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MATABELELAND AFTER THE DISPERSION: A STUDY IN  
INVOLUNTARY POPULATION MOVEMENTS, THEIR ECONOMIC  
& POLITICAL IMPACT IN THE ERA OF COLONIALISM,  
1893 - 1960

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by

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AUGUST 1988

## PREFACE

This paper comes as a result of seven months' work at the National Archives, Harare. The time which saw the production of this paper was punctuated by a number of obligations falling upon the author throughout the entire period of archival research, among them fieldwork in the Midlands Province for a forthcoming independent study of that area. Time divided amongst numerous obligations has never been known to produce an atmosphere conducive to a thorough treatment of just one of them, unless such a time division lacked a single element of impartiality. This paper therefore comes before a thorough and exhaustive investigation of the relevant archival material has been conducted. The search for these is an ongoing process, and it is hoped to unearth more relevant files which, taken together with oral interviews soon to be conducted in Matabeleland and elsewhere, will make possible a reconstruction of the history of rural Matabeleland between 1893 and 1960.

Given the inconsistency of visits to the Archives by the author and the almost absence of relevant oral interviews, it can only be expected that at this stage the paper cannot be entirely relied upon as truly representative of the historical developments in rural Matabeleland in the period of reference. Yet it is necessary that the paper should come out now, in view of its forward - looking nature. The arguments it advances at the moment may be premature, but at its most development stage these will certainly be worthy making.

It has been necessary to conceive of this study in view of the inexhaustive nature of the historical works that have devoted a fraction of their time to involuntary population movements, particularly their development/ underdevelopment aspects.

## INTRODUCTION: PROJECTED AREAS AND PROBLEMS

The study of rural society in colonial Zimbabwe is by no means a new phenomenon in Zimbabwean historiography. Indeed the period covered by this study has seen the publication of historical works which, if only partially, have sought to treat the conditions of the rural Africans on a country-wide scale. But, as this study seeks to show, increasingly very few of these works have seriously devoted their space and time to an honest diagnosis of the conditions of the rural Africans under colonialism. To a very large extent such works have failed in this regard simply because they were not meant to be treatises of conditions obtaining in the rural areas consequent upon colonization. A serious handicap of most of these works has been their tendency to view everything in European terms. For instance most, if not all, of these works have often adopted a dualist approach, seeking to cover the processes of historical development in both racial entities. In the end such works have proved to be lopsided, giving ultra-attention to the European side of the colony's history while paying scant regard to the African one. The result has been the characterization of such works with a type of Eurocentricism which has often led to very significant historical developments in rural colonial Zimbabwe being sacrificed at the altar of the history of European capitalist development, social and political supremacy. No work has decidedly tilted the scales in favour of the evolutionary processes in the African areas and their consequences for the Africans during the period under examination, nor has a history exclusively Afro-centric, touching on developments of European origin only in as far as these shaped the historical process in the rural areas, been written. We have thus general works, such as that of Robin Palmer, which expertly deal with land-related racial issues but which fail as diagnoses of conditions obtaining in African rural areas because they set out to deal with a combined diluted history of the two racial societies. Since Palmer<sup>1</sup> himself admits that his work is almost entirely based on archival material with no fieldwork undertaken by him in the rural areas of colonial Zimbabwe, it can be argued that it was never his intention to write a history with an African bias. A serious omission of Palmer's work has been its failure to see involuntary population movements from areas designated European to the so-called African Reserves consequent upon the implementation of certain legislative measures in colonial Zimbabwe, to which he devotes so much of his time, as a deliberate settler-policy to interfere with African development.

The only work which has made any serious attempt to address the problems of involuntary population movements, and which has a lot of direct relevance

for the present study is that by Per Zachrisson.<sup>2</sup> However, Zachrisson's work has its own weaknesses. For instance, only one chapter seriously addresses itself to involuntary population movements and, apart from failing to make a critical analysis of the implications for the human and animal-land ratio, of pouring the displaced Ndebele into the Mberengwa District, Per Zachrisson pays scant or no attention to the economic and political hardships caused to the displaced Ndebele by the forced removals. He fails too to make an analysis of the relationship imposed on the Ndebele and Shona by forced removals in the areas of social mixture. This is probably attributable to the fact that, like Robin Palmer, Per Zachrisson set himself a task to write a bipartite history that of colonialism and Missionary activity in the Mberengwa District. In this way little space was left for the history of the African areas proper. The present study therefore attempts to fill an obvious gap in Zimbabwean history by concentrating on population movements in Matabeleland and their attendant disruptive effects on the Africans on a political, social and economic level.

A study of this nature, however, is subject to a number of constraints. In the first place the Matabeleland study of involuntary population movements suffers from a serious lack of documentation. This has important implications for the study as a whole in that it preconditions the narrow theoretical framework within which the whole discussion will operate. In the light of the general dearth of sources, particularly of a published nature, the study has to draw very heavily upon archival material and the author's fieldwork in Matabeleland and other areas of Zimbabwe.<sup>3</sup> In the second place very little is available in the National Archives of Zimbabwe on the period 1893-1897, a problem attributable to the fact that up until 1898 the Native Department which was established in 1894 for the first time, had not yet organised itself on a sound footing. What is probably more important is the fact that while there are few or no written secondary sources on the subject during the entire period covered by this study, what is available in the name of Archival material on the period 1893 - 1902 is extremely disappointing. Apart from the Annual Reports of the Chief Native Commissioner for the Province of Matabeleland for the year ending 31st March, 1898 in which is mentioned the movement into southern Bulalima - Mangwe District of Chiefs Mphoeng and Raditladi and their people from neighbouring Botswana, and a few small-scale movements of people in and around the Matopos area after 1893 and 1897, virtually nothing is said about population migrations in the early colonial period.<sup>4</sup> At the risk of repetition, it is possible to attribute this to the unstable nature of the Native Department until 1898. But it must be pointed out that whites disinterestedness in African affairs, save in matters

concerning labour, commerce, revenue, African stock and agriculture, characterised the entire early colonial period. Thus although there might have been population movements, forced or otherwise, in the first few years of colonization these seem to have not been taken cognisant of by the nascent white administration which had an arresting eye on matters economic. The economic activities of the Matabeleland Africans had to be jealously watched from the outset since upon their subsequent destruction lay the success of the European economy. Another explanation probably lies in the fact that no census of the Africans was taken until much later. But all the same the requirements of labour demanded that the number of people residing in a particular district be known—hence the rough estimations of the African population from time to time in the early colonial period.<sup>5</sup> The tenuity of sources characterising this important period in the history of colonial Zimbabwe means that the present study of Matabeleland is deprived of the necessary background information to the history of population migrations. This is a serious limitation to the study in that earlier theoretical arguments it could fall back on are simply not available. This legacy of emptiness obviously bequeathes to the present study problems of analysis and interpretation. In the third place is the fact that archival material covering the period 1902 - 1960, as supplier of data that can be used in a study of this nature, is in the main inconsistent meaning that this paper has to contend with gaps which are not easy to fill. Since such inconsistency may be viewed as reflecting lack of interest in African affairs in the majority of Native Commissioners, this paper is left in too much speculation as to the really nature of things in the African areas. Nevertheless there were occasionally devoted Native Commissioners whose reports could be relied upon as true pictures of what went on in the rural area, as this paper will endeavour to show. In the fourth place, the fact that this study lacks predecessors means that precedents must be looked for beyond the borders of Matabeleland and colonial Zimbabwe, a point of weakness in that theories may be brought in which fail to adequately suit the Zimbabwean situation.

The first serious historical work on Matabeleland came in 1976<sup>6</sup> but, apart from covering only the first three years of the present study's period of reference, this otherwise good work contains very little of theoretical value for the present discussion. This is easy to explain. In the first place the present study covers the period 1893 to 1960 while Cobbing's concentrates on the period 1820 to 1896. This spatial disparity between Cobbing's work and the present study actually makes the two enquiries dichotomous. In the second place Cobbing set out to write an exclusive history of the Ndebele while the present study treats the population of

Matabeleland from a macrocosmic level. In the third place the study in hand operates within a triangular framework of relations between the colonial state and the Matabeleland Africans, and the colonial state and the settlers/land companies on the one hand and the settlers/land companies and the Matabeleland Africans on the other to analyse the genesis, implications and impact of involuntary population movements and related developments in Matabeleland. The difference between this and Cobbing's work is also registered by the fact that, spatial disparities set aside, the latter's major concern and task was to correct the general misconceptions about the Ndebele state, particularly its tripartite politico-economic-military structure.<sup>7</sup> In the fourth place the present study extends beyond the borders of Matabeleland to trace the effects of the overspilling tendency of population migrations from this western part of the country - a necessary digression which seeks to impress upon the reader the idea that at the end of such population movements resettlement took place, not in a vacuum, but in areas which were already populated by non-Ndebele speakers. The study traces these developments in an attempt to establish attitudes on an ethnic, political and economic level, of the intermingling population groups. It will also be argued in this paper that, contrary to R. Kent Rasmusen's conclusions,<sup>8</sup> the migrations of the Ndebele did not end about mid-1839, but resumed after a fifty-four-year lull, to continue to significantly influence the African population structure of parts of colonial Zimbabwe. The migrations covered by this study only differ from those described by Rasmusen in that they do not assume an inter-territorial nature. Rather they are localized and mainly bipartite in nature, allowing their being categorized into Matabeleland to Matabeleland migrations (tentatively-dubbed short distance migrations) and Matabeleland to beyond Matabeleland migrations (long distance movements). However, the description of the first category of movements as short-distance may be deceptively too general given the nature of the area under examination. Indeed certain migrations extending beyond Matabeleland may also be short-distance in nature while migrations confined to Matabeleland may occasionally be long-distance.

The migrations forming the subject of the present study may be conceived of as falling into two major categories: involuntary migrations and semi-voluntary migrations. The forces determining these two types of population movements need to be understood from the outset. A central argument of this study is that the genesis of involuntary and involuntary-related population movements in Matabeleland between 1893 and 1960 lay in the 1893-4 Anglo-Ndebele war. The course and termination of this war witnessed the appropriation of land from the Africans by individual white settlers on a scale

hitherto unprecedented in the history of the nascent Rhodesian colony.<sup>9</sup> Almost overnight the foundations governing the unstable nature of the relations existing between the Matabeleland Africans and the land, and which characterized the entire period under examination, were firmly laid. In this way the military conquest of Matabeleland in 1893-4 may be viewed as a period of transition during which the Ndebele and their immediate neighbours entirely lost control over the land. The Matabeleland Africans found themselves being transformed into squatters on the land as most of this fell into European control. Herein lay the roots of involuntary population movements which would characterize the history of rural Matabeleland during the period covered by this study. An important object of this paper is to lay bare these roots of African underdevelopment in Matabeleland: for instance, apart from robbing the Africans of their agricultural potential and ability by means of lending precacity to the human-land relationship, the new developments at once created conditions favouring labour migrancy. Needless to say that this slowly but surely nibbled at the ability of the Africans to develop their own areas. It will be contended that any change that affects the structure of land-holding, particularly when this is governed by a new capitalist ownership of the land resources, and the coercive and semi-coercive uprooting and removal of people tied to such land by a long history of free interaction with it has the effect of diluting the enterprising nature of the people affected while ecological disasters in the areas used as collecting depots for such displaced people, more often than not, become the order of the day.

In rounding off this introductory section it must be pointed out that in a study of this nature voluntary and involuntary movements of people are often too hard to distinguish—one from the other. However, three types of movements in Matabeleland can be noticed: (i) those based on cattle-owners making a decision to move because conditions were not working in their favour. Indeed the fact that they were living on privately owned land with its own set of conditions of residence such as limit to the number of cattle they could keep upon the land and the closed nature of the area open for their own use (areas they could use for their own purposes were clearly defined for them by the owners of the land) meant that they were forced to contend with increasingly inhibiting factors, not only in the way of stock-raising but also that of crop cultivation. (ii) Those based on people deciding to move as a way of evading rents and tenant labour on European farms, and (iii) Movements determined by legal force such as when the land-owners and land companies and the colonial government made use of legal privilege to evict the Africans off the land. The last type of movements



could be characterised by physical force at times. A look at some of the developments taking place in Matabeleland as early as 1897 will demonstrate what the author means. In August of that year Bonnar W. Armstrong, Native Commissioner (henceforth to be referred to as NC) for Mangwe District, writing to the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) stated: "Acting on your instructions in re: C.N.C. 1652-97K 227-97II on Monday week last gave Chief Sangulube and the Natives living on Mr B. Prescott's farm, Mangwe Poort, four days to prepare to remove to the Government Location granted them at their own request at the Mgobi Hills near the Ngwizi river drift". Perhaps more revealing is a later part of the same letter which ran as follows:

Finding at the expiration of that time that they had not made arrangements as directed and hearing from the Chief that he could not get them (his followers) to obey his orders and from others that they were purposely delaying with the object of avoiding removing until it should be planting time and consequently too late to do so, I went down there on Saturday last with two mounted police and four Native Messengers and ordered them out of their kraals straight away.

Quite clearly we see here legal means being used to catalyse unity of purpose between the colonial administration and the emergent white-landed class against the Africans of Matabeleland. Instances of this are characteristic of the entire period covered by this study. The first two types of movements differ from the last in that they cannot be described as strictly involuntary given the apparent absence in them of direct physical force backed by legal means. But to the extent that they depended, more or less, on the same types of conditions as shaping involuntary population movements, any description embracing them calls for an extreme exercise of caution. Any full study of population movements must also include voluntary variables so that these will be treated wherever they occur in the period covered by this study if only to facilitate a clear distinction between the various types of movements.



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NOTES

1. Robin Palmer, Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1977), p.2.
2. See Per Zachrisson, An African Area In change. Belingwe 1894 - 1946: A Study of Colonialism, Missionary activity and African in Southern Rhodesia (University of Gothenburg, Department of History in Gothenburg, 1978).
3. The author has not yet embarked on fieldwork in Matabeleland (the first leg of this should start in the August - September vacation) but a number of interviews have been conducted in the Midlands Province which should, at the cost of generalization, serve as a pointer to the response of the rural Africans to involuntary and/or semi-voluntary migrations in the colonial period.
4. NB6/1/1: Native Commissioners' Report. Annual Report of the Chief Native Commissioner for the Province of Matabeleland for Year ending 31st March, 1898, NAZ. See also S512 Report on Matopos National Park, June, 1949, NAZ.
5. See Files, NB6/1/1 - NB6/1/12: Native Commissioners' Reports.
6. See Julian Raymond Dennis Cobbing, "The Ndebele Under the Khumalos, 1820 - 1896," (Ph. D. Thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976).
7. Ibid., pp. 44ff
8. R. Kent Rasmusen. Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi's Ndebele in South Africa (London and Cape Town, Rex Collings with David Philip, 1978), p. 2. Here R. Kent Rasmusen argues that the migrations of the Ndebele started in Zululand in about 1821 and concluded when Mzilikazi himself arrived in Matabeleland about mid - 1839.
9. See for instance L.H. Gann, A History of Southern Rhodesia: Early Days to 1934 (London, Olatto and Windus, 1965), p. 146; R. Palmer, op.cit., pp. 35, 48; Per Zachrisson, op.cit., p. 225.
10. NB6/4/1: Native Commissioners' Monthly Reports for 1897; NAZ.

CHAPTER ONETHE FOUNDATIONS ARE LAID: 1893:1909.

The period 1893 to 1909 is problematic as regards the nature of population movements in Matabeleland. In the main the material available at the National Archives covering this period is marked by a clear absence of descriptions of human migrations although these are reported. Also characteristic of the NC's reports of this period is their failure to account for such population movements, whether on a localized or territorial scale.<sup>1</sup> This is probably easy to explain. Indeed the delineation of districts in Matabeleland at this time was still a hazy affair with certain district names being used as blanket terms to cover as yet unexplored portions of greater Matabeleland. This was particularly so for the early part of the period. Bubi district, which included present day Tsholotsho, Nkayi and parts of Binga can be regarded as a good example of this.<sup>2</sup> The resultant feature was the creation of oversized districts in this western portion of the country whose demographic data could only be assembled with difficulty. Demographically, certain parts of such districts had not been touched by 1898 while some of the modern districts simply did not appear on the map of Matabeleland-witness Beitbridge, Hwange etc. Thus given the vastness of Matabeleland at this time, at least in the eyes of the local administrative officials, possibilities seem to lean heavily towards the dwarfing of the real and frequency of population movements, both at a district and inter-district level. Yet in the background of this general tenuity of essentially basic information must certainly lie the fact that the period 1893 to 1909 was one of nativity as far as involuntary and related population movements characterising the period 1893 - 1960 were concerned. In it must also lie the beginnings of economic, social and political dislocations characterizing the African areas throughout the period covered by this study.

Despite the general tenuity of sources on this early period of colonial history in Matabeleland, a careful analysis of the Archival material available for the period covered by this paper leaves the reader with little doubt as to the disruptions caused by the 1893 Ndebele War on a social, political and economic level. For instance the area in and around the Matopos witnessed small scale movements of people as early as 1893 for the following reasons: (i) alienation to Europeans of land on which they had been living, and (ii) a desire to live on land which was free of access to Europeans, among others.<sup>3</sup> Already we see here the major types of migrations emerging: involuntary and semi-voluntary/involuntary. The same source on

which footnote 3 is based also shows that from 1896 onwards there was a large influx on people into the Matopo Hills due to alienation of land to European settlers by the British South African Company (BSA Co.):

.....it appears that the Shashani Reserve and the Matopos could very easily have accommodated all the Natives normally living in that area in 1896 and their heirs, but that the very large influx since that date is responsible for the overpopulation of the National Park; that this influx was brought about by the alienation of land by the Company and later by the Government to European settlers, and the eviction of the Natives from such land and from Rhodes Matopos Estate<sup>4</sup>.....

These forced and related removals of people marked the genesis of economic and social disintegration which was to be a characteristic feature of Matabeleland from 1893 through to 1960 - a factor which makes the period 1893 to 1909 a very significant one. At a political level the period 1893 to 1909 also marks the genesis of the slow destruction of hitherto traditionally unified social entities which features prominently in the post - 1910 period. A slow dispersal of people ejected from the Matabeleland highveld slowly emaciated certain of the Matabeleland chiefdoms whilst occasional tearing down of independent chiefdoms outside Matabeleland took place.<sup>5</sup> These developments call for a redefinition of population movements, not only in Matabeleland but in the country as a whole, in terms of organization or otherwise.

It will be proposed, for purposes of this study, that population migrations of Matabeleland origin were not, in the main organized. In the materials that have been consulted so far there does not seem to be any legal provision as to the organization of population movements in Matabeleland. This is particularly so as regards the Matabeleland - to - Matabeleland migrations although this may appear to be too general a comment in view of the quasi-organized nature of certain of these migrations, particularly in the post - 1910 period. But, generally speaking, in spite of areas of resettlement being determined for the displaced Matabeleland Africans by the colonial regime, no pre-migrations arrangements were made to ensure that people under a particular chiefdom or social organization would be transferred to them as a recognizable social unit. In this way social disintegration was insitutionalized. Indeed resilience alone determined that even some of the population movements falling into the Matabeleland - to beyond Matabeleland category of migrations reached their destinations as units. The roots of these developments are clearly recognizable in the period 1893 to 1909.

For instance in 1903 the NC for Bubi reported an increase in the population of his district due to what he termed "immigrants and new births." He gave the size of the increase over 1902 as nine hundred and three people.<sup>6</sup>

Population movements of this nature were reported throughout most of Matabeleland in 1903 but they had one thing in common: in most cases their causes were not explained. However, in view of the fact that movements of a coerced nature proper began in 1893 it is probably safe to assume that these early movements were due to evictions from the emerging European farms. Indeed evidence shows that after 1893 and 1896 a number of Ndebele speakers migrated into and settled in the Sebungwe - Mafungabusi area.<sup>7</sup> Large exoduses of people from certain parts of Matabeleland to others are even reported:

Ever since the close of the rebellion there has been a steady exodus from the Hills for the Mapani veld and for other districts.<sup>8</sup>

No doubt this must be attributed to the voracious scramble for land by the white settlers on the Matabeleland highveld. Indeed the pattern of Ndebele settlement in Matabeleland before the middle of the nineteenth century had been determined by the productivity or potential productivity of the land<sup>9</sup> - hence the peripheral and semi-arid parts of this western part of Zimbabwe were avoided showing the economic consciousness of the Ndebele. In the 1890s the white settlers were to quickly recognize this fact and occupy those same areas which had experienced effective Ndebele settlement earlier on in the century thus giving gradual rise to involuntary and related population movements and their accompanying economic and social disintegration in Matabeleland.

NOTES:

1. See for instance NB6/1/1 - NB6/1/9: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, NAZ.
2. NB6/1/4: Native Commissioner's Annual Report, 31st March, 1903, Dubi, NAZ.
3. S519: Report on Matopo National Park, NAZ; See also.
4. Ibid.
5. The author has the Bvute chiefdom of Mberengwa in mind. Before the first delineation of reserves Chief Bvute ruled over a vast area lying roughly between Mberengwa, Filabusi and For Rixon. Bvute was recognised as a chief by the colonial administration until 1951 when he was demoted to the rank of headman under chief Mazwiwa. When the first reserves were delineated he lost his entire area/chiefdom to European farms and was forced to move into Chief Mapirovana's area in the south. Due to overcrowdedness in the Mapirovana Chiefdom and the resultant shortage of land, some of Bvute's followers had to join chief Ngungumbane who had settled further south with his followers after being evicted from Willoughby's Ranches in the Esigodini area. See "Report on Bvute Headmanship And Community: Belingwe Tribal Trust Land And District", in Delineation of Communities: Belingwe Tribal Trust Land And District 1965 and P. Zachrisson, An African Area in change.
6. NB6/1/4: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, 1903, NAZ.
7. NB6/1/4: Annual Report of the Native Commissioner, Sebungwe-Mafungabusi, 1903, NAZ.
8. NB6/1/8: Report of the Native Commissioner for 1908, Matobo, NAZ.
9. See J.R.D. Cobbing, "The Ndebele Under the Khumalos," p. 45.



## CHAPTER TWO

### The Settlers tighten their grip on the Land: 1910 - 1920

The year 1910 marked an important stage in the history of population migrations in Matabeleland. Four significant developments serve to illustrate this. In the first place the Private Locations Ordinance of 1908 went through implementation for the first time in Matabeleland in 1910,<sup>1</sup> practically affecting the stability of the land-human relationship adversely. In the second place the settlers' anti-African progress attitude crystallised itself in a more pronounced way for the first time in the form of jealousies which manifested themselves in tendencies to physically evict the Africans from privately-owned farms. Here indirect means were also employed as this chapter will attempt to illustrate. In the third place the diverse nature of population movements in Matabeleland also crystallized. In the fourth place the period immediately after 1910 saw the readjustment of certain of the Matabeleland boundaries, a development which, if only slightly affecting the population structure in some places, led to marked disturbances in others.

The implementation of the Private Locations Ordinance (PLO) in 1910 affected the Africans of Matabeleland in a number of ways. First and foremost it lent precacity to the position of the Africans vis-a-vis the land, making the imminence of involuntary population movements more real than ever before. Indeed the Matabeleland peasants had lost their livelihood in the voracious land grabbing process of the Ndebele War period. Following the 1893 War the stamp of private landed-property had completely sealed Central Matabeleland and other places where land which had been communally owned by the Ndebele and other Africans suddenly became privately owned after steadily drifting into massive individual European, syndicate and company holdings. Almost over night the foundations of future massive involuntary population movements had been solidly laid; but the Africans of Matabeleland had in the main maintained their positions albeit as squatters. Colonial historians in the name of Gann have sought to explain this in terms of the "Matabele-" preferring" to stay where they were, rather than abandon their ancestral acres for the sake of dry, sandy granite country, whilst farmers encouraged the Matabele to remain and work for them."<sup>2</sup> This kind of interpretation, however, tends to think that the Matabeleland Africans were always given a choice and, in the process, deprives them of resilience and the spirit of resistance. Contrary to this kind of biased view of the Africans of Matabeleland, the present thesis will propose that these indigenous people had the ability to say "No!" and expressed this in defying the claims that

the land had now become European-owned by refusing to relinquish their landholdings and homes. It will be argued that if they later moved at all this was largely because the European settler had now acquired the ability to employ coercive measures to drive them off the land. Such measures included increases in rents and grazing fees and sometimes direct interference with the African's economic activities as when the settler demanded African labour on his farms during odd times of the year. Because these developments actually undermined the economic progress and functions of the Africans, the latter, more often than not, elected to set themselves free by migrating. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that the Matabeleland Africans only look to this as a last resort. Whenever possible they resisted movement of any kind. The ANC, Insiza seemed to sum up the general attitude of the Matabeleland peasants when he reported in 1910 that,

There will be a large exodus of Natives from private farms on to Reserves when the present crops are reaped, but owing to the natural love a Native has for argument and diplomacy and to their vascillation, it is a matter of impossibility to give a correct estimate of the number who will actually leave. It is certain that a large proportion of those, who have refused to sign agreements, when the time comes for them to remove, will ask to be allowed to agree to the Landholder's terms, and remain in occupation of their present sites, to which they have become strongly attached by a generation of residence.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier on in 1897 Bonnar W. Armstrong, NC Mangwe, had echoed the same attitude when he reported with relation to Chief Sangulube and his people that

Acting on your instructions in re. CNC. 1652-97 K227-97 I on Monday week last gave Chief Sangulube and the Natives living on Mr. B. Prescott's Farm, Mangwe Poort, four days' notice to prepare to remove on to the Government Location granted them at their own request at the Mgobi Hills near the Ngwizi river drift. Finding at the expiration of that time that they had not made arrangements as directed and hearing from the Chief that he could not get them (his followers) to obey his orders and from others that they were purposely delaying with the object of avoiding removing until it should be planting time and consequently too late to do so, I went down there on Saturday last with two mounted police and four Native Messengers and ordered them out of their kraals straight away.<sup>4</sup>

More examples of a fitting nature can be cited but they will all the same point to the same set of circumstances: the Matabeleland peasants did not willingly collaborate with the capitalist settler to effect their political and economic demise. These resistances must be seen as expressing economic

and political consciousness on the part of the Africans of Matabeleland. In economic terms acquiescence might suddenly lead to huge sections of people being driven into marginal areas. Such a development, the Africans knew very well, would steadily lead to a serious marginalization of their traditional economy - it would adversely interfere with livestock raising - a very significant branch of economic activity in Matabeleland, in the first half of the period covered by this study. Obviously buttressing such marginalization was the insufficiency or complete lack of viable grazing lands in these outlying and semi-arid areas of Matabeleland. From an agricultural point of view these outlying areas were also inhibitive, hence the Africans always resisted removals to them. In the political sphere the case of the Bvute chiefdom has already been addressed in the introductory section of this paper and more instances can be cited. In Matabeleland itself the example of the Kwalu Chiefdom in present day Siyoka Communal Lands can be given - here Chief Sitawudze, a foreigner from the north was imposed on Kwalu's people as Chief after he was removed into the area.<sup>5</sup> Chief Kwalu who had recently died was never replaced by a legitimate successor. In the second place the implementation of the PLO brought into operation a number of coercive measures designed to frustrate the African economic effort. R. Lanning, NC Bubi, wrote thus of the measures in 1912:

For the first two years of the Private Locations Ordinance it imposed no great hardships on Natives living on alienated land i.e. private farms, but as practically every agreement was only for a period of one year from date of making and one year's notice to be given in the event of any alteration of terms in the agreement, the Natives had no great security of tenure to their lands, and thus the majority of Company landlords have given their tenants notice to leave. In 1913 they intend to charge grazing fees for all stock owned. While this would not have been an unreasonable fee to exact from the tenant if the amount were on a sliding scale, which would more or less only affect the wealthy native, there is no difference made of any sort, and the amount demanded, 3/- per head per annum for small stock, sheep, goats and pigs, I consider exorbitant, and has resulted in all natives who own stock giving notice to leave the private farms and they will go into the Reserves.<sup>6</sup>

An important point emerges from this report: the European landed class treated the rich and poor peasants on the land indiscriminately as regards the various land related taxations. In this way peasant differentiation was imposed on rural Matabeleland with poor sections of the rural population getting poorer whilst the richer ones those which could comfortably manage the rents sauntered economically big above their weaker counterparts. But this economic advantage should never be overemphasized as both sections of the

rural population, more often than not, responded to the coercive measures in the same manner: leaving the private farms for either the Reserves or unalienated Crown Land.<sup>7</sup> But the Reserves were not elastic. They soon became congested and overcrowded. This kind of development, combined with the fact that the Reserves generally encompassed areas of inferior land quality, led to ever increasingly poor agricultural yields.<sup>8</sup> Those who moved into unalienated Crown Land merely postponed their movement onto the Reserves by one or two years at the end of which they were obliged to join their kith and kin in the proper areas of African settlement as Crown Land farms were gradually taken over by the settlers. The occupation of unalienated Crown Land farms by the displaced Africans in Matabeleland should be seen as a diversionary tactic expressing not only their economic resilience but also their ability to distinguish between economically viable and poor land. Many of those who opted to remain on private farms when the removals gathered momentum from 1910 onwards found themselves in the circumstances aptly described by Frderick Engels when he said of tenant farmers,

Rents are pushed so high that in times of average crops the peasant and his family can barely make ends meet; when the crops are bad he is on the verge of starvation, is unable to pay his rent and is consequently entirely at the mercy of the landlord.<sup>9</sup>

The period 1910 to 1920 was also one in which the settler racial economic attitude crystallised. In Matabeleland the settler racial superiority had physically expressed itself in the massive land appropriations of the Ndebele War period and after, but the Africans had hung on to the land for reasons already discussed. However, when the emergent settler farmers began to increasingly focus their attention on the land around 1910, they could not tolerate competing with the African. This had to be nipped in the bud by edging the Africans out of agriculturally viable land. In Matobo the beginning of this process was marked by a steady exodus of people from the district to adjacent areas. By the end of 1910 400 people had been successfully removed from certain farms in the district. The NC Matobo gave reasons for such developments as follows:

Europeans are steadily clearing natives off their land, the given reasons being that the majority of youths and young men are attracted to mines and elsewhere by higher wages, leaving few but middle aged and old persons available for the landowners' requirements, and these even are too busy as a rule attending their own affairs, crops and cattle to give the landlords much assistance; moreover, it is stated on account of small rents and the trouble of collecting them, taken into consideration the destruction of trees and the amount of grass

grazed down by their stock, that Native tenants are anything but undesirable. Farmers carrying on bona fide operations as such, are generally of opinion that it is more satisfactory and profitable to obtain the labour they require in the ordinary way, and this to a great extent they are now doing.<sup>10</sup>

White jealousy could never be clearly expressed. A situation was developing in Matabeleland where those Africans who were in want of a collaborationist attitude were being forced to migrate into their economic demise. But collaboration also meant economic retrogression. It meant that the Africans would spend more time working for the economic well-being of the white settler rather than improve their own conditions. It also meant that the Africans would fatten the settlers' coffers by willingly paying more money in the form of the numerous rents. Another cause of removals lay in the alienation of Crown Land in Matobo to incoming European farmers. F.C. Elliott, NC Matobo, had written in 1909 in connection with this new development that:

Considerable dissatisfaction has been caused, especially among stockowners, at the amount of land alienated to European farmers, which has necessitated the removal of a number of kraals to unalienated land and reserves. Those who have cultivated at will for years and allowed their cattle to roam at will all over the country without let or hindrance, find it hard to conform to the restrictions placed upon them by white settlers, who are now rapidly acquiring land on the localities never before owned by Europeans;....<sup>11</sup>

The situation we are confronted with is one in which the African was gradually forced into the economic periphery of the country as a whole. The African possession of agriculturally viable land steadily diminished in most parts of Matabeleland while population migrations clearly began to assume a semi-voluntary variable. Van Gielgud, NC Bulawayo seemed to sum up these developments when he reported the diminution in the amount of ground cultivated by Africans in the vicinity of Bulawayo, as compared with the amount cultivated in 1909 and 1910, in the following manner:

The reason is that white men are settling around Bulawayo in increasing numbers, and the Native is being forced to seek land at a greater distance from the town. Large numbers have left this year, many to settle on the Reserves, while others intend to leave after the next harvest.<sup>12</sup>

Although the present thesis recognises the historical diversity of population movements in Matabeleland from the outset, it nevertheless maintains that the different types of these movements together with their particular features are all part of the one secular process of the occupation of the land



by the white settlers. In this way they are all equally the historical result of a similar set of determinations. Although the diversity of the experiences appears to discourage attempts at a general approach to the question of population movements, it is an important obligation of this paper to juggle with this important point throughout.

The increased settlement of Europeans in and around Bulawayo and the general white farmer policy of squeezing the Africans out seemed to have gone to the extent of even crippling the European farming activities in the area, showing the absence of general consideration in the 'White-Settlers' enthusiasm to edge the Africans out of the land. Echoing this view the NC Bulawayo pointed out in 1910 that

Farmers of the District cannot rely upon the Indigenous Natives to supply their farm labour, and, during the last two years, if it had not been for the labour supplied by the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau, farming in the vicinity of Bulawayo would have become impossible. The policy adopted by the Farmers towards their Native Tenants has, in many cases, been hasty and against their own interests and has resulted in depleting their farms of the Natives, who, if more tactfully managed, might have been available as labourers.

In the period 1893 to 1910 the Matabeleland Africans had successfully resisted movements because no legal devices existed in white settler hands to enable them to nibble at the African economic effort. After 1910 the situation had radically changed and the Africans, in order to protect themselves economically, moved from alienated land whose occupation went along with the new conditions of rent imposed by the white landowners. While in certain parts of Matabeleland such unpreparedness or refusal to meet the rent requirements orchestrated what may be termed semi-involuntary removals, more often than not, such attitudes on the part of the Africans (particularly where they were reluctant to move) involved involuntary-removals which characterised themselves in the form of large exoduses from privately-owned land to either Unalienated Crown Lands or Reserves. The case of Insiza quoted above illustrates this very well. The unpreparedness of the Africans of Matabeleland to reconcile themselves to agreements formulated by the exploitative and capitalist landowners actually represented the crystallization of economic consciousness on their part. The year 1910 was also a significant one in relation to population migrations falling into the Matabeleland-to-beyond Matabeleland category. The year saw the removal from the Fort Rixon section of the Insiza district to the Mberengwa district of Chief Matonsi and his people.<sup>14</sup> The same year also saw the removal of a very large number

of people under Chiefs Silwana and Ngundu from Matobo to settle in the Mberengwa Reserve and Gwanda district respectively.<sup>15</sup>

Another significant development taking place immediately after 1910 was the readjustment of district boundaries in parts of Matabeleland. True, the revision of district boundaries did not always entail involuntary population movements, but the impact it had on social structure in the affected areas should never be underestimated. For instance, the boundary revision, more often than not, entailed the creation of new districts whose populating necessarily tore apart hitherto homogeneous social units in certain parts of Matabeleland. In 1911 the Nyamandhlovu area which had been part of the Bubi district obtained a district status—that is to say that it was constituted into an independent and separate district. This development might not have been necessarily accompanied by population movements of an involuntary nature, but there was an excision of a large number of Africans automatically included within the boundaries of the Bubi and Bulawayo districts.<sup>16</sup> A huge number of Africans under chiefs Tategulu and Mbambaleli from Bulalima Mangwe district were included in the newly created district, sending it to a start with a population of some 10 704 people. Prior to these inclusions the new district could already boast of some 329 people, being mainly removals from alienated land after the people's failure to reconcile themselves to the terms of the PLO. The Acting Native Commissioner. (ANC) Nyamandhlovu, also reported some 616 people having removed to unalienated lands on the Bembesi River, preparatory to going to the Shangani Reserve. These Africans were not included in the population of the Nyamandhlovu district because they were, at the time the ANC issued his report, in transit to the Bubi district where they were to come under the NC of that district "for all purposes of administration."<sup>17</sup> The question of the disorganized nature of most of these movements of people had already been proposed above and it is difficult, in the face of this, to arbitrarily rule out social and political disintegration in Matabeleland in the period covered by this study.

At the Southern edge of Central Matabeleland, the NC Gwanda reported an increase in the population of his district due mostly to "those natives under chief Ngundu who have been placed on my books owing to a portion of Matobo District being now included in the District by the readjustment of District boundaries." A suggestion which is being made here is one of non-involvement of population movements—only an alteration of boundaries with people who had previously belonged to the Matobo District now falling under the Gwanda District. We are faced with the problem of interpretation here in that



according to the 1910 report of the NC Matobo, Chief Ngundu and his followers actually moved from Matopo to Gwanda in that year. While it is hoped to verify the truth during fieldwork in Matabeleland, it remains to be pointed out that what ever happened, the disintegrative effect of the revision of boundaries on a social level mattered more than anything else. In 1912 the NC Insiza reported a fall in the population of his district of some 1 362 people made up of 633 tax paying units and their families which he attributed to the alteration of boundaries. These people probably fell under three chiefs transferred to Shurugwi and Gweru, in consequence of their villages falling within the new boundaries of these districts which the NC also reported about in 1912.<sup>18</sup> In 1920 Chief Ngundu, now living on Farm Sheet in the Gwanda district, had to protest to the local Administration when measures were made to include this farm into the Matobo district.<sup>19</sup> The reason for this lay in the divisive effect the boundaries revision had on the Ngundu community—the inclusion of one section in the Matobo district while the other one remained in Gwanda.

From 1913 onwards that part of the Gwanda district covered by Liebig's Ranching farms witnessed active population movements of both an involuntary and semi-involuntary nature. In 1913 alone twenty-one headmenships together with their people were removed from Liebig's farms on to unalienated land mainly because they had declined to enter into Private Locations Agreements with the Ranching Company.<sup>20</sup> Needless to say that these and other responses reflected a general economic solidarity amongst the Africans of Matabeleland. However, more often than not, refusal to cooperate with a landlord was a sure way of risking being turned out of the land as the Liebig's example shows and this led in turn to migrations into the Reserves and/or unalienated land. But the Gwanda district did not have sufficient reserves that could be successfully used as sanctuaries for the displaced populations. In view of these shortages the Africans naturally found their way into unalienated Crown Land farms where permanence of residence was never guaranteed since these were constantly on the sale list and could be bought any time, necessitating further movements of people. Now this precarious human-land relationship did not augur well for the economic development of the people affected. More significant was perhaps the fact that these Africans benefited future buyers of Crown Land farms by clearing them of trees and bushes (an indirect form of exploitation) and making them economically viable. This form of exploitation should never be underestimated since it certainly worked against the economic progress of the Africans not only in Matabeleland, but in other parts of colonial Zimbabwe. Arguing in this

voan for the Amazon area of Brazil Joe Foweraker had this to say:

Peasants claim the land by their labour on it and occupation of it. Their claims are nearly always contested, however, by local landholders, regional "political chiefs," or more or less distant entrepreneurs. These large landholders and big companies assert their "rights" to the land against the "claims" of the peasants, and attempt to appropriate the land which the peasants have occupied. Significantly the "rights" of the economically and politically powerful will very likely not prevent the peasants' occupation of the land but only facilitate their final eviction from it. In this way a prospective cattle-rancer, for instance, can profit from the peasant labour of clearing the land, by putting down pasture and raising cattle in place of people. In general, it is not only land which is appropriated but the value created by peasant labour in the process of occupation.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed this picture can aptly be applied to the Zimbabwean situation and to Matabeleland in particular during the colonial period. Thus the African might evade being exploited by the capitalist white settlers by avoiding rent, both in cash and in kind, by way of leaving privately-owned land but the occupation of unalienated land could never shield him from the physical exploitation of the worst type. By the end of the day the African in Matabeleland could hardly make himself exempt from exploitation since even the so-called Reserves, with their obvious economic limitations, did not hold any future for him. As a result of this he stood to be exploited once more by exposing himself to the labour market.

The chapter gives itself the task of addressing these issues and many others in the hope that it may positively contribute to the historical understanding of rural developments in Matabeleland in the colonial period.

NOTES

1. See NB6/1/10 - NB6/1/11: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, NAZ.
2. L.H. Cann, A History of Southern Rhodesia: Early Days to 1934, p. 183.
3. NB6/1/11: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, 1910.
4. NB6/4/1: Native Commissioners' Monthly Reports, Matabeleland, for the year 1897, NAZ.
5. Interview with Revd. Mdawu, Harare, 7 August, 1988.
6. NB6/1/12: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports for 1912, NAZ.
7. See NB6/1/10 - NB6/1/12: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, NAZ.
8. See Giovanni Arrighi, "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia," in Giovanni Arrighi and John S. Saul, Essays on the Political Economy of Africa (New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1973) p. 202.
9. See Frederick Engels, "Preface To The Peasant war In Germany," in Marx Engels Selected Works (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1986), p. 240.
10. NB6/1/10: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports for 1910, NAZ.
11. NB6/1/9: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports for 1909, NAZ.
12. NB6/1/11: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, 1911, NAZ.
13. Ibid.
14. NB6/1/10: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, NAZ.
15. Ibid.
16. NB6/1/11: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, 1911, NAZ.
17. Ibid.
18. NB6/1/12: Native Commissioners' Annual Reports, 1912, NAZ.
19. N3/8/2: Alteration of Boundaries, NAZ.
20. N3/16/7: The Liebig's Extract of meat Company's Native tenants, NAZ.
21. Joe Foweraker, The Struggle For Land: A Political Economy of the Pioneer Frontier In Brazil From 1930 To The Present-Day (London, Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 14.

CHAPTER THREETrends in the development of Involuntary population movements: Problems of Policy and African response, 1920 - 1940

The period commencing in 1920 and ending in 1940 was significant in a number of ways. It marked the maturity of the Matabeleland-to-beyond-Matabeleland category of population movements. It also marked the widening of the mediatory role of the colonial state machinery in lending legality to the various immigrations both within and beyond Matabeleland. The period also saw the crystallization of the fraternity between the various representatives of the emerging settler rural bourgeoisie and international capital and the colonial state—a development which for the first time threatened to completely physically wipe out the total African economic systems in Matabeleland. Indeed these developments seem to smoothly fit into Paul Mosley's analytical framework—the argument that "settler economies quickly develop an economic nationalism of their own and to that extent fail to fit the classical-imperialist model of underdeveloped countries whose economic policy and development are dictated by the needs of the European metropolis.<sup>1</sup> A revolutionary argument indeed! However, Mosley's argument seems to be handicapped by his underplaying the ever existing alliance between international capital and the settler economy. Indeed there might have been economic nationalism among the white settlers as evidenced by their struggle for responsible government after 1916, but it would be a gross misinterpretation of historical events to argue in favour of the success of this kind of nationalism from the start. Even after 1923 the dominance of international capital continued to characterize the major economic activities in colonial Zimbabwe. In this respect Ian Phimister seems to advance a more acceptable argument when he says that:

The constitution,....., was hedged about with safeguards. These were designed to protect rights of capital, prevent discriminatory legislation against Africans without Imperial sanction, and stop Southern Rhodesia from passing laws incompatible with the more general interests of the Imperial connexion.<sup>2</sup> In short, the settler state was a carefully crafted compromise between the interests of local and metropolitan capital.<sup>2</sup>

Generally the rhythm of the migratory flows from the most fertile parts of the Matabeleland highveld quickened its pace in the 1920s' and 1930'. As early as 1924 exploration parties to determine those parts of the Midlands Province which were habitable had begun swarming into the Save Reserve, even

overspilling into South Western Manicaland. The period 1924 to 1927 alone saw several Matabeleland Chiefs, among them Chiefs Ngundu (From Gwanda), Maduma (from Insiza), Mjingeni- also known as Tshuwe - (from Insiza) and Ngungumbane (from Mzingwane), sending exploratory delegations to the Save.<sup>3</sup> In some instances the chiefs went there in person. These exploration parties were the culmination of the enthusiastic response on the part of some chiefs to the urges of the Governor of Southern Rhodesia on the occasion of his visit to Matabeleland in 1924 that they should take up land which was available for their occupation in the Save Reserve. In a letter to Secretary to the Governor on 2nd January, 1925 the CNC was to write about this enthusiasm in the following manner:

It will be recalled that on the occasion of the visit of His Excellency the Governor to the Matopos mention was made in his speech to the chiefs and headmen assembled that land was available for some of them in the Sabi Reserve. As a result of His Excellency's announcement several of the chiefs concerned sent deputations to inspect the land and were very favourably impressed with the prospects of settlement there.....<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, it is futile to generalize about this enthusiasm. Indeed, contrary to the favourable response of some of the chiefs, a good number of others defied the Governor's urges while the general populace openly objected to evacuating Matabeleland. As a result of this the CNC reported in 1927 little progress having been made in the way of people moving to the Save, attributing the poor performance to the "general disinclination of the people, particularly the women, to leave their homes, until compelled by more or less intolerable conditions" and "unfounded hopes of a change in respect of the land they now occupy, to which hope the Matabele obstinately cling."<sup>5</sup> The CNC also reported Chief Ngungumbane having abandoned his intention to settle in the Save Reserve because "he could not induce his people to accompany or follow him." Chief Ngungumbane and his followers later settled in nearby Mberengwa district in 1929.<sup>6</sup> Earlier on in 1924 J.W. Posselt, NC charter, had written of Chief Ngundu that,

This Chief and followers called here and declined to go and see the land in the Sabi Reserve which would be available for their settlement and insisted on going to the Mhondoro Reserve. Although I told them that this Reserve was not available and at the most I could only settle a few families in it they elected to visit this Reserve. I understand from the messenger who accompanied them there that they were favourably impressed with the country.



I would like you to make it quite clear to Chief Ngundu that a settlement on a large scale in the Mhondoro Reserve is quite out of the question and unless he and his followers are prepared to select land in the Sabi Reserve I cannot assist them.

The NC Selukwe, also confirmed the refusal or disinclination of Chief Ngundu to settle in the Sabi Reserve and even showed how boldly the displaced African could make his preferences known when he wrote that,

In the Mhondoro Reserve, which they also tell me they visited they were unable to find land suitable to their requirements, but found a suitable locality near the Umniati River and close to the Central Estates fence. I told them that this, from my map, appeared to be Crown or Alienated land and that they would in all probability still have to pay rent. They then said they would go back and consult with their people,.....<sup>8</sup>

Apart from expressing the economic consciousness of the African- the ability to determine the type of soils which held a livelihood for him- the procrastinations of Chief Ngundu epitomized the old story of African resistance and resilience in the face of the disruptive forces of colonialism. Already in 1924 the NC Selikwe reported some 15 of Ngundu's people having removed to the Mberengwa district while practically all the people under this Chief who lived on the farm Dorset intended to remove to Mberengwa as well. In all probability these people represented a branch of the larger group of people under Ngundu who were removed from Matobo in 1910, a factor which would boost the argument that the capitalization of land in Matabeleland from 1910 onwards had a destructive effect on the organisation of chiefdoms as well as on social organization. Although the larger group certainly moved into the Gwanda district, the occupation of farm Dorset by a sub-section of this large group cannot be completely ruled out in view of the disorganized nature of the migrations from the outset and the persistence of this trend after 1910. The lying of farm Dorset at the edge of Matabeleland also lends possibility to some of Ngundu's people settling on it after 1910. The Africans of Matabeleland had even started organizing protests against settler monopoly over the land by 1927 and it is interesting to note how links were being established between peasants in rural Matabeleland and the Industrial and Commercial workers' Union of South Africa. For instance Acting CNC Jackson wrote of peasant dissatisfaction over the land position in the Mringwane district pointing out that,

It is illustrative of Native feeling on the subject of land and shows an endeavour on their part to remedy their grievance by what they conceive to be constitutional means, their first immediate step being to hold meetings and raise a subscription of

money to serve as medium for approaching the Government. An unsatisfactory feature of the movement is that a Nyasaland Native named Sambo, believed to be the local representative of the Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union of South Africa (Clement Kadalie's notorious organization) appears to be fomenting discontent among our indigenous Natives and that the Young Chief Fish is taking an active part.

These protest movements emerging in rural Matabeleland, if will be argued, were directed against the removals which emanated from the falling of all land into European control thus deposing the Africans from control of their economic life. This makes sense in that by 1935 Chief Fish and his followers had become established in the Buhera district of Manicaland after being removed from Mzingwane.<sup>10</sup> This group of Ndebele joined the others which had taken up settlement in the Save Reserve soon after 1924, including Chief Mjigeni Tshuwe, previously of the Insiza district.

Most of the involuntary population movements imposed on people in rural Matabeleland consisted in pushing them off agriculturally viable land apart from permanently uprooting them from the land by introducing instability in land settlement in general. In this way the European capitalization of the land attacked the two major economic activities of the rural Africans: agriculture and livestock raising. The areas into which they were pushed were often too arid to sufficiently give support to these economic activities; in the main the soils characterizing these areas were very poor while the rains they received were often not adequate to support a viable agricultural industry. The forced migrations posed a serious threat of rural economics in Matabeleland. This is clearly borne out by some of the events of 1928, particularly that involving the removal of Sikonkwane from Mayfair, Insiza. Wrote the NC Gwelo:

I have the honour to inform you that I tried to persuade Sikonkwane to settle in the "Native Purchase Area" but he declined. His reason being that the whole of the area was "Gusu", i.e., sand veldt, and he was used to ploughing "Isibomvu," red soil, in more open country.

Mr A.J. Cunningham brought Sikonkwane to meet me at Delano Ranch and suggested Craigola Ranch if only as a temporary refuge for the old Native, who is on the horns of a dilemma, being compelled to move at once the balance of his herd of cattle at Mayfair in the Insiza district, and having no place to put them. Mr. Cunningham states that Sikonkwane has in all 1 500 head of cattle and he can sell about a third and buy a farm. He states his intention to purchase one of the Main Belt Block Farms. I pointed out the



inadvisability of buying a farm in the midst of European farms, ...<sup>11</sup>

of the Native Purchase Area on which Sikonkwane refused to settle the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, was to write,

I do not know the particular farms referred to in the correspondence, which have been allocated to Native Purchase Area, but from a comprehensive knowledge of the country to the North of the Railway Line, I have no doubt that the description given of them, as being "Gusu" or Teak Forest Belt is correct, and if that is so, it can be taken that for ordinary settlement purposes the land is useless, except for the narrow river valleys which run through it, and which are exceptionally fertile. An ordinary sized farm in the above country for a man with 1 500 head of cattle would be quite inadequate. As far as I can see from a study of the map issued by the Carter commission very little of the land allocated for Native Purchase on the North side of the Railway Line in Matabeleland is of any use for the purpose. The vast bulk of it is either waterless or in the Teak Forest Belt, and its only value, with the exception of the narrow valleys referred to above, is the timber it produces.<sup>12</sup>

Later the NC Gwelo was to write of Sikonkwane's response to offers of the same land. "He was very upset and asked me if I considered the ground was fit for human occupation. It certainly is useless both from an agricultural and pastoral point of view, and I had to admit it."<sup>13</sup> In the event, for Sikonkwane stability of settlement only remained in the realm of a dream throughout the rest of the 1920s. He was moved at short notice from one Crown Land farm to another as the Europeans pegged out and took up land in the Gweru district, necessitating the locating of new grazing land for his many cattle, which was not always an easy task to do in view of the general scarcity of land in and around Matabeleland. At one time the NC Gwelo even suggested to Sikonkwane that he sell most of his cattle as a way of alleviating the shortage of grazing land in the district to which the latter apparently responded favourably although he had no intention of doing so.<sup>14</sup> The shortage of grazing land was perhaps magnified by the fact that throughout 1928 Sikonkwane went on a course of constant collusion with the Meikle's farms management as his cattle "trespassed" onto the company's ranches. At the beginning of August of that year Sinkonkwane and Mr. van N kerk, Meikle's Farms Manager, took turns to visit the office of the NC in protest against the other's claim to grazing land.<sup>15</sup> The case of Sikonkwane in all probability epitomized the general trend of developments in Matabeleland between 1920 and 1940. The chapter seeks to explore these issues and to

determine to what extent they undermined the African economic performance during the period under examination. The covering of long distances in removlas also entailed loss of livestock since the Veterinary Department often objected to cattle traversing certain districts along areas of transit. For instance Madina, moving from chief Ngundu's area, Gwanda, to chief Fish Mandege's area, Buhera in 1935 was forced to sell his head of cattle, 53 in all, because the Veterinary Surgeon objected to these being moved through the Gweru district.<sup>16</sup> It remains to be verified through fieldwork whether the many stokowners who sustained these losses in material terms due to removals were able to restock after reaching the new areas. It can, nevertheless, be argued albeit tentatively, that these cattle losses epitomized in a vivid way the bad side of colonized life in economic terms. Indeed restocking must have proved to be an uphill task in view of the fact that cattle for sale were simply not available. Even those who managed to get some could certainly not restock to their original holdings, meaning that economically they could no longer enjoy the same status after settling in the new areas. Socially ethnic units who had lived under the same chiefdom prior to migrations could not remain bound together either. More often than not small clusters of people remained stuck into areas of transit during migrations of huge ethnic groups, showing the disorganised nature of these movements in terms of destination. Such social disintegration also reflected the general absence of clearly defined migration policy in the colonial state. The case of Mberengwa which is painted with pockets of Ndebele speakers illustrates this lucidly. Today it is possible to single out numerous clusters of people of Matabeleland origin in most parts of the Mberengwa District. In the Mposi chiefdom is to be found the largest concentration of Ndebele speakers outside Ngungumbane. This area of Ndebele concentration spans the Vumukwane and Mtuzugwi parts of the chiefdom. These people, constituting the Masuku, Khumalo and Dhlohdhlo branches of Ndebele speakers are generally referred to as Madingendawu (Ndebele: Amadingendawu - those who look for a place to settle or simply foreigners) by the local Shona speakers. Other Ndebele speakers in the Mposi chiefdom occupy the Guvaravatonga, Makereni, Danga, Chasa, Mutakura/Chegato and Magavakava areas while Pamushana or Langeni in the north also provide accommodation to the Ndebele.<sup>17</sup> Other areas of Ndebele speakers in Mberengwa district outside Ngungumbane are Mudzidzi in the Mataruse chiefdom, Machingwe, Mulungisi Gwai and Nyala areas in the Chingoma chiefdom. Clusters in the Mtuzugwi - Vumukwane and Mudzidzi areas claim a relationship.<sup>18</sup> Most probably these Ndebele clusters fell off the larger group led by Ngungumbane while on transit to the Nyamhondo area in

1929.<sup>19</sup> The varied nature of totemic names among the groups also suggests individual families moving into the Mberengwa district from neighbouring Matabeleland either voluntarily or involuntarily - a feasible proposition, in view of the disorganized nature of most of the population movements under examination. Whatever happened the picture presented certainly reflects the disruptive effects of population movements on a social level. In economic terms the voluntary drifting of families into the Mberengwa district may be viewed as reflecting the search on their part for agriculturally viable and open country, away from the congested reserves in Matabeleland, after being evicted from the European farms in the area. In this way they fell into the broad category of coerced population migrations.

Within Matabeleland itself there were active population movements from European farms to the Reserves and/or unalienated Crown Land farms. From 1930 onwards people were moved from privately owned farms for the following reasons: (i) the cancellation of Private Locations Agreements due to the difficulty experienced by settler farm owners in getting in rents and Dip fees, and to having to pay 5/- per head location fees (a capitalist tendency manifested here); (ii) Alienation of Crown land; (iii) allegations that African tenants on certain farms were indulging in stock-theft; (iv) certain farms changing hands as these were sold by owners; (v) certain farm owners pressing the local administrative agents to remove African tenants on racial grounds, and (vi) cancellation of Private Locations Agreements in preparation for the implementation of the Land Apportionment Act. In 1933 huge migrations of people occurred from the Insiza district where T. Meikle, one of the large landowners in the area, turned tenants off his farms for reason number one above. There were movements from farms Klipplaats, Waterfall, Waterfall Extension and Blagdon for example. Other movements occurred from Shamba Block, Kangesi and Knocknara while families on Tsomo Block and Avoca were also served with notices to leave Meikle's farms.<sup>20</sup> In numerical terms 14 families were evicted from Blagdon, 22 from Klipplaats, 4 from Waterfall and Waterfall Extension, 34 families, from Shamba Block and 3 from Kangesi. All the families from Blagdon, by virtue of their being practically all Abanyatini Ex Mzingwane, were moved to Crown Lands Cala and Masinga in the Mzingwane district while a few Shona speakers removed to the Mberengwa district, with others going to the Native Purchase Area under Chief Ndube. All Venda speakers went to the Gwanda district leaving those Africans "who 'Konze' to Sibasa", going to the Insiza Reserve.<sup>21</sup> The reason for these removals overspilling beyond the Insiza district had

something to do with the critical shortage of land in the district. The ANC Filabusi reported also Africans on Doornboom, Nxaba, Vumi and Msimu farms removing in the winter of 1933 without enjoyment of notice because these had been alienated to Liebigs. Two Headmenships were affected. The alienation of these farms to Liebigs also cut off Africans on adjoining Crown land from the Mzingwane River - a source of water for stock during dry months of the year. At the time when T. Meikle was clearing his farms of African tenants the General Manager of the London & Rhodesian Mining and Land Company (Lonhro Company) was also approaching the colonial government through the CNC to have all the people living on the Company's farms evicted. The reason behind these evictions was loss of cattle by the company, allegedly through thefts by the Africans living on the farms. Wrote the Lonhro representative on August 5th, 1933:

We are having a lot of trouble on Insiza section of Glass Block with some native tenants. These tenants are a thoroughly bad lot. We have had three cases of suspected stock-theft just recently. On one occasion four boys were found with dogs in one of our paddocks, chasing a steer; for want of evidence they could only be charged with hunting and trespassing. Later on, the Section Manager found, at one of their kraals, Natives cutting up hides of cattle into small strips; unfortunately there was not much left to find the brands etc. The Filabusi Police also have a number of undetected cases of stock-theft on Glass Block on their records. ....these tenants are a bad lot, and it is necessary to have them removed. Will you kindly give us your usual helpful assistance in this matter?<sup>22</sup>

Evidence available shows that the colonial state fully co-operated with the Lonhro Company in the removal of people from Glass Block. One of the objects of this chapter is to analyse the rôle of the state in lending instability to the relationship between the African population and the land in Matabeleland in the period 1893 - 1960. One of the problems facing the student of historical development in rural Matabeleland during the period under review is one of deciding just who was behind the massive population migrations of the time. Thomas H. Holloway has advanced the argument that in legal systems recognizing private property, the state theoretically retains ultimate control - directly in public land, and indirectly in private land through the recognition of titles and the principle of eminent domain. He has also argued that when a landed elite controls the politico-legal apparatus of the state, public and private land policies might be expected to coincide.<sup>23</sup> There is no doubt that this argument applies to colonial

Zimbabwe almost perfectly. Robin Palmer has shown how the great majority of white Rhodesians envisaged retiring onto a farm someday thus boosting the policy of "possessory segregation". He has also tried to show how, as the political power of the settler grew, that of the farmers almost closely followed in its furrows, arguing that in 1930 13 of the 30 members of the Legislative Assembly were drawn from the settler farming community while all Rhodesian Prime Ministers up to that date (except one) and the majority of cabinet Ministers were or had been farmers.<sup>24</sup> In this way Holloway's argument cannot be overemphasized. The colonial state certainly played an increasingly important role in edging the Africans out of the land.

In 1934 there were a lot of migrations from privately owned farms to the Reserves or unalienated crown land farms in the Bulalima Mangwe district. Chiefs Banko and Hobodo and their people constitute some of the huge groups of people who were moved from private farms which had changed hands through sales. But there was a problem of where to move these people right from the beginning. Wrote the NC Plumtree, with reference to Banko's people:

I have received a letter from Mrs Rose Taylor requesting me to give immediate notice to Natives on Taylor's Block and Roy to remove.... The number of male Natives affected is 88 on Taylor's Block and 18 on Roy. These people are part of the following of Chief Banko who lives on the adjoining property known as Smith's Block, now in the Market. It is conceivable that Chief Banko and his following may soon be similarly served with notices to quit in the near future.. I am at a loss to know where these Natives will be settled.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to see how the mere appropriation of land from the Africans had led to the near disintegration of the once compact chiefdoms even before the modern involuntary and related population movements under examination. Further disintegration was to occur in the areas of resettlement due to the fusion of the various ethnic groups from different parts of Matabeleland as these were compressed together owing to the shortage of land. The two chiefdoms of Banko and Hobodo were compressed together on the Crown Land between the Semokwe, Shashi and Ramaquabane Rivers,<sup>26</sup> and one would like to believe that one of these chiefs had his political power compromised. The truth is that more often than not the Africans resisted removals, and in the case of chiefs such behaviour could lead to loss of political power. Examples of chiefs losing political power due to colonial activities abound in Matabeleland where one example has already been cited in the Beitbridge district (the case of Kwalu in the Siyoka area). But the Kwalu case differs



somewhat from developments taking place in certain parts of Matabeleland south. For certain chiefs loss of land through evictions was closely followed by loss of political power. The case of chief Mike-ex Natishazha is a good illustration of this. Chief Mike and his people- a mixture of Venda and Ndebele- had lived in an area in the West Nicholson section of Matabeleland called Natishazha. This area stretched from Majorda Farm in the north to Todd's Hotel on the way to Beitbridge, in the south. When word reached him through the NC that he and his people were to remove from this area in 1951, chief Mike openly protested against the move. However, in the end the decision of the colonial state prevailed and Mike and his people were moved to the Dibilishaba area of the Gwanda district where they live to this day. This area lying to the extreme southwest of the district already provided accommodation to a Sotho ethnic group under Chief Mathe. Because Mike had resisted removals he was reduced to a mere sub-Headman when he got to Dibilishaba, with a huge section of his people being subjected to Chief Mathe's rule. But something more than this also happened: Some of Mike's people got absorbed by chiefs Marupi, Chitawudze and Hlamba.<sup>27</sup> This, no doubt, represents an illustrative example of the destruction of chief-taincies through involuntary population migrations. At this time the Marupi and Hlamba chiefdoms were subjected to two pressures: on the one hand the size of these chiefdoms were reduced as portions of them reverted to European land; on the other they were turned into collecting depots for people evicted from private farms in other parts of Matabeleland.<sup>28</sup> The dispersal of people once under the same chiefdom should be viewed as reflecting not only the disorganized nature of population movements in Matabeleland during the period under examination, but also the general shortage of land which could make the heading of people together practicable. In the absence of adequate land for the resettlement of displaced people no clearly defined policy governing population movements was necessary. By the end of the day the colonial state found itself grappling with two thorny and conflicting problems: the safeguarding of settler interests and protecting the Africans from the economically devastating evictions and the resultant diminishing African hold on the land. The devastating effects of the removals were summed up by Mr Vellah when he pointed out that,

People lost a lot of livestock due to straying.  
 People were not familiar with <sup>the area</sup> into which they  
 were being poured and this worked very heavily  
 against efforts to relocate straying stock.

Of the effects on the land of people from different areas of origin being headed together he said:

In the new areas there was congestion as variegated social elements came together. Drought conditions set in the new areas as a result. After 15 years of settlement things got worse. Congestion affected grazing areas which in turn adversely affected the growth of herds. In the Natishazha area people had never experienced drought conditions. Even in the nationwide drought of 1947 people had not suffered very much due to the fact that their herds continued to do very well in view of the sparse population which did not impinge on grazing areas.<sup>29</sup>

These developments are very important as determinants of the conditions of the rural Africans during the period under review in Matabeleland. It is therefore significant that they should be analysed within the context of the subject of discussion, and the chapter sets itself the objective to do just this.



NOTES:

1. Paul Mosley, *The Settler Economies: Studies in the economic history of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1900-1963* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.1.
2. Ian R. Phimister, "Zimbabwe: the path of capitalist development " in David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin (eds.), *History of Central Africa Volume Two* (London and New York, Longman, 1983), p. 267.
3. S138/21: Native And European Land Administration 1926-1933: Removals of Natives from European Land; Settling of Natives in Reserves; — fencing of reserve boundaries, NAZ.
4. CNC to Secretary to His Excellency the Governor, 2nd January, 1925, S138/21; NAZ.
5. CNC To Secretary to the Governor, 25 January, 1927, S138/21, NAZ.
6. See Pe Zachrisson, *An African Area in change. Belingwe 1894-1946: A Study of colonialism, Missionary Activity and African response in Southern Rhodesia*, p. 262.
7. NC Charter to NC Selukwe, 15th October, 1924, S138/21; NAZ.
8. NC Selukwe to Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, 13th October, 1924, S138/21, NAZ.
9. Acting CNC to Secretary to the Premier, 10 June, 1927, S482/527/39: Native Land Matters: 1927 - 1946. NAZ.
10. ANC Buhera to NC The Range, 16th August, 1935, S1542/R3: Removals 1933-1939, NAZ.
11. NC Gwelo to Supt. of Natives Bulawayo, 12 June 1928, S138/21, NAZ.
12. Supt. of Natives Byo. to CNC Sby, 18th June, 1928, S138/21, NAZ.
13. See NC Gwelo to Supt. of Natives Bulawayo, 15 August, 1928, S138/21, NAZ.
14. Ibid.
15. NC Plumtree to Supt. of Natives, Byo, 8 September, 1936, S1542/R3, NAZ.
16. See Letter of Enkeldeorn to Salisbury, 13th November, 1935, S1542/R3, NAZ.
17. Interview with Mr Tairevesa Ruwita, Highlands. Harare, 22 May, 1988.
18. Ibid.

19. See Delineation Report on Ngungumbane Chieftainship and Communities: Belingwe Tribal Trust Land and District, 1965.
20. ANC Filabusi to NC Fort Rixon, 10th June, 1933, S1542/R3, NAZ.
21. ANC Filabusi to NC Fort Rixon, 13th October, 1933, S1542/R3, NAZ.
22. Zonhro Representative Insiza to Colonel C.L. Carbutt, Salisbury, 5th August, 1933. S1542/R3, NAZ.
23. Thomas H. Holloway, Immigrants on The Land: Coffee and Society in Sao Paulo, 1886-1934 (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p.11.
24. R. Palmer, Land and Racial Domination, p. 137.
25. NC Plumtree to Supt. of Natives Bulawayo, 3rd March, 1934, S1542/R3, NAZ.
26. CNC to Minister of Native Affairs, 28th September, 1934, S1542/R3 NAZ.
27. Interview with Mr. A.M.N. Vellah, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, 19/8/88.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.

## Chapter Four

### The Position in the Past - 1940 Period

This period is probably notable for its being dominated by the Matabeleland-to-Matabeleland category of migrations. Only two major migrations with an overspilling tendency have been identified: the movement of a large group of Ndebele speakers under Chief Mazetese and one other group whose leadership is still a subject of archival research to the southern section of the Masvingo Province. The two groups migrated from the Insiza District where land was being taken up by the settlers in the 1940s.<sup>1</sup> According to the source just cited the groups moved from Fort Rixon in 1948 and Filabusi in 1953 respectively. Although the exact size of the group that moved into the Sengwe area in 1953 has not yet been easy to ascertain, it must have, indeed, been huge in view of the diluting effect it had on the Shangani ethnic group in the area.<sup>2</sup> The same source alludes to the straining of relationships between two ethnic groups forcibly married into a symbiotic neighbourliness by involuntary population movements when it observes that,

Mazetese's original area was in the Fort Rixon district. They were moved from there by the Government in 1948. Chief Maranda regards them as immigrants who have deprived him of a portion of his traditional area. A boundary between these chiefs (the Old Pioneer Road-Mapasure) was delineated by the administration some years ago and that boundary is adhered to, although Maranda at one time thought Mazetese should be a headman under him.

At the time of removals in 1948 a huge section of Mazetese's people under Headman Makunungunu moved to Malapati in the Sengwe area of Mwenezi. Another section under Vulela remained in the Fort Rixon and probably later migrated to Lupane in Matabeleland North. The reason for removals was given by the ACNC when he reported at the end of March 1948 that,

At the end of the Quarter under review an item of some interest took place in that a fairly large mass movement of Natives with their stock was commenced from the sub-district of Fort Rixon in the Insiza District to Lupane District. This movement has been necessitated by the fact that the bulk of the population of the Fort Rixon sub-district has always resided on privately-owned farms and, owing to such farms changing hands, it was felt that steps should be taken to give such Natives security of tenure.<sup>3</sup>

In 1948 3 chiefs, 2 Headmen and approximately 1 600 people with 8 000 head of large and small stock were actually removed from the Fort Rixon and resettled in the Mberengwa and Lupane districts.<sup>4</sup> One of these Chiefs was certainly Mazetese.

The period after 1940 also saw the gradual peopling of the Gwai and Shangani Reserves—two areas which had been eschewed by the Ndebele after 1893. Thus by 1950 815 - 896 families had been moved to the Shangani and Lupane from Insiza (Fort Rixon) and Matobo.<sup>5</sup> After that date there remained 8 000 families in Matabeleland needing 1 600 000 acres for whom there was no land while 9 000 other families in communal occupation of Native Purchase Areas would ultimately be removed from them consequent upon sub-division. Also by 1950 189 families had been moved from the Matopo National Park to Prospect Ranch, 700 from Gwanda Crown land to Tuli and 300 from Hadane (Mzingwane) to Gwanda.<sup>6</sup> But throughout the 1940-60 period Lupane remained the centre of destination for the majority of population movements in Matabeleland. In 1950 the NC Lupane indicated that he would accept 469 families who could not be accommodated in the Shashani into his district together with their 600 head of stock but that Lupane should first be developed in preparation for these Matobo families.<sup>7</sup> But he also sounded some caution when he pointed out that this district was "becoming populated rapidly. I have taken on this year a large number of families and over 1 000 head of cattle from Nyamandhlovu District. The people being moved from Doromoland are said to be coming here as well, and I do not think the information contained in previous charts about the carrying capacity of this district is accurate. There is no surface water in the Reserve this year and because of this and the insufficient number of dipping tanks large areas are over populated and overstocked. The extensive 'Gasu' areas carry very little grass and no water. The Irrigation Department have declined to sink boreholes anywhere but in the vleis and valleys."<sup>8</sup> Already ecological disasters were becoming discernible in the arid areas like Lupane which were being used as sanctuaries for the displaced people of Matabeleland. In the period 1940 to 1960 the seriousness of the land shortage in Matabeleland became starkly clear to the colonial administration. The Native Department correspondence during this period show this very well. The present chapter, when it is fully developed, will seek to trace the political implications for the Rhodesian colony of pouring the Africans into the arid areas of Matabeleland. It will also address the economic and social implications and attempt to measure the general response of the people affected.

## CONCLUSION

The close of the Ndebele war of 1893 marked the loss of economic independence which the Matabeleland African had enjoyed before the colonial period. The most fundamental change which occurred in 1893 was his loss of the land as this fell into European control. The loss of land meant the loss of the ability to meet his subsistence needs through both livestock raising and the tilling of the land for agricultural purposes. More important than this was the fact that the colonization of the land by the settlers made involuntary population movements a foregone conclusion in Matabeleland throughout the colonial period. Involuntary population movements as a colonial institution lent fragility to the African's hold on the land. In this way the African economic system was completely undermined meaning that he would never again be in control of his economic potential. A displaced African would be easy prey for the settler farmer and miner. For the sake of survival he would be forced to sell his labour cheaply. This is the sense in which the types of migrations discussed in this paper are viewed as an institution of exploitation and underdevelopment.

NOTES

1. See Delineation Reports on Chief Mazetse and Community: Marnada Tribal Trust Land, July 1967, and The Sengwe Chieftainship and community: Sengwe Tribal Trust Land: Nuanetsi District, 1967., NAZ.
2. Ibid.
3. S1618: Chief Native Commissioners' Quarterly Reviews 1938 - 1948, NAZ.
4. Quarterly Review of Native Affairs for Quarter Ended 30th September, 1948, S1618; NAZ.
5. S160 LS3B/50: Resettlement of Natives, Shangani District, 1950-1957, NAZ.
6. Ibid.
7. NC Lupane to Provincial Native Commissioner, Matabeleland, S160 LS/100/3A/50 (-106/1/50): Movement of Natives. Crown Land Farms 1950, NAZ.
8. Ibid.



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