhodesia" in T. Ranger and J.Weller, *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa.*

[4] Mia Brandel-Syrier, *Black Woman in Search of God.* London: Lutterworth Press, 1962.

[5] Pauw , 1975

[6] Murphree, 1969.

[7] T.O. Ranger, "Protestant Mission in Africa: The Dialectic of Conversion in the American Methodist Episcopal Church in Eastern Zimbabwe, 1900-1950." Paper presented at the Religion in Sub Saharan Africa Conference, Brigham Young University, October 22-25, 1986.

grandfather's sister. Her role was that of family lawyer, and judge in household quarrels, inheritance disputes, and intra-family relationships. Traditionally her power and influence stemmed from the fact that her lobola was used by some member, or members, of her father's family to secure their own wives, thus she assumed the title of Semukadzi "the owner of the wife."[8]

Women also had considerable influence as chiefs or chieftainess. Chief Tendai consolidated his control in Manicaland partly with the aid of many women, some of whom were relatives of the former chief, Bvumbi. Tendai's daughters, Chikanga and Muredzwa were also chieftainesses.[9] Muredzwa, was reputed to have had great wealth in cattle, many people working in her fields, and wisdom like that of Solomon. Her spiritual powers were also reknown. It was said that whenever she left her house for Mtasa rain would pour down to water her footprints so that enemies would be unable to follow her.[10] Yet tradition robbed her of nine of her children.

> After her first daughter Mukonyerwa, she had three sets of twins and followed by triplets, which brought the number to nine babies who were all thrown away being put in big pots, for in those days people preferred animals to twins of people. When a cow would give two calves, the owner would jump here and there with great joy. If a woman would give birth to twins, she would be left alone kept in a hut which no one was allowed to enter, to go nearby or to talk to her till a witch doctor would be asked to come and give her some medicine which would make her not to give birth to twins anymore.[11]

Despite the fact that women, like Muredzwa, presided over territory, had wealth in cattle, and commanded armies, they were powerless in the face of tradition.

The Effect of Colonialism

With the beginning of European settlement and subsequent expropriation of African land, the tasks and responsibilities of Africans, especially those of women, became

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[8]Nobath Gandanzara, Umbowo, 50, 5 (May 1967).

[9]Rev. E.L. Sells, The History of Manicaland Rhodesia 1832-1897 Resource Material, Old Mutare Mission Archives, n.d.

[10]Shepherd Machuma Files, "Historical Society 8", Old Mutare Mission Archives.

[11]Shepherd Machuma Files 5, Old Mutare Mission

increasingly difficult to accomplish. Land became the prominent issue for control of the African population. By 1897 reserves had been established for Africans, reducing the land which they could utilize to 37% in Mashonaland and 17% in Matabeleland. Although taxes had been imposed by the colonial government to force men into wage labour, access to land provided an alternative and in 1901 it is estimated that most Africans were still economically independent of wage labour. In fact, prior to 1904 Africans responded to economic opportunities created by the mines and supplied the bulk of the foodstuffs required as well as hiring out bullocks for transport; trade with the African population was estimated at £350,000.[12] As European agriculture sought to become competitive, legislation systematically channeled Africans into wage labour and out of agriculture. Further control of the African population was accomplished by regulating residence and business opportunities. By 1906 Africans in urban areas were prohibited by law to live outside 'locations' except as domestic servants. By 1915 it was recognized that the Reserves were unsuitable and would become increasingly so in the future.[13] As the population in the reserves increased, traditional agricultural methods became less effective.

The decrease in agricultural potential forced women, as well as men, to enter the wage labour market in an attempt to help make ends meet. By 1925 women and children assisted in reaping cotton and tobacco. These two crops provided the only outlet whereby women could earn money in the rural areas. It was believed that such work was especially suited for women since it required "quick fingered workers." Nevertheless employers were not willing to pay these adept workers the same wages as they paid men.[14] Many of the women employed in the tobacco grading shed had

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[12]G. Arrighi, "Labour Suplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia," *The Journal of Development Studies* 6,3 (April 1970), p.201.

[13]Resolution of the Wesleyan Methodist Synod of Southern Rhodesia, Jan. 1915. MMS Box 826.

[14]District Annual Reports of All Native Commissioners, December 31, 1925.S235/503. National Archives of Zimbabwe.

young children and babies which they were forced to take with them to work. The children were often left lying on blankets or sacking while the mothers worked. Even as late as 1951 these women received an average wage of only £1 per month plus food.[15]

Before the European invasion of Southern Rhodesia it was said that a woman could support a small family through her hoe and the use of a milch cow. Grain had not become commercialized by sale and barter to traders. However by 1930 the lifestyle of many Africans had changed significantly. £5 no longer meant the acquisition of wealth (a cow) since even that cow had to be dipped, and dipping fees necessitated money. Children were expected in most localities to go to school, with fees increasing, and school children were expected to be simply clad in European clothing. European utensils (including ploughs) had become near essentials. This made African women more dependent upon African men as the main wage earners.[16] However, employers were almost unanimous in their lack of concern for African women and children, stating, "We pay a man for the value of the work he does, we are not concerned with his wife and family."[17] The 1931 Land Apportionment Act divided Rhodesia into African and European areas and prohibited Africans from purchasing land outside designated areas. Between 1931 and 1941 an estimated 50,000 Africans moved to the already overcrowded Reserves. African competition for markets with white farmers was exacerbated by the Maize Control Amendment Act of 1934 which discriminated against African farmers. The 1951 Land Husbandry Act forced African farmers to destock and limited the amount of land available to any one farmer; as a result, 68.3% of the total male population was forced into migrant labour.[18]

These changes in society were most keenly felt by African women. As the frontline

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[15]J. Wilson Vera, Report on a Survey of African Conditions in Marandellas, Southern Rhodesia, Feb.-April, 1951.

[16]Chief Native Commissioner Memorandum, 1/27/30, S138/55. National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[17]Report of Committee of Enquiry to Investigate the Economic, Social and Health Conditions of Africans Employed in Urban Areas. Jan. 27, 1944, S1561/51. National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[18]J.F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner*, Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 1969, p. 30.

of stability for their families they were faced with the reality of providing for their families with significantly reduced resources in land and male labour. As some African men became involved in cash crops, utilizing the plough, the amount of land available for food production was also decreased. Added to these hardships, as increasingly larger numbers of men were driven from the rural areas, women were involved in unpaid forced labour working on the roads, thereby decreasing their potential time for agriculture.[19] Opportunities for African women in wage labour were restricted to agricultural work on white farms with its strenuous long hours and low wages or domestic service arrangements.

African women were not eager to engage in domestic service, in fact indications are that they avoided it. And for good reason, working and living conditions were akin to slavery. The Melsetter district had a reputation for having the highest percentage of young African women in domestic service. White farm owners forced the daughters of their tenant workers into such work. They received little or no wages.[20] And because of their parents' dependency on wage labour they had no avenue of complaint.

In the urban areas, the demand for female domestic servants grew as 'black peril' fears circulated in the 1930s. Europeans were divided over the issue of utilizing female labour in domestic service and thereby freeing male labour for other sectors. Accommodation was a major problem. Often these young women were locked up like prized possessions when the employers left the premises, or were under close scrutiny at all times. As one employer boasted of her domestic, "she had a room next to mine and was never out of my sight."[21] The rooms were small, 8' to 10' square with little ventilation, generally built on the verandah. The girls often had to use the latrine at the

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[19] Private Secretary, Premier's Office to Chief Native Commissioner, 9/16/39, S235/430. National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[20] Annual Reports, District Native Commissioners, 1929, S235/507, National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[21] Evidence Given to Committee on Native Female Domestic Service, Salisbury, 1932, S94, National Archives of Zimbabwe.

location rather than at their place of employment. The average domestic ate one meal a day consisting of mealie meal porridge and tea or coffee and a slice of bread, extras were "a tin of dripping and a little meat." Even this small amount of food was not always promptly dispensed. One woman did not get her first meal until 3 o'clock.[22] In addition, there was little or no social life for the domestic servant.

The hours of employment varied but generally accounted for the entire day, consisting of all domestic chores and in some instances the more strenuous chores like chopping wood. The wages were purposefully kept low, between 10 to 15 shillings a month. The prevailing thought was that these young women were not competent to handle more money than that. Even this small amount was often lost to the girls' fathers. There was no one to whom domestics could appeal for help in addressing their grievances.

Despite the growing demand for female domestic servants, African women were hesitant to supply the need; increasing their numbers only in times of economic distress. Even though domestic service was often a stop gap between school and marriage, many young women preferred to do without wages rather than be subjected to the tightly controlled existence of a domestic servant. Hence, for many years, much of the domestic work was performed by African men. By 1969 the male-female ratio was still 2:1.[23]

Yet the lure of the urban areas continued to attract women as the overcrowded Reserves failed to provide the necessary resources. In an attempt to maintain control of their labour and provide income women utilized the few opportunities that did exist. Women became involved in a circular migration: working in the rural areas during the agricultural season and then moving to the urban areas during the winter, engaging in petty trading. Young girls from the nearby kraals sold agricultural produce in town

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[22] Ibid.

[23] D.W. Drakakis-Smith, "The Changing Economic Role of Women in the Urbanizaiton Process: a Preliminary Report from Zimbabwe." *International Migration Review.* 19 (Winter 1984) p. 1283.

when possible.[24]

Many single women earned income by subletting. In 1930 an estimated 139 African women paid stand rent in the Bulawayo Municipal Location. Most of these women had owned stands for years. The rent was 5 shillings per month. The majority of the stands had four to six huts erected on them which the women rented out at 5 shillings per month. Perhaps sympathetic of the housing difficulties facing women, the female owners did not require Location permits from women renting from them. While many of the female stand owners lived on their stands with their reputed husbands, some resided on the mines outside the Locations and collected their rent at intervals.[25] Although municipal authorities expressed concern that these women might be exploiting their tenants, their real concern was probably that these women had escaped wage labour and had some minimal control over their lives. Women not in domestic service were branded as prostitutes.

Prostitution was a noticeable factor in the rise of mining and urban centers. It was yet another indication of the desperation of many women. Dissatisfaction with marital arrangements and the increasingly difficult life in the rural areas, lack of employment opportunities coupled with inadequate housing in the urban and mining centers propelled significant numbers of women into 'the oldest profession'. Many women appeared to prefer the relatively easy life on the mines with migrant laborers who could provide them with more money, better clothing, and required less work from them. As the Native Commissioner's reports suggested, "The women in all cases being very reluctant to return to their homes and families preferring a life of sloth and ease in a compound, with a more lenient master, to that experienced in their kraals...The woman eventually becomes infatuated with her easy life and lenient lover and later passes from

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[24]Evidence given to Native Affairs Commission, Enquiry into Salisbury Native Location, 12/6/30, S85, National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[25]J.C. Brundell, Chief Superintendent, B.S.A. Police to Staff Officer, 10/2/29, S235/440. National Archives of Zimbabwe.

man to man in the compound."[26]

Beer brewing also provided a means of keeping control of one's own labour and generated revenue for the payment of taxes. As a result it was highly resented by the colonial administration. Women in rural areas, often sent by their husbands, brought beer to the mining compounds for sale to mine workers. This proved to be a highly lucrative trade, with prices ranging from 2 to 6 shillings per calabash pot. But the women selling the beer had to carry it over twenty miles in many cases.[27] It was estimated that twice as much could be earned during a weekend brewing beer as could be earned in a month's working the mines.[28] However, pressure from the colonial administration in the form of police raids made the brewing of beer a difficult endeavor.

These strategies were the actions of individual women which did not affect the majority of African women. Most were left to devise other means of reducing the economic, social and psychological pressures brought on by societal changes due to colonialism. Increasingly women turned to Christianity as a means of alleviating some of their problems. Their reception was influenced by the impressions which Europeans had formed of African women.

European Impressions of African Women

Biased by their own cultural traditions, early Europeans quickly formed vivid impressions of African women which were long-lasting. Unaccustomed to viewing the physical labour which African women performed many Europeans were aghast at their condition and likened them to slaves. Some missionaries saw the Church as the only hope for African women,

> "I was much impressed with the backwardness of the native women. They do not, like the men, have occasion to go much from home and know nothing of the privileges and benefits of our Christian civilization. Some of their heathen customs fraught with abominable cruelty and

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[26]Native Commissioner's Report, Urungwe Sub-district, 1923. S235/501. National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[27]Supt. of Natives, Gwelo to C.N.C. Bulawayo, 12/7/08, P.R.O. Co. 417/475, National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[28]District Annual Reports, 1926, S235/504. National Archives of Zimbabwe.

> demoralization to their own sex they seem to cling to even more tenaciously than the men. Nothing can really set them free but the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.[29]

Coupled with the need to justify their own existence to their parent Church in England, African women became a cause to promote the spread of Christianity. As District Superintendent John R. Gates of the Methodist Episcopal Church proclaimed:

> To furnish a place and the instruments for God to make a WOMAN out of this down-trodden, helpless sex, is to be engaged in one of the biggest tasks that either the Church or the nation has to do....Were I a Hercules in body in mind and in soul I would use every ounce of my strength twice, yea, a hundred times to send home to the hearts of those sainted women of the home-land the appalling need of African womanhood. It is a conviction in my heart as deep as the center of its core that to save Africa we must save the African WOMAN, yea, if we are to lift Africa a foot out of the mire of paganism toward the Eternal Christ, we must life the African woman a little higher.[30]

Not all missionaries had such lofty ideals or deep commitment toward African women, but this impression of them and their condition was nearly universal among Europeans and set the tone for decisions on issues concerning women.

The issue of arranged marriages was a particular point of contention between European missionaries and the African community.

> There are places within 50 miles of Salisbury where there is no girl of the age of 15 or 16 who is not married, and that very often to a man many years her senior. This means that these mere children begin to bear children and to work hard in the fields, and have to face a life of drudgery. [31]

Missionaries found resistance from chiefs and headmen who refused to allow girls to attend the mission schools because they feared that the missionaries taught disobedience to their parents. This was not entirely unfounded. As one missionary admitted, "we do not teach disobedience to parents, but we are thankful to see that with some encouragement the girls are likely to strike a blow at these heathen customs of

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[29]Rev. J. White to Mrs. Bradford, April 30, 1918. MMS Box 1052.

[30]John R. Gates, District Supt, Umtali, East Central Africa Mission Conference. Minutes of the East Central Africa Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1911, p. 15-16.

[31]Rev. Latimer P. Hardaker to Miss Bradford, March 4, 1924. MMS Box 1052.

marriage which are so degrading.[32] The predominate belief among missionaries was that African women disapproved of these marriage arrangements and only needed a bit of prodding to openly defy them. As Mrs. H. Springer, missionary wife of Rev. Springer said, "To be or not to be free, that is the question which we must decide for the most of them. They are ready for freedom if we will only place it within their reach."[33]

Added to the missionary viewpoint was the government view that African women provided the means by which African men avoided working for wages. Many men, after working in the Transvaal, returned with money on an average of £30 per man. Almost invariably this money was immediately converted into what Native Commissioner Peter Neilsen, referred to as "real value" in the shape of a wife. "Whereas the getting of goods or wealth, through labour must necessarily result in the general and many-sided activity which we call civilization, the acquisition of women, the Natives' wealth, not through labour but through the unearned increment furnished by female children, must necessarily lead through continued inactivity to stagnation which is the antithesis of civilization."[34] Thus government and church were tacitly united in a stand against arranged marriages almost immediately from the outset. The predisposition was already set toward christianizing African women, all that was needed was for African women to make the first move.

The Lure of Christianity

The development of a "women's church" cannot be predicated upon the fact that women were more religious than men or that Christianity held an exalted place for African women, or even women in general. African women made rational choices based on their needs and the options which they had and, as a consequence, many

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Mrs. H. Springer, *Snapshot from Sunny Africa.* New York: The Kantanga Press, 1909, p 152.

[34] Peter Neilsen, N.C. Chipinga, Annual Reports. District Native Commissioners, January 23, 1929. S235/506.

responded by joining mission communities. The missions became havens for marginal women and girls: widows without means of support, those dissatisfied with their home life, those seeking refuge from arranged marriages and respite from abusive husbands. At the mission stations women found a different lifestyle - lessons in housekeeping, cooking, sewing, laundry, and hygiene and access to medical care. Mission life itself was an education and an entry into a changing world.

The image of the missions as havens in a changing and often confusing society was inspired by the fact that missionaries were themselves seen as protectors in some localities. Oswald Brigg explained his acceptance among the community around Gwenda mission:

> The progress of our work here has exceeded my most sanguine expectations. When I came, I received scarcely any welcome at all...and now the church is far too small for the congregations that gather...one of the greatest helps to our work here has been the cruelty and tyranny of the B.S.A. Co's native police! In these far remote districts the poor Mashona are sadly at the mercy of these police, who, against the law...extort goats, sheep, fowls or money with threats of flogging etc., often pretending to the ignorant Mashona that this was done under the authority of the government! Of course when I found all this out...I at once began protesting, upon which the Mashona around hailed me as a deliverer; and deputation after deputation of people came to put themselves under my protection![35]

Although the missionaries could provide little protection, and may therefore have been perceived as the lesser of two evils, the mission farms did provide access to land, medical care, and education.

The Methodist Church's plan of conversion was to develop Christian communities with its evangelists and teachers as the nucleus around which the community would be built. Each teacher or evangelist was to take one to five children into his home for which he was to receive wages for teaching and providing for this aggregate family. As friends and relatives also gathered, these grouping would develop into communities which would act as "beacons of light" and thereby attract others. The success of this concept was aided by the creation of reserves for Africans which pushed them from

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[35]Oswald Brigg to Mr. Hartley, 4/28/01. MMS Box 825.

their traditional lands. As more Africans became landless missionaries became faced with the dilemma of providing homes for more people than they had anticipated. A missionary visiting the mission at Pakuli in 1901 discovered that the church paid for the keep of six pupils, the native teacher kept thirteen others - including himself and wife. The wife pointed out a young woman who had arrived from a distant place, clad in a bit of bark kilt and asked, "Missionary, is there not cloth at Gikuki with which to cover that woman? She is a good woman, and has come a long way to us. We have no food, but she is digging, and in three months she can eat. We can't send her away."[36] The woman was given a covering and allowed to remain.

The Church's outspoken stand against polygamy and arranged marriages also attracted girls and women to the mission stations. Women also found some avenue of redress from abusive husbands. A woman who was beaten by her husband because her baby had died reported this to Rev. Coffin. The husband was made to carry stone for a week and threatened with a stiffer sentence if the abuse was repeated.[37] The missions thus became known as a place of refuge, especially for women. One of the earliest mission girls was Mufambiswa. She and her mother had been taken as slaves from Malawi and sold in Rhodesia. The mother was married near Gananzara. The daughter ran away from her purchaser and went to Penhalonga. From there she made her way to Old Mutare mission by following the telephone wires in 1905.[38] By 1925 young girls were being brought by their fathers to the missions when their mothers died. They were left to live with friends and attend school. At Epworth, wives were also left by their husbands who worked in the urban areas, without the general fear of losing them, which was associated with leaving wives in town locations.

Allowances were made for women without means of support. Before 1930 women

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[36]East Central Africa Mission Conference. Minutes of the East Central Africa Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1901. p. 25-26.

[37]Rev. Shirley D. Coffin, East Central Africa Mission Conference. Minutes of the East Central Africa Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1909, p. 55.

[38]Shepherd Machuma's Files 3, Old Mutare Mission Archives.

without husbands were given "free tickets" to live at the mission and attend services. Mrs. Ndonya, a widow, stayed at Epworth mission farm for eight years rent free. Although she was offered mealie meal rations, she preferred to plough for herself, having access to a plough, oxen and wagon. She was also excused from dipping fees.[39] This arrangement was originally made to help the poor widows, but by 1931 it was apparent that many women took advantage of this opportunity to find housing and means of taking care of themselves. Supt. Brown condemned the practice, pointing out that some widows who contributed only 3d for their tickets, were actually richer than some of the men who worked in town and could therefore afford to pay the full amount.[40] Beginning in March 1931 "free tickets" were abolished and each individual had their case reviewed as to the suitability of reduction of contributions. Many women remained on trial, although faithful members of the church, because they could not earn the necessary money for tickets; some were allowed to remain on the roll (in cases of extreme poverty) and at the mission, but some were removed from the roll and given "removal notes" to vacate the mission. Nevertheless by 1935 the number of widows was still quite noticeable. Mr. Machiridza drew attention to the fact that there were so many widows living in his part of the village that a man should be appointed to act as a kind of headman to them.[41]

Access to medical care was an integral part of the association with missionaries. Many people, women in particular, were attracted to Christianity after they had received medical treatment from missionaries. Rev. H. I. James, at Old Umtali mission, recorded how on one cold rainy day in March, 1934,

> A woman was brought in on a stretcher from the Premier Estate. She was dying. She had been very sick for several days and, according to native custom as a last resort, they had sent for her mother but her arrival had not brought the child, so they brought her here. We told them we were afraid the case was hopeless but that all who could pray should

[39] Epworth Farm Journal, 3/8/37, Methodist House Archives, Harare.

[40] Minutes of Epworth Leaders' Meeting, 7/29/31, Methodist House Archives, Harare.

[41] Minutes of Epworth Leaders' Meeting, 1/29/35, Methodist House Archives, Harare.

> do so as we worked. We quickly put her under a light anaesthetic and saved both mother and child. It was a miracle. It was touching to see the six heathen men on the ground as if in prayer. The young mother and her husband both expressed their desire to learn about a God who helped people in such a wonderful way.[42]

Another woman, Hanuchandiwoni, left to die outside her village, was found by Rev. Greeley and Dr. Gurney and taken to the mission where they performed emergency surgery. She became a Christian and continued to bring gifts to the doctor as long as he lived. Her daughter became one of the earliest mission women.[43] On one of her visits to a rural village evangelist worker Muriel Pratten found an old woman who consented to have her eyes bathed, "One could not restore her failing sight but the lotion soothed the smarting pain...later in the morning she found her way in church....When all the sore eyes, coughs and "tummy" troubles had been attended to, a few simple words were spoken to explain why we had come and to invite the women to begin to follow in the Christian way."[44] In this way many women were "brought to Christ."

Because Christianity was associated with Europeanization, to be a Christian meant starting a new life, and to a great extent it meant alienation from that which was African or traditional. Changes in lifestyle were evident among Christians. By 1910 the European (American) plough was slowly taking the place of the hoe. Better huts with large doors were to be seen in almost every kraal.[45] The new life-style often brought advantages for women. Since women had the responsibility for hoeing, the use of the plough significantly decreased their workload. Although Abraham Kawadza deliberated for some time over the efficacy of the plough, his three wives were delighted with it. His subsequent conversion to Christianity resulted in further changes for his wives. The youngest wife was allowed to be the wife of another man with whom she wanted

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[42]H. I. James, Old Umtali, Rhodesia Annual Conference. Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal church, 1934, p. 173.

[43]Shepherd Machuma's Files 10, Old Mutare Mission

[44]Muriel Pratten, Epworth Mission Circular Letter, 9/15/32. MMS Box 830.

[45]Tegwani Circuit Report 1909, 1/10/10. MMS Box 346.

to live; an inherited wife was placed with a brother. Kawadza retained his first wife and increased his maize crop that year to over four hundred bags.[46] By 1927 storekeepers reported a good trade in ploughs, having sold 110 for the year. Women reputedly preferred to marry men with a plough because they demanded less work from them.[47] In 1931 the Native Commissioner for Goromonzi complained that the old order was changing for the worse since women "wont' grind as they used to do and are always frequenting the stores."[48] And from Shangani it was reported that wood and water were increasingly hauled to the kraal by sleighs, as women put pressure to bear on their male relative to adopt the sleigh method.

African women's desire for European style dresses was noticeable as early as 1929. Vast quantities of imported materials were used up every year. As the Native Commissioner for Marandellas reported,

> all these dresses - and there is not a girl within the length and breadth of the Colony who does not wear one if obtainable - are made to a stock pattern of hideous design and grotesque proportions, at every trading station or store. One local trader employs no less than 12 machinists on his establishment in meeting the demands of his customers for such dresses....No doubt such apparel, however ill-made, dirty or ragged, may be regarded by many as an advance, since it is believed to show a growing sense of modesty compared with the wearers of the more scant but picturesque attire of former days.[49]

The new lifestyle was reflected in the surroundings of the Christian educated girls. Evangelist Muriel Pratten described the home of Dinah Zinyengere, a product of mission education, "everything was spotlessly clean....The little flower garden around the hut - the tidiness of it all - the embroidered pillow case and spotless bedspread, the little knick-knacks, so neatly arranged - the jar of flowers on the table - all spoke of an

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[46] G.A. Roberts, Mutambara Supt., Rhodesia Annual Conference. Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, 1946, p. 228.

[47] District Annual Reports, 1927. S235/505.

[48] Native Commissioners' Reports, 1931. S235/509. Zimbabwe National Archives, Harare.

[49] Annual Report, District Native Commissioners, 1929. S235/507, p. 49. Zimbabwe National Archives, Harare.

elevating influence at work."[50]

The change in the young women was more than just physical. In 1917 Grace Clark remarked, " the last bride who left us, such a beautiful, capable girl, who had not only been herself raised to high level of womanhood, but had spent several months sowing the seed in the newest white center, came to us a few short years ago, a terrified little heathen girl, pursued by an angry old man who had paid a few head of cattle for her."[51] They developed self confidence as well as a deep Christian devotion. Destined to be the wives of the evangelists and teachers, these mission girls were transformed into the foundation of a Christian vanguard.

Very popular with African women were "Mother's Meetings" which were held in the homes of the minister's wives. Over tea and cake or bread the Scripture was read, explained and discussed, advice on keeping homes and family members clean was dispensed, and childrens' ailments and simple remedies were discussed. By 1924 Rev. Hardaker could boast, "There are some 1200 natives living on the mission. Of these I estimate there are probably 350 women and girls....we have here the most advanced native women of Rhodesia. The attendance at the weekly meetings for women...numbers about 150 and these women are decently clothed, many of them able to read, most of them with some idea of cleanliness and all of them anxious to make progress."[52]

But this new lifestyle also attempted to mould African women into the stereotypical image of the dependent "housewife." By 1931, Rev. Holman Brown complained that "the wives and women spend too much time in their gardens and too little looking after their houses and children who must run around wild and undisciplined. It must not be laid upon the women so much to be the food-producers. The man (husband) in living

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[50]Muriel Pratten, "More Jottings from Mashonaland", 5/7/32. MMS Box 1052.

[51]Grace Clark, Rhodesia Mission Conference, Official Journal, Minutes of the Rhodesia Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1917, p33-34.

[52]Rev. L Hardaker to Miss Bradford, 3/4//24. MMS Box 1052.

Christian circles is the breadwinner and the woman (wife) is homemaker."[53]

The spiritual development of the mission girls was nurtured as carefully as the practical lessons in domestic science. Two hours of religious teaching every morning was augmented by weekly class meetings. The girls were encouraged to lead their own daily prayer meetings as well. As early as 1910 the girls had started to preach in church. It was impressed upon them that the redemption of their own people rested with them. Many of these young girls held regular services at the kraals and encouraged other girls to come to the mission. Many of the missionaries were surprised by the depth of spirituality which the girls exhibited. Fanne Quinton, at Old Umtali recalled, "It is a joy and an inspiration to hear the testimonies and prayers of these girls. They tell me that God is real to them....They appear to me to be earnest Christians those who are Christians. It is not hard to teach them about God. They have believed in Him a long time, but they did not know His name."[54] The seriousness with which these girls accepted their spirituality and responsibility is exemplified by Emma Nourse observations in 1911: "Some weeks ago in a testimony meeting a little girl about ten years of age rose to speak. She found it hard to do so as some strong emotion was filling her heart. At last I found that she was sobbing because her heart was sad over the heathenism of her mother and family."[55] The isolation of these girls from their communities and culture increased their devotion, as well as the burden of Christianity.

The wives of the teachers and evangelists were also subjected to a rigorous training program at the missions designed to produce good Christian wives. The program included one hour per day in scholastic work, an hour per day for sewing, and instruction in household matters such as lessons in hygiene and care of babies.

The Birth of Ruwadzano/Manyano

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[53]Rev. Holman Brown, Minutes of Leaders Meeting at Epworth, 10/28/31, Methodist House Archives, Harare.

[54]Fanne O. Quinton, Fairfield Girls' School, Old Umtali, Rhodesia Mission Conference, Official Journal, Minutes of the Rhodesia Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1917, p. 47.

[55]Emma D. Nourse, East Central Africa Mission Conference. Minutes of the East Central Africa Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1910, p. 25.

The Ruwadzano/Manyano developed out of the Women's Prayer Union of the Wesleyan Methodist Church which dates back to 1895. The organization was called a prayer-cycle on similar lines to that of the Gleaner's Union of the C.M.S.[56] As the Methodist church spread into Rhodesia from South Africa, the idea of forming a women's prayer union came with it. In 1917 Mrs. Matambo, the wife of one of the African ministers from South Africa, was organizing the women's prayer meetings in the Bulawayo circuit.[57] The Methodist Synod passed a resolution to extend the prayer union throughout the district in 1920, making Mrs. John White president, Mrs. Herbert Carter secretary and treasurer, and Mrs. Matambo and Mrs. Lewanika organizers for Matabeleland and Mashonaland respectively. Early references in 1921 suggest that the Ruwadzano, as it was beginning to be called by that time, was rapidly spreading.[58] The movement obviously fulfilled a need among African women.

> Some of them walked long distances to be present....Many of them very poorly educated, their resources are slender in the extreme. But they have a meeting every Thursday for prayer and consultation. If these leaders know little they are certainly ahead of the rank and file. They give, of their store, what they can. On practical everyday things they consult, as well as matters pertaining to the Kingdom of God.[59]

Despite the fact that its officers were European, their influence and guidance within the organization continued to be a subliminal issue within the movement. As one member recalls, "My mother started the Ruwadzano in her own area, it wasn't the white woman...the white minister's wife who came and listened to them. It was the evangelist's wives who mobilized the women in the rural areas....the white lady would just come around each time there was going to be the annual conventions."[60] By 1924,

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[56] Womens Work Minutes Book VII Oct. 1895 - Sept. 1901. MMS Box 1105.

[57] Quarterly Meetings Minutes of Wesleyan Native Church, Bulawayo, 6/20/17, Methodist House Archives, Harare.

[58] Rev. Latimer P. Hardaker, Epworth Circuit Report 1921. MMS Box 349.

[59] Nengubo Circuit Report, 1925, MMS Box 1257.

[60] Interview with Mrs. Mapondera, Harare, 3/18/88.

the wives of the mission evangelists were still the primary Wesleyan contacts with the movement.[61] Although in January, 1928 Rev. Frank Noble, Chairman of the Southern Rhodesia district, claimed that the movement was under the "control" of the Synod, by June of that year he amended his statement to admit that the movement was under the "supervision" of the Synod Committee.[62] In actuality the missionary supervision of the Ruwadzano was a tenuous one at best. Evidence suggests that there was some resentment to the imposition of Synod "control" over the organization. Reverend Moses Mfazi bitterly complained of "those who were trying to take for themselves from the natives, the glory which was their's in the Manyano work."[63]

The movement spread from the Wesleyan Methodist church to the Methodist Episcopal Church (United Methodist). In 1928 an evangelist from Waddilove, Kanyangarara, was transferred to Old Umtali mission for training. His wife Rebecca, who had accompanied him, found a spiritual vacuum among the wives of the evangelists' and teachers' and she started to organize them. The women began to meet in the early hours of the morning, around 4 a.m., as they gathered firewood, talking over their problems, praying, giving testimonies and sharing their experiences. When Mrs. Kanyangarara left, Lydia Chimonyo took over and is given credit for starting the Rukwadzano Rwe Wadzimai around 1929. This 'fellowship of women' grew as other women were invited to join them in private prayer at a place called 'chingando' on the Premier Estate. The group of women attracted the attention of church officials. One morning Rev. Chimbadzwa followed them and, seeing their purpose, gave them permission to meet in church. As the husbands of these women completed their studies and were transferred along with their wives to other areas, the women spread the movement.

Within the patentedly paternalistic society of the MaShona the strength of the

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[61] Rev. Latimer P. Hardaker, Letter to Miss Bradford, Sec. W.A., March 4th 1924. MMS Box 1052.

[62] Rev. Frank Noble, Letters to Bradford, Jan. 21st, June 8th, 1928. MMS Box 1052.

[63] Rev. Herbert Carter, Letter to Rev. Moses Mfazi. 12/23/27. MMS Box 828.

Ruwadzano is all the more remarkable. The vitality of the movement was based on the women's own perception of their right to preach. Quoting St. Paul, "In faith stand as men" the women preached, and held their own revivals, which were responsible for many men, as well as women, joining the church. This notion of women having the right to preach developed over time and was not shared by many African men. Early opposition to the movement was based on the belief that "there was nothing in the Bible which said that women could go to heaven, or that they could be allowed to preach." [64] For many women, membership in the Ruwadzano placed them and their marriages in jeopardy. Most of the members were wives of non-Christians. Husbands tore up their red blouses, forbid them to attend meetings, refused to allow them to contribute to the Church, and married second wives (which was against the rules for membership).[65]

The women eventually won their rights to preach by their sheer numbers, their devotion and enthusiasm, and their victories over traditional ngangas, which by the 1940s were legendary. During one such confrontation,

> the revival group came to the village of a native doctor, who threatened them with a spear that they dare not enter his village with the old story of Jesus. When the men in the group saw these threats they advised a retreat, but would they take this cowardly advice? NO! They all shouted with one voice "If this man kills us, go and tell the Umfundisi that we have died in Christ's name." When this Isangoma saw their bravery he sat down and permitted them to speak to his wives and children. He also sat down and heard the Word.[66]

Diplomatically the Ruwadzano paid particular attention to the chiefs and headmen in their areas, praying with them and sending special invitations to them to attend their revivals. They also exhibited their willingness to serve them as well as Christ: working in Chief Mutambara's fields; helping in their Ishe's garden at Gandanzara; giving wood to elderly chiefs' wives at Mutambara; making bricks for the headman's house in Chiduku; contributing toward the funeral expenses of the headman; collecting firewood

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[64] Rev. Latimer P. Hardaker to Miss Bradford, 3/4/24, MMS Box 1052.

[65] Rev. M.J. Rusike, Makwiro Circuit Report, 1941. MMS Box 1262.

[66] Ruwadzano/Manyano Report 1947. MMS Box 1264.

for the Ishe's wife; cleaning Chief Mtasa's court and yard, and reaping the rupoki of an ailing headman's wife.[67]

By 1932 the organization had formally developed the objective "to serve Christ and others." They met with women who had problems in their homes. Through conversation, prayers and shared experiences they were able to provide some practical and psychological relief.

During the 1930s and 40s the Rukwadzano provided freedom of movement, with preaching tours, revivals, and conventions while enhancing the self concept of the women. This was during a period when African women were receiving criticism from all sides. Even missionaries described African men living in Locations away from tribal control as "the prey of wandering women."[68] Native Commissioner files report the dissatisfaction of headmen and chiefs with the behavior of women. The government officials were sympathetic to the demands of African men, although they felt that women had not been given any additional freedom under their administration, but that the women had merely taken advantage of the lack of control exercised by their male relatives. "In the towns steps have been taken by the Native Dept, with the co-operation of the police, to reduce the number of women who have no legitimate means of maintaining themselves. Also whenever the guardian of a woman desires to get her back, he is given every assistance."[69] The inability of African men to "control" women resulted in the collaboration of the Colonial government and African men in the form of the Natives Adultery Ordinance. This ordinance, which made adultery a criminal offense, was aimed at curtailing the movement of African women.

The establishment of a uniform, by which the Ruwadzano became known was originally developed to ease the burden of the poorer members. Many women only had

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[67]Rhodesia Annual Conference. Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955.

[68]Report of the Work in the Southern Rhodesia District, January, 1936, Methodist House Archives, Harare.

[69]Chief Native Commissioner, Notes on Rhodesia Agricultural Union Agenda, 1933, S1542/A6, p. 558.

one dress and when they attended the revivals or conventions they had to take off that one dress and wash it, thereby missing the activities while it dried. So to lessen the embarrassment of the poorer women a uniform was instituted. However the uniform became a badge of respectability and status for the women, so much so that non-Christian women began to copy it and wear red blouses. Within the Wesleyan Methodist church the black skirt symbolizes sin, the red blouse, the blood of Jesus which washes and cleanses away sin, and the white cap and collar, the purity of salvation in Christ. In the United Methodist Church the blue dress represents courage, and the red hem of the arms, belt and collar represent the cleansing blood of Christ.

To the Ruwadzano Christianity was a liberating force for women as well as men. In 1941 Mrs. Titus Maranke eloquently expressed the motivation and potential of the Rukwadzano:

> The women of Africa were scattered about just like the bones on an open valley. They used to be sold to far countries for life. They used to be stolen by robbers.... They knew nothing about what women of other countries were doing. They were like slaves....The men had no thought that a woman could do anything. Whatever a woman tried to do was called foolishness and waste of time. The men had a saying, "The best way to advise and explain things to a woman is to scold and beat her." God saw that the hope of the women of Africa was lost like the hope of the dry bones on the open valley and he sent us His Living Word. Today "There is a noise and behold a shaking and the bones come together, bone to bone."... There is a saying among our people, "There is a secret power in a woman by which she can send a king to fetch her a cooking stick."[70]

However, this secret power of the Ruwadzano was never utilized to its fullest extent. Church committees sought to curtail the activities of the organization. It was suggested that small group meetings be held daily with "suitable persons" in charge, and that one or two larger meetings in charge of a minister also be held daily. The use of money in buying food for the conventions was deemed extravagant and the all-night singing was deplored.[71] The women were accused of having "dancing meetings" at

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[70]Mrs. H.M.Titus Maranke, *Official Journal*, 1941, p.164-166.

[71]Committee on the State of the Church, Rhodesia Annual Conference. Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, 1941., p. 161.

their revivals and the all night revivals were eventually prohibited in the Wesleyan Methodist church. Group meetings came under the jurisdiction of the circuit president.[72] Ironically, some of the opposition came from the husband's of Rukwadzano members in the Church who felt that the organization was too strong. "Some would say, are you trying to be bishops, you women! We don't know what you are doing now. You are trying to make a church come under Rukwadzano! The church is the church!"[73] Admittedly many women of the church came through Rukwadzano, first coming to their meetings and later joining the Methodist church. But despite the tightening controls, the organization continued to flourish.

Marginal women continued to be a special concern of the Rukwadzano. Widows, if they were not inherited by their husband's brothers or sons, were without support. The Rukwadzano plowed and weeded their fields, supplied food, clothing, and firewood to these women.

The Rukwadzano also defied tradition by helping women who had multiple births, giving them clothing, food, and emotional support. Tradition had dictated that these babies were killed immediately after birth and the mother was placed in isolation until after she was 'doctored' by the traditional healer.

The Ruwadzano movement grew out of the needs of African women. The expertise which the women had gained at mission stations like Old Umtali was shared with other women. By organizing and holding conventions information was shared and women reaffirmed their faith in God and themselves and were encouraged to persevere. While not completely solving the problems, they eased the burden of those in need: making bricks, carrying water for the sick, supplying mealie meal, and attending crops. They pooled their meagre resources and thereby began to affect some small changes in their environment. Through the extensive network of the Rukwadzano women channeled emotional support through the church and established programs to deal with economic

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[72]Wedza Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 10/5/36, 9/46, Methodist House Archives, Harare.

[73]Interview with Mrs. Sarah Munjoma, Matendendze School, 3/29/88.

and social problems. By the 1960s Ruwadzano women had begun to branch out to organize women's clubs in the townships.

Liberation War

The liberation war attested to the devotion and spirituality of the Ruwadzano/Manyano and proved that it was more than a stepping stone to a new lifestyle. Many members gave their lives for their faith. As very visible Christian representatives they often came into conflict with both the freedom fighters and Ian Smith's Security Forces. Particularly in the rural areas, mixed signals were the order of the day as the larger struggle for African liberation was often played out in microcosm between the forces of Christianity and spirit mediums. Since Christianity had meant adopting a Western way of life to the detriment of African culture, during the war "freedom fighters tried to push one issue - their own culture. And unfortunately its not everyone of them who really understood what the issue was. So they also felt that brewing beer the African way is African culture and therefore at times they would force even some of those Christians to do that because they felt this was the African way of life."[74]

As the liberation struggle intensified, it became increasingly difficult to carry on Christian activities. By 1974 many Ruwadzano members had ceased to attend meetings in the rural areas. Some branches consisted of predominantly older women. Women were having difficulty getting to the conventions, "women make great efforts to come, some walking many miles and not always finding easy cooperation from their families."[75] Often Ruwadzano/Manyano members were forced to bury their Bibles and uniforms, putting them on when they arrived at their meetings which were held in one another's homes or out in the bush. Some had their uniforms, Bibles and hymn books burnt or destroyed. One member who dared not be seen with her Bible and hymn book, kept her lectionary notes hidden in her shoe.

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[74]Interview with Dr. John W. Kurewa, Parliament, 12/29/87, Harare.

[75]Work Among Women Commitee Report, 11/2/74, Methodist House Archives, Harare.

By 1978 the Ruwadzano had become involved in refugee work as more people migrated out of the wartorn rural areas. Churches were closed, many ministers retreating to the urban areas where they became 'squatters'. Membership in urban areas increased as people came to live with relatives.

In the rural areas church meetings were reduced to house fellowships by 1979. Funerals were used as excuses for Christians to gather and have fellowship. "When someone died we would pray together. Some would be drinking beer outside, some would be praying inside."[76] But even at funerals caution had to be observed, so as not to offend the forces who controlled a particular area. As one Christian recalled, "My mother died in November 1979. We went to the funeral. The Manyano were singing and as long as we stuck to traditional songs it was alright. But the Manyano went too far, they started singing Christian songs. The guerillas stepped in and said "You have strayed now, stop it." So they stopped."[77]

The conflict between Christianity and African culture caused many to re-examine their lifestyle. On mission farms some tenants dropped Christian living, some drinking beer publicly. Schools were closed. The African Customs and Beliefs Committee in the Methodist Church began to discuss African healing practices, spiritual healing, ancestral worship and African liturgies.

The relationship between the Ruwadzano and "the boys" often depended on the personalities of those in the occupied area, as well as their mutual concerns.

> Some of the freedom fighters would come to the ministers saying 'war is very hard for us, please pray for us.' This was blessing for us. You could do it the whole night without any fear. We could gather when 'the boys' needed something, gather clothes and money and send to the freedom fighters, not as Christians but just helping, with a note "we know you are our sons and daughters and are fighting for the freedom of this country and we are with you."[78]

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[76] Interview with Mrs. Chombo, Harare, 3/17/88.

[77] Interview with Dr. Chirenji, University of Zimbabwe, 2/17/88.

[78] Interview with Mrs. Chombo, Harare, 3//17/88.

Nevertheless, the Ruwadzano were often caught between a 'rock and a hard place' - suspected by Ian Smith's Security Forces of aiding 'the boys' and at the same time harassed by 'the boys' for being affiliated with a Christian organization. Some members were locked up in confined areas known as "keeps" or "protected villages." But even within these "protected villages" some Ruwadzano members organized themselves as branches. Some were beaten, tortured, maimed. Many church members and leaders were killed. One report from Marandellas disclosed that ten Ruwadzano members had died.

The members of the Rukwadzano Rwe Wadzimai were affected by denominational affiliation with Bishop Muzorewa, even though his political office was separate from his religious office within the United Methodist Church. Rukwadzano members did take part in his political campaign, but as individuals, rather than as Rukwadzano. However the fact that they were very visible in their red and blue dresses lends support to the contention that even if Bishop Muzorewa was not supported by the Rukwadzano, they were used to render political support whether they intended to do so or not. Nevertheless, three MPs during his tenure were Rukwadzano women. Therefore the Rukwadzano had some bearing on the decision to include women in the administration.

Conclusions

Confronted with both traditional and 'customary' practises which discriminated against, or ignored them, African women looked to those with whom they could best empathize, those who shared similar problems. They developed support groups among themselves. The fact that these support groups were established within the church are a result of the options which the church offered for women. African women were responsive to the changes in society if they were viewed as beneficial to them - the use of the plough, acceptance of medical facilities, lessons in hygiene, and access to land on mission farms.

The establishment of support groups is important to individuals in transitional periods. Support groups provide sanctuary, a medium through which individuals can filter information from the outside world, and provide validation of one's worth. The

growing importance of the uniform for the Ruwadzano became a badge in the face of discrimination and hardship which served to reassure the women that they were worthy, even if only in the eyes of God. The harmful effects of absent or confusing feedback in a changing environment, such as African women in colonial Rhodesia found, could be reduced in the case of individuals who were effectively embedded in their own smaller social networks which provided them with consistent opportunities for feedback about themselves and for validations of their expectations about others. The weekly meetings during which they could reassure each other and plan effective strategies to confront their problems acted as a buffer in an often hostile world. As with the Ruwadzano, support could take the form of personal service, cash assistance, or work assistance.

Within the family, women are crucial to stability. They are responsible for the health and welfare of children, preparation and allocation of food, and dwelling maintenance. Yet the changing society in Zimbabwe made their tasks overwhelming. In times of extreme stress such as existed under colonialism, women faced most acutely the consequences of the changes in society. The importance of creating relative stability within the confines of urban and rural life was particularly difficult. African women were concerned with the difficulties which they encountered: the superhuman tasks of providing sufficient food in the rural areas; the frequency of desertion by a spouse; undesirable employment opportunities; the lack of housing and reliable child care in urban areas. The women's concerns were definitely of this world. Far from being escapist and "otherworldly", the establishment of women's organizations within the church gave them a means of addressing these issues as well as giving vent to their emotional and psychological distress. The importance of coping with stress has until very recently been underestimated. The issue of resilience has taken on such importance that it is now seen as a form of resistance.[79] Shaped by the needs of the

[79]Belinda Bozzoli, *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983.

women themselves, their agenda was therefore a microcosm of the social problems confronting the African community.