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REMAKING LABOUR, RESHAPING IDENTITY:  
COTTON, COMMODITIZATION AND THE CULTURE OF MODERNITY IN  
NORTHWESTERN ZIMBABWE.

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July, 1992

A Thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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Cotton, commoditization, and the culture of modernity in Zimbabwe



## **ABSTRACT**

Until the 1960s, the Gokwe region of Northwestern Zimbabwe was perceived as the wild, remote, and culturally backward domain of the "Shangwe" tribe. Since the introduction of small-holder cotton production in the 1960s, and the influx of immigrants from the south, it has been represented as a miracle of agrarian transformation, a frontier of commoditization, and more broadly, as an exemplar of the transition to modernity. In this thesis, I explore how alternative narratives of commoditization inform modes of state intervention, representations of ethnic difference, and forms of agrarian labour in Gokwe. Using my own ethnographic journey through Gokwe as a referent, I examine the different ways in which colonial maps, indigenous myths, and ritual exchanges variously locate relations of power, labour and identity in social space. Labour forms and commodity relations are continually remade as farmers, traders, ethnographers and administrators argue over the signs of modernity and its antitheses.

## Résumé

Avant les années 60, la région de Gokwe, dans le nord-ouest du Zimbabwe, était perçue comme étant le domaine sauvage, isolé et culturellement arriéré de la tribu "Shangwe". Depuis l'introduction de la production de coton par des petits cultivateurs dans les années 60 et l'afflux de migrants venus du sud, la région a été présentée comme un exemple de transformation agraire réussie, une nouvelle frontière de la marchandisation (commoditization) et, de façon plus générale, un modèle de transition vers la modernité. Dans cette thèse, j'explore comment différents récits sur la marchandisation rendent compte des modes d'intervention étatique, des représentations des différences ethniques et des formes de travail agricole dans la région de Gokwe. Utilisant mon propre séjour ethnographique dans cette région en guise de référence, j'examine comment les cartes coloniales, les mythes autochtones et les échanges rituels situent différemment les relations de pouvoir, le travail et le sens de l'identité dans le tissu social. Les formes de travail et les rapports d'échanges marchands sont continuellement renouvelés par les fermiers, les marchands, les ethnographes et les administrateurs, qui ne s'entendent pas sur les signes de la modernité et ses antithèses.

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## PREFACE

This thesis is broadly concerned with labour, ethnic identity and commoditization in a rapidly changing agrarian society in Southern Africa. Looking back on my own life, it now seems clear why I should have chosen to pursue these three themes--indeed, why I have been stalking them throughout my academic apprenticeship. My own parents were culturally suspended between an idealized eastern European tradition from which they and their parents had come and the peculiarly American fascination with work and wealth. An adamantly secular, New World Jewish identity provided the unstable bridge between these landscapes, the one more imagined than remembered, the other lived and constantly improvised. As a member of the generation that drew (guiltily, of course!) on the relative affluence produced by the labours of the previous two, I struggled often to recover the link between labour and an authentic sense of identity--one that seemed given so unselfconsciously to other boys who mowed lawns, delivered papers, or slung hamburgers after school in rehearsals for what seemed to me the peculiarly Protestant art of making a living. The parents of these schoolmates, often relatively well-to-do, would ceremoniously withdraw the weekly allowance and shake hands with their progeny as the latter ventured

across the threshold of their natal home and out into the wide world of productive wage-labour, thus enacting caricatured roles in the theatre of industrial capitalism. If these roles are apparently not being played so often any more by middle-class adolescents, or at least not in the same way, perhaps it is because the romanticized icon of the manual labourer is rapidly vanishing both from the world of representations and from common everyday experience in North America.

Disdainful of these suburban simulations, I travelled at age fifteen to the state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico on a summer exchange programme, choosing to live with a family of sharecropping maize farmers. (The options, as I recall, were something of an amateur ethnologist's smorgasbord: one could "experience" weavers, potters, or peasants.) There, a wiry man named Crispin Zurrita introduced me to the machete and the ox-plough, the sixteen hour work days, and the diet of tortillas and salt typical of agrarian families that still occupy much of the earth's inhabited surface. There, too, I encountered Don Crispin's benefactors in town, reticent people with televisions and extravagant double beds squeezed into dark cement rooms.

It was during that summer in Oaxaca that I must have found my calling in anthropology, and also where I first posed questions about the origins and consequences of rural inequality. It is also where I first became an active agent in the production of what I will be calling the culture of



modernity: my travelmate and I each paid Don Crispin \$100 for the privilege of being initiated into this pre-industrial fantasy of poverty, austerity and manual labour. Crispin was pleased, of course, to be paid for *accepting* the labour of two young men in exchange for some rather simple provisioning (we slept in what had been the chicken coop); had he been educated, he might have written an anthropological essay on the perverse economic behaviour of North Americans like ourselves. Like the coffee-picking tours taken by sympathetic *cooperantes* in Nicaragua throughout the 1980s, or the package weekends on Montana dude ranches sold to New York executives, I now recognize the whole arrangement for what it was: a form of labour tourism founded on my own society's romantic proclivities and the deeply one-sided appropriations they entail. Nearly two decades later, the black and white portraits that I took of Don Crispin and his family still hang on my wall--evidence of some enduring attachment to (possession of?) their world, a world I had in fact leased for a month, although neither I, nor they, understood it that way at the time. I never sent them copies of those pictures, nor even wrote them a letter at the time. At worst, the camera I wielded was an evil eye used to steal their souls and turn them into decorative fetishes that would later attest to a precocious field experience. I have long been haunted by the sense of duplicity surrounding that adventure--just as anthropology, as a discipline, seems to be haunted by similar

misadventures.

As an undergraduate, I remained preoccupied with the relation between labour and identity in my own society and in those radically different from mine. The key themes were already sketched out in Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, the very first text I read as an undergraduate; and although I found it maddeningly difficult, it spoke to me as profoundly as anything I have read since. Marx understood labour to be at the core of human social praxis--the process by which people create their material world as well as their conceptions of that world in the process of producing the means to sustain and reproduce social life. Human praxis, thus conceived, is nevertheless a notoriously difficult concept to grasp, more so for those of us who have not "produced" even a fraction of our lives directly from nature but rather taken for granted that livelihood is obtained by being paid with money to perform "work," and thereafter by using that money in order to purchase the commodities necessary to live.

It is easy to imagine, as I suppose I did, that this difficulty does not extend to people who are able to make a living in at least partial independence of wages. The figure of the "peasant" has, since the industrial revolution, served as a powerful, if romantic or nostalgic, vehicle for this notion. In signifying an ideal subject, with a partially unmediated relationship to the reproduction of daily life, and

a resultant consciousness that is antithetical to that of the subjects of the capitalist world, the figure of the peasant has been prominent in popular and academic discourse since the early nineteenth century; indeed, until recent attempts to deconstruct the concept of the peasant, academics in diverse disciplines were pre-occupied with how such a subject apprehends the world and acts within it--economically, politically and morally.

Ironically, life for children in capitalist society usually begins in a kin-based residential unit, just as it does for children in "peasant" societies situated rather more distantly from the core regions of late capitalist development. The means of life in such a domestic group are generally provided for children without expectation of return; or at least they are provided until such time as the child is socially defined as an adult and is forced, tempted, or motivated by circumstances to leap from the secure shore of guaranteed livelihood into the perilous waters of the capitalist labour market--waters in which there is little choice but to sink or swim. The antithesis of commoditized labour is thus still contained, if only symbolically, within the form of the Western family. Still, it is projected onto societies, distant in either time or space, in order to tell a story to ourselves of our own alienation and loss, to reflect on the morality of commoditized labour in a moment when people are disposed of on the streets by the tens of

thousands in the heartlands of industrial capitalism.

This is where we arrive at the conundrum I encountered in the post-settler colonial economy of Zimbabwe. What can one predict about the way in which wage-labour is articulated with domestic life in a society in which the production of commodities by means of commodities is already well developed, but highly uneven across economic sectors--one in which a person who works for wages in an urban factory producing machine cogs or underarm deodorant may have siblings who feed their children with home-grown maize and gathered green leaves? Or, to bring us somewhat nearer to the case at hand, how can one account for a process of commoditization in which people whose great-grandparents worked for wages on mines and farms at the turn of the century, have only just begun to purchase fertilizers and pesticides and to grow crops for sale? Where is the momentum of history here? How can such a convoluted unfolding of economic process be explained, if at all, by economic models of development or underdevelopment or by anthropological models of cultural contact and change? Who indeed would find the need for such models of explanation and why? These are among the questions that provide the context within which my own research--its objects, questions, and methods--was initially framed.

#### Contribution to Knowledge

One of the original contributions of the thesis, I hope, is to make these questions not just background, but to show

how, by the very fact of being asked, they restructure the very objects to which they refer. In the course of the thesis, I draw on many voices and texts, including extensive quotations from my own field journals, and present them in a kind of open dialogue with one another. The result is, I hope, a novel way of writing ethnography--and in particular, an ethnographic account of economic transformation and its representations.

This is, to my knowledge, the first comprehensive ethnography and ethnohistory of the peoples of the Gokwe region of Northwestern Zimbabwe; at the same time, it constitutes an exploration of how the idea and practice of ethnography itself serves as a discursive resource in the remaking of labour forms and social identities in Gokwe. The thesis establishes a counterpoint between colonial modes of representing and locating labouring subjects in a fixed geographical space, and indigenous ways of modelling social relations in terms of the movements and conquests of ancestors and commodities across a politically charged landscape.

Finally, the thesis is intended as a sustained and novel challenge to models of economic transformation that take as axiomatic a unilineal process of "development" from a pre-commoditized to a commoditized condition, particularly those models that take the appearance of wage labour as a ready index of capitalist transformation and the "loss" of ethnic authenticity. The people of Gokwe, I suggest, have long been

engaged in dialogue around the significance and content of the "modern" and its manifestations in various modes of agrarian practice. They are therefore part of, rather than remote from, the ongoing invention of the culture of modernity.

### **Acknowledgements**

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This project began as part of a collaborative effort. It saddens me that for a variety of reasons (having largely to do with the institutional conditions under which academic knowledge is formally produced) that I had to finish it alone. Nevertheless, the imprint of many minds and the kindness of many hearts over many years are hidden within what I have written here. Of the many fine teachers I have been fortunate to have, a few directed my gaze toward the questions that led me to the themes I explore below. In my first year of undergraduate work at the University of Chicago, John MacAloon introduced me to social theory generally and to Marx's writings on labour, praxis and the commodity in particular. His enthusiasm, intensity and insight have carried me a long, long way since then. These interests were deepened during my two years as part of the remarkable programme on Social

Thought and Institutions at Stanford, under the leadership of Charles Dreke-meier, a humanist of rare qualities and extraordinary scholarship. While at Stanford, the late Michelle Rosaldo turned my interests toward issues of semiotics, representation and metaphor--and encouraged me to continue in anthropology, advice I belatedly accepted. But it was Bridget O'Laughlin who stimulated my interest in labour and the peasantry in both Africa and the wider African diaspora, and whose level of political engagement was a model for myself and many others. During my long tenure as a graduate student at McGill, I have incurred many debts both within the Department of Anthropology, and in the Centre for Developing Area Studies where I was a resident fellow for much of the 1980s. John Galaty has been extremely generous as both supervisor and friend through two theses, constantly encouraging me to follow my nose into new intellectual territory and challenging me to achieve both synthesis and clarity where I was content to muddle through. It is to him that I owe my interest in the discursive and pragmatic aspects of ethnicity, as well as in problems of textual analysis; his constant pressure to deal with and reveal my experience in "the village" accounts for some of the unusual techniques of ethnographic writing I have experimented with here. Jérôme Rousseau, who has served on both my M.A. and Ph.D. committees, has consistently offered one or two treasured bits of advice or insight just when they were most critically needed--not

only with respect to theoretical issues of ethnicity and social structure, but also with respect to finishing a dissertation. He may well wonder what I did with his admonition not to try and write all six theses I seemed to have mapped out. I can only say that had it not been for his cautionary advice, I may well have tried to write twelve. Colin Scott has taken great pains to make sense of a distant ethnographic context in the fragmented way I have tried to make it known to him. In myriad ways, he has let me know that he understands, perhaps better than anyone else, what it is I have been trying to come to terms with in this thesis.

The influence of Keith Hart will be apparent in what I have written; as friend and mentor during his two years at McGill in the early 1980s, and through his writings since then, he has been an unfailing source of inspiration. Peter Gutkind, who acted as my supervisor during the first two years of fieldwork preparation until his departure from McGill in 1986, has been a model of intellectual and personal integrity for innumerable students, including myself. He steered me through the literature on agrarian transformation (helping Gul Rukh Selim and I to organize a graduate seminar on that topic in 1985), through the writing of the research proposal, and has been a constant source of encouragement ever since. As founder and leader of the Labour Studies Group at the Centre for Developing Area Studies, Peter helped a team of us through years of difficult research negotiations and grant requests.



The other faculty leader of that group, the late John Bradbury, joined me in an initial field investigation into labour in Zimbabwe's mining industry in 1984; it is with great fondness that I remember him, his constant encouragement, and his constant admonitions not to take the pretensions of academe too seriously. Of all my colleagues in the group, Suzanne Dansereau stands out as having been of immeasurable help and support throughout our years working on and in Southern Africa together and separately. I treasure her friendship.

Thanks also must go to Myron Frankman, Christine Jourdan, and Roger Keesing for giving me the opportunity to try out some of my evolving ideas in their classes, and especially to my own students in Anthropology 151-204B who, with more enthusiasm than nine-o'clock lectures warranted, listened to an endless parade of ethnographic examples from "Gokwe," wherever that really is. During the last year of writing, I have benefitted greatly as well from feedback from members of the Pastoral and Agrarian Systems Équipe at McGill, and most especially from discussions with Don Attwood. Diane Shea, Judi Snively, Karina Kielmann, and James McGill all provided useful comments and support when I was struggling to find my way out of the morass toward the end. James started, and Wendy DeSouza finished, the wonderful digitized maps that I have been able to use here, and I am extremely grateful to both of them.

My debts to institutions and friends in Zimbabwe is equally great. Joseph Mugore, himself an alumnus of the Labour Studies Group, provided much appreciated support and advice in his capacities as avid scholar, able bureaucrat, and faithful friend. During the early formulation of research problems, Brian Raftopoulos, then at the Research Division of the Ministry of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare, was of crucial assistance. Although it took almost four years before we could acquire permission to do it, he, together with Sam Moyo, Tom Shopo, Lloyd Sachikonye, and Thandike Mkandawire among others at the Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies (ZIDS) first proposed in 1984 that we work in the Sanyati-Gokwe region. Marshall Murphree most generously agreed to affiliate Gul Rukh and I to the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) at the University of Zimbabwe from January, 1988 to July, 1989. There we enjoyed not only a congenial environment in which to share ideas, but also the freedom to pursue our own plans as we saw fit. Of the many who provided useful commentary and advice at the research seminars we presented, Ben Cousins stands out as being of particular help. I would like to register my gratitude to the several departments of the Government of Zimbabwe that provided support for my research: the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement; the District Administrator's Office in Gokwe; and Agritex. The last in particular provided us support in myriad ways, ranging from crop data to logistical

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unbelievably, Eli did not live to see me finish--I greatly miss the arguments we would have had about what I have written, but most of all, I just miss him. My daughter, Sharoda Eliya, was born just as I was trying to draw this particular chapter of my life to a close; she has opened a new one, delightful beyond what I could ever imagine. My wife, Gul Rukh, lives and breathes within everything I have written here--only she will understand what that has meant to me and to the three of us.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

|          |                                                   |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------|
| AGRITEX  | Agricultural Technical and Extension Service      |
| AMA      | Agricultural Marketing Authority                  |
| ARDA     | Agricultural and Rural Development Authority      |
| CCGA     | Commercial Cotton Grower's Association            |
| CFU      | Commercial Farmers' Union                         |
| CMB      | Cotton Marketing Board                            |
| DA       | District Administrator                            |
| DC       | District Commissioner                             |
| GMB      | Grain Marketing Board                             |
| NFAZ     | National Farmer's Association of Zimbabwe         |
| RAEO     | Regional Agricultural Extension Officer           |
| TILCOR   | Tribal Trust Land Development Corporation         |
| ULV      | Ultra-Low Volume (Sprayer)                        |
| VIDCO    | Village Development Committee                     |
| WADCO    | Ward Development Committee                        |
| ZANU(PF) | Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) |
| ZAPU     | Zimbabwe African People's Union                   |
| ZNA      | Zimbabwe National Archives                        |
| ZNFU     | Zimbabwe National Farmers' Union                  |



PART ONE

OF MIRACLES AND MIRRORS:  
THE PUZZLE OF COMMODITIZATION IN GOKWE

## INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

### Journal Entry: 24 March 1988

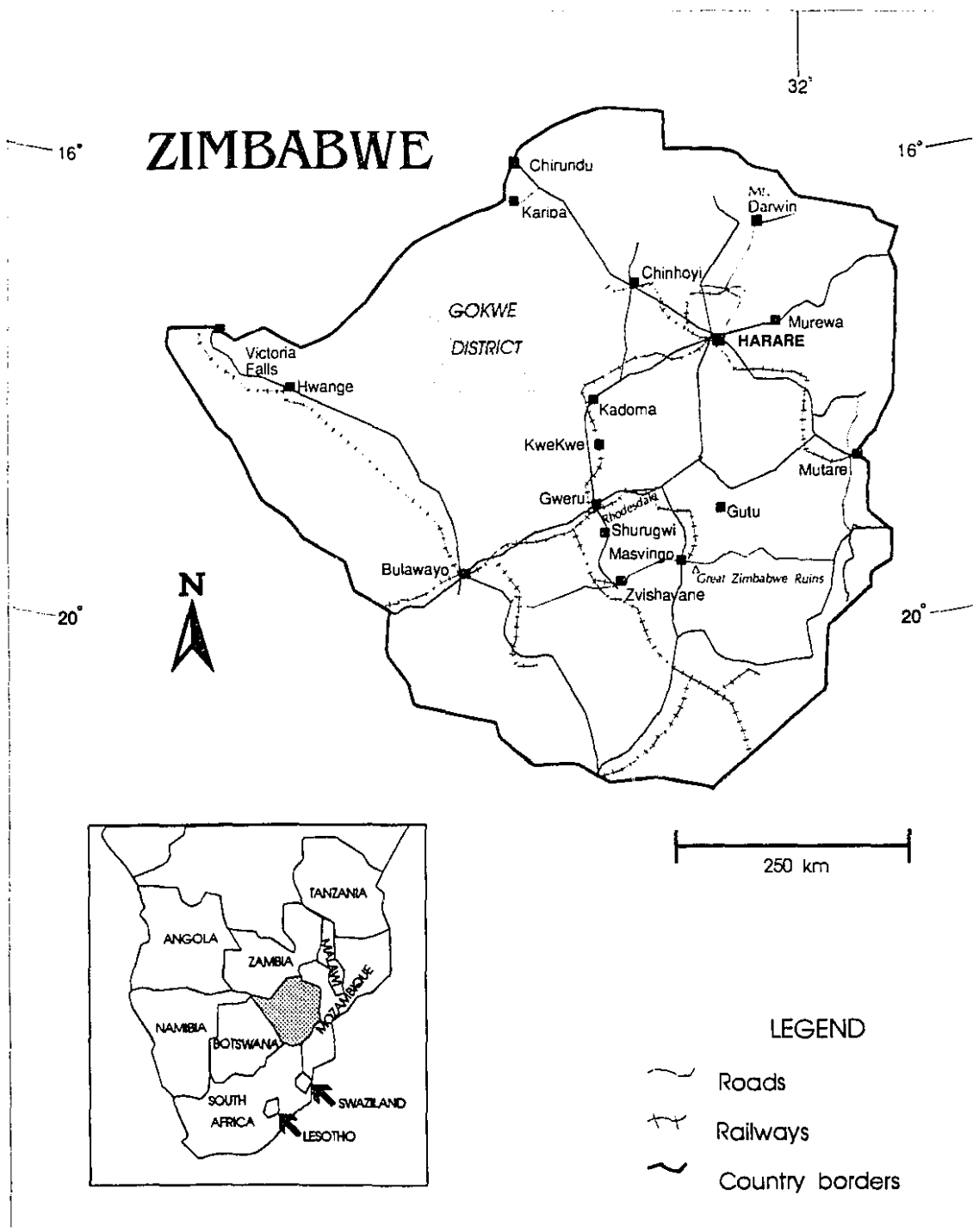
"They will be chasing money with an axe." So said Mr. Matiratidza, extension worker for Goredema South, Gokwe District, as we sat with him and Enias, his *mukomana*<sup>1</sup>, in the candlelit kitchen. That must have been last Wednesday or Thursday night, just after he returned from the Gwebo beerhall, watery-eyed and less reticent after his habitual "two pints". The beer-hall was not crowded this time of year. No money yet--the cotton bolls just beginning to burst, and one last month of hard work was required before the cotton checks would start to come in and the drinking would begin in earnest. By September there would be no more checks for many, no more money, and no more drinking. That is when people would have to work in the October heat, stomachs empty. They might slaughter cattle to sell the meat; they might borrow from the shopkeeper against the cotton crop being planted; they would be "chasing money with an axe."

### The Miracle of Gokwe

Looking at virtually any map of Zimbabwe, Gokwe District appears as the centre of a gap in a crescent wrench opened toward the northwest (see Map I.1). This gap is identifiable as an open space, an absence which is framed by the bold dark lines of the two-lane tar road running from Victoria Falls south to Bulawayo, over to Harare and then northwest again to cross the Zambian border at Kariba and Chirundu. Outside this

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<sup>1</sup>Literally a "young boy"; in this context the term was used to denote Enias's position as a paid domestic servant, although he was a man in his late twenties.



**Map I.1--Zimbabwe, showing position of Gokwe District.**

frame the map is densely packed with the colours or markers that denote things and people. Within it there is virtually nothing marked at all. The material map provides an appropriate model for, as well as reflection of, the representation of Gokwe that most Zimbabweans characteristically have in mind. This gap in the map that signifies Gokwe, and that the mention of "Gokwe" evokes in turn, is fraught with emotions for most Zimbabweans who do not live there and even for some of those who do: the fear of the unknown and the inhuman, disdain for the uncivilized, and sometimes longing for the unwritten possibilities of a social and economic frontier.

I will return to the historical, discursive and symbolic construction of this map in later chapters. For the moment I will only draw notice to Gokwe's very recent and very remarkable transformation: once constituted as the negation of national progress, "Gokwe" has miraculously begun to assert itself as a fecund, energetic symbol and source of primeval development. Its emergence as probably the fastest growing district in the country in terms of both population and agricultural commodity production since Independence makes Gokwe a palpable emblem of the economic potential of the nation. If, as many now think, Zimbabwe stands as a beacon of hope for salvaging small-scale agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is Gokwe that provides its most dramatic and compelling example.

Gokwe district had been a unique blind spot on the settler colonial horizon. When the famous Morris-Carter Commission was charged in 1925 with recommending a final apportionment of land between Europeans and Africans, only Gokwe district (known as Sebungwe at the time) was deemed unworthy of, and in any case, too remote for, a first-hand inspection (Palmer 1977:164). In the event, the Commission recommended that a mere 3 percent of its land area be designated for European occupation. (The next lowest proportion of European land assigned in any other district in Southern Rhodesia was fully 25 percent.) More telling was their proposal that nearly four-fifths of Gokwe's land area be classified as "unassigned" (ibid.:275). In the decades to follow, its lands were at some times dismissed as "uninhabitable," at others as "uninhabited." If Gokwe's land occupied at best an indeterminate place on the colonial horizon, its people were virtually denied any presence at all.

Only two decades ago Gokwe was still perceived as a dangerous and wild space, populated by lions and elephants, by people who hunted without clothes. In the years since then that picture has been rapidly and radically transformed. Today, Gokwe is home to tens of thousands of cotton producers, traders and agents of the state engaged in the rough and tumble business of making money any way they can. Some of these people may be thought of as "indigenous" in the sense that their presence in the district antedates the colonial

conquest at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Many others are immigrants who were settled in the district by force or choice after 1950. The livelihood of both of these socially recognized categories of persons is now largely based on the production of cotton and the circulation of commodities, cash and credit that it generates. These days, nearly everyone in Gokwe seems to be "chasing money with an axe."

How did this miracle of commoditization come to be? What sort of changes did it herald for the future of these people? These were the sort of broad questions that animated my research when I arrived in Gokwe early in 1988; but they were not, I should stress, the product of my curiosity alone. Zimbabwean government officials and local scholars were curious, too. And so were the people of Gokwe themselves, although for them such questions were in a very real sense "lived" rather than "asked." The intellectual and political context within which these questions were meaningful, my struggles to find answers to them, and the process through which they gave way to different kinds of problems while I was

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<sup>2</sup>Among indigenes a distinction is made between autochthons (*varidzi venyika*--literally, "owners of the land") and stranger-conquerors (*vatorwa*--literally, "those who have taken"). The latter are said to have arrived in Gokwe under the leadership of a chief bearing the title "Chireya" at least two generations before the establishment of Ndebele suzerainty over the scattered Shona-speaking chiefdoms of western Zimbabwe in the 1830s. The earliest mention of Chireya in the written historical record that I am aware of occurs in a Portuguese document dating from 1784 (see Sutherland-Harris 1970:257). Indigenous narratives of Chireya's conquest are discussed in detail in Chapter IX, below.

in the field and after my return, together make up the primary subject of Part One of the thesis, but continue to inform the latter two parts as well.

The trope that best describes this process, and hence reappears often throughout the text, is that of the journey. In many ways, the modernist perception that human history moves in a single direction is grounded in the idea that by travelling across cultural frontiers, one can travel through time. In anthropological practice, the "field" always lies beyond a cultural boundary, and fieldwork, by definition, involves crossing a frontier--going someplace where one is not, and perhaps where one has never been. As in all ritual crossings, success in this endeavour depends upon the fieldworker's imaginative capacity to make the frontier into a home, and retrospectively, the home into a frontier. The work of this metaphorical journey to the field--the anthropologist's special act of transformation--is wrought from a movement through frames of vision and understanding. At the moment of crossing the boundary, the frame fuses the place and its human subjects into a single, vacuous object (in the familiar formula, the anthropologist says, "I am going to place x to study people y"). Like a shadow on the moon, the frame encloses an identifiable space with a border but no details. What the ethnographer brings to the border is an expectation that one will find what one is looking for: it might be ritual, emotion, economy, politics or a thousand

other things.<sup>3</sup> In my case it was "agrarian labour" and its place and transformations within a process I thought of as "commoditization." When the frontier is crossed one initially sees through frames constructed dialectically in terms of what one knows about home: "What they are doing here is like/not like, what I already know." Thus I began to see events that looked like wage-labour (which I knew) or that looked like something else (labour paid with salt; labour performed in large groups and so on).

Ideally, the initial terms of this rather limiting dialectic give way to frames of perception that more nearly approximate the experience of those one has come to live among. To attempt to cleave nearer to the experience of others, as Geertz suggests, means accepting "that ideas and the realities they disclose are naturally and indissolubly bound up together." Of course the ethnographer/traveller never succeeds wholly in seeing through the eyes of the other:

What he perceives--and that uncertainly enough--is what they perceive "with," or "by means of," or "through" or whatever word one may choose. In the country of the blind, who are not as unobservant as they appear, the one-eyed is not king but spectator (Geertz 1979:228).

These stages that I have described in the journey of ethnography are not entirely discrete. Nor are the

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<sup>3</sup>The expectation that an aspect of the real will appear as if in a frame, a picture or an exhibition lends itself to a variety of cultural practices linked to colonialism, of which ethnography is only one. See Mitchell (1991:chap.3) for a brilliant examination of the practice of "enframing" the world of the Other in the colonization of Egypt.



"experience-near" concepts of the inhabitants free of the frames of understanding that have been brought by previous travellers. In a place like Gokwe--perhaps in every place, every frontier--many of the inhabitants have made their own ethnographic journeys, calling, for awhile anyway, another place "home" and then returning with some other way of understanding a larger whole that encompasses and overcomes the distinction between home and frontier.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

My own intellectual and geographical journey across the metaphorical frontier is partly reflected in the narrative organization of this thesis, even though it is not obviously a story in the conventional sense. The three main parts roughly correspond to three successive stages in my research. These stages in turn may be taken to represent three vantage points, or levels of engagement with the problem of commoditization and the transformation of agrarian labour in Zimbabwe, in Gokwe, and finally, in the village of Tazivana. The first of these stages took the form of ruminations of an intellectual sort that I engaged in both "at home" in Montreal and in a series of trips I made to Zimbabwe (or through it on my way to somewhere else) in the mid-1980s. Although on each of these occasions I made forays into the countryside to visit mines (an initial focus of interest) or tourist attractions, I spent most of my time in Harare, from which it seemed peculiarly difficult to escape. There, I passed the time

talking with local intellectuals, union leaders and civil servants, with hotel waiters and taxi drivers, and with sundry expatriates--South African refugees, American aid workers, European teachers--about Zimbabwe's past, present and future.

The second stage of the research began early in 1988, when we finally received permission to remain in Zimbabwe to carry out field research for an extended period of time. Beginning in early March of that year, we travelled widely throughout the Gokwe region, interviewing officials of the Cotton Marketing Board and the Agricultural Extension Service (Agritex), attending Agricultural Field Days, and conducting a survey of farmers and cotton transporters. The Gokwe we discovered over the next five months was a place constructed from the vista afforded by its public pathways--its nodes and networks of commerce and administration rather than its lived-in communities. Ours was a trader's itinerary--one that took us always to the edge of, or in between, places rather than inside of them. Although we detoured through villages to conduct interviews, it was from public offices, marketing board depots, and schools that we departed during the day and to which we returned to cook our meals and put down our bedding for the night. It was a milieu we shared with other deracinated public sector workers--temporary teachers, mechanics with the District Development Fund, local administrators. Sharing their cooking fires after long days talking to farmers at the depots, our impressions were

filtered through our conversations with these transient people, through the experience of collectively being outside of the world of farmers we believed we might penetrate with our interviews and somehow come to know, and yet certain that we were much nearer to that world than the bureaucrats who sat idly formulating plans in the capital.

The third stage of the research, my experience of which is mostly embodied in Part III, began when we settled into a single village in the ward of Goredema that August. From that point forward, we began to see Gokwe differently. Perhaps it was because we began to work the land itself rather than move indifferently across its surface. In a way that we only gradually came to understand, this form of involvement with the soil of a particular locality enabled us to share in its substance and to be incorporated as one more strand in its long social history and its complex politics.

There are three implicit political maps or modes of representation that correspond to the positions that we successively occupied in these phases of our research. The first of these conjoins Zimbabwe with a global order of power in which flows of knowledge and capital are defined by its jural status as a nation-state among other states. This is the map of power that defines the terms on which foreign scholars, donors, and tourists engage with "Zimbabwe" as an entity, define it as a place with certain characteristics (a population, a development strategy, a literacy rate, and so

on), and a history that may stand alongside those narrated for other nation-states that together constitute "the world." The second maps a hierarchy of power emanating from the centre of the state to its interior--it marks out the interstices running between local places, connecting the administrative and commercial cities of Kadoma, KweKwe, Gweru and Bulawayo to rural hubs or "growth points" such as Gokwe and Sanyati, and finally (where there are roads and rest camps) to the countryside itself. The third centre of power is nearly invisible within the maps of the first and second and stands in constant tension with them; it emanates from the lowlands of Gokwe, oscillating between Chief Chireya, on the one hand, and the ancestral chiefs who speak through a hierarchy of spirit mediums--to Nevana in central Gokwe and his superior, Vanehwowa, in Sanyati. These three arrangements of power in space (and implicitly in time as well) are laid one over the other. The first made it possible (indeed, ultimately dictated the terms under which) we were able to be present in Zimbabwe's northwestern hinterland at all; the latter two constitute alternative orientations that people in Gokwe attend to at different moments and for different purposes. And in a host of complex ways they serve as the fields within which identities are shaped and reshaped in Gokwe. The farmers themselves are often transformed into travellers, being turned outside of the village world they live within, bringing the experience of having traversed the paths that

link worlds to bear on their village lives.

With these three broad divisions in mind, let me now present a sketch of the individual chapters. In Chapter I, I begin by recounting the climate of arguments, ideas and images that gave shape to discourse about agrarian transformation in Zimbabwe during the years immediately following the end of settler colonial rule. This discussion narrows to a recounting of my incorporation within a particular research programme--one that was informed by a grand cross-continental and inter-epochal exchange of ideas (distilled in what has been known as the "Agrarian Question") as well as by the more localized politics of research as it occurs in and through the post-colonial Zimbabwean state. In Chapter II, I step away from this discussion of intellectual politics to pose questions about the organization of knowledge about commoditization, a knowledge that gives such an intellectual politics its discursive substance. Here, I reflect on the commodity and the commoditization of labour as they are represented, imagined or experienced in both my home--North America--and in Zimbabwe. These reflections lead me in Chapter III to draw conclusions about how the "puzzle of peasants" is reworked in many different modern practices, practices that simultaneously include anthropology and the state management of "rural populations." In the latter part of the chapter, I return to where I began--to conversations with Gokweans and a sketch of the variety of positions they

occupy in the village where I did my most intensive work. I do so in order to show how these people, as both objects and interlocutors of the project of modernity, effectively destabilize the aspiration to write their labour and their lives into a monolithic, or even coherent, story of commoditization. This leads me finally to consider the "remaking" of labour within and outside of the stories that have been written about commoditization in Gokwe.

Part Two takes up the question of the historical relationship between space, identity and the making of the labouring subject. My purpose is to explore the history of the relation between subject-making and place-making in northwestern Zimbabwe, at once through a critique of how Gokwe has been made in texts and maps, and at the same time through my own rewriting of the district as an experience I have lived through and tried to make sense of. Chapters IV, V, and VI contrast, respectively, three ways of representing Gokwe as a space: the first apprehending it as a totalized geographic object; the second, as a juxtaposition of my own journeys and encounters; and the third, as a complex and rapidly changing regional economy that is lived through the eyes and lives of individuals situated in particular localities. Thus Chapter IV looks at the radically different modes of representation, and consequently, views of commoditization, that appear in four texts written about Gokwe in the 1970s. Chapter V, in contrast, breaks apart these monolithic constructions of

Gokwe, presenting in their stead a composite of narratives of my own journeys through the district. Here, I use my encounters with individuals and events as tokens of particular places within Gokwe's variegated landscape. In Chapter VI, I use these encounters as a source of puzzles about the turbulent world of cotton, commodity production, and trade in which the lives of middle-men, teachers, extension workers, farmers and the odd anthropologist intersect.

Chapters VII and VIII move from the representation of place to that of identity. Together, they elaborate a single theme--the making of ethnic/labouring subjects in Gokwe during the colonial period and today. In Chapter VII, I examine the evolving relationship between ethnic classification, political control, and the extraction of taxes and labour prior to the Second World War. In the first part of Chapter VIII, I analyze the shift in techniques of ethnic representation by colonial officials and anthropologists that took place after 1940, drawing special attention to the use of ethnic maps during a time of widescale forced relocation of peoples; then, I discuss the play of opposed identities between modernizing immigrants and indigenes in everyday discourse in Gokwe today.

Part Three is more conventionally ethnohistorical and ethnographic in its subject matter, if not always in its mode of presentation. In it, I have three related objectives. The first, addressed in Chapters IX and X, is to capture indigenous renderings of how labour, property and political

history go together, and to explore how the relationship between these dimensions of agrarian praxis have shifted in response to the generalization of cotton production and commodity circulation. I try to show that when the people of Gokwe express the relationship between identity and place, between rights in land and rights over labour, and between indigenes and immigrants, they have recourse to a fundamentally different mode of description than that of the colonial and post-colonial state. Rather than describe the geography of power in the static, visual language of a map, they usually choose to describe it in terms of journeys, the actual or mythical movements they and their ancestors have made through space. Such descriptions evince a conception of power--including the power to command tribute or labour usually identified with states--not as an absent or silent force, but as a visible, embodied process. My second objective in Part Three is to draw attention to the quality of labouring acts and their relationship to various dimensions of time. As part of this exercise, Chapter XI recounts my own experience as one who internalized a range of labouring techniques in the course of an annual agricultural cycle. In doing so, I want to evoke the substance of what people do and what they know when they labour in particular ways. In Chapter XII, I turn from an exploration of labour as process to the signification of labour as social form--to see how "gifts" and "sales" of labour simultaneously signify and



enable relations that involve obligation, cooperation, reciprocity, and debt. The conclusion returns to the questions of politics, theory and method raised in Part One: how many stories of commoditization are there to be told? How does their telling in itself inform the ways in which labour takes form over time in Gokwe?

Let me now summarize. The larger, guiding questions of Part One are: How are questions of commoditization posed, with respect to whom, and with what effects? How does the figure of "labour" work within the modernist discourse on commoditization? Parts Two and Three attempt at once to answer these questions with respect to Gokwe and to retell Gokwe's story in a variety of other ways and from other points of view. Together, the various chapters draw a sometimes discordant composition linking the multiple significations of texts with those of bodies as they realize socially inscribed forms of labour. Still, between the three parts of the thesis, there is an overarching theme: that of the argument over identities that the remaking of labour in Gokwe continues to entail, just as it has in the past. The journey I have recorded here thus begins with the commoditization of labour only to wander away from it through considerations of identity, power, and history. But I return to labour again at the end, not with an accumulated knowledge of what it represents in terms of the directionality of change, but with an enriched sense of what it might mean, and how its meanings

might be remade from a variety of points of view in time, space, and identity in Gokwe's multiply-layered social landscape.

**CHAPTER I**  
**SUCCESS STORIES: AGRARIAN REPRESENTATIONS AND THE POLITICS**  
**OF RESEARCH IN POST-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE**

**The Deconstruction of African Rural Political Economy**

How is agrarian Africa to be represented, to be analyzed and understood? The analysis of rural African society over the last two decades has taken place in a largely deconstructive mood. The hard epistemological ground of classical ethnology envisioned an African landscape populated with primordial ethnicities, each with a distinctive culture to be described and a unique ethnohistory to be told. In recent years that smooth, mosaic-like surface has been decisively broken, its fragments to be ploughed under perhaps once and for all. In place of what Thornton (1988) calls the master trope of classification, the monographs of the last decade have tended to substitute the metaphors of process and practice, dialectic and differentiation. Social phenomena once thought to be expressions of timeless essence have been shown time and again to be made out of contingent appearance: tribes and states, along with the apparatus of culture they seemed to embody, are increasingly represented as constructs of the colonial imagination, products of ethnographic artifice, or the result of a fortuitous and ephemeral

confluence of political and environmental events. It is not only "the tribe"--a term darkly stained with colonial connotations--that has been subjected to savage assault. The more abstract discourse of political economy--the working language of post-colonial states the world over--has become, to employ its own jargon, "problematic." The nominal categories out of which the edifice of political economy is built--"household," "peasant," "class", "women," and "state," among others--have been exposed as arbitrary frames that operate to conceal difference within the objects they set out to represent.

But what I have characterized as a deconstructive strategy is still subordinated to a commitment to the production of positive knowledge, a restless quest for the truth, a relentless search for the "real" processes at work in determining the course of agrarian change. "What must we know," scholars ask, "in order to recommend the right thing to be done?" At a time when virtually all scholarship is held to have implications for "policy" and becomes a potential charter for a revised course of action, whether by states or subaltern classes, there is an urgency implied by the rhetoric of "development". It is an urgency not lost on development's most ardent critics who vigorously debunk the language of agencies, states, and other intellectuals in order to substitute another knowledge of their own making. The reasons for this are both general and particular, global and local.

At the crudest level, language use, and the knowledge it constitutes, is motivated by money; the international discourse of development is, after all, the medium through which decisions about resource allocation are made, and it is these allocations that African states so heavily depend upon. But the commitment to the production of knowledge of specific kinds, for specific audiences, may equally respond to local conditions, to the home-grown styles and politics of intellectual debate, and to contemporary political struggles.

In this chapter, I look at the shifting representations of Zimbabwe's rural political economy during the recent era of its deconstruction, and the transformations in the kind of knowledge of rural society that has been produced as a result. My purpose is twofold: first, to address the politics of knowledge and of policy that make use of such representations; and second, to situate my own research practice in its proper context, one in which various narratives of development were competing to define what constituted the proper objects of research and the purpose to which such research ought to be put.

### Success Stories

The mid-1980s were heady times in Zimbabwe--times in which the ideological baggage of the repressive white minority government that had been ousted in 1980 was being deconstructed and new "truths" and possibilities revealed. Foremost among these was the evident truth that black

Zimbabwean cultivators, given the support of a sympathetic state, could collectively engineer an extraordinary increase in agricultural commodity production in a relatively short space of time. Even in the face of recurrent drought and increasing regional instability, Zimbabwe seemed on its way to becoming the undisputed champion of the race for sustainable African agricultural development. Ironically, having amassed a costly stockpile of over two million tonnes of grain between 1984 and 1986, the country was even being deemed a victim of its own success.<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly, the country had long possessed a prosperous, export-oriented commercial farm sector, one that bears comparison more with South Africa than with the peasant based agrarian structures that dominate the continent as a whole. But Zimbabwe's quiet agrarian revolution was being wrought among the country's Communal Area farmers, long regarded as inefficient, subsistence-oriented producers, languishing in colonial reserves, with little surplus to sell but their labour. Now, evidence could be marshalled to show that the commoditization of the agricultural product in the peasant sector since Independence had apparently taken place with astonishing speed.<sup>2</sup> In the context of continent-wide

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<sup>1</sup>See African Business. October, 1986.

<sup>2</sup>For example, while the contribution of Small-Scale Commercial Area and Communal Area farmers to the total maize marketed through official channels averaged only 8 percent between 1978 and 1980, by 1985 it was just under fifty percent (Agricultural Marketing Authority 1986a: Appendix 3). The

pessimism toward both peasants and states, it was small wonder that the Zimbabwean peasantry had, in the words of a leading local economist, "both captured the imagination of foreign observers and sparked hope that Africa may yet surprise the world with its particular brand of green revolution" (Hawkins 1986:4).

It seemed entirely reasonable at the time to take seriously the capacity of the state to support an agrarian transformation of this velocity and magnitude. The facilitating role of the state in generating Zimbabwe's "green revolution" had, in the eyes of many, never been more apparent, and praise for the agrarian policies of the Mugabe government had rarely been so multipartisan. The "well-known ingredients" for agricultural success, as one local business reporter put it, were all included in Zimbabwe's own particular recipe: "generous and prompt payment for farmers, rapid expansion of collection and storage facilities, more credit and agricultural advice for peasant farmers" (African Business, October, 1986).

On the surface, this "recipe" seemed to offer something to satisfy everyone. Neo-Narodniks abroad were enthusiastic about the populist commitment of the government to a small-

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expansion of export commodity production among Communal Area farmers had been equally impressive. Whereas in 1980 they accounted for under twenty percent of the nation's cotton crop of about 150,000 tonnes, by 1985 they were producing nearly 40 percent of a record national crop that was twice that size. (See the Financial Gazette, 3 October 1986 and 7 November 1986; and Agricultural Marketing Authority 1986b:Appendix 4).

farmer centred development strategy. The major multinational lenders enjoyed watching the use of producer price incentives pay off with a dramatic increase in peasant production of what were thought of as "food" crops, like maize, and "cash" crops, like cotton.<sup>3</sup> Even conservatives inside and outside the country appreciated the fact that black farmers were being brought into the centre of the national agrarian economy without dismantling, or even causing any relative disadvantage to, the private large-scale commercial farming sector.<sup>4</sup>

In this widely publicized portrayal of Zimbabwe's promising agrarian future (regarded, it should be remembered, through the rather narrow window of five years of post-colonial history), "national" progress was foreseen without

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<sup>3</sup>The conventional opposition of "food" crops (aligned with notions of home consumption) and "cash" or "export" crops misrepresents a much more complex reality, since both food and non-food crops were being produced by peasants for both the domestic and export markets. Maize is thus a "food" crop when consumed at home and a "cash" crop when surpluses are sold to the marketing board. And cotton, although never consumed directly at home (except perhaps to stuff pillows) is not always exchanged for money. Like maize, cotton is ultimately sold by marketing boards on both the domestic and the international market.

<sup>4</sup>The recently gazetted Land Acquisition Bill (1992), it should be noted, has eroded this consensus, since it provides for the compulsory acquisition of land by the state at prices set by a government committee, and without recourse to challenge in the courts (see the Harare Herald, 27 January 1992). Petitioning by large-scale commercial farmers and pressure from external donors, however, may yet make appeals to arbitration possible. There is, in any case, little chance that land will be appropriated on the scale envisioned, especially in the wake of massive food shortages brought about by the current drought and the premature sale of national grain stocks.



fear of furthering agrarian class cleavages. Through the rational cooperation (here meaning "cooperation not founded on racial sentiments") of formerly antagonistic agrarian interest groups, and the equally rational policies (here meaning "policies seeking to enhance market mechanisms") of the state, all "sectors" of the agrarian economy and population would prosper.

This particular version of Zimbabwe's agrarian "success story" was read by many with a jaundiced eye. After all, at the time the Lancaster House accord was signed in 1979, few nations on earth seemed to manifest such blatantly antagonistic agrarian class interests. Perhaps still more daunting was the degree to which the various arms of the inherited state apparatus were woven into a structure explicitly designed to privilege white capitalist farmers. Even if these social contradictions and structural obstacles had been temporarily deflected from coming to the fore, was it really plausible that they had already been overcome? For many critics (e.g., Bush and Cliffe 1984; Cliffe 1988) it was virtually self-evident that the mass of black Zimbabwean cultivators had been given a raw deal after the liberation war--that, as a matter of both morality and social welfare, much greater priority should have been given to redistributing lands that had been alienated to white settlers over the

ninety preceding years of colonial rule.<sup>5</sup> Others made the same argument from the point of view of economic efficiency, breaking down the statistics in order to show that the minority of peasants who did have access to land comparable to that held by white farmers performed at similar levels of productivity per unit area. The commercial farmers, moreover, were shown to be holding large areas of prime cropland for investment purposes or extensive livestock production instead of employing it intensively for the production of grains that might enhance Zimbabwe's role as the bread-basket of the region while ensuring its own domestic food security (Weiner et al. 1984; Moyo 1986).

But another, more fundamental, critique was afoot. The explosion in production for the market originating in the Communal Areas called into question the presumed subsistence "nature" of the peasantry, their relationship to the wage economy, and their homogeneous identity as a social category or class agent.<sup>6</sup> In colonial Southern Rhodesia, the

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<sup>5</sup>The debate over the "cost-effectiveness" of the new government's resettlement plans has overshadowed virtually every other consideration of agrarian policy since 1980; that it was underway at full throttle before a single family was actually resettled is clearly symptomatic of the political volatility of the question of land redistribution. As Moyo (1986) has observed, the parties to the debate (e.g. Blackie et al. 1981; Kinsey 1983) were initially consultants to multilateral or bilateral lending agencies concerned with the prospects for capital investment in the new state.

<sup>6</sup>This question recapitulates the focal point of debate over the historical dynamics of Zimbabwe's agrarian economy that began with Arrighi's (1970) seminal critique of Barber (1961). For excellent and complementary treatments of the

historiography and ethnography of the African peasantry had been based upon opposed social identities that mirrored a distinction between "natural" and "commoditized" economies, the most important being an opposition between black "subsistence" peasants and white "commercial" farmers. This binary opposition of social categories received semantic reinforcement from a set of parallel dichotomies that were prominent in the development discourse of the settler colonial state: black/white; African/European; backward/progressive; and traditional/modern. Such contrasting pairs were constitutive elements in the jural allocation of various rights and obligations, particularly those governing access to land, the domain of trade, and the sale of labour-power.

Where such contrasts were not obvious, the state endeavoured to create them. Ian Smith's UDI government was committed to reinventing a natural model of African politics and economy under the rubric of his "community development" policy (see Bratton 1979), just as the Afrikaner Nationalist government in South Africa articulated a similar strategy in support of the so-called "separate development" of tribal "nations" in Bantustans.

These epistemological projects--projects that sought to discover an economically conservative tradition lying behind the politically volatile behaviour of Zimbabwe's peasants--

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commoditization of peasant agriculture over the last century see Ranger (1985a) and Phimister (1988).

were validated through the deployment of statistical measures that were themselves based on naturalized categories. Thus "African farmers," who were one hundred times as numerous as "European farmers," and were forced to live on the poorest 50 percent of the cultivable land in the country, were measured to have produced only 5 percent of all marketed crops in pre-Independence Zimbabwe (Whitsun Foundation 1978). Such "evidence" merely confirmed what had already been assumed about Africans: their homogeneous backwardness, traditionalism, and subsistence orientation. The Africans clung, or so the statistics made it seem, to some pre-commoditized stage of economic reason. Only their slow and careful exposure to western economic rationality, mediated by agents of a paternal European state, could overcome the inertia of centuries and bring the peasants into the transformative embrace of the commodity.

In the 1970s, concerted efforts were made to rewrite this story in accordance with what became widely known as the "labour-reserve" model of the colonial economy. In this anti-colonial version of economic history, the difference in success between black peasants and their white counterparts in the agrarian social structure had nothing to do with differences in rationality and everything to do with the politics of dispossession and market manipulation by the

settler colonial state.<sup>7</sup>

In common with the earlier narratives of development, however, this story nominated collective subjects--"the peasants," "the state" and so forth--and attributed to them certain inherent qualities, motives, or tendencies in order to make a succession of events seem both plausible and necessary. If, on the other hand, "peasants" did not exist as such, and if "the state" was taken to encompass a heterogeneous complex of institutions with conflicting interests rather than to embody a unitary set of aims, then there might be other,

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<sup>7</sup>The "labour reserve model" of southern African rural social formations was popularized in the writings of Arrighi (1970), Wolpe (1972), and Meillassoux (1981). Insofar as the model precludes a dynamic of accumulation within the "reserves", and predicts the extrusion of all wage-labour into the industrial or commercial farming sectors, it differs little from the Lewis model it was meant to replace. (See Lewis [1963]; and its application to Southern Rhodesia by Barber [1961]; See Worby [1985a, 1985b] for comments on these deficits in the application of the model to Botswana). In fact, the policy of maintaining subsistence agriculture and "traditional" welfare mechanisms to subsidize urban wages was expressed as a highly conscious strategy by the colonial government early in the century (see, e.g., the remarks of Lord Hailey, cited in Meillassoux [1988:12]). The labour reserve model thus served primarily as a formal abstraction of that strategy for the benefit of social scientists. But there is an intriguing sub-plot to these alternative tellings of the causes of peasant "backwardness" in Zimbabwe. In the colonial ethno-geography of "tribes" (see Chapter VII, below), the "Shona" were deemed to be culturally indisposed toward selling their labour, unlike tribes from other territories, especially Malawians, who were deemed "willing to work" (see van Onselen 1976). Where Arrighi would find only a unimodal economic logic of efficiency-maximization and one-sided domination, the colonial assumption of cultural distinctiveness as applied to the "subject races" ironically granted them a degree of choice and agency informed by "culture," these capacities being much touted by the new culturally informed economic anthropology of the late 1980s.

equally plausible stories to be told.

### Peasant Differentiation and the Sign of Wage-Labour

By about 1985, such alternative tellings began to appear. The fiction of a unitary peasantry was disaggregated<sup>8</sup> and replaced with a set of subjects about whom a new story of rural transformation in post-colonial Zimbabwe might be written. The master concept in this critical agrarian analysis became "peasant differentiation." One dimension of differentiation was found to be manifest in regional and local variations in the degree to which peasants participated in the commodity boom.<sup>9</sup> Differentiation within particular Communal

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<sup>8</sup>I say "disaggregated" and not "deconstructed" since the same statistical rhetoric was deployed--one that encoded distinctive sentiments, situations and motives by attaching numbers to statistically abstracted subjects--"the poorest twenty percent," "the female-headed households" and so on.

<sup>9</sup>Moyo (1986:187-89) for example, argues that in 1984, the less than 10 percent of Communal Area farmers residing in the prime agro-ecological zones (Natural Regions I and II), accounted for over 60 percent of the total maize marketed by peasants to the Grain Marketing Board. In the poorest lands, only those peasant farmers living in close proximity to the commercial centres and transport arteries that formed the backbone of the colonial economy have been able to avail themselves of new government marketing outlets and support programmes in order to increase their sale of crops to the state. Harris and Weiner (1986:44) argued on the basis of large-scale survey data that the balance of peasant families, who are concentrated in the semi-arid lands of Masvingo and Matabeleland provinces in the south and west, must often struggle to pool income from wage remittances and occasional livestock sales to make ends meet. In drought years, the majority have been forced to rely on public relief. For a comprehensive profile of regional disparities in Communal Area access to government services, see Zinyama (1985).

Areas began to emerge as another, more significant, dimension. Surveys revealed, for example, that only some households were able to convert government subsidies and assistance into expanded commodity production; their local economic power seemed to be augmented by their ability to join together in cooperatives for the bulk purchase of inputs and bulk transport and marketing of produce (Bratton 1986:378-9; Govaerts 1987: Part II; Truscott 1987:13). These successful peasants often used remittances from relatives employed in town in order to accumulate tools and livestock. Meanwhile, others, notably widows and divorced women, exerted at best a tenuous hold on property or productive resources of any kind (Gobbins and Pranker 1983; Moyo 1986; Zinyama 1986; Jassat and Chakaodza 1986; Govaerts 1987:I,58-9; Pankhurst and Jacobs 1988; Cousins, Amin, and Weiner 1992).

Perhaps the most startling revelations of all that began to appear, however, were those concerned with the classic index of agrarian class formation--the commoditization of labour. The hiring of agrarian labour within the Communal Lands themselves, once inconceivable, was quite suddenly discovered to be utterly pervasive (Zinyama 1986; Jackson et al. 1987; Govaerts 1987; Weiner and Moyo 1988; Adams 1987; 1991a; 1991b).

The identification of processes of class differentiation, and more specifically, of rural wage relations among Zimbabwean peasants in the present, coincided with, and was

reinforced by, their "discovery" in the past. Social historians writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s were busily pushing the existence of wage labour relations within the Reserves far back into the early colonial period (Palmer 1977:230). Phimister (1988:109, n.173), for example, recorded that in the early decades of colonial occupation many Southern Rhodesian peasants hired men from outside the colony who were passing through on their way to search for work on the highveld. These migrants usually performed a single agricultural task and were compensated with food before moving on to the mining areas and towns in search of permanent employment. Schmidt (1988) offered the intriguing suggestion that within the first two decades of colonial occupation, rural women were using the sale of millet beer as a means to hire workers to replace the labour of absent men. "As a result," she concluded, "capitalist labor relations between Africans began in the Salisbury area before 1910--financed by the cash earnings of African women" (1988: 61). As ox-ploughs became more widely adopted in the Reserves after the First World War, households without oxen or without sufficient labour to do the work often hired on young men to plough their fields.<sup>10</sup> And according to a source cited by Phimister

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<sup>10</sup>Davis and Dopcke (1987:68), as well as Phimister (1988:72), also note the presence of peasants hiring themselves out to plough for others in the Reserves for a cash payment. While one might be tempted to interpret the existence of such wage-relations as evidence of "rural proletarianization," such a view would be both confusing and premature. Those offering their labour for ploughing were



(1988:295 n347) 56,000 labourers were employed by black farmers in the Reserves and Native Purchase Areas in the late 1950s. Setting aside the question of the reliability of this last figure, or indeed what kind of wage relations it might refer to, it became increasingly difficult to square such data with the persistent notion that a "communal" form of agricultural organization persisted throughout the colonial period in the Reserves.<sup>11</sup>

### **From Agrarian Revelations to Agrarian Questions**

At the time that my wife (Gul Rukh Selim--a political scientist) and I were first formulating our plans to conduct

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often migrant proletarians or cash-cropping farmers who reinvested earnings from jobs or grain sales into the purchase of oxen and ploughs, and then offered their services to others less well endowed with draught power. Obviously, we would do well to avoid using the label "agricultural proletariat" for those leasing out a combination of their capital and labour in this way. It would be equally misleading to call all the draught-hiring peasants "agrarian capitalists" just because they were the ones paying the wages to ploughmen. Ranger's "Reserves entrepreneurs" (1985:70), qualify rather better for this appellation since they clearly hired labour in order to bring more land under cultivation and expand their output of cash crops.

<sup>11</sup>It might be pointed out, moreover, that the figure refers to the period following two decades of legislative manipulation and direct intervention designed precisely to level emergent class inequalities among African cash crop producers, while at the same time securing market advantages for their white competitors. Many of those African farmers who had undertaken capitalist, or at least expansionist initiatives in agriculture during the 1920s, were eventually sifted out and, after long delays, spatially segregated in the Native Purchase Areas (Ranger 1985: 237). As they capitalized their land and expanded production, many of these new freehold farmers came to depend on the seasonal recruitment of casual labourers from neighbouring Reserves (Cheater 1984:chap.4; Phimister 1988:280).

research on processes of agrarian transformation, the significance that should be attached to these revelations about the differentiation of the peasantry both in the past and in the present was the topic of intense intellectual debate. After discussion with members of various Zimbabwean research institutions over several preliminary visits, we settled on the area comprising Gokwe District and the adjacent Sanyati Communal Land in Kadoma District as our research locale.<sup>12</sup> The "peasants" of Gokwe were rather less intrinsically interesting to many of the researchers in these institutions than the main commodity they produced and the complex class relations that seemed to be emerging around its production and trade. In the view of some, the cotton issuing forth so abundantly from Gokwe's small-holdings represented a mass of value that might be harnessed, augmented, and appropriated by the young post-colonial state.<sup>13</sup> Others more gloomily foresaw an insidious substitution of inedible cash crops for food crops that would leave the peasantry vulnerable

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<sup>12</sup>For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the whole research area as "Gokwe" from this point forward.

<sup>13</sup>At the time it was being transferred abroad either in the form of raw lint or as earnings to the foreign shareholders of multinational textile firms based in Zimbabwe. Approximately thirty per cent of Zimbabwe's cotton-lint is retained for domestic processing and use; the most important end-products deriving from raw cotton--textiles from cotton lint, edible oil from the seed, and livestock feed from the seed cake--are produced by a handful of multinational firms. Exported lint is sold exclusively by the parastatal Cotton Marketing Board; the major markets, which value Zimbabwe's hand-picked, medium-staple product, are found in western Europe.

to famine; and still others were concerned that a predatory class of rural traders was pre-empting the role of the state marketing boards as providers of crop payment and credit in the region. With all of these concerns in mind, it was suggested that we investigate how the specialized production of cotton by small-holders in Gokwe might be linked to a strategy of state-sponsored rural industrialization.

If a single broad theme inspired interest in our carrying out such an investigation at the time, it was that of the "Agrarian Question." This was itself a resurrection of political concerns debated by the Social Democrats in Germany and Russia at the turn of the century, and now being used to explore several inter-related themes: the capitalist transformation of agriculture, the relationship between small-holders and large capitalist farms, and the growth of a home market for industrial products and wage-foods (i.e., the staples that most workers buy with their wages) in countries of the contemporary Third World.<sup>14</sup> On the face of things,

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<sup>14</sup>The classic texts are by Lenin (1964[1899]) and Kautsky (1990[1899]). Their revival in Western Marxist discussions in the early 1980s was due to the efforts of Tribe and Hussain (1981) and Goodman and Redclift (1981), among others. Important applications of the analytical approach in the contemporary Third World were made by De Janvry (1981) and Hart (1982), with the best recent application in southern Africa coming from Levin and Neocosmos (1989). Significantly, it was local intellectuals, rather than expatriate scholars, who first began to refer explicitly to an "agrarian question"--in the classical sense developed by Lenin and Kautsky--in the Zimbabwean context. See Shopo (1985a; 1985b) and Moyo (1986).

Zimbabwean intellectuals had better reasons than those in some other post-colonial states to make parallels between their own agrarian economy and that of Europe nearly a century ago. Like the countries of Central and Eastern Europe at that time, Zimbabwe's agrarian landscape is divided fairly dramatically into two kinds of farms--a relatively few (about 4000) very large ones run either by capitalist owner-operators or absentee landlords who hired managers or tenants, and a vast majority of very small ones (about 700,000) in the hands of "peasants" depending largely on family labour. The central questions arising from the classical debate follow from this "bi-modal" pattern of agrarian tenure: First, what are the principal differences in the way in which large commercial farms and small peasant farms are organized, both technically and socially? Is the land in each type held under a different tenurial arrangement? Do large and small farmers depend on different sources of labour (such as family members of the owner, seasonal migrant workers, or bonded labourers) and organize that labour in distinctive ways? Do they make different uses of the land and other natural resources on the farm, employ different kinds of tools and machines, use different kinds of crop and livestock inputs, draw on different sources of credit? Second, how are these two major categories of farm organization linked to one another within the same national economy? Do they compete with one another for supplies of fertilizer, fuel and labour, and for access to

markets for their products? Or do they complement one another either indirectly (with, say, small farms supplying the domestic market for staples while large farms produce for export) or directly (for example, with small farms supplying seasonal labour to large estates). Third, how is the relationship between these two types of farm organization and the overall pattern of agrarian class relations changing over time? Are large farm-owners gobbling up small ones and turning peasant families into wage-workers, or is the peasant sector surviving? Are relations of debt-peonage, sharecropping or labour tenancy on large estates giving way to capitalist agriculture? Are some small-holders accumulating enough capital to expand their holdings or intensify production by buying machinery and labour-power? Are others, independently or as a consequence, swelling the ranks of a landless proletariat?

This set of interrelated, and presumably empirical, questions has served as background for the really big question, which is of an unabashedly political cast: Given the current trajectory of agrarian class formation, and the place of agriculture in the national economy, is there a clear road ahead to socialism? What kinds of political strategies and economic policies would promote the creation of class alliances--say, between the urban proletariat and the dispossessed peasantry--that might hasten the advance down that road? The role of the state in determining the balance

of advantages accruing to various classes whose fate rests one way or another on the organization of agricultural production has always been a key, if often implicit, dimension of the "question." This suggests that the impact of the relations between the state and social classes (what we more conventionally think of as "state policy") ought to be taken into account: not only with respect to specific agrarian classes (such as petty-commodity producing peasants, large-scale quasi-feudal or capitalist farm owners, and the partially or fully proletarianized agricultural labour force), but also with respect to the suppliers of industrial inputs into agriculture, the processors of agricultural products, the traders who deal in the flow of grains and other products and inputs at various levels of scale within and across national boundaries, and finally the industrial workers (and to a lesser extent "peasants" too) who purchase processed agricultural products with their wages.

The model suggested by these debates for Gokwe's development within a national development strategy emerged out of a series of hypotheses linking social processes to state imperatives. The thinking went something like this: If the production of commodities in the countryside had indeed brought in its train the increasing economic differentiation of the peasantry and the commoditization of rural labour, then these developments might provide an opportunity for industrial entrepreneurship by the state. By drawing on local labour

"freed" from its attachment to the land, rural factories would be able to process raw cotton into the low-cost inputs and wage goods (e.g. clothing, cooking oil and animal feed) that peasants and rural workers currently purchased at high cost from town. Meanwhile, the intensification of agriculture through mechanisation would generate demand for the domestic production of inputs such as pesticides, inorganic fertilizers and farm machinery. On this basis, Zimbabwe would strengthen its industrial base while raising the real incomes and living standards of both workers and peasants.

Within this broad agenda, I was going to examine the social and economic consequences of the remarkably rapid intensification of cotton production in the region. My particular emphasis was to be on the changing organization of agrarian labour, with a focus on the interplay between wage and non-wage forms, and the labour flows between farms organized on the basis of different tenure relations. Gul Rukh would be exploring the linkages between state policies, market structures and the process of rural class formation. These investigations, we felt, would speak directly to issues of state policy with respect to land tenure and distribution, wage rates, and marketing institutions. But at a more general level, we were being asked to participate in the realization of a political vision: the remaking of the state according to the model of the integrated and increasingly self-sufficient,

if still largely capitalist, organism<sup>15</sup>--one from which some as yet undefined form of socialism might eventually spring.

Imported Models, Internal Agendas: The Politics of Research

If the application of this model was local, its origins were essentially exogenous. Some of its Zimbabwean proponents had been recruited from universities in Britain and North America where they were pursuing higher degrees while waiting out the liberation war. Places such as London, Manchester, and New York--the historical well-springs of a now-decaying industrial capitalism--provided the ambience for their formative intellectual years. Others had been trained in the centres or distant outposts of the socialist world: Moscow, Addis Ababa, Dar es Salaam. Both groups were from a generation that retained little faith in the empty romanticism proffered by leaders such as Nyerere and Kaunda--the fathers of "African socialism" during the heyday of decolonization in the 1960s. It is not surprising, however, that this younger generation of civil servants and academics should continue to pose questions about Zimbabwe's long-term future trajectory in terms of world-historical models of economic development, and

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<sup>15</sup>The roots of this model in the economic thought of both rural folk and economists are historically deep and geographically diffuse, with the pioneering works in political economy by Adam Smith and James Steuert being in some ways exemplary of the thinking it entails. While built on the paradigm of the "house" that conserves savings and strives toward integration and self-sufficiency, the model nevertheless integrates some elements of the contrasting metaphor of the corporation, which invests in order to expand. See Gudeman and Rivera (1990:174-8).



the capacity of individual states to shape their destiny within that trajectory. They were, after all, only the most recent bearers of a discourse that has united Europe and the colonized world in a long conversation about the subjects, agents, and masters of economic transformation during the five centuries of European colonial and capitalist expansion.<sup>16</sup>

The terms on which we, as foreign researchers, were invited to participate in this conversation, were shaped by a recognition that even after decolonization, African states (or their citizen scholars) rarely pursued a research agenda that was of their own making.<sup>17</sup> The Zimbabweans felt they were

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<sup>16</sup>The theme of such a mutually constitutive dialogue through the colonial encounter appears in much anthropological literature over the last decade. In particular, see Taussig (1980), Sahlin (1985), J.L. Comaroff (1989) and Gudeman and Rivera (1990). These writers explore the intimate interplay of interpretations that lay behind a more visible, and general result: the idea of "revolution" as an idiom of collective practice and the imagining of the nation-state as a natural foundation for community formation (see Anderson 1991:156 and ff.). It is this latter development that enables us to think of the world as comprising a finite set of parallel, bounded identities--one fashioned on the model of the nation-state (see Rousseau 1991).

<sup>17</sup>Particular ire was reserved for the legions of foreign scholars who seemed to appear on the scene of "liberation" in one country after another in southern Africa, sometimes referred to as "red-feet" or as sponsors of "revolutionary paternalism" (see Mandaza 1986). It should be stressed that the politics of scholarship in this context are extremely complex; among the most delicate have been conflicts within the academy (staffed disproportionately with white Zimbabweans) that have taken the outward form of struggles over the relationship between "race" and post-colonial national identity and commitment. In any case, the local scholars attempting to forge a national research capacity in Zimbabwe should not be mistaken for blind apologists for the

pioneering new ground by harnessing expatriate intellectual labour according to their own political designs and purposes, rather than having the terms of reference set for them by Western universities, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Aware of this pre-existing context, and of the highly compromised history of social anthropology in the region, I abjured the undertaking of a purely "ethnographic" study. Instead, I embraced what I believed to be the pursuit of a knowledge grounded in the perspective of a critical political economy, albeit one informed by the attention to the details of local social process derived from my disciplinary training. The product was, I hoped, to be knowledge produced in the service of the dispossessed--those left with neither voice nor resources by the convoluted and contradictory process of commoditization I intended to chart. Still, prompted in part by the distaste that our Zimbabwean collaborators had for expatriate romanticism, I explicitly disavowed any secret desire to preserve or restore some pristine, undefiled tribal way of life, or to insulate its subjects from the corruption of economic exchange, wage labour and the state. Such "corruptions" I took for granted as having long been at work: the "peasants" constituted a differentiated and contradictory object. The only way out of rural poverty and exploitation, I felt at the time, was

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post-colonial regime, as their recent ostracism and even persecution by the Mugabe government should make apparent (see Cheater 1991).

through the commodity and the state, not around them, or in a retracing of steps away from them. In the course of the research and after, however, I was led to reflect more deeply on the sources of both my and their pre-occupation with the commoditization process--the puzzles, fantasies and phantasms it seems to continually evoke, and its centrality in the conversation across the old colonial divide. It is to these reflections that I now turn.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MYSTERY OF COMMODITIZATION

#### Consuming Identities: From Abstraction to Authenticity

Why has the commodity, and the process of commoditization in particular, arisen as a central theme in the conversation between post-colonials and their erstwhile colonizers? As is well known, Marx began his analysis of capitalism with the commodity: "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails," he wrote, "presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities" (1967[1867]:35). At the core of every commodity, in his view, lay the trace of two historical processes: the abstraction of labour from its origins in a concrete social process intimately linked with nature, and its subsequent misrepresentation as a self-animating object, divested of any evidence marking its human, social origins (Marx 1967:76; see also Taussig 1980:4-5; Hart 1982b; Appadurai 1986:7-9). The apparent dominance of the social world of persons by a world of alienable things was, for Marx, the central feature of capitalism and its most mystifying puzzle.

#### The Anxiety of Abstraction and the Salvation of Domesticity

A century after Marx's death, the interest in commodities

has undergone something of a revival in both Western academic and popular discourse.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this revival have partly to do with the globalization of what we think of as "commodity culture"--Coke in the Kalahari, Levis in Lithuania, or Sony Walkmen in the Amazon. The discomfort generated by the penetration of these key emblems of Western commodity culture into the idealized reserves of pre-capitalism or anti-capitalism has been signalled by the prominence the media typically gives to such displacements. A parallel development is the invasion of commoditized services and items of consumption into the most intimate spheres of domestic sociality, reproduction and self-provisioning. Here I have in mind phenomena such as phone sex, surrogate parenthood, and fast food consumption--practices that, through the medium of

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<sup>1</sup>And in social anthropology. Two recent collections, one edited by Appadurai (1986), the other by Bloch and Parry (1989) epitomize a trend which takes Malinowski and Mauss as founding ancestors (see also articles by Parry [1986] and Hart [1986]). An earlier tack, launched in somewhat different directions by Taussig (1980) and Hart (1982b), looks to Marx for inspiration. Whether or not Marx's theory of commodity fetishism counts as a precursor of "cultural" readings of capitalist economic behaviour is, in my view, a moot question, since our concept of "culture" did not exist when he was alive. Support for such a view, however, comes through strongly in Taussig (1980;1989), whose position contrasts strongly with that of Sahlins (1976) and Kelly (1992). Marx himself argued that even fetishized value was "real" in the sense that it works as the socially derived basis for capitalist exchange relations (see Geras 1983:165); as Ferguson (1988:492) points out, fetishistic thinking in the business world is extraordinarily effective in carrying out capitalist activity: it is a cultural feature that works on its own terms.

money and contract, separate activities in time and space that were previously presumed to be indissoluble natural unities (cf. Hart 1987:90).

These possibilities symbolically threaten to abolish a residual non-commoditized "domestic" sphere in which labour is a non-reducible qualitative experience (the phrase "labour-of-love," most often applied by women with calculated irony to activities such as cooking, child-care, and even sex, captures the way in which this sphere is culturally read from the side of commoditization).<sup>2</sup> They relate to two pervasive features of what has come to be known as the "post-modern condition" (Lyotard 1984; Jameson 1984; Harvey 1989). The first has to do with the routine representation of individual subjects and social categories as numerical abstractions. In the transactions that characterize civil society in the post-industrial capitalist world economy, the person is asked to bear an ever increasing range of numerical aliases--phone numbers, fax numbers, credit card numbers, and bank account numbers linked to machines that disgorge cash in response to

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Donham's recent reflections on the relationship between the rise of capitalism and the cultural marking of public and private spheres: "'love' is just as much the secret of capitalism as the 'commodity'". The intensity of the first depends upon the abstractness of the second" (Donham 1990:205). In a related discussion, Kopytoff (1986) points out that anxiety tends to arise in Western societies around the commoditization of persons, or when commodity traffic breaches conceptual boundaries in which persons and things ought to circulate separately.

a numerical prompt--in order to mobilize personal economic resources. What remains of our relationship with the state is not only governed by social security and medicare card numbers but also by the data used to allocate resources according to interests which are defined in terms of statistical abstractions.<sup>3</sup>

The abstraction of persons from any recognizable social context and their projection as numerical ciphers into databases mirrors the abstraction of exchange value that defines the commodity.<sup>4</sup> In particular, it parallels the process by which the identifiable, qualitatively distinct, labours of individuals are quantified as an abstract summary value. This is what Marx called the commoditization of "labour-power," and is taken for granted by neo-classical economists as "labour," an eternal and universal "factor of production" purchased in the market at a going price, the returns to which may be precisely calculated. During periods of recession and labour market restructuring in the global economy, however, this logic of calculated abstraction ceases

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<sup>3</sup>See also Giddens (1990). This process of abstraction is anticipated by Weber's concept of formal economic rationality and his specific stress on the logic of calculation, made possible by money, that structures ever widening spheres of economic action (1978:I:81,85). See also the classic work on money and modernity by Simmel (1978).

<sup>4</sup>My debt here is to Hart (1982b:41 and passim), for whom the most recent phase of commoditization is realized in the use of abstract ciphers to commensurate social labour: "Social labour is measured directly, without material transfer, as computerized transactions which represent human subjects as numbers in information-processing machines."

to dominate a large proportion of economic activity. At such times people in industrialized societies are "set free" simultaneously from both long-term wage careers and from the cushion of state welfare programmes; many are forced either to take up careers as petty-commodity producers or to expand the role of self-provisioning in their struggle to reproduce themselves (see Hart 1987). Both the experience of abstraction and the living through of its antitheses during periods of recession give rise to a pervasive cultural motif: nostalgia for times past and places lost--a yearning for rural integration, self-sufficiency, and "family" or "national" values (Williams 1973; Stewart 1988).

The second feature of our contemporary experience that stimulates us to reflect on the process of commoditization follows from this process. It derives from what Baudrillard (1988) and others (see e.g. Wernick 1991a, 1991b) have described as the production of the consumer under the sign of the commodity, or the signification of desire that seems to propel the reproduction of late capitalism.<sup>5</sup> Nostalgia for

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<sup>5</sup>The key dynamic may be expressed as a dialectic between homogeneity and heterogeneity, or between identity and difference. (Barthes's work [1983] on "the fashion system" remains a key exposition of this idea). The producers of commodities either succeed in markets by selling more cheaply (achieved through the mass production of homogeneous objects) or by selling "difference," (i.e., by finding a unique market niche). Advertising strives to make these contradictory tendencies commensurable. By deploying a strategy of representation that identifies the possession of the object with a unique lifestyle, the consumer is called upon to realize an identity within that lifestyle through the consummation of desire in the act of consumption. The moral



an epoch or place in which these conditions were absent--in which social identities are given rather than purchased, a world in which desire and the sacred or valued are not a product of advertising--has motivated the Euro-American quest to discover the pre-capitalist Other through travel and ethnography; the temptation has been strong to confirm such analytical negations by generating models of economic behaviour in non-Western societies that give priority to norms of reciprocity and morality. These norms are seen to be embodied in the gift--what Mauss (1990[1950]) so eloquently characterized as the unity of person, spirit and thing that always compels a return; or else they are imagined to be vested in corporate identities such as clans and lineages that are seen to efface all individuality; or yet again, they are prominent in the "New Age" celebration of cognitive or ideological models that privilege the mysteries of Nature over an overly secularized Humanity. We are often filled with paternal nostalgia by the picture of the starving Ethiopian, always represented as a victim of drought rather than war, the icon of the starving child serving not only to reduce and

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discomfort generated by the homogeneity and abstraction embodied in the commodity is assuaged through the association of the object with past-times, family values, or even more specific social identities (see Carrier 1990). MacDonald's use of the slogan "Food, Folks and Fun" to sell its mass-produced hamburgers, the very antithesis of home-cooking, is exemplary.

objectify but also to infantilize the "underdeveloped" world as a whole. Yet at the same time, we are unable to naturalize starvation in our own midst in this way--in fact, until the recent invention of "the homeless" as a kind of late modern social estate, we have been unable to even recognize or acknowledge the existence of hunger and dispossession among the unsigned human remainders of capitalist commodity culture.<sup>6</sup>

Playing with Tradition: The Dramaturgy  
of Commoditization in Zimbabwe

This profound ambivalence about the commoditization of human society has a particularly powerful resonance in the settler and post-settler colonial states of Southern Africa. Take two contemporary cultural Zimbabwean artifacts--each a

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<sup>6</sup>Alongside a headline announcing the decision of General Motors to close down a fair proportion of its North American plants, the Toronto Globe and Mail (19 December 1991) carried a picture of a former auto-worker shivering in the streets in the shadow of the massive GM headquarters in Detroit. The man held a sign that read, "Will Work For Food." In this context, it is useful to remember that Mauss's project in The Gift was, in part, to make visible the moral basis of exchange embodied in the gift that continues to underlie capitalist cultural practice, and to put that knowledge to use in the critique of public policy: "As we shall note that morality and organization still function in our own societies, in unchanging fashion and, so to speak, hidden below the surface, and as we believe that in this we have found one of the human foundations on which our societies are built, we shall be able to deduce a few moral conclusions concerning certain problems posed by the crisis in our own law and economic organization" (1990[1950]:4). It is easy to assume that Mauss's work was the source of the dichotomy between gift and commodity culture rather than to recognize its role in making a seminal critique of that dichotomy.

special kind of commodity. The first, the Zimbabwean dollar coin, shows on its reverse side the main enclosure of the Great Zimbabwe ruins. On its face is depicted one of the seven stone birds that was pilfered from the ruins by early white settlers and sent to museums in Cape Town. There, these relics stood as a testament to what these settlers believed to be, quite fantastically, an ancient Caucasoid civilization (Garlake 1983); this was one way of asserting their natural right to the land on the basis of a Lockean theory of first occupancy. The Zimbabwe dollar not only announces the sovereignty of a new state over the national currency, but also recovers symbolically an ancient heritage of commodity economy that was denied to blacks even late in this century.<sup>7</sup>

The second artifact is a Zimbabwean advertisement for Bata shoes that was a recent prize winner at an international film festival. The ad depicts a dancing phalanx of exuberant black teenagers in full pseudo-tribal gear: spears, shields, skirts and feathers. Suddenly they stop--looks of pain having

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<sup>7</sup>See also Hart's (1986) illuminating discussion of the "two-sided" nature of money, encoded in the marking of state-sponsored specie--"heads" bearing the image of the sovereign who stands for and behind the authority of the state that issues the "coin of the realm," and "tails" specifying the coin's abstract, impersonal value as payment in exchange. In the Zimbabwean dollar coin, both sovereignty and value are invested in the material traces of the ancestors. On the obverse of the coin, the ancestors are embodied in the bird; on the reverse side the accumulation of value is represented in the abstraction of ancestral labour embodied in stone. The question, "Who does the state represent?" is thus answered in concert with the question, "Who has the historical right to appropriate value?"

appeared on their faces--and rub their swollen, tender bare feet. The physical and cultural discomfort posed by this revival of traditional practice is resolved by the addition of Bata sneakers to their apparel--in pink, blue and green--in the next tribal dance scene.

I have not selected this last item at random. One of the purchases of choice--especially among women--when the peasants of Gokwe receive their first cotton checks in June, are a colourful pair of Bata sneakers. The advertisement is deliberately quoting self-consciously "traditional" dances such as those performed by children in Gokwe during the course of Agricultural Field Days--events that have as their explicit purpose the inculcation, representation and celebration of a set of distinctively modern values.<sup>8</sup> The children, who just by being in school evidence an aspiration on the part of their parents to be "modern," don skirts of black and white cloth strips over their uniforms, and dance in coordinated fashion to a pulsating drum rhythm. "Tradition" is both modelled (the black and white cloth is an explicit evocation of spirit mediumship) and once again infantilized (children perform it as "play"). The performance of the children, within the context of the wider event, suggests a teleology of progress

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<sup>8</sup>Our own research assistants believed the English word "tradition" to refer exclusively to the kind of dancing done on such occasions. Field Days are rituals of modernity, organized by government extension workers and local farmers associations in order to honour the most "progressive" farmers and held throughout Zimbabwe just before the harvest. I describe them in detail in Chapter VI.

from the past-time of ancestor-worship to the future-time of practical, scientific education and rational agricultural management: in a trope familiar to western biological science (and Freud's peculiar anthropological history), ontogeny here recapitulates phylogeny. Zimbabweans, too, are operating under the sign of commoditization, although precisely what is being signified is constantly being contested in ways that are locally distinct, just as in North America.

As these examples only suggest, the region of Southern Africa has been a rather special laboratory for the playing out of various ideologies of difference between the civilized, on the one hand, and the pre-commoditized, on the other. Thus the Bata advertisement is meant to appeal to the tension felt by urban Zimbabwean youth between their increasing appetite for commodities and their cultural nostalgia for an authentic, "natural" past. It is a tension that has been central to various representations--both apologetic and critical--of the region's now world-infamous cheap migrant labour economy.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The internationally popular South African film, The Gods Must Be Crazy, constitutes an extraordinary radicalization of the commoditized/pre-commoditized distinction, presented as comic narrative. Produced at a time of heightened guerilla activity by the African National Congress, and consequently of heightened white fear, the film opens with "Bushmen" discovering and marvelling at a Coke bottle fallen from an airplane; it goes on to depict the ineptness of Johannesburg whites when faced with survival in the Kalahari Desert, and the bungling manoeuvres of a group of black guerillas led by a physiognomic "Cuban." Through parody and farce the film attempts to make laughable the consequences of "races" being displaced from their "natural" position in evolutionary time and space. Significantly, the film played at a mid-town Manhattan theatre for over a year in the early 1980s, and

### The Labour Trope

The mention of Southern Africa's distinctive labour economy returns us once again to my focus, since "labour" works as a powerful trope in the thinking through of the dialectic between the commodity and its negations. As an object of discourse and anxiety, labour marks out one of those key semantic arenas in which the work of metaphor in Western thought, colonial practice, and local response becomes refocused and contested again and again. The reasons are not hard to find. In the wake of the European Enlightenment, in which human agency in the world is accorded autonomy in its relation to nature, labour is easy to take as a natural, even universal human category--what at least some human beings must do in every society in order for that society to persist over time. For Marx, the material situation of modernity (marked by the dawn of industrial capitalism) yields the very possibility of thinking of labour-in-general--i.e., as an abstraction subject to quantification apart from its particular instances as "concrete" human activity (e.g. 1967[1867]:75). Nevertheless, the role of labour in creating value is obscured to persons engaged in capitalist exchange relations.<sup>10</sup> In such relations, the social origins

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bears comparison with American fables of racial displacement, such as "Beverly Hills Cop."

<sup>10</sup>"Hence, when we bring the products of our labour into relation with each other as values, it is not because we see in these articles the material receptacles of homogeneous human labour. Quite the contrary: whenever, by an exchange,

of value are taken to be natural properties of objects. In Marx's own memorable phrase, "a relation between men...assumes...the fantastic form of a relation between things" (ibid.:72). In this theory of knowledge, modernity simultaneously makes possible the apprehension of the mystifications of both the past and the present, even as everyday life proceeds through the fetishism of the objects of exchange.

If we accept this approach, then our notion of "labour" becomes a universal substance and source of value, capable of comparative analysis across widely separated zones of time and space. And indeed this is what the classical political economists sought to do at the close of the eighteenth century: by displacing the Physiocratic model that located the origin of wealth in the fecundity of nature, they relocated the source of "value"--conceived as that which makes objects produced for exchange commensurable--in all those instances of human activity that are transformative of nature--i.e., in labour. The possibility of such a conception, one that universalizes human history according to a common denominator

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we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate as human labour, the different kinds of labour expended upon them. We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it. Value therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, we try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of our own social products; for to stamp an object of utility as a value, is just as much a social product as language" (Marx 1967[1867]:74).

of needs and the specifically productive labour required to satisfy them (Baudrillard 1975), is distinctive of modern epistemology, an epistemology that not only makes of human history a uniform and total process, but that also makes the comprehension of that process an imperative task.<sup>11</sup>

But Marx was more careful than his predecessors to locate the appearance of abstract labour in history. In the Grundrisse, Marx (1973) sketched the philosophical basis for conceiving of the process of commoditization as a dialectical process underlying human historical development. In challenging the universal categories of property posited by bourgeois political economy, he argued that the sale and purchase of labour-power by juridically free individuals represents a relatively recent form of property in human history, a history that begins with the separation of the person from nature through the production of objects that stand outside of themselves. Economic historians and anthropologists since Marx have engaged in a similar critique of neo-classical economics, dividing the societies producing goods for exchange or sale ("commodities") from historically prior or developmentally backward societies that are deemed to produce goods for use (Polanyi et al. 1957; Sahlins 1972;

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<sup>11</sup>See Habermas (1987:6) for a discussion of the origins of the idea of modernity in relation to shifting conceptions of time.



Taussig 1980), or exchange things as gifts (Mauss 1990[1950]; Gregory 1982). The question of the appropriateness of using market models for the analysis of economic processes that either preceded or remained outside of the capitalist orbit was raised explicitly by Polanyi (1944, 1957), who proposed the well-known evolutionary sequence of distributive mechanisms--reciprocity, redistribution, and market. The school of thought Polanyi gave rise to, often labelled "substantivist," has tended to view the commoditization of products and labour as the near side of a single great watershed in the history of human social and economic organization.

The problem with such an approach is that it merely substitutes simplistic dichotomies (e.g., production for use/production for exchange; gifts/ commodities; non-market societies/market societies) for the formal models of human rationality upon which neo-classical economic science so heavily depends. Such dichotomies have, at least since Aristotle, had a strong moral component; they have served as a rhetorical and romantic posture from which to criticize any economic system or strategy that privileges exchange over provisioning, that makes "production the aim of man" instead of "man the aim of production." The operations of such morally loaded contrasts in the discourse on commoditization in Zimbabwe is most apparent with reference to the phenomenon variously denoted in the literature as "collective,"

"cooperative," "communal," or "group" labour.

"Group Labour": A Statistical Romance?

The invocation of figures of anti-commoditization can be used not merely to track the movement of social development in the past, but equally to imagine the return to such a past in the future. Among those researchers who have "discovered" the differentiation and commoditization of the peasantry in Zimbabwe, there are some who have sought to derive models for an undifferentiated agrarian future from a latent set of "communal" relations said to silently persist within the Communal Lands.<sup>12</sup> In their view, evidence of "cooperative" or "collective" work arrangements that transcend co-resident domestic groups, signify a kind of egalitarian potential that can be nurtured by appropriate agrarian policy measures. To this end, the evidence of supra-household forms of cooperation has been juxtaposed with various indicators of differentiation. Alongside the data on instances of inter-

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<sup>12</sup> The invocation of "communal" social relations in the planning discourse of bureaucrats both before Independence and since has been explored in a recent paper by Ranger (1988). Cheater (1990) has provided an exhaustive analysis of how such constructions were variously built into colonial versions of customary law governing the allocation of land-use rights in the Reserves. See also Cousins (1989; 1990), who has examined how various notions of "community" have been invoked as a basis for the establishment of grazing schemes in Zimbabwe. For a comprehensive assessment of early planning ideology and practice with respect to Resettlement Areas (lands transferred from commercial freehold areas formerly reserved for whites), see Munslow (1985).

household hired labour, many of the recent surveys have therefore attempted to elicit information on its apparent antithesis, "group" labour (Truscott 1985; Bratton 1986; Govaerts 1987). And although it is sometimes recognized that forms of labour cooperation may in some instances work as covert mechanisms for exploitation and accumulation, the statistical frequency of such "groups" is most often taken to be an index of rural egalitarianism. Implicitly or explicitly, such egalitarian forms are usually taken as a kind of model for what planners of rural development and resettlement should seek to achieve.<sup>13</sup> In this way, statistical abstractions from complex social forms are used rhetorically in the service of development planning.

Such a strategy, however, leaves implicit the relationship between hired labour, on the one hand, and the persistence of so-called "group" labour, on the other.<sup>14</sup> Do

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<sup>13</sup>In this regard, it is interesting to revisit the conclusion to Uchendu's seminal article on the relationship between African work groups, social change, and social policy, written within a fervidly positivist paradigm: "Any policy pronouncements, like those credited to Tanzanian leaders, that the hire of farm labour constitutes exploitation requires rephrasing. The challenge of African rural development is not to make 80 to 90% of our people poor, labour-sufficient and contented small-scale cultivators but rather the achievement of an economic structure in which 80% or more can find a decent livelihood in the non-farm sector" (Uchendu 1971:260).

<sup>14</sup>The persistence of non-wage labour forms even under circumstances where small-holders are entirely subsumed by capitalist commodity markets has been a persistent problem for theorists of petty-commodity production ever since Kautsky wrote "The Agrarian Question" (1988[1899]), and remains so today (see Long 1984; 1986; Gibbon and Neocosmos 1985).

they stand in opposition to one another, the one a harbinger of rural capitalism and differentiation, the other an expression of enduring rural solidarity? Or should we surmise that an emergent rural bourgeoisie is utilizing antiquated forms of cooperation to capture surplus labour in the guise of a commitment to reciprocity or common effort (Cousins 1989)? Posited at this level of generality, these are not alternatives that one can meaningfully choose between, especially when the "choice" depends upon the abstraction of ideally opposed, static categories out of a welter of complex and dynamic relations. Yet it is the very complexity of these relations, I would argue, that requires attention, but so rarely receives it.

Marx's insight is better appreciated if we read him as viewing the commoditization of labour as a dialectical process, rather than as a decisive "fall" indexed by the appearance of a single, morally marked, element, whether that element be markets, money, or wage labour (Hart 1982b). Even so, any evolutionary view, however dialectical, tends to reify

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Excellent empirical studies of the fate of work groups faced with rural commoditization elsewhere in Africa include those by O'Laughlin (1973) on Mali, Saul (1983) on Burkina Faso, Donham (1985) on southern Ethiopia, and Barth (1967), as well as the contributors to a volume edited by Manger (1987), on Sudan. (See also the important reviews of the world-wide literature on this topic by Erasmus [1956] and Moore [1975]). For Zimbabwe, however, with the exception of Cheater's (1984) work on the rather special case of the Small-Scale Commercial Areas (formerly African Purchase Areas), there has been little discussion on how such non-wage forms articulate with the recruitment of wage labour in practice, or why they persist in doing so. I will take this matter up at length in Part III.

and totalize a process that is always partial, uneven and contradictory,<sup>15</sup> just as it tends to eliminate from consideration the motives, perceptions and agency of those perceived to be the victims of that process (see Long 1986).

### "Labour" as Cultural Construct

One solution anthropologists have sought to the theoretical dead-end of assumed universality or historical inevitability is to adopt a relativist or historicist position, one that would affirm the idea that our intuitive, post-enlightenment concept of labour is shaped by a particular cultural frame as well as a unique historical experience. From this position, our "labour" (and the moral evaluations we attach to it) cannot be assumed to mirror the "labour" of cultural Others. This is not to deny, of course, that the views of those Others--formed as they are within the embrace of a global capitalism--may well be partial appropriations, transformations and even inversions of our metaphors, cultural categories and values (see e.g. Schwimmer 1979; Parkin 1979; Cartier 1984; Comaroff and Commaroff 1987; Strathern 1988; Beaucage 1989).

If we adopt this relativist point of departure, then we ought to first think through how "labour" is constituted as a

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<sup>15</sup>This position is where the debate on the relationship of petty commodity production to the capitalist world system has, after strenuous attempts to discover theoretical uniformity in empirical diversity, finally landed. For key positions in the debate, see Bernstein (1977); Friedmann (1980); and Gibbon and Neo-Cosmos (1985).

cultural construct in Western thought. In general, we can argue that our metaphorical abstraction of labour from its human agents, and from the particular status of those agents as social subjects makes possible two modes of action: the quantification of the capacity to labour in terms of units of time, and the sale of such a capacity for money. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980:64-8) have observed, the two core metaphors that structure our conceptions of labour are those that assert that both time and labour are material resources, conjoined in the production of useful things, and hence at the source of the creation of value. The categories of play or leisure are formally opposed to those of work or labour, but at the same time viewed as substantively identical: both are understood as "resources" that may be quantified in terms of time and that may be "used up."

Anthropologists generally recognize that it would be much too simplistic to assert that these core metaphors exhaust what can be culturally asserted about labour in Western capitalist societies, and that by extension, they may have little if anything to do with the meanings attributed to "labour" in other cultural universes.<sup>16</sup> For example, in the course of interrogating Marx's own view of labour as the

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<sup>16</sup>Lakoff and Johnson themselves make this point (1980:67): "The RESOURCE metaphors for labour and time hide all sorts of possible conceptions of labour and time that exist in other cultures and in some subcultures of our own society: the idea that work can be play, that inactivity can be productive, that much of what we classify as LABOUR serves either no clear purpose or no worthwhile purpose."

alienation of the producer manifest in the object, Kelly asks,

is it the object of all humanity to make objects?  
Does all humanity inhabit a world of things known  
as separately made, and thus valuable, according to  
the activity employed in giving them form?  
(1992:104).

In a review of the Melanesian material on this topic, Strathern (1988:chap.4) argues persuasively that another core metaphor is here at play--one that posits the separation of the person from a substance that they are able to externalize. Yet such metaphors tend inevitably to work their way into anthropological thinking about the thinking of the Other, if only by negation. Thus Kelly (1992:104-5) argues that conceived within the ambit of capitalist cultural ontology,

[e]ven subsistence activity is imagined as a sort of commodity production, regardless of the fact that no objects are fashioned for sale in markets. In a projection of ownership, a capitalist form of relation to objects, these putative laborers are imagined to own the object-products of their purported labour, imagined also to own their own labour itself (Kelly 1992:104-5).

This makes it difficult, at best, to make anthropological investigations into other cultural appropriations of the semantic space of labour anything more than opportunities to make visible the dualistic metaphors that structure our own thought.<sup>17</sup> The problem becomes especially acute when the

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<sup>17</sup>Thus we might note that although it is common to think of labour-power as a commodity, it is rare that labour is thought of as a gift. Gifts are commonly assumed to be objects rather than what we call "services." The ambivalence we attach to the notion of "doing a favour" for another without monetary recompense signals the sense in which the notion of the gift is in fact relevant: does such an act imply reciprocity or is the only "real" favour one that is given

Other is considered to straddle such dualisms, to be situated in a time and space that is characterized by being in between hypostatized "worlds," a state that is invoked through the metaphor of "displacement."

Anthropology has had a prominent, if not entirely unique role in exploring the conundrum presented by the "displaced African" in Africa, understood to be wedged between modernity and the pre-commoditized past (see Ferguson 1990b). The preoccupation with displacement, however, has only been made possible by a prior assertion of difference, and the attitude of puzzlement that this assertion makes possible. It is for this reason that I begin the following chapter by making a brief detour through the problem of puzzlement with the Other, a problem that seems to provide a context for the discourse on commoditization and difference that I have been exploring up to this point.

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"freely" without implied obligation of a return (summed up in the aphorism, "I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine"). Note how reciprocal services are often read as forms of corruption, or as signs of pre-modern personalism intruding into a world that ought to be governed by impersonal contract. A set of related issues are discussed by Hart (1988) in an essay on the role of trust in marking out the domain of friendship in opposition to kinship, on the one hand, and contract, on the other.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE CULTURE OF MODERNITY

##### The Puzzle of Peasants

Puzzlement characterizes discourse about cultural boundaries. The modern practice of anthropology is in one sense a meta-discourse motivated by, and concerned with, the puzzlement originally generated by colonial attempts to assimilate and transform enigmatic subjects, who lie, by definition, on the far side of such borders.<sup>1</sup> In an essay that touches on this predicament, James Fernandez has observed that the familiar bigotry associated with the "colonial mentality" was largely structured around theories of the pre-

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<sup>1</sup>In his famous charter for an interpretive anthropology, Geertz writes: "The claim to attention of an ethnographic account does not rest on its author's ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask or a carving, but on the degree to which he is able to clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce the puzzlement -- what manner of men are these?--to which unfamiliar acts emerging out of unknown places give rise" (1973:16). To my mind, this effort "to reduce the puzzlement" is not a mandate unique to anthropologists but characterizes the point of orientation for all occupants of social positions in which a successful practice is at least partly measured by the production of a knowledge of others. In rural Zimbabwe, it is colonial administrators, agricultural extension staff, and doctors who have been the most prolific ethnographers, not professional anthropologists. The Native Administration Department Annual (NADA), which I will have frequent occasion to cite, as well as the extraordinary ethnographic corpus of the physician Michael Gelfand (see e.g. 1962, 1970, 1973), provide ample evidence to this effect.

logical, childish, or undisciplined modes of thinking that were thought to be characteristic of colonial subjects. This concern with discovering distinctive mentalities that formed an integral part of the colonial project was motivated, he suggests, by "a preexisting interest in maintaining and justifying a structure of privileges" (1980:45).

Despite this critique of the colonial gaze, Fernandez still ventures to make what is typically an anthropologist's distinction between the rational pragmatism of the Colonialist and the modes of thought perceived to obtain in the mind of the Native. As an exemplar of this difference, he examines the form of puzzlement effected by riddles: Western (or in any case schooled) thought solves riddles by attempting first to abstract, and then to apply, a rule.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, "traditional" thought draws riddles or puzzles in the shape of analogies, the referents of which must be discovered. These riddles,

constitute an ambiguous stimulus for creative and constructive responses. They are not instruments designed to provoke the detection and application of certain rules...Analysis into parts is not really so important in these societies as is the periodic construction or reconstruction of the whole. The whole is what is truly edifying, and its reconstruction is a purpose which puzzlement can subtly serve (1980:51).

While Fernandez himself states that the cultural

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<sup>2</sup>For Bourdieu (1977:20), this procedure in formal reasoning has characterized attempts to codify observed or prescribed behaviour since the Sophists, and represents a particular defect in most anthropological efforts at interpretation.

distinctiveness of these two modes of thought is undoubtedly overdrawn, his contrast reminds us that puzzlement is asymmetrical: cultural encounters are always two (or more) sided and mutual, but the sides never puzzle out one another in an identical way. The encounter that pits the missionary, the colonial administrator, the tourist, the extension officer, or the anthropologist against the Other (or, nearly just as often, pits them against One Another) is shaped not only by a historically given context of unequal power but also by culturally constructed ways of thinking about that context. All sides that are represented in such encounters must deploy such a set of cultural presuppositions within some sort of situationally meaningful framework if the other parties are to be "known" and strategies for interacting with them devised (Todorov 1985; Sahlins 1985).

Since the Second World War, and in some instances even before, anthropologists have shared with other social scientists the desire to produce a knowledge of the global ramifications of commodity production and circulation on human societies, particularly those post-colonial societies that are unevenly and peripherally situated within the ambit of late capitalism. In the 1960s this was most often glossed as the study of "modernization"; in the 1970s and 1980s, as the study of "development and underdevelopment." But the possibility of such a study is predicated on the kind of puzzlement I have been discussing. From the vantage point of today it is

tempting to locate the desire (compulsion?) to account for (and thus recreate) the difference of Others in the predicament of de-colonization--in the paternalism that wondered if the impatient Natives,<sup>3</sup> under the tutelage of European institutions, would be able to manage modernity alone (Geertz 1973[1963]; Dalton 1971). Yet perhaps we should look back further to the epistemic break that Foucault (1970) locates in the human sciences at the end of the eighteenth century. Or we may speculate with Diamond (1968:101) that such puzzlement originates with civilizations, whether western or non-western, that create primitives as the negation of their own essence:

Wherever civilization arises, the primitive in Man is subordinated; it withers away, grows attenuated or is replaced. Thus the puzzled search for what is diminished, the search for different ways of being human, for the primitive, which is anthropology, begins.

What was, in Diamond's view, anthropology's most edifying mission--to quell the hubris of civilization through the emulation of the primitive--has since been deemed its greatest leap of bad faith: the "primitive" is now seen as a phantom object of longing constructed in ethnographic texts (see e.g. Torgovnick 1990).

Social science in this context, retains the broad goal of making the puzzle of the Other intelligible by logically

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<sup>3</sup>As should be obvious from the context, I use the term "Native" throughout to refer, ironically, to a construct or figure in colonial thought, not to refer to colonial subjects themselves.

deriving rules or models that explain observed peculiarities -  
-i.e. by finding something regular or regulating within them.<sup>4</sup>  
An inevitable concomitant of such a search for the rules and  
mechanisms underlying social processes has been the search for  
units of analysis, or domains in which the rules are thought  
to operate and over which they are thought to govern (see  
Guyer 1981). But the key to these efforts at abstraction and  
formalization is that they seek to master what is presumed to  
be resistant to natural comprehension, and, ultimately, to  
make them governable (in either the political or the  
epistemological sense).

#### **Doubt, Dialogue and Paradox:**

##### **Commoditization in Gokwe Revisited**

These kinds of epistemological strategies have, of  
course, been prevalent throughout the margins of colonial  
empires (Asad 1973; Said 1978; Mitchell 1991). One might even  
go so far as to say that the questions of difference that  
underlie theories of commoditization are, in a very broad  
sense, the distinguishing queries of the Modern Age. Taken  
together, they constitute a genre of systematic speculation on

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<sup>4</sup>Bourdieu (1977), at least in the eyes of some critics,  
has not wholly overcome this limitation with his concept of  
habitus, which has built into it a regulatory principal that  
admits neither to any awareness by the actor nor to any  
dialectic with the external world. In this sense the concept  
stands opposed to "praxis" (see Gose 1989). For his response  
to these and related criticisms, see Bourdieu (1990:14-15 and  
chap.7).

the sources and causes of human progress, one that can be traced back to Vico and that we now take for granted. As Athens has long stood as both the founding icon of western civilization, and as the model for its idealized replication, so do other places come to stand for what ought to be within the global discourse of development that characterizes our day. As I have suggested, Zimbabwe briefly stood in this figurative relation to the whole of Africa in the mid-1980s,<sup>5</sup> and Gokwe itself has recently stood in this relation to the rest of Zimbabwe. Yet Gokwe retains its status as an exemplar of successful development at the cost of considerable doubt and misgiving. It is a bit like the feeling most of the rest of the world has about the United States: progress and material wealth, yes, but at what cost to "culture" and human values? The doubt that is manifest in the modern ambivalence toward commoditization in western thought and in the

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<sup>5</sup>Zimbabwe's transient apotheosis followed on the convergence of two events: first, the striking production of large marketed surpluses by small-holders in 1984-85 following three years of drought; and second, the heightened concern in the international development community with "food security" in Southern Africa. In 1988, President Mugabe was given the dubious honour of receiving a US \$100,000 award from the Hunger Project. But fashions change, and those external observers who once praised the Mugabe government for its economic pragmatism are now just as eager to damn it for not imitating the democratic reforms undertaken by Eastern European socialist regimes. A more tragic outcome of these ideological wars has been the recent collapse of Zimbabwe's food-security position. In 1991, under IMF pressure to liberalize marketing structures and ensure that parastatals run on a strictly profit-making basis, the Grain Marketing Board sold off its surplus maize stocks. The result, after the disastrous cropping season of 1991-92, has been widespread food shortages and even famine in some rural areas.

anthropological puzzles it continually poses and solves, finds a curious double in Gokwe, as I soon discovered.

As we continued the conversation I recorded above (see the introduction to Part One), Mr. Matiratidza, the local extension worker, cast doubt on the depth of Gokwe's economic transformation in a way that reflects both the positioned gaze of his profession and that of his subjectivity as an immigrant to Gokwe:

"These VaShangwe<sup>6</sup> don't know how to use their money," he said shaking his head and smiling. "You will see their houses -- no bricks, no latrines."

"Do they use fertilizers and sprayers?" we asked.

"Some use," he replied, "but many ... they don't. They say, 'we know what to do with our land. Why should we ruin it with your fertilizers and pesticides?'"

"But they grow cotton?"

"Aah, they grow plenty!"

Looking back on this recollection of a conversation, the first entry in my field diary, I am astonished to discover how many of the key puzzles it seems to encode concerning the form, process and consequences of commoditization. I can also see

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<sup>6</sup>At the time, I was categorically and practically a stranger to Gokwe; nevertheless Mandiudza presumed I would understand who he was referring to, in referring to the VaShangwe. The apparent paradox in this expectation--that a newcomer should already know, a priori as it were, the ethnic layout--is explained by the fact that historically, only strangers (administrators, missionaries, immigrant farmers and by logical extension, the anthropologist) have used this term to refer to Gokwe's indigenes. I will explore the origins and implications of such ethnic attributions in Chapters VII and VIII, below.

in hindsight how it suggests an unexpected method for resolving those puzzles--or rather a method for dissolving them. That method lies beyond the ferreting out of the ethnographic facts that the "informant," Matiratidza, reveals in the course of what he says; it consists rather in an alternative strategy of retrospectively reading the conversation--one that looks for the way in which social subjects are posited and given voice within it, the way that speakers establish a common ground from which to comment on the world they temporarily share.<sup>7</sup>

This "sharing" within a dialogical situation, however, does not occur on a neutral or stable ground. On the contrary, it is a ground charged with power. In this case, that power derived from my position as the bearer of symbolically charged discourses: a white man (echoing settler colonial power); attached to the university (implying a

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<sup>7</sup>The fact that the fieldwork experience largely consists in such conversations or dialogues has recently received a great deal of notice in anthropology. See e.g. Dwyer (1982); Clifford (1986:12); Rosaldo (1987, 1989); and Gudeman and Rivera (1990). The philosophical roots of such a perspective lie in the tradition of German hermeneutics, especially Wilhelm Dilthey and his intellectual heir, Hans Gadamer. Dilthey was the direct inspiration for Victor Turner's focus on the "anthropology of experience" (see Turner and Bruner 1986); Gadamer's work has grounded (perhaps less directly) the recent emphasis on the dialogical character of fieldwork: "The dialogical character of language...leaves behind it any starting point in the subjectivity of the subject, and especially in the meaning-directed intentions of the speaker. What we find happening in speaking is not a mere reification of intended meaning, but an endeavour that continually modifies itself, or better: a continually recurring temptation to engage oneself in something or to become involved with someone" (1989:26).



mastery of educated discourse); authorized by the Ministry of Agriculture (perhaps tasked with evaluating Matiratidza's knowledge and performance as an employee of that Ministry). Matiratidza, in his conversation with me, could choose to locate himself on either side of this perceived asymmetry in power; that is, he could place himself through speech (but also of course through gesture, dress and so on) as an object of domination, or he could place himself on the side of the dominating power I represented for him. The latter choice implied mutually constituting an Other from whom we could collaboratively distinguish ourselves. And this he did, of course, not only by speaking English rather than Shona, but more importantly by naming the VaShangwe, by displacing them--that is, by referring to "them"--from the common ground upon which we stood.

But establishing this common ground proved to be difficult, because the markers that he used to signify difference (toilets and bricks, the use of money on beer) failed inevitably to locate the two of us in a common field of reference and meaning. For example, the way Matiratidza was putting away pints of beer on a weekday evening seemed in my view to undermine one attribution ("they don't know how to spend their money"), since by my calculation he was probably spending ("wasting", I thought) roughly a third of his income that way. These kinds of mis-understandings were immediately consequential for the way I reformulated my research

questions.

Most perplexing to me at the time was the seeming paradox of the involvement of Matiratidza's "Shangwe" farmers in the commodity economy. At the time, I thought that their behaviour ran against not only my own Western intuitive logic, but against the grain of economic history everywhere. It seemed to me that people would generally be inclined to exchange familiar products for strange ones before they would consider producing a strange commodity, such as cotton, that they had, according to their own accounts, never even seen before in its raw form. The VaShangwe, however, seemed to be working it the other way round: here they were producing cotton with passion and abandon, even though it was a crop apparently unknown in this particular part of Gokwe before 1972.

In this respect, they seemed remarkably to be fulfilling the chief desideratum of decades of post-war international development expertise: they were "progressive" cash-cropping farmers, rising spontaneously to meet the opportunity afforded by new markets, reorganizing themselves to grow a notoriously demanding crop for sale to the state. Yet in the view of local administrators and agricultural experts, immigrants, and virtually all Zimbabweans living almost everywhere else, they were singularly backward. They didn't "know how to use their money." They were reluctant, in other words, to spend the money they earned on items of domestic comfort and working

capital that had become standard fare elsewhere in rural Zimbabwe decades earlier. In fact, as Matiratidza indicated, the consumption of such items served as a ready sociological index with which to distinguish the VaShangwe from the immigrant farmers who had begun to populate the district over the past three decades. Was there something peculiar about the history of this region, about the manner of its incorporation into the spheres of commodity production and exchange defined by the settler colonial state, that could account for such an odd response? Alternatively, was there something distinctive about the social organization and cultural construction of economic life of these peasants that made them eschew commodity purchases that others both sought and relished?

We cast about for further clues. Stranded at a rural bus stop a day earlier, Mr. Hama, one of the first extension workers to be posted to the district and now on the verge of retirement, had told us the story of how cotton had been introduced into the district in the 1960s and 1970s. It was a story of how the intransigence of conservative peasants had been overcome by the cunning of the extension service, the example of sophisticated immigrants, and the avarice of chiefs. Before long, however, we learned that the smooth background of economic and social stasis against which Hama's story was constructed contained more than a few wrinkles. One was the collective memory (and archival documentation--see

Kosmin 1977) of an extensive trade in locally produced tobacco that dated at least as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Gokwe region was a dominion of the Ndebele chiefdom to which it paid tribute in kind. Another was the presence of indigenous elders who had worked for wages on colonial mines and farms as long ago as the First World War. It turned out that not only were commodities produced for tribute and trade in Gokwe over a century ago, but that labour-power itself had been sold as a commodity shortly after the dawn of colonial rule. After the introduction of cotton in the 1960s, Shangwe seasonal migrants flooded the free-hold farms of eastern Gokwe and the state farm in neighbouring Sanyati to work for wages. They went to weed and to pick cotton, a crop that they themselves were still reluctant to grow. Today, those same commercial farms are ploughing under cotton for lack of labour. The VaShangwe, who seemed destined to enter the post-colonial economy as migrant rural proletarians, are now growing cotton for themselves.

A picture began to emerge in my mind of history folding back upon itself. A people who had once planted tobacco as a token of subordination to a hegemonic pre-colonial state, and then had wage-labour extracted by the early settler colonial administration, subsequently seemed to deny their historical familiarity with the commoditization process. On the contrary, they presented the inscrutable face of economic

conservatism and were consequently branded as primitive and backward--as people still assimilated to nature. Today, they were once again vigorously and voluntarily engaged in producing a commodity that was introduced and purchased for money by the late-colonial state and its successor. Yet they resisted the specific rationality that would seem to be imposed by a money economy; they went about producing for others and provisioning themselves in their own way.

As I have suggested, a historiography of the convoluted path of commoditization in Gokwe--indeed of commoditization among Zimbabwean peasants everywhere--was not even possible in Zimbabwe until the 1970s; or rather such a history was written as a spatial juxtaposition of essential human types, each representing different "stages" of progress (Fabian 1983; Wilmsen 1989). Even now the manner of its writing is shackled by an epistemology (and the techniques of analysis such an epistemology authorizes) that is designed to reveal the ever-elusive directionality of social and economic transformation. To those not steeped in the convergent discourses of social science, colonial administration, and agricultural extension that characterized official thinking in settler colonial Rhodesia, however, the history of Gokwe's peasants may not present such a puzzling succession of events. After all, since Redfield's work in anthropology and Schultz's in economics many have argued that peasants have their just and sufficient reasons for what they do---whether these are

governed by cultural values (the classic relativist position) or by the avoidance of economic risk (the formalist one). In either view, these reasons need only to be "discovered" through a process of empirically-based research. The reason of the Other is presented as a riddle to be solved: such is the detective nature of much anthropological work in remote places.

These motivations for research and the methods they entail (ranging from direct observation to dialogue and interpretation) are in no way incompatible with an underlying teleological model of modernization and development, one that sees the rise of capitalism as expressive of a kind of transcendent Reason that must eventually capture and dissolve Culture. In practice, it is extremely difficult to divest ourselves of such a model, since it provides a ground against which we raise questions and arrive at answers concerning the puzzle presented by the (principally economic) behaviour of postulated Others. And this is where the formulation of anthropological knowledge links up with powers of governance that it often cannot imagine as consequences of its own practice.

The forms of governance that are made possible, unwittingly or otherwise, by such knowledge became starkly apparent to me when I came across an article published in 1980 by the Chief Training Officer of the Department of Conservation and Extension, entitled "Reasons Why Peasants Do

Not Adopt Innovations" (Kennan 1980). Based on his reading and distillation of the works of prominent anthropologists--among them Margaret Mead, Ralph Linton, Eric Wolf, and George Foster--Kennan concluded there were ten such reasons: "mutual distrust in interpersonal relations;" "perceived limited good;" "dependence upon and hostility towards government authority;" "familism;" "lack of innovativeness;" "fatalism;" "limited aspirations;" "lack of deferred gratifications;" "limited view of the world;" and lastly "low empathy" (1980:194).

As Chief Training Officer, the author of these views was responsible for conveying a "scientific" perspective on the social forces abetting or inhibiting agricultural change to thousands of extension workers in the field. He was articulating, in the name of anthropological "discoveries," an approach to unravelling the mystery of the peasant subject, and the imperviousness of that subject to economic logic--a proposition that virtually all anthropologists today would disavow. But the rhetorical question posed in the article's title implies an epistemological position that provides the mandate for the operations of Agritex, the most pervasive and powerful arm of the local state apparatus in the Zimbabwean countryside. As I will have occasion to show, Gokwe became a kind of laboratory for the demonstration that the extension service, properly oriented, could provide the conditions for the erasure of this essential difference between peasants and

moderns; Gokwe in fact became a local success story in the struggle for commoditization, conceived of as a state-initiated process, as opposed to a "natural," evolutionary one (e.g. Reid 1971; Bates 1978).<sup>8</sup>

In the remainder of this chapter I want to pursue the problem that this entire genre of analysis, and its epistemological frame, presents--the way that it orients questions, observations, analyses and conclusions in the anthropological project. I should immediately add that I do not wish to suggest that this approach is erroneous, but rather to indicate its practical effects in the constitution of social relations at every level, from village to state and beyond. It is not something that anthropologists, through a process of self-reflection and auto-critique, can correct and

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<sup>8</sup>M.G. Reid almost single-handedly developed and pushed through the cotton programme in Gokwe in the 1960s. He and Kennan were apparently senior colleagues at the Department of Conservation and Extension (CONEX) head office during the brief tenure of the Muzorewa government at the end of the 1970s (Reid was by that time serving as Senior Planning Officer). Curiously, Reid published what amounts to a direct refutation of Kennan's premise--that peasants do not, as a rule, adopt innovations--two years before Kennan's article appeared, in the same journal (Reid 1978). The items in the "partial list" that Reid presents of agricultural practices "adopted or modified by African farmers in Rhodesia since 1890," number well over one hundred (Reid 1978:149). Kennan evidently found the anthropological meta-discourse on pre-modern modes of thought to be more compelling than counter-evidence provided by hundreds of empirical instances of technological and organizational change among the peasants working under his department's tutelage. It is perhaps Kennan's modernism, and the discursive closure that makes certain kinds of statements inadmissible to it, that deserves to be characterized in terms he reserves for "peasants the world over" as a distinctive "mentality" or mode of thought.



overcome by enlightening themselves and their colleagues. Rather, I take this discourse of development within the broader discourse on modernity to be constitutive of relations of power and economic practice in the social world.<sup>9</sup> It is to the workings of this, the substance and effect of the ethnographic and colonial encounter, that I now turn.

### **Mirrors in the Culture of Modernity**

The discursive formation--to use Foucault's (1972) term--that took active shape in the thought of the Enlightenment and continues to inform much of the intellectual effort in the discipline of anthropology, has a distinctive mode of operation and effectivity. It works, as Fabian (1983) has shown so compellingly, by continually differentiating and then temporally displacing Others ("primitives," "tribals," "peasants") from the position of the writer, speaker, or observer. What has escaped notice until recently, it seems to me, is that the discourse of modernity and development is now integral to the expressive, reflective, and pragmatic endeavour of the people who were once merely its objects; it is part of "their" own discursive repertoire, "their" means of reflecting on their own experience. As V.Y. Mudimbe (1988:xi) has observed,

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<sup>9</sup>Robben (1989) eloquently illustrates this proposition in his study of discursive conflict and economic practice among Brazilian canoemen and boatowners. See Worby (1984a, 1984b) for my own attempts to link discourses of ethnicity and development to economic practice and social inequality in Botswana.

it is in these very discourses that African Worlds have been established as realities for knowledge. And today Africans themselves read, challenge, rewrite these discourses as a way of explicating and defining their culture, history and being.

What this implies for an anthropology of "development," or a theory of "commoditization," will become clearer if I return briefly to the fieldwork encounter and the ironic shifting of subjective positions it so often entails.

#### Simulations of the Anti-Modern

##### **"You have come to civilize us."**

It was with these words, (not the very first, but among them), that we were greeted by Moffat Mbano, the forty-two year old "Shangwe" peasant who was to be our host in the field for most of the next year. Was he being ironic, polite, submissive, or sincere? His epigrammatic statement was so arresting, of course, because it seized and inverted the venerable command of conquistadors and colonialists: "We have come to civilize you." The memory of the imagined resonance of these words, echoing through the age of modern imperialism, evokes shame in modern ethnographers, and sets the terms for their self-appointed, ever-edifying mission. That mission is emphatically not to civilize the other, but to listen to what the other has to say about what it is to be human in a different set of circumstances; and then, perhaps, to use what has been overheard as a novel ground from which to launch a critique of civilization itself (Diamond 1974; Marcus and

Fischer 1986). But Mbanjo's words instantly subverted that project, filling me with shame and prompting my spontaneous protest: "No, no!--we've come to learn from you!"

In that protest, it seems to me, lies embedded the complex predicament of ethnography in the post-modern world. The Natives now know the language of the West within which they have been objectified, invented; they sell themselves framed as post-cards, offer up their mystery in stylized artifacts, and present themselves to be civilized before being told or asked. In these acts which anticipate that very difference upon which all forms of social domination depend, the Natives threaten to expose difference itself as pure contrivance--as artifact or ideology. In short, for those who would forever have them remain in the frozen time of the museum case, or the innocent isolation of a cultural island, these simulators of the anti-modern have come to know too much and too soon.

We might think about this turn of events as a reversal of mirrors. In the lore surrounding archetypal situations of "first contact," mirrors are the mystifying gifts that the colonial modern brings for the primitives, enabling them to "see" themselves for the first time, diverting them from the intrusion of the outsider to the spectacle of themselves. Mirrors are, of course, also central metaphors of reflexivity

in anthropological discourse.<sup>10</sup> Half a century ago, Ernst Bloch used the mirror metaphor to comment on the limits of Spengler's historical relativism, in a way that prefigures the critique of ethnographic holism taking place in anthropology today:

The very process of history is broken up into Gardens of Culture or "Culture Souls." These are as unrelated to each other as they are without connection to Man and human labor (which is the pervading matter of history) or to nature ... Quite artfully, historical relativism is here turned into something static; it is being caught in cultural monads, that is, culture souls without windows, with no links among each other, yet full of mirrors facing inside. (Cited in Fabian 1983:44-5).

Now it seems that the mirrors have been turned around by the Natives and face outward. Playfully, they deploy them so that

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<sup>10</sup>The classic formulation belongs to Kluckhohn (1964[1944]:19): "Studying primitives enables us to see ourselves better. Ordinarily we are unaware of the special lens through which we look at life...The scientist of human affairs needs to know as much about the eye that sees as the object seen. *Anthropology holds up a great mirror to man and lets him look at himself in his infinite variety* [emphasis in original]. This, and not the satisfaction of idle curiosity nor romantic quest, is the meaning of the anthropologist's work in non-literate societies." The title of a seminal collection of articles reflecting various "reflexive" perspectives in anthropological discourse, A Crack in the Mirror (Ruby 1982) is intended to reveal that the mirror is constructed, and never in a way that is innocent of the observer's motivations. But this does not in itself signal an epistemological shift of great magnitude or qualitative difference. As Crary (1988) shows, the reflexive preoccupation with "the eye that sees" was inaugurated two centuries ago by Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, a text that marked a rupture with eighteenth century social thought and made possible a science of the seeing/known subject (cf. Foucault 1970). The "post-modern" break requires a different mirror metaphor which I pursue below.

wherever the anthropologist seeks the Other, instead of difference, she or he finds only identity--a mirror image, perhaps even a parody, of the self engaged in a futile search for someone else. This is often not an enlightening game so much as it is a perplexing, disturbing, and highly disorienting one. For me, it initiated an ongoing process of rethinking the positions my investigation assumed and entailed. It forced me to reconsider the relations of power such an investigation implicitly attempted to instantiate, relations which were being reflected back at me mimetically. And finally, it led me to shift my strategy.

The disquieting predicament I describe is not unlike what James Clifford (1988) has recently called "the predicament of culture" itself. That predicament, as I see it, consists in the awareness that the gaze and speech of the observer has been captured in advance by the object of observation. Cultural essence is thus revealed to be merely staged, literally "put on" as a means of resistance, mockery or empowerment (cf. Basso 1979). In Clifford's words, "If authenticity is relational, there can be no essence except as a political, cultural invention, a local tactic (1988:12)."

Indeed, there is an increasingly prevalent view that culture is only "a moment in a multi-centred process" (Rousseau 1990:49); that representations of, and the boundaries between, "our culture" and "their culture" are intertextual products of continuous improvisation, invention,

and transaction (Drummond 1980; Wagner 1981; Handler 1984; Boon 1990; Thomas 1991), and that these accounts of culture are as various as the perspectives lent by the "positioned subjectivity" of the individuals who express them (Keesing 1974; Rosaldo 1989; Kelly 1992).<sup>11</sup>

The point may be illustrated by returning briefly to the residents of Gokwe I have already introduced, namely Matiratidza and Mbano. Matiratidza's persistent reiteration of the backwardness of Shangwe economic practice only appropriates and redirects elements of an earlier discourse that must have once been aimed at himself. Indeed, from other points of view--including those of his immediate superiors--it could still be. On weekends, Matiratidza-the-extension-worker rides off on his motorcycle to become Matiratidza-the-peasant-farmer in a village of illegal squatters some sixty kilometres away. Flouting the orderly vision of legal tenure and settlement prescribed by the state in the name of progress, he exemplifies, in this latter role, an equally unruly embodiment of the very backwardness he elsewhere derides. His expression of self-identity is in this sense deeply fragmented and the

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<sup>11</sup>Kelly (1992:98) sums up the prevailing mood: "by 'culture,' I mean a complex of forms and a grammar of their use, something that changes over time not simply because of the limits and pressures of material exigencies, nor merely in the play of practical reason and chance, but in a process of transformation, renewal, and expansion in the hands of otherwise diverse and variously situated agents empowered by it."

style of its presentation situationally determined.<sup>12</sup>

The case of Mbano and his kin (who are cast in Matiratidza's ethnosociology as a "Shangwe" tribesmen), even better illustrates some of the ways in which the question of who is civilized and who is to do the civilizing has become so important in Gokwe. Since these particular people figure prominently in this work as a whole, I will use this opportunity not only to make the methodological point about cultural self-representation, but simultaneously to outline some of the main categories of social identity in the village we lived in during the later stages of our research.

Anticipating in a sense the civilizing mission of the arriving white anthropologist, Mbano had long ago learned to speak with many distinct cultural voices. Educated in his twenties at a Baptist mission, and trained to work on land survey teams as a contour pegger by the colonial extension service, he was highly adept at shifting his stance--or the very point of view from which he spoke--according to the speaking situation he found himself in. In this way he had little difficulty explaining his own opinions or practices or commenting on those of others, even though taken together these positions were highly contradictory. A nominal

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<sup>12</sup>This kind of fragmentation is often difficult for North Americans to grasp, accustomed as we are to metaphors of "core" identity, of "true" and "false" selves. To my mind the fragmentation or multiplication of selves, is a central, if rarely articulated process that fieldwork almost inevitably entails. See Kondo (1990) for a beautiful evocation and analysis of that experience.

Christian, he was able to state with pride and honesty that he abstained from alcohol; yet it was with some embarrassment that he admitted to having two wives. This fact he attributed to his lack of family labour, that labour being conceived metaphorically as mere instruments of production: "my wives are my machines," he explained to us and to a number of our "European" and presumably Christian visitors. What he felt to be a fundamental violation of civilized Christian sentiments in one context could thus be justified if it were located in another--the abstract discourse of classical political economy framed by a wider field defined by the rhetoric of modernity. Many of Mbano's paternal uncles and his own brothers were also Christians, but of a different kind. As *Vapostori* (members of the Apostolic Church of Johanne Marange), they abstained from drink and medicine, but cited scriptural authority in support of their right to marry as many wives as possible. They actively and consciously parodied, and thus challenged, the link between missionary Christian ideals and the Bible, the textual source of missionary authority; indeed they claimed to have mastered that source better than the missionaries whose original power and legitimacy depended upon it. Moreover, in their agricultural endeavour, they aspired to surpass even those who subordinated themselves most uniformly to the dictates of the Church in its modernizing mission. Their style of capitalist entrepreneurship was grounded in an Old Testament model of domestic form combined with Protestant



1 notions of family hierarchy and work discipline. Many *Vapostori* boasted of their mastery over the sphere of modern commodity economy--defined in terms of their knowledge of, and ease of access to, machinery, markets and money. Yet they relished the opportunity to simultaneously display a set of explicitly anti-modernist sentiments and practices. The force of their identity was manifest in their deliberate juxtaposition of beliefs and behaviours that the self-described bearers of civilization hold to be antinomies.<sup>13</sup>

A third category of Mbano's male agnates were as uninterested in church membership as they were in simulating the "Modern" in their words, actions, and bodily appearance. Polygynous, and deeply invested in the ritual and casual consumption of home-brewed beer, they emphasized the link between ancestors and descendants as a primary referent in modelling their own behaviour. For them, the consumption of home-brewed beer metonymically united the living and the dead; at the same time it served to make manifest the differences separating "traditionalists" from the two categories of Christians already mentioned.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>See Long (1968) for a pioneering treatment of the relationship between religious ideology in another millenarian sect operative in southern Africa--the Jehovah's Witnesses--and canons of economic practice.

<sup>14</sup>The tripartite division of Shona-speaking communities into "traditionalists," "mission church members," and "members of African independent churches" has been made before. See, e.g., Bourdillon (1988). A seminal overview and comparison of Shona adaptations to major Christian denominational practices, the apostolic movement, and "traditional" religious

The wives of all of these brothers sometimes identified with the commitment of their husbands to one or another of these identities, and sometimes did not. Certainly for women, every expression of identity was inflected by their jural subordination to men, although the quality and degree of that subordination was hardly uniform. In their conversations with us, women, more than men, allowed their own autobiographies to colour the ways they constructed themselves, their perceptions and their desires in the present. In the presence of men, they were, with few exceptions, condemned to making a passive display of silent assent.

Much of what I have to say concerns the complex play of discourse, identity and practice that these highly unstable and decentred positions entail. Central to that play, or rather to my awareness of it and my ability to transcribe it, is the fact of my own presence as interlocutor, foil, or mirror for the projects of those I worked and talked among. Our arrival in the village seemed to catalyze a more intensive manoeuvring between postures by others. While there is no way of knowing one way or the other, we were often literally told that our mere presence was transformative, that it had changed things irrevocably in favour of Progress; our presence, in other words, was taken as both a sign confirming the arrival

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orientations, is provided by Murphree (1969).

of a state of modernity and a model for its future trajectory--for the path to be followed, the style of life to be led. Intellectually, I strained against this predication of myself as one who would embody, represent and enact the meaning of modernity for those I lived among. If anything, my desire was to empty myself of the very attributes of modernity that some of our hosts sought to be imbued with by means of our presence; I wanted to fill myself instead with what I perceived to lie beyond it: "to learn from them," as I had pleaded so emphatically.

One result of this clash of intentions was a shift in my focus of attention, for inevitably I was drawn to reflect on the arguments that were generated not only by our presence, but by the complex field of discourse and practice that I will call the "culture of modernity" in Gokwe. I use this phrase to suggest an ongoing argument over identity, one that draws on the rhetoric and embodiment of social distinctions that have been formative of European discourse and practice over roughly the past two centuries--centuries marked by the abandonment of the slave trade, the rise of bourgeois liberalism and industrial capitalism, and by economic imperialism and colonialism abroad. As the Comaroffs (1991) have demonstrated so compellingly, the central figures of western self-conception are themselves products of the colonial enterprise; thus the culture of modernity, and the repertoire of identities and differences it continuously

produces, must be seen as having taken shape, or as having been invented in the nexus linking the West with its colonized alter.

For women in Tazivana village, as much as for men, the practice of polygyny featured as a central object of such arguments about the meaning of modernity, as a place where contradictions within portrayals of the modern were condensed and explicit justifications demanded to be put forward. Other prominent arenas for contesting identities and announcing differences along the axis of modernity included church membership, literacy, styles of dress and food preparation.<sup>15</sup> But it was to the realm of what we circumscribe as the "economic"--itself a central trope of modernity--and especially to the reorganization of labour contingent upon the explosive spread of cotton production and the wider commoditization of the life it has entailed, that I paid greatest attention and that will receive special notice in what follows.

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<sup>15</sup>See Hatch (1992) for an intriguing discussion of how Urban Senegalese women in different class positions appropriate and contest the dominant fashion system. Her argument draws on important work by Hebdige (1979) that emphasizes the forms of resistance to hegemonic culture implicit in the uses of "style" by urban sub-cultures. The key source of recent interest in hegemony, its appropriations and subversions, is Gramsci (1971).

### Remaking "Labour"

As my title suggests, the theme that ultimately ties together the chapters that follow is that of the remaking of agrarian labour in Gokwe and its relationship to the expression of social identity. I want to speak of "remaking" in part to echo the Shona verb phrase *kuita basa*, which may be translated as "to do work" or "to make through effort." Flexibly employed in everyday speech, this expression covers the sense of "work" familiar to English-speakers--that of striving to accomplish a task through the application of energy. As I will suggest below, it may stretch to cover waged employment as well, although more specialized terms have evolved or been adapted to cover this kind of economic relation. But before I explore the vocabulary bearing on agricultural labour that is brought into use in Shona in greater detail, it might be instructive to reflect briefly on the semantic space the words "work" and "labour" have come to command in English over the centuries since industrial capitalism took root. It is common knowledge that usage in this regard is not the same on either side of the Atlantic, or indeed elsewhere in the English speaking world. It would be wrong-headed to establish a fictitious world to which "we" refer to when using these terms, and then to contrast that world, monolithically conceived, against the world of Shona

speakers.<sup>16</sup> The project of figuring out what "work" or "labour" amounts to in another culture, distant in space and/or time, inevitably entails some kind of translation, not only between lexical terms but across metaphoric domains.

The several Shona terms which might capture what in English translates as "labour" or "work" are focused around two central morphemes: the noun, *basa*, and the verb root *-shanda*. Another verb root, *-sevenza*, though of Nguni origin, is widely used in Gokwe. Of the two, *basa*, broadly connoting "work" conceived as "exertion" or "effort," has a somewhat greater range of metaphoric applications. Thus "*ane basa*"--literally "he/she has work"--means "he/she is busy doing something"; or one might say rhetorically of any demanding task, "*ibasa, nhai?*"--"it's really hard work, isn't it?" With a locative prefix, *ku-*, yielding *kubasa*, the term denotes "place of work." In this case, however, it is always used with reference to a place of wage employment, and indeed in urban areas the word *basa* has acquired the conventional

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<sup>16</sup> The project of contrasting western and non-western (sometimes "capitalist" versus "pre-capitalist")--conceptions of work and labour has been of interest to both anthropologists and historians of late. Particularly in the French literature, the seminal work has been J.P. Vernant's (1965) analysis of the lexical elements in ancient Greek that pertain only tangentially to modern conceptions of work, and thus provide the clue to an alternative world-view (see Schwimmer 1979 and Cartier 1984). Notable ethnographic case-studies include Parkin (1979) on the Giriama of coastal Kenya, John and Jean Comaroff (1987) on the Tshidi-Barolong in South Africa and Beaucage (1989) on the Garifona of Honduras and the Maseual (Nahuat) of Mexico.

referent of "job" or "employment" (as in the ubiquitous signs suspended at eye level on the front gates of homes in the low-density suburbs of Harare that read *Hapana Basa*--"No Work/Jobs [available here]"). The notion of "effort" appears in another verb phrase, *kubata basa*, literally "to seize hold of (grasp, tackle) work", but also used more broadly to refer to a vocation (as in "*Munobata basa rei?*"--"what kind of work do you do?"). In this compound form the noun *basa* is sometimes omitted in reference to more specific tasks: "*Nhasi tinobata muminda*"<sup>17</sup> --"Today we will tackle [work] in the fields." This clearly shifts the emphasis on the effort to be expended, the action of facing what is to be done and its locus, the content of the work itself being left unspecified. The element of abstract effort is similarly reflected in the generic phrase for "thank-you!": *maita basa*--literally, "you have done work [for me]!" But conversely, the content of work, or even the object of production may, in a fetishized way, be said to demand a quantity of effort or *basa*. Here I can give as an example a poignant phrase we heard often in Gokwe: *basa redonje haripere*, "the work of cotton never ends."

The meaning of the term *basa* extends metaphorically to encompass notions of duty and responsibility as well: "*Handina basa nazvo*"--literally, "I have no work with these matters" (i.e., "it's none of my business"). Even the general state of

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<sup>17</sup> I have taken this example from Hannan (1984, s.v. bata basa).

one's affairs may be queried by asking, "*Basa rakadii?*" ("How's work/everything going?") or, "*Basa riri kufamba here?*" ("Is work going/moving well?").

The verb stems *-shanda* and *-sevenza* are both used much more exclusively with reference to the experience of wage labour. Thus to engage in working for wages is *kushanda* (or *kusevenza*, widely used by Shona-speakers, but of Nguni origin) and a wage-worker is called a *mushandi* or *musevenzi*. With the addition of a causative extension, the verb *kushanda* becomes *kushandisa* or *kushandidza*, meaning "to use," or literally, "to make to work." Thus, one might ask, "*Vanoshandisa mapadza chete, here?*" ("Are they only using hoes?"). It is tempting, given this latter usage, to see in the verb stem, *-shanda* the semantic implication of passivity--of a tool to be used--rather than self-conscious agency.<sup>18</sup> Thus its use tends to contain a moral connotation-- that a person who works in this way is not doing so out of her or his own volition. More than once, while working in the fields of our village hosts, passers-by hailed us by shouting out, "*Vashandi!*"--which can only be translated as, "Wage workers!." Since we were not in fact working for wages, but were known to be leaving the village before the benefits of the harvest would be realized, this jest effectively captured the moral tension involved in our devoting effort to an enterprise in which it was hardly

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<sup>18</sup>It must be said, however, that *-shanda* may on occasion be used transitively, as in the phrase, "*Uri kushanda basa rei?*" ("What kind of work do you do/ are you doing?").



clear that we had any intelligible interest whatsoever. It is a tension that attaches to wage labour in agriculture generally, and that accounts for the low status of those who undertake it.

It is not until Part Three that I will be talking directly about the ways in which the social form and process of agricultural work have been remade over the last century, and, in some detail, about how that "work" is actually accomplished and differentially valued today. The chapters of Part Two that immediately follow may seem to stray somewhat far from that theme, but the connecting threads will be more apparent if I suggest an additional sense, or rather a pair of senses that I wish to convey with the idea of "remaking labour." The first of these is best captured by the term "praxis," still the only way we have in Western thought--if not precisely in English--of evoking in a single term the reciprocal determination of human action-in-the-world and consciousness-of-the-world (see Marx 1972[1845]; Bernstein 1971; and Kitching 1988). The term has the virtue of allowing us to understand "labour" simultaneously as work in the physical world and at the same time as signifying (hence always social) practice (Gose 1989). Thus we might say that there is no pre-determined concrete act or abstract substance that exists as "labour" apart from its social and linguistic formulation as such; at the same time, what is given in the language of labour exists in a dialogue with its referent--a

bodily practice that is at the same time a cultural construct and a social performance. Arguments over what labour is, what it means, and the identity of those who perform it are thus made through the body in its social context. In this sense, I will be talking about how, in the process of reorganizing both the process of labour and the social relations that contain it, new social identities and distinctions are announced and put on display. But I will also sometimes have in mind the ways in which praxis remakes the body itself, investing its movements with form and discipline.<sup>19</sup>

Lastly, I want to think of "remaking" labour in the sense of "refiguring." By this I mean the changing ways in which ideas about work or labour have occupied a particular trans-

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<sup>19</sup>Given the attention granted to the disciplining functions of industrial labour organization, it is striking how little attention has been paid to the discipline that inheres in the performance of non-commoditized labour in agriculture. In the context of a recent discussion of sport, Bourdieu sketches out a very suggestive line of investigation about the relationship between bodily discipline, belief and domestication that could well be extended to attempts to reform agrarian labour practices, and thus commitment to the culture of modernity, under colonial rule: "If most organizations--the Church, the army, political parties, industrial concerns, etc.--give such a big place to bodily disciplines, this is to a great extent because obedience is belief and belief is what the body grants even when the mind says no...It is perhaps by thinking about what is most specific about sport, that is, the regulated manipulation of the body, about the fact that sport, like all disciplines in all total or totalitarian institutions, convents, prisons, asylums, political parties, etc., is a way of obtaining from the body an adhesion that the mind might refuse, that one could reach a better understanding of the usage made by most authoritarian regimes of sport. Bodily discipline is the instrument par excellence of 'domestication'..." (Bourdieu 1990:167).

cultural semantic space. It is a space that spans the ground between evolving colonial views of agricultural labour in Southern Rhodesia and the recasting of those views in local terms by Gokweans themselves. I emphasize here "the space that spans," rather than the polarized, homogeneous views that are often attributed to the discourse of colonizer and colonized. The dialogue between Europe and Africa--a dialogue that took place through the exchange of objects long before it took place through any exchange of words, representations or force of arms--has not been one between two hermetically sealed actors each with a static cultural universe.' As a number of writers have recently argued (e.g., Stoler and Cooper 1989; Cooper 1989; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), metropolitan discourse with regard to the "labouring classes" was instrumental in shaping colonial social relations (not only in the domains of politics and the economy, but also in those of law, manners, health and sexuality); conversely, metropolitan social relations were themselves sometimes recast in an idiom imported from the periphery of empire.<sup>20</sup> There were, moreover, multiple and often conflicting points of view among colonial settlers as well as among indigenous peoples with regard to the modernizing project; as I have already suggested for Gokwe, some of the colonized appropriated the

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<sup>20</sup>As Timothy Mitchell (1991) has noticed, nineteenth century devices for the supervision of populations in the industrializing core, such as Bentham's panopticon, were often devised and tested on the colonial frontier.

categories of exogenous discourse, while others reworked the colonial experience in terms of an explicitly anti-modern world view. The resulting plurality of styles and voices in Gokwe seems to amply illustrate what Bakhtin (1981) intended to capture with the term "heteroglossia": a multiplicity of ways of construing, speaking to, and implicitly making arguments about the nature and significance of social relations. In the next part of the thesis, I begin to explore how this polyvocality leaves us with a variety of contrasting portraits of Gokwe and the kinds of labouring subjects it is said to contain.

Yet despite this dispersion of speaking positions within and across social categories (such as the colonizers and the colonized) that were once taken by scholars to be relatively uniform, there is a sense in which the culture of modernity provides a unifying axis around which everyone is given voice. For above all, the culture of modernity is defined by a paradoxical situation in which all human subjects are able potentially to speak or act from the position of the modern. The component discourses of modernity--"development," "freedom," "commoditization," "novelty"--all enable the reproduction of the modern/anti-modern duality in which one who engages in a linguistic, sartorial, or bodily practice may, perhaps even must, create an other who is made different

in kind by being deferred in time.<sup>21</sup> The labour or agrarian practice of those living through the culture of modernity is thus always at the same time a way of remaking an identity, and, at the same time, a way marking difference from a fictive other. These are themes we may now explore in detail with respect to Gokwe.

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<sup>21</sup>The notion of a simultaneous displacement in space and time is captured by Derrida's neologism, *différance* (1978).

PART TWO

LOCATING THE LABOURING SUBJECT: PLACE AND IDENTITY ON THE  
NORTHWESTERN FRONTIER

## INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

The Sebungwe [Gokwe] District...is a vast and semi-arid expanse that defies the encroachments of civilization and all that comes in the train of civilization. - *H.M.G. Jackson, Chief Native Commissioner, Southern Rhodesia (1971[1935])*

### Representing Gokwe

"Gokwe" today names a river, a town, and a district. The river, small and unnoteworthy, runs down the northwestern slope of the Mafungabusi plateau into the lands of Chief Nemangwe. The town is now a bustling administrative and commercial centre, with upwards of 5000 permanent residents. It boasts several banks, a glistening row of shops and restaurants in modern brick and glass, several beerhalls, and a tarred main street. A major grain depot lies on the south side of town and plans are underway to construct a cotton ginnery. Dozens of buses from every corner of the district roar in and out of the vast dusty space in front of the shops from before dusk until long after dark. The space provides a venue for the informal marketing of fruits, vegetables and trinkets to travellers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Gokwe Growth Point (a term I use interchangeably with "Gokwe Town") is the only growth point designated as such so far in Gokwe District. There are at present 17 "rural service centres" commonly referred to as "townships" or informally as *mashops* where a concentration of businesses and

The boundaries of the modern district--at 23,030 sq. km. the second largest in Zimbabwe--were drawn in 1926.<sup>2</sup> They follow the major rivers which today define the hinterland of commerce emanating from the Mafungabusi plateau and from the major towns of Kadoma and Kwekwe that lie on the central line of road and rail running along the highlands from Harare to Bulawayo.

These three referents of the term Gokwe--which are geographical and administrative--are not the only ones,

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local government offices can be found. The Growth Point presently supports a saw mill and milling factory as well as a manufacturer of electrical goods, the latter to be in operation shortly. Smaller welding operations, furniture makers and mechanics can also be found (Business Herald. 23 May 1991, p.22).

<sup>2</sup>See Rasmussen and Rubert (1990:109). Frequent name and boundary changes during the colonial period make it somewhat difficult to follow historical sources referring to the region as whole and Gokwe District in particular. The directory to district government archival sources in the Zimbabwe National Archives lists the colonial boundary changes as follows: Government Notice 55 in the year 1898 (GN 55/1898) defined the boundaries of Wankie and Sebungu districts, which together constituted the northwestern portion of the colony of Southern Rhodesia. Mafungabusi District was listed the following year under GN 13/1899. Sebungu and Mafungabusi were amalgamated under GN 35/1901 and renamed "Sebungwe-Mafungabusi," then abbreviated to "Sebungwe" under GN 35/1907. GN 597/1926 altered the boundaries of the district, and the name "Sebungwe" was changed to Gokwe in 1957 by GN 27/1957. Additional confusion arises from the jural differentiation of land categories based on tenure within the district. There are today four Communal Lands (known as Reserves until 1961, then Tribal Trust Lands until 1980) in the district--Gokwe, Sebungwe, Kana, and Gandavaroyi. Freehold title and the alienation of land in exchange for money is prohibited in these areas. The Small-Scale Commercial Areas (formally African Purchase Areas) of Copper-Queen and Chemagora are divided into fenced lots; title-deeds are leased to individual farmers who may eventually attain outright ownership.



although they are the only ones appropriate to a narrative of planning and the only ones possible within the language of modern geography. The language of a geographical science that inscribes territories--the property of sovereign states--lends itself to a distinctive mode of description. It makes possible the representation of a place whose surfaces and geomorphology can be described all at once, as if they were being observed by an omniscient god whose presence can neither be discerned nor disclosed. The history of human observation (the relation of the place to be described to the experience of the observer; the transition from the moment of "discovery" to that of incorporation into a known and controlled space) is effaced in its textualization.<sup>3</sup>

In the planning and project documents that make up the post-colonial literature on the Gokwe region, or the journalistic reports that dwell equally upon matters related to its "development," this representational strategy is one way of authorizing interventions. It is a strategy that both establishes the attributes of the object to be transformed and at the same time lends an urgency to the process of transformation. The urgency is eminently impersonal--it is necessary from the point of view of the moral imperatives of

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<sup>3</sup> As Mary Louise Pratt writes (1986:32): "In terms of its own metaphors, the scientific position of speech is that of an observer fixed on the edge of a space, looking in and down upon what is other. Subjective experience, on the other hand, is spoken from a moving position already within or down in the middle of things, looking and being looked at, talking and being talked at."

society as a whole, for which the state stands as both token and agent, and not from the private values or interests of any particular author. One noteworthy feature of this erasure of the author from the text in such references to geographical facts and features is that it serves as the basis for the objectification, naturalization, and manipulation of Gokwe's human inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> If the social facts of demography, ethnicity, and production are juxtaposed to an administered space, then the inhabitants of that space are made available for various kinds of evaluations and interventions within the context of larger national development strategies. Their performance as producers for a national economy, the efficiency of their exploitation of natural resources, and their potential as labouring agents may be assessed, compared, and put to work in satisfying some utility for the state.<sup>5</sup> By working through the language of physical and social geography, the discourse of development generates an architectural blueprint of the interior of the state,

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, those inhabitants themselves rarely inhabit the text either, save as loosely invoked ethnic, economic or demographic categories that may or may not resonate with local attributions of identity.

<sup>5</sup>See Worby (1984b), Ferguson (1990a), and Escobar (1988, 1991), for related views on how this process works in practice. The relationship between modes of representation or description, and pragmatic intention, it might be noted, is a strong philosophical concern of some geographers themselves (e.g., Pickles [1988] and Walther [1988]). See also Foucault's discussion with a group of French Marxist geographers (1980) on descriptive geography as a form of colonial espionage in the eighteenth century.

nominating subjects to fill the rooms it constructs.

Gokwe could not have been represented this way before the advent of planning and the development of the attendant institutional forms that "planning" implies.<sup>6</sup> Before the Agritex office was established in 1962, Gokwe was strictly a frontier from the point of view of the state; and its "frontier" quality was being continuously recreated in narratives that emphasized danger and difference, as well as an unrealized potential for economic exploitation.<sup>7</sup> The figure of the frontier, however, did not simply vanish in the face of the dry rationality embodied in development planning; it persisted in particular voices on both sides of the racial divide.

### Themes of the Chapters

In posing the problem of description with respect to

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<sup>6</sup>For an extensive treatment of the origins, applications, and limitations of "planning" in rural Zimbabwe, with special reference to Midlands province, see Drinkwater (1988).

<sup>7</sup>Newbury (1987:164) has drawn attention to the important distinction in metropolitan discourse between "bush" and "frontier": "From the perspective of the metropole, Bush or Outback are seen negatively, as truly peripheral areas; the frontier, on the other hand, is usually seen positively, as only geographically peripheral but not unimportant. Bush and Outback are not seen as areas of external expansion for the metropole, while the frontier often is; nor are they seen as crucial to the cultural identity of the heartland, while the frontier often is." When we told urban Zimbabwean friends we were living in Gokwe, they almost invariably said something like: "Out there? In the bush?." Modern administrators, in contrast, view it as a potential frontier for expansion and planned settlement; indeed, that is why the region was selected for us to research.

Gokwe and its peoples in this part of the thesis, I will be using both a critical and a narrative voice. On the one hand, I want to critically examine the process by which accounts of commoditization in Gokwe have relied upon the assignation of contrasted identities to a determinate arrangement of space. In particular, I am interested in showing how specific places in a socialized landscape are made to bear attributes of modernity and its negations.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, I want to show how my critical reading of these processes is a product of my encounters with living persons, landscapes, and texts; for it is these encounters that are the sources of conversations, visions, sensations, and words that have and always will dance in my head when I try to tell others "what is really going on" on that volatile frontier.

Chapter IV works in a critical vein. I begin by juxtaposing four very different ways of representing Gokwe as an inhabited space towards the end of the guerilla war. Each of the texts I examine makes an implicit argument about the causes and consequences of commoditization in Gokwe; but they differ so sharply, that reading them side by side, one would have cause to wonder whether or not they referred to the same physical location. This doubt has a very real foundation, for, as I wish to argue, experience is deeply bound up with

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<sup>8</sup>This observation is applicable beyond Gokwe, and beyond the moment and context of colonization: it lies at the heart of a late-modern situation in which subjects form and reform themselves in light of global narratives of development and difference.

styles of representation: there are different "Gokwes" in these texts, each inhabited by a distinct cast of subjects. More important, each of these representations has implications for the form and direction in which power is exercised; for texts --in both the representations they embody and those about which they are silent--may themselves provide a context for the exercise of power. I emphasize this last point at the end of the chapter by looking at the dominance of a single mode of textualizing "Gokwe" after Independence--that of the development planning document.

In Chapters V and VI, I try to displace the totalizing vision of Gokwe that all of these texts reflect with one that derives from the limited perspective afforded by the view from a bus window or from a village path. Chapter V describes a series of landscapes, each recaptured from my memory or from my inscription of journeys that we initially made into Gokwe town and later into the diverse localities comprised by the district. Toward the end, I summarize what I learned about the very distinctive aesthetic and pragmatic qualities of the soils in Gokwe and the implications that differences in soil and topography have for the relationship over time between adjacent places. Chapter VI traces other journeys that we made in the course of our survey of cotton farmers and other players in the cotton economy. Along the way I pause to record the voices of people variously involved in the finance, production, purchase, transport, and processing of cotton:

farmers, casual labourers and tradespeople; loan officers and extension workers; as well as depot managers and lorry drivers. Each of these actors perceives the nexus between cotton and commoditization from their own particular location within an integrated economic space. But they comprehend it equally in the context of their own life stories, stories that recount their own experience of coming to be located in a particular part of Gokwe, and their sense of their difference from, or opposition to, other subjects who live there.

How have these subjects been constituted in colonial, immigrant, and indigenous scenarios of social knowledge? How have they provided a context for judgements that differently situated actors make about one another, and for the social and political practices in which they engage? This is the problem taken up in Chapter VII. After recounting our own early attempts to read ethnic subject identities into Gokwe's social landscape, I scan archival records and early monographs in order to trace the origins of the colonial discourse on ethnic difference in northwestern Zimbabwe. In Chapter VIII, I trace out the transformations in that discourse after 1940, especially by examining the expression of conceptions of ethnicity in ethnographic maps. My aim is to investigate how in Gokwe (as elsewhere in Southern Rhodesia) the identity of the Native as a labouring subject was reshaped to fit the perceived imperatives of economic and political reform. This process was realized in a dialectic with more tangible

expressions of colonial power, such as the relocation of thousands of tenants from the Rhodesdale estates into Gokwe in the 1950s, where they were refigured as modernizing immigrants. The chapter concludes by enquiring into the way in which discourses of ethnicity are appropriated and reworked by immigrants and indigenes in Gokwe today.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NORTHWESTERN FRONTIER: "GOKWE" AS DESCRIPTION AND REPRESENTATION

To its own inhabitants, an area is always a homeland. It becomes a frontier when it comes to be so defined from outside and by outsiders.  
--Igor Kopytoff (1987).

At last my ambition was about to be realized and I set out from rail-head to take over my first District at the "edge of beyond."  
--Herbert Nassau Hemans, *Native Commissioner, Sebungwe [Gokwe] District* (1971[1935]).

#### Narrating Place and Time

How do we sum up a place in order to make it known to another? What are the effects of invoking "place" in an ethnographic narrative, in development discourse, in a village meeting? If I refer to Gokwe as an "economic region" and proceed to describe it, is it different than if I say that it is merely a place I have been, or than if I invoke it only to say something of the people who live there?

Naming a place can often be a powerful, if implicit, strategy for representing social relationships. This is because the identity of persons in everyday discourse is



partly built out of spatial metaphors.<sup>1</sup> As an imagined social space, situated in relation to other significant places, "Gokwe" can evoke a compelling set of images, themselves charged with a symbolic ambiguity and emotional ambivalence that attaches itself to "people from Gokwe." In the first chapter I indicated that this uncertainty is due in part to the difficulty of narrating a coherent story of commoditization in Gokwe--"commoditization" being one of the strong tropes of modern thought both within and outside of Zimbabwe. Such a story, if it were to resonate sensibly with other available narratives of development, would tell of a sequence of predictable transformations--let us say from the dominance of use-values to that of exchange values, or from the pooling of the product of collective labour to the exploitation of wage labour for private accumulation (see Sabeau 1990:9).

This does not mean, of course, that there are no available stories at all that attempt to order these kinds of transformations in Gokwe; on the contrary there are many, each formed within a distinctive genre, a particular way of telling about a place in time, of creating a "chronotope," as Bakhtin

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<sup>1</sup> The principle applies to the metaphors that structure academic discourse as well. Some anthropologists have recently noticed how peoples become so firmly attached to places in modern ethnography that they have difficulty escaping the metonymic associations that locate them in a global ethnological landscape. "How," asks Appadurai (1988:39), "have places turned into prisons containing natives? The answer lies in the ways that places have been married to ideas and images."

(1981:84) conceived of the matter with respect to the construction of the novel.<sup>2</sup> In a comparable fashion, ethnographic reports, administrative memoirs, planning documents, historical narratives, and the varieties of everyday discourse all provide glimpses of, and contribute to, the semiotic construction of place and time, as well as social identity and difference.

Both the classic ethnographies produced by British social anthropologists working in Africa in the inter-war period and the more anonymously authored "development" texts embodied in project reports and policy statements share a common strategy of representation, typically invoking the idiom of "place" with feigned transparency. Both textual genres normally begin by providing a "setting" against which to situate the problem that is to be the ultimate focus of analysis--whether that problem be the relationship between ritual and rank, or the demographic correlates of successful irrigation management. A strategy of distanced description characterizes these overtures, one that serves to depict a geographically bounded, physical Nature in terms of which certain cultural variables, or patterns of economic endeavour might be explained. In

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<sup>2</sup>Bakhtin acknowledges both Einstein (his contemporary) and Kant as important influences in the formulation of his own ideas about the use of time-space in literature. Like many modern anthropologists interested in specifying the alternative spatio-temporal cognitive forms or frames of reference that characterize other cultures (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1940:104-108), Bakhtin differs from Kant in taking these forms "not as 'transcendental' but as forms of the most immediate reality" (1981:85).

either genre the author establishes the authority of the text by making the compass of its knowledge exceed the sum of the particular journeys and experiences of the ethnographer or development consultant. Whether "ecological regions" or "culture areas" are invoked, a naturalized ground is established against which a figure of human subjects of cultural analysis or objects of transformation may be set or drawn.

My purpose in drawing attention to this way of "setting" narratives of social life and its transformation, is to show how it has implications for the way in which agrarian labour is configured in texts, the way in which it appears as an object of analysis, and the way in which it is subjected to regimes of reform. Because the body itself serves as its immediate vehicle, agrarian labour can be either foregrounded with culture as one facet of human agency and invention--i.e. as praxis--or it can be backgrounded as a species of naturalized activity, part of a system of ecological variables. This latter kind of naturalization easily links modes of bodily endeavour with the kind of totalized, rationally integrated space of the colonial economy that the Southern Rhodesian state sought to institute from the 1920s onward. One of my goals here is to de-naturalize this way of representing Gokwe's inhabitants and their labouring bodies--or at least to reveal such a naturalizing strategy to be merely one kind of narrative construction, one that blurs a

complex dialectic between the experience of place and its symbolic appropriation by various social actors over time (see Fernandez 1990).

In order to do this I want first to explore how the idea of "Gokwe" as a bounded inhabited space has been textualized in various contexts and for various audiences. My initial focus is on the 1970s when the guerilla war recharged the northwestern frontier with national significance. I look at four very different kinds of texts published during this period of ardently argued ideologies--a newspaper report, a reprint of an old Native Commissioner's memoirs, a historical essay by a local scholar, and a thesis on the topic of practical education by a district agricultural officer. Then I turn to a set of texts that have represented "Gokwe" since Independence, showing how the planning discourse of the state refigured the district as an object of sustained, positive intervention by government agricultural authorities. In these latter texts, the "dark interior" that "Gokwe" evoked in the colonial mind was exposed to the light of rational planning; the wild frontier was illuminated and domesticated as it was pacified by the victorious army of Zimbabwe's new rulers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>There is plainly an absence in the set of texts I examine. The missionaries, who elsewhere in southern Africa were so much the architects of the colonial imagination, with their tropes of frontier conquest and enlightenment (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), only appeared in the district in the 1950s and 1960s, when missions were established by Catholics at Kana, Nembudziya and Chireya and by American Baptists at Nemangwe and just across the eastern boundary at Sanyati. We did not seek access to these missions, not only

### Gokwe 1977: The Dark Interior

In December 1977, at the height of the guerilla war, a reporter for the Rhodesian Herald visited Gokwe police headquarters. His account appeared under the title "Life Can Be Very Tough in Gokwe...the Dark Interior of Rhodesia." The reader is introduced to Chief Inspector Mike Harvey, Member-in Charge of Gokwe Police Camp, "one of the BSAP's [British South African Police's] most remote stations." Harvey, we are told, "is responsible for 300,000 Africans in 1,400 kraals in an area of approximately 15,000 sq.km., or 1/25th of the country." We read that 43 other "Europeans" live in Gokwe village "when the children are home from [boarding] school" as well as 500 "Africans" --people who, the reader might notice, are more easily counted in units of one hundred. They are remote from civilization: 140 kilometres from the town of Kwekwe--"the nearest accessible centre"--and 150 kilometres from Kadoma.

The reporter goes on to recount the history of the Gokwe station:

The village's first Police post was set up in 1914. In those days it was home for two white and four black men whose job it was to preserve law and order among the indigenous Batonka and Shankwe

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because they impinged so marginally on Goredema where we lived, but because the importance of church membership imported by immigrants from the Masvingo region or by returning migrants from the towns was at least as important as these missions themselves. Gokwe's late mission experience may account for very widespread membership in various Independent Churches, principally the Apostolics of Johanne Maranke, which I discuss in later chapters.

tribes.

These days, we learn, the police presence is much greater in the district, due to what Harvey describes as "a low-profile terrorist presence." After describing a recent skirmish with the "terrs," he laments with frank paternalism that "the tribespeople here do not understand what is happening." The Chief Inspector's wife, according to the report, has other regrets: "I'd rather have my son here than at boarding school," she complains, "and I never get a chance to have my hair done properly in a salon."

This attention to the life of the inspector's wife echoes an early passage from H.N. Hemans's memoir of his journey to take up his duties as one of Gokwe's first Native Commissioners over half a century earlier. Recalling the plight of the wife of an isolated white farmer he encountered living just south of the district, he offered the following reflections:

I never ceased to admire the fortitude of Mrs. Crutchley, who lived year after year in a clearing wrested from the virgin forest with no associates of her own sex and seemingly perfectly contented to be with her husband and two little girls. They were 64 miles from the nearest town and the railway ...Thus, the poor lady was perforce able only at the rarest intervals and that when the wagon was lightly loaded to leave her home and make the monotonous journey of five or six days to see the faces and enjoy the company of other white women. No shops, "talkies," tea-rooms, afternoon tea-chats about children, dress, servants, experiences and so on and the many little amenities woman enjoys when in civilized surroundings.

All honour to her and others like her who have enabled their men to carry on and open up the country while caring for them and looking after

them in sickness and in health (Hemans  
1971[1935]:16).

Chief Inspector Harvey was clearly living in a gendered colonial universe similar to that inhabited by Hemans forty years before him. Hemans's narrative tactic--lamenting the austerity of a woman's frontier life in order to foreground the much greater dangers and deprivations faced by men--was clearly of Victorian vintage, but it was able to withstand the test of colonial time. Mrs. Crutchley is portrayed as an island of civilized domesticity in an opaque "virgin" sea. Hemans thus establishes her as a guardian of European virtuosity (and the Crutchleys as a conjugal emblem of European reproductive purity) even while his panegyric to her plight works as a signpost pointing to the real task and adventure at hand: the penetration of the "virgin" Native domain by male officers like himself.<sup>4</sup> The only other named female figure marking the narrative serves precisely the same function<sup>5</sup>: thereafter it is all Officers, Natives, Buffalo and

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<sup>4</sup>This moment in Hemans's narrative betrays an unresolved tension attending (the sometimes metaphorical) sexual relations between colonizer and colonized, a tension that intensified after the increased immigration of white women into the African colonies. In pursuing this and related themes across the colonial landscapes of several European powers in early twentieth century, Stoler (1989) observes that these women were often burdened with the task of embodying bourgeois morality on the colonial frontier, thus clarifying social and sexual boundaries between Europeans and the colonized Other that were often obscured by the behaviour of their "immoral" male counterparts.

<sup>5</sup>During a brief excursion across the Zambezi into Northern Rhodesian territory, he meets Mrs. Fell: "Here, too, was another example of a brave and intrepid woman, a lady by

Lion.

In the course of sixty years of intervening colonial occupation some of Hemans's "natives" had become Harvey's "terrs," while others remained the ingenuous, uncomprehending souls who felt grateful for the protection and guidance offered by the Rhodesian Department of Internal Affairs. Both men had dutifully faced a frontier on "the edge of beyond"; but the frontier that Hemans had "opened up" to colonial scrutiny and control had since reverted once more to a "dark interior": closed, formidable and more dangerous than ever.

I will have occasion to discuss Hemans's memoir at greater length below (see Chapter VII). For now, I want to draw attention to the timing of its reappearance on the reading lists of Rhodesia's besieged and isolated white community in the early 1970s. The book was republished in a series that was to reissue many other classics of so-called "Rhodesiana", a series that was dedicated to the Rhodesia Pioneers' and Early Settlers' Society with the expressed wish "to honour the men and women who pioneered Rhodesia, and to promote a wider interest in the country's history." The agenda of the publishers was evidently to furnish a nostalgic historiography that might serve as a counterpoint to the "terrs" who were already threatening in 1971 to retake the

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birth, who sacrificed her existence to her husband and the natives in their care. She could only at the rarest intervals get to civilization, as the greater part of the journey had to be done by machila. Hats off to her and her kind" (Hemans 1971[1935]:68).



"civilized" centre. Against the daily reportage of encounters with guerrillas--disloyal and ungrateful Africans held to be in the thrall of foreign ideologies--a white Rhodesian might read of a happier era when Native Commissioners lived as a welcome paternal presence among their African subjects: "Too little is known by the public," writes the publisher of the Rhodesiana series in a preface,

about these men who lived among the tribes as their 'fathers' since the time in 1896 when Rhodes himself spent two and a half months in the Matopos talking to the Matabele Chiefs...Above personal skills and training, leadership and integrity, his vocation implied complete dedication inspired by the high ideal of bringing a better life to the tribesmen whilst showing respect for tribal customs and mode of life. He was required to exercise patience and tolerance in the face of great frustration, to have a sense of humour, and to accept the loneliness felt by a cultured person cut off from society<sup>6</sup> (L.W.B. 1971).

At the very moment when "Rhodesia" was drawing its last breath as a named national entity, it was busily straining to reconstitute itself through an archaeology of its own self-making. Its beleaguered citizens sought to imagine a glorious past embodied in the selfless exploits of heroes and martyrs, who "cut themselves off" from society in order to create society anew. The publisher's phrase may have been unconscious, but it seems less than fortuitous: Rhodesia, isolated by international sanctions, had been formally "cut

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<sup>6</sup>Hemans (b.1871, d.1935) was the son of a wealthy cocoa merchant and an Oxford graduate. Prior to joining the British South Africa Police in 1898, he was engaged in banking in Buenos Aires.

off" from the recognized community of nations after 1965. In a painful inversion, white Rhodesians now inhabited a frontier beyond the edge of the very world from which they held themselves to emanate.

### **Native Reason, Native Desire**

If Hemans's memoir belonged to a genre of place characterization that soothed the nervous soul of white Rhodesia in the 1970s, it was not the only genre representing the northwestern frontier at the time. Not long after the reprint of Log of a Native Commissioner appeared, and only shortly before the publication of the newspaper report on Inspector Harvey and the other brave Europeans at the Gokwe police post, a social historian produced an article on the economic history of "the Shangwe people" of Gokwe District (Kosmin 1977). Kosmin situates the Shangwe against a densely described human ecology, one characterized by the presence of abundant game resources and rich alluvial soils but equally by the constraints of tse-tse fly and frequent drought (ibid:270-71). His brief is to show how the pre-colonial Shangwe had adopted a perfectly rational economic strategy to cope with these natural risk factors. On the basis of exhaustive archival work, he documents the rise and fall of local tobacco production on upland *mopani* soils in the forty years of colonial occupation preceding the Second World War. The larger purpose of his exercise, however, is to show how, in precise correspondence with Arrighi's (1970) famous thesis

concerning the underdevelopment of the Rhodesian peasantry, European markets had undermined indigenous petty commodity production in Gokwe in order to stifle African competition with European producers and to foster the flow of labour out of the district. The argument is presented as a case study that contributes to a larger narrative of commoditization in central and southern Africa (Palmer and Parsons 1977).

Kosmin has little use for Hemans's memoir; although acknowledging that it provides the only description of Shangwe tobacco manufacture (which he cites in detail), he adds sarcastically that Hemans had "a passion for big-game hunting," suggesting that he had minimal interest in the economic predicament of the natives he was charged with administering. On the other hand, Kosmin provides no evidence in his own text that he has ever been to Gokwe himself, that he has spoken to the elders or visited the old tobacco fields. The records of falling production and increasing taxes suffice as witnesses to the tale he has to tell. Somehow, this is expected to bring us nearer to the true feelings of the Shangwe, their rationality as well as their yearning for freedom from oppression:

In light of the Arrighi thesis it would appear that this is a case of delayed proletarianization in which a peasant economy is first fed then later strangled by capitalism. The Shangwe love of independence and their unwillingness to turn out to work for Europeans led the authorities, whose prime concern in the inter-war years was to increase labour supplies, to regard the Shangwe as lazy and backward, but their desire not to enter into a hostile and complex new world when they could meet

their cash needs in a familiar environment is very understandable and natural (ibid.:285)

Kosmin's neo-classical economic science, like Arrighi's, coolly deploys numbers in series, then uses them as signs of desire, thwarted or fulfilled. His "Shangwe" are a collective noun, a romantic figure painted in the broad, ennobling strokes of eighteenth century discourse. Their resistance to the European agenda for modernization is "very understandable and natural," because the "new world" that it insists they enter is unfamiliar, "hostile," and "complex." But these childlike sentiments do not compromise their fundamental rationality, and thus their ability to act in their own best interests given a predatory colonial state destined to dissolve their self-sufficient world.

Ironically, Kosmin's narrative is intended to undermine the argument that the economic dominance of Europeans is the result of the "natural" play of market forces, rather than the immoral play of European politics:

They [the Shangwe] were able to withhold their labour because they were less integrated into the capitalist economy than other peasants. However, it would appear that holding out against the historical trend did not help them in the long run, and they were eventually forced into the vicious circle which drained their local capital in terms of migrant labour without any repayment by social investment in terms of health, welfare, and education. This was a direct result of the responsiveness of the state to the needs of white farmers, that is, political rather than market forces. Thus this study demonstrates the validity of the Arrighi thesis and shows it would be wrong to imagine that the peasant sector of the Rhodesian economy was inherently unable to respond to economic challenge (ibid.).

While this conclusion was clearly an attack on official Rhodesian ideology, and a justification for a change of regime, it contains a more subtle position on the morality of modernity in general. Commodity production is here naturalized--the Shangwe never were confined to a "subsistence" economy, Kosmin suggests, but were perfectly adapted as specialists producing an appropriate commodity within a regionally diverse ecology. But commoditization is unnatural; it is seen as the product of an artificially induced desire for Western things (e.g. manufactured cigarettes) and a set of politically induced "needs" (e.g. to earn tax money by selling labour).

### **The Frontier of Light**

So far I have discussed a range of texts whose rhetorical form and political content lie relatively near to the surface, and that together begin to map out the discursive field within which "Gokwe" could be known to readers outside of it in the decade before Independence, some ten years before our arrival. Now I turn to yet another genre of place characterization being produced concurrently with these--that associated with planning and agricultural extension. The texts associated with this genre suggest less tendentious motives than those I have dealt with so far. But they prove in the end to be the most consequential of all, having endured as a way of writing about Gokwe for sixty years, and having had the greatest impact on how the people of Gokwe see themselves and the place

in which they live.

The Herald reporter who ventured out into the bush that day in 1977 to visit Gokwe's stalwart white community did not select for interview any of the agricultural officers stationed there. Had he done so, both the topic and the tone of the dispatch might have been different. We gain a sense of that difference from a Group Extension Officer named Derek Bates, a man who had served at Gokwe since the late 1960s. In 1978, Bates completed a B.Ed. thesis on the agricultural extension strategy in Gokwe (Bates 1978). His confident moral outlook in the thesis is of a piece with much that was written by Alvord's pupils and successors in the Southern Rhodesian extension service over the previous half-century. What is so striking, however is how sharply that outlook contrasts with the that of the tired, almost melancholy tone captured in the voices of other whites in Gokwe by the Herald reporter. In the course of documenting the extraordinary "success" of the cotton extension programme at Gokwe since 1963, Bates makes no mention of absent hair salons, of course; but oddly, he makes no mention of the war and the "terrs" either. Nor does he dwell on the history of economic interaction between the indigenous people and the European colonizers. These two categories are treated as timeless archetypes that are brought on stage *ex nihilo* in order to make possible the drama of transformation he wishes to recount--a drama which the enlightened extension worker, like the missionary, may be

shown to bring about. First he introduces the "European farmer":

The extension agent in Rhodesia has to deal with two different cultures. The European farmer with his western outlook may be more readily motivated to change by promises of increasing profit from his farm. Generally he accepts that farming is a business, apart from its attractive life style.

He is orientated towards a money economy where the making of more money is a motivating force, whether it be for its own sake or as a means to other ends.

It may therefore be safe to say that in general, it is much easier to motivate a European farmer than an African farmer (1978:10).

Then the "African farmer" is presented: "The African farmer in the Tribal Trust Land lives in a primitive society where, 100 years ago, money played no part at all" (ibid.). Finally, "government policy" is brought in as a potential force for the moral reformation of the "tribesmen":

It is government policy to raise the standard of living of the tribal population and bring them into the cash economy. This is to be done mainly by increased agricultural production, which means motivating the tribal farmer to change his traditional ways. How can this be done?

Bates has no need of making Gokwe the locus of any unique dangers or resistances to modernity; and perhaps it is because Gokwe has been his home that he does not need to see it in this way. For him, Tribal Trust Lands in general are the repositories of the Traditional, an obstacle that must be faced with tenacity and sensitivity by the extension worker. Some tribesmen are "progressive" and these must be encouraged by being shown the possibility of reaping higher profits

through cutting costs. Others are "backward" and subject to the conservative force of custom. These forces must be understood before new attitudes can be introduced through a kind of applied social physics. The remaining text endeavours to demonstrate how in fact such a transformation in attitude and practice was effected in Gokwe. Upwardly sloping graphs depict logarithmic increases in gross production and in the number of participants in the cotton programme. Increasing levels of debt and the emergence of a regional market for cotton-picking labour are cited as laudable signs of progress. Throughout the text, Bates names no individuals, as his subjects find their place in the pre-figured categories of his experiment in engineering the transformation of consciousness through a reformed agrarian praxis.

Through its stunning silence with respect to political context--cotton production ceased absolutely between 1977 and 1979 in many parts of Gokwe District under sanction of death by the guerrillas--Bates's text works in a strangely idealist register. In spite of his intimate and sustained experience with Gokwe's peoples, he produces a History of Reason writ small, in which Gokwe functions as a chapter in the ongoing Work of Progress. The contrast with other contemporaneous representations of Gokwe could hardly have been greater: Harvey's "Dark Interior" was, quite simultaneously, Bates's



Frontier of Light.<sup>7</sup>

I have suggested that during the 1970s there were at least three ways of naturalizing the inhabitants of Gokwe, each embodying a different rhetorical strategy and each motivated by a separate sphere of practical intent. One was to assimilate natives to animals "outside of society"--to make "terrorists" exemplars of the wild and dangerous, and other natives embodiments of the tame and tractable.<sup>8</sup> A second was to naturalize both the desire (for commodities) and the rationality (in the pursuit of livelihood) of Gokwe's aboriginal inhabitants, the "Shangwe." And a third, modelled partly on the first, was to generate an antithesis between species of "primitive" and "progressive" tribesmen--to make the presence or absence of desire and reason in the native a function of effective intervention by the colonial bearers of civilized practice. These modes of description had the effect of endowing the exercise of subordination with the sense of a self-evident necessity: the terrorists had to be eliminated or tamed; the Shangwe had to be permitted to resume their natural predilection for commodity production and trade, unfettered by politics; the traditional tribesmen had to be induced to

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<sup>7</sup>See Brantlinger (1986) for a discussion of the often paradoxical use of "darkness" in Victorian descriptions of Africa, a trope still in use by the Rhodesian regime at the time of its imminent demise.

<sup>8</sup>Similar tropes were at work in missionary discourse three centuries earlier in the Americas. See e.g. Todorov (1985) and Blackburn (1991).

change his attitudes toward agrarian praxis.

### **Gokwe After Independence: The Rhetoric of Planning**

If ways of writing about Gokwe since Independence have anything in common that differentiates them from the voices I have recorded from the 1970s, it is in the integrative, naturalized frame within which they organize statements made about it. Totalizing descriptions of this kind have a specific use and a stylistic efficacy. They legitimate the deployment of power and the enforcement of discipline by the locally operative institutions of state; and at the same time they make that act of legitimation invisible, appearing merely as inherent in the "facts." This is one of the discursive mechanisms through which the "development" apparatus may be established, at the same time as its political dimensions vanish from sight (Ferguson 1990a).

There have been at least five efforts to define Gokwe as a "region" for planning purposes over the decade or so following Independence, each drawing a different boundary around the area and aggregating statistics within it.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup>The district administration has had difficulty aggregating data on Gokwe because Agritex has divided the district into two--Gokwe West and Sanyati Regions--for administrative and statistical purposes. The latter region not only straddled districts, but provinces as well, leading to a rationalization exercise in 1989 fixing Agritex boundaries at the district borders. All aggregate data compiled by these new Agritex regional offices from now on will therefore be discontinuous with what was gathered before 1989. Earlier data on the area was compiled by the Whitsun

resulting confusion neatly illustrates the impossibility of discovering any "natural" unit of investigation when looking at "Gokwe." What it is depends upon why one wants to see it, and the pragmatic or rhetorical uses to which one wishes to put that vision.

Early on in our stay, while visiting the offices of the Regional Agricultural Extension Officer (RAEO) at Gokwe Growth Point, I was delighted to come upon a comprehensive synopsis of the area in which we'd come to work--a document that the Officer had prepared the year before and subsequently filed away under "Gokwe Region: Annual Development Extension Programme Plans." Using a rhetoric of distanced description to sum up the territory that fell within the office's administrative domain, the document presents a compendium of knowledge deemed relevant for agricultural development. In a curious juxtaposition of formal data and informal "insider" knowledge, it organizes information into three categories. The first, "Facts of the Area," comprises "Physical Features," "Topography," "Vegetation," "Seasons," "Temperatures," and "Water Supplies." The second, "Markets and Infrastructure," has no subdivisions, but describes the distribution of

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Foundation (1977)--which called the entire area the "Sanyati Region"--for purposes of legitimating the construction of a rural workshop and machinery centre. A similar definition of the region was adopted by the CMB consultant hired in 1986 to evaluate the rationale for doubling the capacity of the Sanyati gin (Agricura and Ronco 1986). In 1982, a major land-use study on the "Sebungwe" region was inaugurated that comprised all of Gokwe district and the western Zambezi valley (Scudder 1982; Blackie 1984).

marketing board depots, roads, bridges, schools, dip tanks, air strips, small business centres, and finally, newspapers and publications. The last category, "Socio-Economic Facts," begins with "Population Statistics" and then advances to "Organizations," itself sub-divided into "Groups," "Political Organizations," and "Religious Organizations." Then we read about "Leadership Patterns," "Cultural Facts," "Educational Activities," and "Services Organizations." Oddly, "Economic Activities," which are, one would think, at the heart of the Agritex mandate, are summarized in a short paragraph at the very end.

It was perhaps this feature of its narrative organization that convinced me that the extension staff must indeed be tapped into the very veins of the peasantry, as senior ministry officials had told us in Harare. The remaking of agrarian praxis was, for Agritex, clearly an outcome of the remaking of social institutions; it was evidently seen to be a holistic enterprise extending far beyond the narrowly delimited field of agronomy. Intrigued by the apparently "deep" social profile such a perspective yielded, I quickly copied down all three categories of "Facts" by hand.

Before long, I began to take a distanced and critical view of that document and the neatly summarized view of Gokwe it presented. I began to notice how the document held segments of information apart in such a way that contradictions in logic or in the presentation of facts were impossible to see;

that the constitution of facts was made in terms of categories representing the sedimentation of a political struggle resolved by techniques of reordering knowledge. One fine example of this sort of contradiction is encountered early on in the document, where the district is characterized in terms of the proportion of land falling into numbered "agro-ecological regions." Zimbabwe was classified into "natural regions and farming areas" by Vincent and Thomas (1961) for purposes of "agro-ecological planning." Since that time it has been virtually impossible to read anything about peasant agriculture in the country without reference to this system of numerical classification. The system identifies the totality of land surfaces within the country with their "agricultural potential" primarily in accordance with rainfall variability. The predicates of the categories--e.g., "Region V: suitable only for extensive livestock production" --specify the directives of state policy as much as the "real" constraints of environment. This is partly how the banning of riverbank cultivation has been justified in Gokwe and the entire Zambezi valley. But the latent political function of this particular body of scientific knowledge has only recently been made apparent, and never explicitly been the object of critique. How could it be that Gokwe's astonishing output of cotton could be produced on land that was largely classified as Regions III, IV and V, the best of these being defined as "marginal for maize, tobacco and cotton production" (Whitsun

Foundation 1978:53)? The anomaly might have been corrected by banning the production of these cash crops thus forcing reality to conform to what was already known.<sup>10</sup> Instead, the agro-ecological map is now being redrawn on the basis of a closer scrutiny of the data on rainfall distribution in such a way that areas of Gokwe may be upgraded to Region II (Hussain 1987:38). This will enable the reality of what is *in fact* produced to better coincide with the categories designed to specify what *ought* to be produced.

The facts compiled by the RAE0 and the figures on production-related activities that appeared elsewhere in the file marked "Plans" were partly based on local data submitted at regular intervals by the lowest level field staff in the extension service. In the months that followed I continued to be amazed at the sheer quantity of data compiled periodically by these field staff members for submission to the regional offices at Gokwe and Sanyati. Annual assessments of a wide range of activities fill thick notebooks stacked along many shelves in the regional offices. The extension workers present their achievements in three columns of figures: one

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<sup>10</sup>There was a precedent for this: after deciding that the dominant agrarian strategy of Zimbabwe's pre-colonial population was leading to excessive siltation and hence ecologically disastrous, streambank cultivation was prohibited under the terms of the Natural Resources Act in the 1941. For historical and contemporary perspectives on the relationship between conservation-related legislation, the practice of "development" and shifts in the colonial and post-colonial political economy, see Beinart (1984), Phimister (1986) and Cliffe (1988).

for the original "target," one for the results "achieved," and one for the results "projected" over the following season. This had the effect of making the transformation of agrarian practices appear to be a direct outcome of the successful application of the extension workers' effort.

By the time I left, I had observed the extent to which the data submitted were, in fact, fictitious. I do not mean that the figures were strictly wrong: on the contrary, as a rough gauge of what was happening they were probably reasonable estimates. What I do mean is that they were something made, rather than, as they appeared to be, something discovered through, say, techniques of sampling and measurement or even interview. They were made by extension workers who were expected to submit monthly reports to the regional office and who knew precisely what kind of knowledge they were expected to produce. Thus the extension workers in our ward were able to submit quarterly production figures for villages such as ours that they had never actually visited during the period in question. It would be unfair to suggest that this is due either to incompetence or guile; the service is grossly understaffed and individuals are rewarded for spending their time training a few "leading" farmers on a few high profile projects such as pen-fattening livestock or experimenting with herbicides or new seed hybrids. As we ourselves discovered, a team of ten such extension workers would have had difficulty eliciting the data required by their

superiors, even using sophisticated sampling techniques. In making this observation, my intention is not to impugn the quality of the data and to issue a call for the collection of more accurate or more representative numbers (although I myself undertook the collection of such data). It is to draw attention to the form in which the object of knowledge takes shape, to that object's local "rules of formation" (Foucault 1972:38) and the recurrent practices set in motion to constantly reproduce it. In this case, the trace of evidence that "development" is occurring is constantly extended through the records of Agritex through an institutionalized procedure of data production.

I have, in this chapter, discussed various modalities of inscribing a social geography of Gokwe. In the years just prior to 1980, a plurality of place-making strategies flourished seemingly side-by-side in the heteroglossic landscape opened up by the guerilla war. The politics of ethnicity was here largely on the surface as different writers developed competing portrayals of "the Shangwe" and what they signified in a larger narrative of commoditization and difference. In the discourse of district planning that came to dominate public rhetoric after Independence, the subordination of people to the description of place--of "the Shangwe" to "Gokwe"--was effected in such a way as to render the application of power by the planning apparatus of the local state virtually invisible (cf. Ferguson 1990a).



Although the discourse of development has exercised a certain hegemony over representations of Gokwe since Independence, the older tropes did not vanish entirely when the white civil servants packed their bags at Gokwe station and headed for the towns and airports. The figures of language through which they described Gokwe to themselves live on in the voices of current residents such as Lazarus Muyambi, the faith healing priest in charge of St. Agnes Mission at Gokwe town (see *Harare Herald*, 25 March 1983). Muyambi, who claims to cure illnesses ranging from "madness and gynaecological problems, to spirit possession" was asked why he came to Gokwe in 1972 to found a mission: "There was a great darkness in Gokwe," he replied. "The Lord had to reveal himself here."

I will conclude by merely noting one key feature that all of these modes of representation share in common: all treat Gokwe as though the identities it contains have existed outside of time. They portray Gokwe as the repository of peoples affixed to the landscape, peoples that exist as eternal attributes of the place they live within (cf. Wilmsen 1989). Even Kosmin's explicitly historical analysis succumbs to this embracing naturalism, making the Shangwe objectively coextensive with Gokwe's ecology and subjectively coincident with the bourgeois model of *homo economicus*.

In the next chapter I present another way of approaching "Gokwe," representing it as an accumulation of individual

journeys and a synthesis of others, of remembered and inscribed experiences of movement, that I have myself taken in coming to know it as a meaningful place. I do not attempt to transcribe some kind of pure sensory encounter, since part of the making of those experiences (and my writing about them here) depended of course on the baggage I'd brought with me. Prior frames of interpretation drew my attention to certain features of the landscape and its socialization. Conversations on the road led me to read into such features certain kinds of causal relationships--between soils and crops, for example, or between settlement patterns and land tenure. Even the "facts" recorded in the RAEO's files served to guide my roving eye, although the relationship between even physical facts and what I saw often turned out to be difficult to establish. I cannot therefore entirely escape the Archimedean mode of description I have criticized above. But I do want to bracket such a vision by illustrating how Gokwe might be discovered and known through the experience of moving through it, of travelling across it, rather than standing above or outside of it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>To take an extreme view, if places are only really known through journeys remembered, then perhaps the only way to characterize them "realistically" is to recall and narrate journeys undertaken and the memory traces they have left behind. One might argue with justification that by invoking the trope of "the journey" I merely reinscribe a peculiarly Western way of culturally constructing the biography of the self: as a lone traveller traversing the universal stages of life according to some uniquely fashioned itinerary. I use it here to resonate with a local idiom of place characterization, one that uses the mythical journeys of conqueror-ancestors to

Above all, my purpose is not to expose other place descriptions as artifice by replacing them with solipsistic, phenomenological travelogue. It is rather to highlight a contrast between two distinct models of place representation that have been used to account for the arrangement of space in relation to persons in Gokwe: journey versus geography, observation in movement versus observation from a stationary vantage point (or, as in a map, from no particular vantage point at all). The contest between these models, as we shall see in Chapter IX, is part of the process through which economic subjects and relations have been reformulated in Gokwe for nearly a century, for the figure of the journey serves as a master trope informing indigenous perceptions of the relation between social identity and political space in Gokwe.<sup>12</sup>

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encode relations between autochthons and immigrants with respect to land, as well as the power of wife-givers and wife-takers with respect to the labour of wives and sons-in-law. See below, Chapter IX.

<sup>12</sup>As one might expect, it is geographers who are reflecting on these and related issues with great insight (see, e.g., Soja [1989], Entrikin [1990] and Watts [1992]; the last appears as commentary on a very recent and very relevant collection of studies by anthropologists on "Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference" [Ferguson and Gupta 1992]).

## CHAPTER V

### LANDSCAPES: "GOKWE" AS JOURNEY, PLACE AND EXPERIENCE

#### Journal Entry: 24 August 1988

Two women--one from Murewa, the other from Tsholotsho --arrived in the village to sell old clothes bought on sale in town. The latter was a wiry *ambuya* ["grandmother"] able to speak perfect English. "This place is terrible," she said to Mbano and Masiras--"all this wind and these hills!"

"All we hear on the news is, 'Murewa is doing this or that,'" the two men said, "so you are the leaders."

"No! We are just one Reserve now," the women replied, "and you are moving up. We used to come here and find people just naked and running from cars as if they were enemies."

"We like not to remember those days," said Masiras.

#### Getting There: The Poetics of Bus Travel

The stories I am able to tell about commoditization in Gokwe are rooted in journeys--journeys that draw together for me three facets of experience: the experience of moving through places; the internal process of interrogating those experiences in light of other experiences I either expected to have or remembered having had in the past; and the framing and reframing of problems as I questioned others and they questioned me in turn. Since Gul Rukh and I usually travelled together, these problems were conceived through conversations

with one another as often as they were through conversations with people we met along the way. The understandings that emerged from these conversations are therefore underpinned by a dialogical process, a process of coming to understand within already given frames of understanding--the interplay of what I already thought I knew and what others expected me to know (cf. Gudeman and Rivera 1990).

The longest journeys--lasting anywhere between eight and twelve hours on the bus--were those we made between Gokwe District and Harare. Without funds for acquiring a private vehicle, we had no choice but to replicate the bus journeys made by urban African workers returning to the rural areas with gifts of goods and money for relatives. Participant observation thus began for us in the process of "getting there" rather than "being there" (Geertz 1988), and it persisted as we periodically oscillated between village and city, and between the different wards of Gokwe District and Sanyati.

All rural dwellers oscillate back and forth this way although they do so according to rhythms that vary widely. For example, the male farmers we knew in Goredema might make a monthly trip into Gokwe town in order to attend a meeting, collect the mail for the village, or attend a court case. These trips would always be the occasion for bringing back items of regular consumption--such as sugar--that could be obtained in bulk more cheaply there. During the dry season,

they might make a trip all the way to Kadoma or Chegutu to purchase farming inputs. The wives of these farmers on the other hand might make the trip to town only once or twice in a year, although they would visit their parents' home in a neighbouring ward somewhat more often. This meant that widely different perceptions of time, place and distance coexisted in the same household. While men, for example, generally understood that to get to "Canada" required air-travel and a great deal of money, most women without schooling believed it to be within reach of a day's bus travel:

**Journal Entry: 4 September 1988**

Gul Rukh was asked today by the women at the river well if we returned to Canada last week. She explained that it costs so much to just go there that we would have to sell the motorbike to purchase an airplane ticket. How much was that? Z\$2600. They were awed.

Not long after this revelation, Mai Dzorai, the younger wife in Mbano's household, asked Gul Rukh if my father had a store. Unconvinced by our declaration that the "Canadian government" had paid for our air ticket, this was the only way she could think of that one might come by the kind of money we must have used to get to Goredema from Canada: in Goredema, at least, only storeowners were likely to have that kind of money. Other women--itinerant traders like the two women from Murewa and Tsholotsho, rural health workers, migrant labourers, or the wives of men who worked in town--were more worldly. The estranged younger wife of Kapita (Mbano's father), for example, some years ago moved to Harare where she lives in

factory housing. She returns to the village perhaps once every two months to visit her sons or to participate in a spirit possession ceremony. Her youngest son Elson, a secondary school drop-out, visits her in Harare about as often--hence acquiring, among some of his peers, an aura of sophistication that derives from his frequent contact with life in the capital. Ironically, several of Elson's uncles and his oldest classificatory brother, had spent years living and working in town as young unmarried men. Now, such an experience is rare, since jobs are few and require a level of educational achievement that few are able to attain.

For Gokweans, then, the experience of being from Gokwe encompasses a tension between a local and a translocal sense of belonging--but it is a tension that is variously realized in the biography of each individual. Those who do periodically move between their rural home and the towns must adopt at least two species of identity: one, an identity of origin semiotically constructed in contrast to that of other urban workers from other places; and the other, an identity made of memory, of places seen, of routes regularly traversed. In this latter respect, being on the bus constitutes a singular historical experience held in common by whole communities, each of them situated at a distinctive node in the national transport network that links urban with rural areas. A person from Murewa in northeastern Zimbabwe or from Zvishavane in the south, for example, knows an entirely

different repertoire of possible buses and routes that can be taken at various times than a person from Gokwe;<sup>1</sup> they have a different selection of township stops for acquiring vegetables (principally cabbages, rape, tomatoes and onions) and processed staple commodities (such as flour and sugar), for purchasing a cold drink, or for using the toilets. The conglomeration of objects loaded on top of and within buses is also emblematic of a region's economy, and the changing preoccupations of that economy's participants from season to season. When we began travelling to Gokwe in late February and March, the buses were loaded high with bundles of empty jute bags that farmers had leased from the CMB depot at Kadoma and were now bringing out to their farms in the Communal Areas; soon, they would start using these bags to pack their freshly picked cotton into bales. Three months later we began to see in their place the commodities that cotton could buy: ploughshares and cultivators, sofa sets, asbestos roofing panels, bicycles and black enamel cooking pots. Then, around the end of August, the signs of a new season appear in the aisles and on the roof racks: sacks of seed and fertilizer, white and blue pails packed with pesticides by the Agricura or Windmill Corporation, and trays of chirping day-old chicks.

These reiterated scenes are incised like distinctive scars on the memories of every migrant and the community they

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<sup>1</sup>Although I can easily list five bus companies that can take me from Harare to Gokwe, I can't list a single one with any certainty that will carry me south to Masvingo.



belong to; they form a kind of common language uniting the multiple instances of a uniquely structured repetitive movement. Following De Certeau (1984:100), we might even say that there is a "poetics" of bus travel that lies part way between what he calls the "rhetoric" of walking and the "disciplined incarceration" of being on a train. The contrast with train travel is especially apposite. In Zimbabwe, the main passenger train runs in a single line along the highlands from Mutare in the east to Bulawayo in the southwest; there, it splits, with one track continuing westward into Botswana and the other branching north toward Victoria Falls. With only two trains each day moving in each direction, the train absorbs a population that is originally dispersed and diverse (as people from an infinite number of unique points of rural and urban origin converge on stations en route) and recasts them into a uniform stream of movement. The passengers, thus united, are rearranged according to a hierarchy of categories (from 1st Class to 4th Class) based on their ability to pay. Virtually nowhere does the line of rail cross the Communal Lands, built, as it originally was, to service the internal and external trade and transport requirements of international capital and the local white settler community.

Buses, in contrast, now fan out over every corner of Zimbabwe. There are no "classes" to differentiate the

passengers who ride on them.<sup>2</sup> As a result a person can, to a considerable extent, freely design her own travel experience according to the destination she chooses and the buses she consecutively boards in order to get there. The bus lines compete viciously with one another, offering various routings, timetables, and degrees of reliability. (We avoided one line after experiencing afternoon-long breakdowns on two consecutive trips.) They even offer distinctive styles of travel. The bus belonging to an operator who only recently took up a route through the resettlement area in eastern Gokwe, for example, displayed bright orange paint, delicate curtains and a musical horn; many others provide popular radio at ear-splitting volume. At the time of our field work--the middle of an extreme foreign exchange crisis--bus operators were so desperate for spares that retread tires were being used even on the front wheels, a practice that twice yielded terrifying blow-outs at high speed during my trips between Goredema and town. Once, when the drive-shaft snapped on a bus I was riding, the conductor coolly disappeared for some time into the bush, only to return with a Y-shaped branch which he proceeded to lash to the underside of the chassis. Passengers tolerate these occurrences philosophically, knowing that there is little to do but pay your money on a bus you trust and take your chances.

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<sup>2</sup>There are still apparently a few intercity luxury buses that used to service the white population; these are confined to the major highveld cities and depart from downtown hotels.

In this chapter and the next, I use my own bus journeys as a vehicle through which to convey something of the process by which knowledge of a place, and the interpretations of what it stands for, are constructed. My purpose is to reveal the fragmented, low-level, and place-specific kinds of encounters and interpretations through which I attempted to come to grips with the "Agrarian Question," and the kind of stories it compelled me to try and weave together out of these diverse threads of experience.

I have provided two conventional maps of the District and its environs, since most readers will still desire a means of visualizing these journeys in an abstracted, two dimensional space. The first map (5.1) outlines different categories of land tenure, and shows major roads and rivers. The second (5.2) locates the domains of important chiefs and headmen in relation to one another (I have made no attempt to inscribe boundaries), since it is by their names that areas are conventionally known and referred to.<sup>3</sup> Although I am myself

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<sup>3</sup>I have not attempted to identify all of the ward units in the district. Under the district administrative structure adopted after Independence, the old *dunhu*, or ward, that was under the nominal authority of a *sadunhu* or wardhead, has been converted into a Ward Development Committee or WADCO, whose elected head sits on the District Council. Apparently, in those cases in which several *sadunhu* were themselves subordinate to a chief (e.g., in Chief Nemangwe's land) the WADCOs have simply been labelled according to the name of that chief and then numbered: e.g., Nemangwe I, Nemangwe II, etc. In cases where the *sadunhu* had more independence, the WADCO is known by the *sadhunu*'s own name (e.g. "Goredema"). The complex interlinkages between chiefly authority and colonial administration are explored in detail in Chapters VII and VIII, below.

critical of the way they predispose us to grasp "Gokwe" as a place, I hope that these maps will contrast with, and therefore serve to highlight, the ways of seeing and thinking spatially about social relations that I have tried to represent in some of the accounts of travel that I present below.

I begin this chapter by presenting a narrative from my journal of our second journey to Gokwe--the first we made by bus.<sup>4</sup> This account, which documents the route from Harare through Kadoma and Kwekwe up the Mafungabusi plateau to Gokwe town (or "growth point"), records a sensory experience and a pattern of activity that we repeated, with interesting variations, nearly a dozen times in the course of our field research. At its endpoint, I pause to reflect on the changing ways in which we came to relate to the people of Gokwe town and its institutions over the course of the following fifteen months that we spent in the district. In the second part of this chapter I reflect on the soils of

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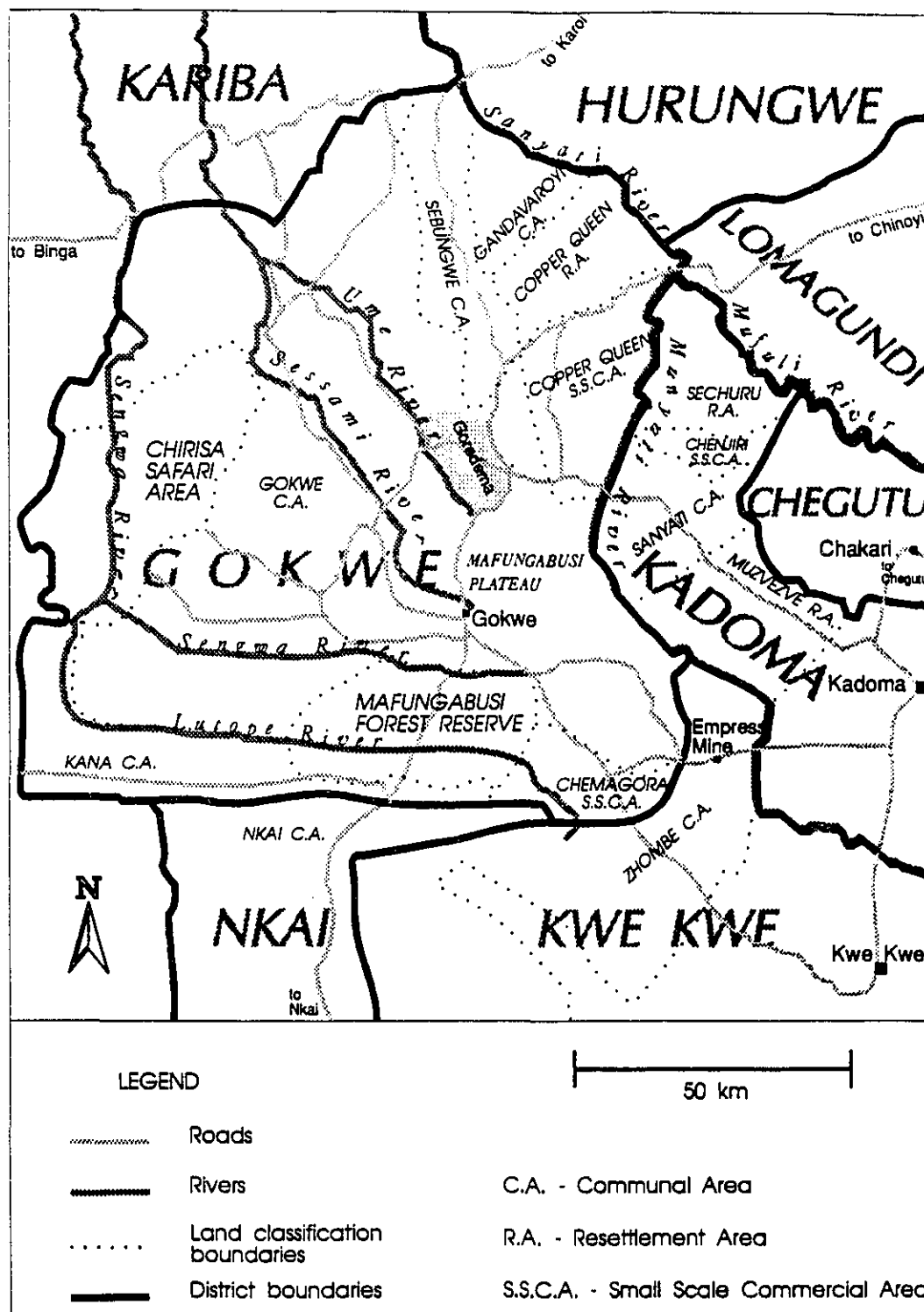
<sup>4</sup>A year earlier, before we had secured clearance for long-term research, we had made an exploratory trip to the towns of Gokwe and Sanyati in a rented car. I will return to that trip in the context of my discussion of ethnicity in the next chapter. I should also mention that I had hoped to make more frequent use of the used motorbike I had purchased for travel between regions. A complete novice, I was duped into buying a 1982 racing trials bike that required a spark plug and carburetor cleaning every 50 km. The temperamental character of what we called the Big Yellow Suzuki occasioned other stories that I do not include here. Suffice it to say that the bus rapidly became the mainstay of our transportation needs within the district, with many experiential benefits of the sort I have sketched above.

Gokwe as I came to see them, to know their qualities, and to understand their implications. The earth itself is the one feature of the landscape that colours my memories of travelling in Gokwe more than any other; its variations serve to index the unique visual aspect presented by each place I passed through. But the effect of differences in soil on the lives of those who live in a particular locality is not merely aesthetic, since these differences often ground the flow of labour and grain between neighbouring communities over time. At the end of the chapter, I look more closely at the relationship rooted in soil that has developed between two wards: one, Jehana, lying atop the plateau, and the other, Goredema, lying just beneath it. This discussion of the soil and its consequences serves as a backdrop for the more situated and dialogical narrative of journeys that I present in the chapter that follows.

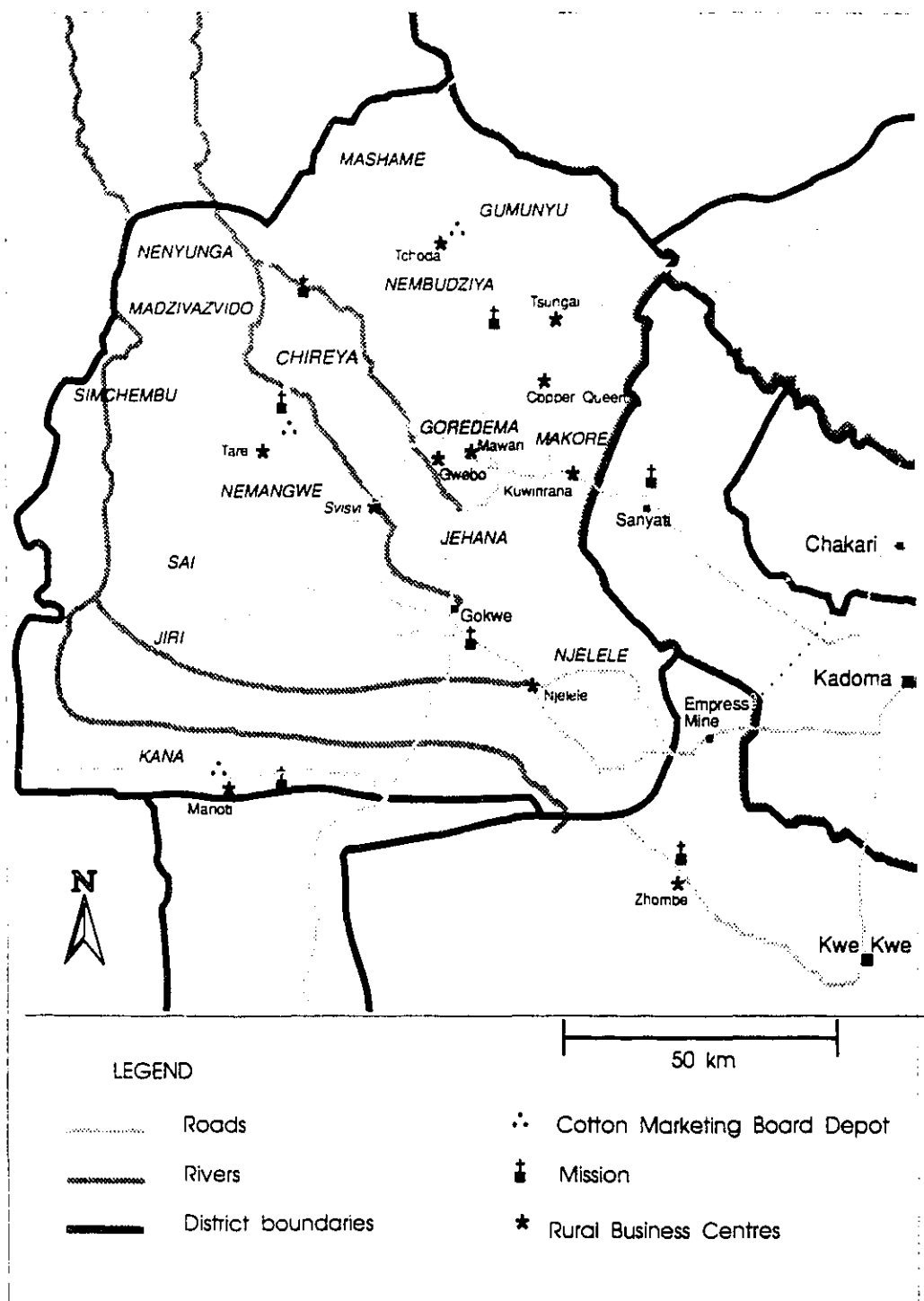
In some instances, the accounts I present here and in the following chapter are the trace of single excursions; in others, they are composites, layers of many journeys, encounters, conversations, formal interviews and readings superimposed upon one another. Some of these I have set apart from the narrative as "cases" or "instances" that gave rise to particular conundrums or revelations as I strived to link moments of experience into some larger, interconnected whole. I have preserved, with minimal editorial interference, the integrity of some of these journal excerpts (indicated by

( indented single space text), in order to remain nearer to the moment of primary interpretation and textualization, and to evoke what was always an evolving sense of discovery.

This procedure will require some forbearance from readers who are accustomed to encountering inscriptions of experience in a text only after being given a foundational knowledge--descriptions of relevant institutions, a chronology of developments or events--within which to set them in context. My hope is that this way of going about it will be illustrative of the very process I want to draw attention to: the ways in which economic relations are continually reinterpreted from perspectives that are spatially situated, hence partial, and yet open to renegotiation and reinterpretation in light of the experiences generated by movement.



**Map 5.1. Gokwe and surrounding districts, showing rivers, roads, and land tenure classification boundaries.**



**Map 5.2. Gokwe and surrounding districts, showing areas identified with major chiefs and headmen.**



## The Road to Gokwe

Journal Entry: 24 February 1988

We began from Baines Ave. at just after 6 a.m., found an emergency taxi to Mbare where we were directed to the Gokwe-via-Kwekwe bus. This trip--from the initial hustle at Mbare with its big city indifference and the *jaga* boys coaxing the *ambuyas* onto their buses, and conning us with stories of early departures, direct routings and timely arrivals--turned out to be our introduction to Zimbabwe's other valence, along which tin can buses, not unlike the school buses of my youth, with names like Tauya, Tombs, Harare Omnibus, and Kukura--something-I-haven't-yet-mastered, ply between townships on the colonial highveld grid. The sooted industrial backways take you out onto Beatrice road from the market, then on toward Bulawayo, farm workers slapping up alongside from time to time, the conductor-boy with his bird-whistles bringing the roaring hulk just short of a halt and then urging it on again with a whack, like a reluctant ox. Norton, Chegutu--their mammoth grain silos, gray and forbidding among the irrigated stretches of maize and soybeans--then Kadoma, the road winding around the GMB and CMB depots, turning away from the staid and well-manicured town centre toward Rimuka township with its long stretch of informal workshops lining the dusty roadside: panel beaters, shoe repairs, brickmakers, tailors.

Every bus station is a market. The bored and apathetic hawkers rising to life from the ashes at the appearance of new prey. *Chibage chinyoro* [green maize]--sometimes hot, more often soggy and fermenting, groundnuts or *nyimo* beans in neat mounds in a tin enamel bowl rising on a head to the bus window--buy by the cup or the bowlful. Small dirty boys with boxes of blackened, tough-roasted maize for eating by the kernel--it usually goes for 50 cents, 10 cents more than if boiled. Hard-boiled eggs at a quarter-a-piece with a brown-bag twist of salt for free. Cool boys in jaunty caps, sunglasses, and jeans with no-ass-left-but-the patches, push on with dangling arrays of digital watches from Botswana (\$5-10), batteries for those watches (\$.50-1.00) mirrors ("*malooking glass*"), safety pins, crotchet needles, bags of salt, baking soda (used, Gul Rukh has discovered, for softening

greens and, we suspect, also nyimo beans), plastic earrings, floppy khaki caps and shorts for school children: "Vana vanofara kwazvo ne mashorts!" ["Children are delighted by shorts!"]. The Dairyboard man; tough-looking guys pushing sweet cream buns; Mazoe ices melting in the hands of baldshaven, barefoot girls, voices weak with something between hunger and hopelessness.

This scene is repeated with yet more intensity at Kwekwe's Amabveni township, Batanai Tavern station, where the bus will sometimes pause a half-hour or more for this final piece-good frenzy before the long sojourn north into the rural hinterland. From Kwekwe the road runs in a single tarred lane through a dense dark-green thicket, rarely broken by a track leading presumably to a commercial farm, but on the whole the landscape seems more in the hands of Nature than of Man. Perhaps hamlets of squatters inhabit the interior of that stretch of maybe 50 km. that leads into Zhombe Mission, Zhombe town--then the wide tar road is sealed off and the bus is diverted onto the red earth ruts that run along side the gleaming pitch that will someday push through to the Sengwa coal fields.

The Mafungabusi plateau appears, rising like a tidal wave at some indeterminable distance out to sea. The climb from the south side is shallow and imperceptible, marked by the Chief Njelele stop and the hundred desperate guava women thrusting bowls full of the luscious yellow fruit in through the windows without even asking a price--only accepting, it seems, what is tossed back out as the bus impatiently pulls away. The road on to Gokwe is yet more riven by the red mud and ruts as the bus plummets in and out of riverbeds, hauling itself onward groaning, bending and rattling in complaint.

Gokwe itself emerges as a long sticky thread: a few shops--one says "Cheapest Shop in Gokwe"--a welder, a miller, the GMB [Grain Marketing Board]--stacked bags of maize covered in bright yellow tarpaulins--then the long bay of shops beyond the broad sandy clearing for the buses; the new supermarket, a bakery, a general dealer or two, and bottle stores of course. In the clearing, women sit placidly before baskets of burnt groundnuts and bananas while streams of people come and go from the tar-road leading on to the Council offices and the D.A.'s camp down the road--a fifteen minute walk--

from where the vista off the plateau's edge stretches flawlessly onto the horizon.

#### Townscape: Gokwe

The Gokwe "growth point" (this technical sounding term had, we discovered, actually found its way into popular discourse) has clearly begun to supersede in importance that at Sanyati--its only rival as a nexus of commercial activity in the region. The announcement made in 1989 that Gokwe will receive its own cotton ginnery is symptomatic of this achievement. With the rapid development of bus routes emanating from its centre, and its increasing importance as a nucleus of business, banking, and administration, Gokwe town is now the central hub of movement within and beyond the district. It has the feel of a funnel through which Gokwe's diverse hinterland population is continually sucked in and subsequently regurgitated back out again. These travellers reemerge bearing a common range of experiences to which they can collectively refer: whether purchasing a daughter's dress at Power Sales clothing store, standing in line for four hours to cash a cotton check at Barclay's Bank, or sleeping on the concrete at the hospital beside a relative stricken with malaria.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Some forty-six deaths were attributed to malaria in the district during the month of April alone in 1989, with perhaps hundreds more going unrecorded (See Harare Herald, 12 May 1989). This was the principal news item in Gokwe to which the national media gave attention. Government teams were sent with much fanfare to spray insecticide along hut walls, but rains and replastering seemed to render these efforts ineffective.

The growth point is situated on the palm of the hand-shaped Mafungabusi plateau. Beyond the featureless fingers of plateau land that extend to the north and west, and in contrast to the flat terrain of the commercial farms along the highlands between Chegutu and Kwekwe, the topography of most of Gokwe District is broken and often rugged. As every bus moves toward the northern or northwestern edges of the Mafungabusi plateau, the passengers within are afforded the dramatic spectacle of the lowlands spreading out below, interrupted by the intermittent appearance of low hills like the floor of a great sea.

It took little time for us to become acquainted with the top brass in Gokwe town. The black successors to Inspector Harvey's hardy band of forty Europeans made up a local bureaucracy of considerable size, but the true notables--the government officers and big businessmen--were still few enough to know by name, and many of them sought, to an extent compatible with their status and dignity, to make us allies. We, in turn, sought to make allies of them, as well as of the mechanics, teachers, nurses, and even army officers who were well placed to lend us a hand at one time or another during our stay in the district.

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The increase in publicity was apparently being registered at the level of local interpretation and experience: *mararia*--the indigenized English word--is the most common label applied to symptoms of general malaise, and is frequently used to explain the inability of persons to engage in agricultural labour during the peak weeding period.

The local government official to whom we made our initial appeal for support, graciously put us up in his guest house the first night we stayed at the growth point. He spent the evening chatting with us amiably about his student years in the United States, and about how distressed he was to be given the impossible Gokwe posting, after having served for some time in the far more "developed" Kwekwe District. Intrigued by our serious intention to transgress the invisible, if tangible, membrane separating urban moderns like ourselves from rural villagers, he went to considerable lengths to help us get our research underway. In language reminiscent of his white colonial predecessors, he spoke of the trip he himself planned to make the following week to Simchembu, the most "remote" and "backward" ward in the district-- the "real bush," as he put it.

The office of the District Administration still represented the political interests of the central government in Gokwe District, just as it had for the ninety years prior to Independence.<sup>6</sup> Beside the sizable home of the official we stayed with and the guest house beside it--both of which were located in the older residential area built for government officers well back in the colonial era--one could still find "the club," an institution comprising a bar as well as outdoor

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<sup>6</sup>Although at an earlier time, greater recognition was given to the existence of rival centres of power manifest in the Chireya paramount chieftaincy and the smaller chieftaincies ranked below it (see Chapter VII, below).

squash and tennis courts. They were in obvious need of repair, but judging from the busy recreational schedule of some senior officials, were still quite functional. Some months later, the official we had come to know and feel at ease with was accused of embezzling public funds and using them to support his wife's local business interests (she owned, I think, a small general dealership). Although these allegations were, to our knowledge, never substantiated, he was forced to resign on short notice; to our regret, we neither saw him, nor heard about him ever again.

The two other foci of public activity were the District Council and the offices of Agritex--the agricultural extension service. The Council's epithet, "*Cheziya*," was a constant reminder of the Protestant spirit in which Gokwe's founding local government intended to develop the district after the wholesale destruction wrought by the liberation war: *cheziya*, as we were often reminded, means "from sweat." The Council enjoyed the use of spacious, newly built offices and a meeting hall. These were painted white and powder-blue, and stood just opposite the two new banks at the south end of town. We had little to do with the Council or its members, although we enjoyed reading about its meetings and decisions in the monthly issue of the short-lived Gokwe Post. Just as we were settling down in Goredema ward in August, the local Council seat reverted back to a man belonging to ZAPU, the party that people had come to know well in the years of the war. In the

wake of the vicious hunt for "dissidents" (whom the ZANU government associated with ZAPU), and despite the unity agreement between the two parties late in 1987, this had some symbolic import. But more important was the perception that the new councillor was an indigenous person, rather than an immigrant outsider like the previous incumbent. In the event, we never learned much from him about what the Council actually did, or what it had the funds and legislated capacity to do.<sup>7</sup> Sitting in our village, the Council seemed much further away than the 55 km., two buses, and two and a half hours it usually took to get to its offices in Gokwe town; indeed, we virtually never felt its presence at all.

Unlike the District Council buildings, the long row of older, manila-coloured offices occupied by Agritex were a

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<sup>7</sup>In fact, it had neither the budget nor the authority to do very much at all, even though shopping lists enumerating literally hundreds of project requests had been duly transmitted up the ministry pipelines to central government for funding on an annual basis. Such projects emanated from Ward Development Committees (WADCs) and included items ranging from the construction of dams to the digging of latrines; only one or two were actually funded annually in the entire district. This much we eventually learned from an expatriate specialist in local government and administration who was contracted under a European Community grant to help find ways to facilitate the distribution of public monies at district level. It should be said that infrastructural development (in the form of roads, schools, clinics and boreholes) was taking place in the district, but according to plans largely formulated in Harare and administered through line ministries operating locally. The District Development Fund--set up after Independence precisely to expedite the construction and maintenance of roads, dams and boreholes throughout the rural areas--was very active indeed, although its activities bore no relation to priorities voiced at the village, ward, or even district level.

constant centre of gravity for us as time and again we returned to pore over files, study maps, and chatted with the immensely energetic and engaging officers and extension workers. Early on in our stay in the district, by virtue of our contiguity with these offices and its people, we assumed a kind of informal identity as members of the Agritex staff--in our own view, as well as in that of farmers and others involved in the business of cotton. But as time wore on in the village, and we seemed to see little of the extension workers, we began to see them as "outsiders" in relation to ourselves. Perhaps it was because they began to make journeys to see us in our village home, and this conferred on us a kind of power viz-a-viz any agents of the state that all villagers share: a power that derives from rootedness, from the sense of always already having been there--not in an absolute historical sense, but in relation to those who merely pass through to offer advice or criticism.<sup>8</sup> This kind of rootedness takes place quite literally in the soil, since it

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<sup>8</sup>I tread cautiously here, wary of Malkki's (1992) incisive critique of the use of "rootedness" in the soil as part of a related set of "arborescent" or "sedenterist" tropes commonly deployed as a means of naturalizing identities; this family of metaphors, Malkki shows, implicitly bestows moral favour upon those who still live in the places they are thought to have originated from: primordial "cultures," ethnic "nations," and so on. By negation, migrants and refugees in this discourse are perceived to be almost pathological: their ontological condition of mobility and uprootedness renders them amoral, outside of the social order that links places with "genuine" nations. Similar polarities in the representation of indigenes and immigrants exist in Gokwe, but they receive a rather different, and in any case highly contested, moral charge. See Chapter IX, below.



is the soils of a given place that provide both the aesthetic and the practical medium of everyday life in the agrarian communities of Gokwe.

### **Ivhu: the Soil**

There are four or five major roads that lead out from Gokwe town off the plateau into the northern and western lowlands (see Map 5.1)--all of them are still "seasonal" in that they are sometimes washed out at river crossings for hours or even several days following a torrential rain. I tend to recall my journeys along these roads by means of the distinctive colours of the landscape they made visible; but when I think of our time living in one village in Goredema, I think of the soil that I would touch each day with my hands and feet.

For the peasants of Gokwe, one's practical reality is as particular as the soil one is given to work with hands, hoe and plough--its colour and its texture, its qualities when it hardens under the sun and when it softens with the rain. Yet the colour lent by the soil to the landscape does not end at the boundaries of the fields; rather, it extends without pause onto the homesteads themselves, their huts visible at a distance from the road like an outcrop of mushrooms with stout stems and broad pointed caps. This is because the soil provides the plaster for the huts, reapplied after every rainy season. The most readily available soil usually serves as the base for plastering, and thus, to some extent, the tones of

the village provide a ready index of the soils its inhabitants work. Sand and clay of contrasting hues are combined with ash and used to decorate the exterior hut walls with geometric (or rarely, pictorial) designs in one to three colours. Several times a year women carry heavy sand and clay on their heads back to their homes, from special deposits known only to them, and decorate the huts with their distinctive design, one which may or may not change from year to year. This special knowledge of the soil is part of a larger aesthetic and sense of quality with which the soil imbues the wider environment, one that I, as a traveller, was always keenly aware of.

Kalahari or Gusu sands (*jecha*) cover most of the western portion of the district, extending eastward in a narrow belt into Makore, Ganyungu and Sanyati. The sands are easy to work--so easy that in Makore ward, farmers are known to use a bicycle rim rather than a plough to draw lines for planting seed. Germination is not inhibited when the soil dries out, and weeds are easy to uproot. The characteristics of sandy soils are also preferred for certain crops.<sup>9</sup> For example, because water drains through the soil structure rapidly,

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<sup>9</sup>The relationship between soil type, settlement choice, and crop choice has been a subject of considerable debate among historians of pre-colonial Shona society. See Roder (1964), Palmer (1970) and Mackenzie (1974). In summarizing the arguments, Beach (1977:41) comes to the sensible conclusion that political constraints, or even the availability of water, probably explain settlement patterns better than soil preferences. "However, given a free choice," he adds, "informants have made it clear that the soil preferred depended upon the type of crop required: finger millet did better in sandy soils, and maize in red clays."

groundnuts grown in sandy soils are not subjected to excessive moisture and hence are less likely to rot after the pods form. Millets also seem to do well in sand. But overall, the sands are poor in nutrients and fail to hold the rainfall well; the leafy and stem portions of plants therefore tend to be relatively small in size, and drought quickly leads to wilting.

One day as we drove north from Gokwe town toward a Field Day in Makore, a young Agritex officer named Mr. Mazuzuma--a recent graduate of an agricultural college and evidently very knowledgeable--briefed me on soils and their properties. He told me that in the western parts of the district farmers had developed their own method of enriching the sand without the use of costly inorganic fertilizers, and this led me to reconsider puzzles about the response to the promotion of such purchased fertilizers by Agritex and agribusiness companies:

**Journal Entry: 8 May 1988**

The Gusu sands running west of Gokwe growth point out into Kana have inherently low fertility, Mazuzuma explained, but were ingeniously managed by farmers using the following indigenous technique: after planting two years in succession, fields are fallowed for 2 to 3 years (the fields are not stumped) allowing the bush to regenerate. Then the bush is cut and ploughed back into the soil before planting again. I wonder how widespread this practice is, and whether or not burning is sometimes substituted. The question of when, to what extent, and why particular farmers begin using purchased fertilizers remains important. We've been told of generalized resistance in Goredema, despite a long-term decline in yields. Perhaps this is where we run up against a "resistance to commoditization"--as if there are limits to what one will utilize money or incur debt for,

especially to an impersonal party such as the AFC [Agricultural Finance Corporation].

My reflections on the local reception to inorganic fertilizers stemmed from stories we had heard about Goredema farmers reselling the fertilizer that was supplied to them as part of an indivisible "package" of inputs under the small-farmer loan program of the parastatal AFC. Too much fertilizer in the black earth simply produced tall plants with few cotton bolls that were in any case more difficult to spray and pick--a fact that the AFC didn't seem to take into account when they formulated the "packages."

These rich heavy black clays, known locally as *chidhaka*,<sup>10</sup> are the soils for which Gokwe district is renowned. In numerous ways, the *chidhaka* soils tangibly structure the lives of peoples living on the northern tip of the plateau and in the broad hilly plain spreading out below the escarpment into Nemangwe, Goredema, Chireya and parts of Nembudziya. *Chidhaka* soil holds moisture for long periods of time, enabling plants to successfully endure the mid-season droughts that plague the lowlands almost annually. Their typically rich nutrient content fosters rapid plant growth;

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<sup>10</sup> From the root *dhaka*, variously denoting "earth", "mud", "soil", or "building mortar". Variant spellings found in maps and local government documents include *sidaga* (when research was carried out on them in the 1960s) and *chidaga* (in the 1980s). These soils are technically classified with the siallitic group of calcimorphic soils. The parent material is basalt on the plateau and triassic grits and mudstones in the lowlands. In both areas, areas of sodic mopane soils are also found, especially in depressions. See Thompson (1965) for background on soil classification in Zimbabwe.

cotton plants often grow to the height of an average adult in the richest *chidhaka* soils of Gokwe, a sight which rarely fails to impress visitors to the district.

Not everything about *chidhaka* is so desirable, however. After a heavy rainfall, the gray earth turns into a sea of deep, sticky black mud that adheres tenaciously to everything it touches. If one ventures to step into it wearing shoes or sandals, these are soon left behind, having been suctioned off the feet and down into the muck (*dzakanyura muchidhaka*). Even bare feet rapidly become encased in huge clods of wet mud. This makes work in the fields extremely arduous; the hoe becomes heavy after a stroke or two, making the work of weeding backbreaking and inefficient, so that one must resort to pulling the sturdy, well-fed weeds out by hand, one by one. In fact, the wet mud can deter unnecessary movement of any kind beyond the homestead (which is often protected with a layer of sand), virtually marooning individual *mushas* (homesteads) for days at a time, while the rains fall and the weeds grow to unmanageable proportions. Those who do venture out to visit others or the shops (usually children and young men) are burdened with the task of cleaning their feet with water and a stick for half an hour after their arrival.

When the intense sun finally does reappear to dry the soil, the surface of *chidhaka* often develops a hard cap or crust, 5-10mm. thick, which can smother newly germinated shoots attempting to break through the ground. Germination

rates are thus much poorer in clays than in loamy soils or sand. After the long winter season, the clay dries and hardens to a considerable depth, making late winter ploughing extremely taxing. As I was to discover myself (see Chapter XI, below) the ploughshare must be driven down with constant force in order to break the hard surface and bite into the soil at a constant depth. The plough turns up huge, rock-like clods, making movement through the furrows a painful, stumbling ordeal for oxen and ploughman alike; it is an ordeal that is only made worse by the presence of the previous season's desiccated cotton stumps, that snag the plough and cut the feet.

Not all *chidhaka* soils, however, are qualitatively the same, and neither are their implications uniform for the people whose livelihood depends on them. Living in Goredema, itself well known for its rich *chidhaka* soils, this is something we came to know well. In order to get to Gokwe town, we had to traverse the black soils of Jehana ward atop the plateau. There were two ways of doing this. One was to take the Munenzwa bus 15 km. east to Kuwirirana, and then to catch the Harare Omnibus going up the steep switchbacks cut into the northern tip of the escarpment. Once on top, the bus would race southward through Jehana along the flat dirt road for some 40 km. until reaching the growth point. If the rains hadn't fallen too recently, we would take a short-cut, scrambling directly up the 250 metre escarpment through the

bush into Jehana, and catching the second bus there as it passed by the primary school.

In time we became aware that the same journey up and down the escarpment between Goredema and Jehana was made by members of both communities, but at different times and for different reasons. In Jehana, the strikingly black earth derives from basalt bedrock lying only a metre or two below. In places it has a cracked, crumbly texture that results from too frequent flooding and the accumulation of salts near the surface<sup>11</sup>; These qualities inhibit the development of tree roots, so that on the bus, one sits high above the chest-high, level plane attained equally by the tall grasses and the gnarled, stunted bushes. In this position it is easy for passengers to spot the curious herd of free-ranging zebra as the bus rumbles across the grasslands to and from Gokwe town. Also standing out in the flat plain of the plateau are the clusters of huts built of fire-split red stone, reflecting one of the ways that Jehana people have had to adapt to the absence of wood suitable for house-poles, and the lack of any soil that will make solid bricks.

Rainfall in Jehana, as everywhere on the Mafungabusi plateau, is considerably greater and more uniformly

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<sup>11</sup>The tilth can be naturally so loose, that it is sometimes called "self-ploughing" by agronomists. Sodic soil formations of this kind are in fact more often associated with low-lying mopane forest. See Agritex (1982: "Sodic Soils and their Stabilization").

distributed over the land and over the season than it is in the lowlands such as Goredema below; and the shallow bedrock holds water much nearer to the surface. These two factors turn out to be a matter of great consequence for the rural economy of the entire region. The consistency of the rains on the plateau means that Jehana's farmers are reliable producers of surplus maize in years when escarpment farmers harvest only a few bags. And the retention of water near the surface of the soil makes it possible for them to grow sunflower as a cash crop late in the season, sometimes as part of a double cropping regimen in which early planted maize is harvested in February and the land replanted with sunflower while the soil is still saturated. On the other hand, the plateau farmers are relatively inconsistent producers of cotton, since cotton plants wither when water is held too long near their roots. Except in years of severe drought, it is the farmers of the escarpment and the lowlands--especially in Goredema, Nembudziya, Nemangwe and Chireya--who excel at cotton production.

The result of this sort of microclimatic differentiation is, as one might expect, a pattern of localized crop specialization and intra-regional trade, one that generates ties of credit and debt as well as the movement of labour between distinct economic zones. In most years, Jehana farmers will have surplus maize to sell to neighbouring wards on the escarpment and below. There, households short of maize



will purchase it either with cash earned from cotton or by pledging the next year's crop:

**Journal Entry: 7 February 1989**

We hear that maize-short families have once again migrated up the escarpment to Jehana to weed maize--for one bucket of grain per acre. Last year Putemende and his wife went up with a scotchcart and worked for a total of six bags of maize. Moffat had anticipated a shortage in 1987 and purchased 10 bags at \$12 each from his patron Aaron Mpofu--paying in advance in May, for delivery in November.

But the plateau is not always so favoured, since in years of extremely heavy rainfall (over 1000 mm.) the land is flooded and the maize plants fall over, rotting the cobs.<sup>12</sup> Under such circumstances, families without liquidity or stored assets will sometimes send their children down the escarpment to pick the (usually flourishing) cotton of their neighbours, money which they will need to use to purchase their own maize:

**Journal Entry: 1 May 1989**

Migrants came down the escarpment from Jehana to work picking Masiras's cotton--5 teenagers who said the crops were poor in Chief Jehana's area. I was unable to discover whether they were working for their families or for themselves. Having found work only at 11 AM, they worked for only about 6 hours and picked a rather paltry amount of cotton for an equally paltry sum of money--little more

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<sup>12</sup>One of our most extraordinary photographs captures the stunning yellow swath of Mrs. Mpofu's prizewinning sunflower crop ripening in February. Two months later we sat in her living room as curtains of rain enveloped the cement block house and adjacent fields, felling and then drowning the beautiful plants in pools of water. As some of the most successful farmers of the district, however, she and her husband had little to fear from such a catastrophe; they had long since diversified into transport, moneylending against crops, and retail trade.

than a dollar a piece.

To our surprise these young day migrants from prosperous Jehana, the place we thought of as blessed by rain, turned out not to be exceptions. As the picking season progressed, we discovered that most of the people from outside the village who came to Goredema to perform *maricho* (casual labour), lived, as did these young people, *pamusoro*, "up on top."

In Jehana, I always felt literally nearer to the sky, a sensation that would be confirmed whenever the summer rain clouds rolled in from the southwest, enveloping us like a dense blanket that seemed to smother the landscape in a frenzy of lightning and water. During November in Goredema, I can remember standing in silent, fearful anticipation as we watched the southern horizon along the plateau above us turn ominously black, the clouds growing darker and more massive, shot through by white bolts of electricity. The monolith rushed towards us, wind whirling, thunder roaring, and then, as if restrained by some invisible barrier, stopped just at the plateau edge, where it unleashed all of its fury. The lands of our village remained bone dry. *Goredema* means "black cloud," but all too often it was the black cloud as spectacle rather than as experience that made the name an appropriate epithet for the place.

Let me conclude this chapter with a summary of the colours of Gokwe that are stained by journeys in the map of my memory. I think of the roads leading west through the forest

reserve out toward Sai as leading through yellowish sands, sometimes shading into red loams. The roads leading north and northwest down the escarpment Nembudziya and Nemangwe advance through black and gray clay cut across occasionally by swaths of river-borne sandy white; in contrast, the roads to the northeast through Makore and Copper Queen are red; and those leading east into Sanyati turn from yellow to white as the sun rises higher in the sky and glares blindingly off the sand.

Yet these are impressions seized from the perspective of one who only moves through these landscapes. To live in any of these places is to know much more subtle variations: the patches of sandy soil where groundnuts may be successfully sown, the moist areas suitable for sweet potatoes, or the alluvial plots where a second crop of maize or sunflower can sometimes be squeezed in. In the next chapter, I will move down these roads one by one into the Gokwe lowlands, addressing other topics, combining my own sense of the knowledge occasioned by travel with the knowledge I gleaned from others who conveyed to me their particular sense of place.

## CHAPTER VI

### LIVING WITH THE MIRACLE: ON THE COTTON ROAD

The farmer who had always existed at a subsistence level was suddenly faced with the possibility of achieving an increase in income, not a slight increase in his normal income, but a two-, or three-, or even tenfold increase. He saw for the first time in his life the possibility of obtaining, by his own efforts, what to him was great wealth.

--M.G. Reid, *Senior Agricultural Officer, Ministry of Internal Affairs (1971)*

I have so far sketched only one journey into Gokwe, and that in the monological voice of the solitary traveller who surveys the landscape as it flashes by, each scene seamlessly shifting into another, like the frames in a film reel. The journeys in this chapter are narrated with a different conceptual itinerary in mind and a different way of pursuing it. Here I am more concerned with the pauses in between journeys, with the times when we got off the bus and stayed for a while in a place to converse with those who lived there. Each such hiatus itself became a point from which to launch into shorter journeys, as we travelled on foot between villages, schools, rest camps and cotton depots.

I begin by etching in two of the main pathways that we followed out from Gokwe town northward and into the lowlands as we carried out our initial survey. The first of these

follows the old ox-wagon route down the escarpment of the plateau just west of Goredema into the five wards in Chief Nemangwe's area--the heartland of what was known as the Inyoka tobacco industry in the early decades of this century, now marked by the lively business centres ("townships") of Svisvi and Tare. From there the road loops past the Sessami Baptist Mission and the CMB transit depot before proceeding northward into the real cotton frontier--the wards of Madzivazvido, Nenyunga and Simchembu--and the newly opened Sengwa Coal Fields.

The second route into the north that I discuss traverses the lands of the Ndebele-speaking immigrants of Jehana on the northern tip of the Mafungabusi plateau rising above southeastern Goredema. From there it drops down the escarpment to cross the Sanyati road and proceed on into the wards of Chief Nembudziya, eventually crossing the tse-tse fence to reach the cotton depot at Tchoda (see Map 5.2).

Finally, I turn to the other primary road that links Zimbabwe's central highlands to the heart of Gokwe District--a road that leads northwest out of Kadoma for nearly 100 kilometres before pausing in Sanyati town and then crossing over the Muniyati river into Gokwe proper. On the western side of the river, the road winds its way through the Copper Queen Small Scale Commercial Area and then into the Gokwe Communal Area. There, it passes first through Makore ward, and then, after the crossroads at Kuwirirana township, into Goredema,

the ward in which we eventually settled in August, 1988 for our intensive village study.

While slowly retracing these journeys, I explore the ways in which the series of unique places we would pass through have been linked together over time to produce a complex regional economy; as we were to discover, it is an economy anchored by the production and trade of cotton, as well as the movement of rural labour between regions normally held to be sociologically and economically discrete. At various points I present sketches of people we met or interviewed, recording their stories alongside my own efforts to abstract what such stories revealed about cotton and commoditization. I also use these conversations as a means of exploring the social relationships that lie in the murky domain between the village and the state: relationships that entangle the lives of farmers with those of CMB depot supervisors, AFC loan officers, Agritex extension workers, and a host of rural shopkeepers, transporters and traders. But the characters who will feature most prominently at the start of this particular narrative will be those ghostly figures that haunt so many ethnographies, but so rarely appear: our four research assistants. As members of Gokwe farming families themselves, they each proved to be a special kind of interlocutor between ourselves and the people of Gokwe during the several months when we first came to know the region.

### **Nemangwe: Into the Lowlands**

The road from Gokwe town into the lands of Chief Nemangwe descends through the rocky, red loam soils of the northwestern escarpment, then down across the sandy streambed of the Svisvi river, and finally into Svisvi township, the point at which the five wards under Nemangwe begin. This is the area that used to be known as "Nyoka;" it is the site both of Chief Chireya's old residence (before he was moved to the north in the early part of the century by the colonial authorities) and that of the original police camp established in Gokwe in the 1890s. It was at "Nyoka" as well that the evanescent attempt was made to harness the local knowledge of tobacco production and trade for the benefit of settler commerce before 1938 (Kosmin 1977). Half a century later, it was in the black clay soils of Nemangwe's land that the cotton extension programme really took hold; and it was here again that Midlands Province first sought international support for the rehabilitation of cotton production and agricultural extension after the disruptions brought about by the guerilla war (Midlands Province 1981).

In 1988, Svisvi was the sight of a sprawling encampment of hundreds of temporary construction workers hired by the government to build a segment of the Sengwa coal road. Unlike the camp of Swedish engineers rumoured to be equipped with generators and even a portable swimming pool further north at Mutimutema, these men were housed in a dense settlement of

portable windowless tin shacks. The visual impression given by their irregular roofs, glinting in the broiling sun, led the locals to call the camp "Silver City." The village elders in the area complained that men in the camps were "spoiling" their daughters, turning them into prostitutes, and generally undermining the authority of parents. Whether or not this was a fair assessment of the situation, the camp seemed to presage the arrival of major changes in the wake of the coal road.

Research in the Land of Snakes:  
Gender, Knowledge and "Tradition"

A few kilometres past Svisvi, the buses plunge through the Tare riverbed and into a sandy expanse of land running along the western bank of the Sessami river. Near Tare township, the road branches off to make a brief detour through an area of deep sands to the Baptist Mission and the CMB transit depot.<sup>1</sup> It was in the sub-district council headquarters at Tare that we trained our four research assistants at the end of April, 1988, before moving to the rest camp near the mission to begin our survey of cotton farmers and transporters. For the next three months we sought

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<sup>1</sup>The transit cotton depots were established by the CMB after 1980 in order to lower, if not eliminate, the cost of transport borne by farmers. Only farmers within 30 km. of a depot can even consider delivering their bales by an ox or donkey-drawn scotchcart; others must make arrangements with tractor or lorry owners, paying (in 1988) between Z\$5 and Z\$25 per bale--as much as fifteen percent of its value after sale. There are three transit depots in Gokwe district--at Manoti (in Kana), at Nemangwe, and at Tchoda (see map 5.1)--which receive, weigh, grade and stockpile bales before transshipping them to ginnery depots at Sanyati, Chegutu and Kadoma.



out farmers to talk to.<sup>2</sup> Our first base was the Nemangwe depot. On Mondays and Thursdays--the *chisi* days devoted to the local ancestral spirits when people were proscribed from engaging in field labour--farmers from within a radius of about 30 km. lined up at the depot to deliver their bales in scotchcarts drawn by oxen or donkeys. We would find them in a long queue warming their hands over hastily built fires at 6:30 a.m., waiting for the gates to open four or five hours later; some had spent the night there, wrapping themselves in blankets against the cold wind. On the other weekdays, when only lorries and tractors were admitted to the depot, as well as on weekends, we branched out into the villages to interview farmers at home and in the fields, often helping them to pick cotton or scrape sunflower seeds from the flower-heads as we spoke. We were to repeat this procedure at the end of June in the villages of Nembudziya and at the Tchoda depot, and once again during July in the Sanyati Communal area and at the ginnery depot near the ARDA estate. We travelled on foot through the villages and by bus between more distant areas, carrying our wash basin, blankets and mealie meal over our shoulders, and laying down newspapers to sleep on the hard

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<sup>2</sup>With the exception of a few general statements, I have not included any quantitative analysis of the results of the survey here, in part because of our intention to publish jointly on the basis of such an analysis, and in part because of the rather different methodological thrust of the present work. A more extended discussion of our survey methodology and its limitations, as well as a preliminary presentation of results and conclusions may be found in Selim and Worby (1988).

cement floor of school classrooms and District Administration rest camps.

Our assistants were local "school-leavers"--two young women and two young men between the ages of 18 and 24 who had finished secondary school and were looking for work. The District Officer at Gokwe had been kind enough to select them for us, after interviewing over 30 candidates who turned up at Tare expressing interest in the job. He had assigned them "points" based on three criteria: number of O-level passes; agricultural experience and education; and knowledge of the area. Mercy and Nyarai scored highly on the first two counts; the daughters, respectively, of an extension worker and a schoolteacher both of whom had immigrated from the Masvingo region, they had each attended mission secondary schools and passed well over five O-level subjects with high marks. Though obviously clever, they were at first disdainful of the farmers they were to interview, as they were of the two young men who were selected to be their colleagues. Perpetually concerned with their appearance, they wore smart polyester dresses which they washed and hung out to dry each evening--a ritual that made Gul Rukh and I feel slovenly in comparison. The young men, in contrast, had only barely managed to pass one or two O-level subjects, although they did rather better according to the latter two selection criteria. Both were from poorer families: the playful, imaginative John-Paul, always dressed in ragged cut-off trousers and a floppy felt hat, had come

from Mvuma after failing his examinations so that he could herd cattle for his uncle. Later, we were astonished to learn that he had completed the manuscript for a novel in Shona. King, the son of a locally born polygamous man, was acutely self-conscious about his indigenous "Shangwe" status (he never referred to himself in these terms); a Seventh Day Adventist, he was always fastidiously dressed in creased jeans, a button-down dress shirt, and a baseball cap. Already growing his own cotton on land given him by his father, his dream was to save enough money to take a driving course and sit behind the wheel of one of the great cotton lorries that he had watched roar through the township in clouds of dust for most of his youth.

All four of them had lived and breathed the world of cotton about which we hoped to learn; they seemed to know implicitly everything about the lives of farmers and about their engagement with the cotton economy that was, from our point of view, completely mysterious. The challenge was to make our ignorance obvious enough to them so that they would see the need to make explicit the taken-for-granted circumstances that gave shape to their daily lives. Nevertheless, it was surprising to see how quickly their "inside" knowledge itself reached its limits, circumscribed by their own relatively brief lives, the particularity of their family circumstances, and their common aspirations to be modern, evidenced by their embarrassed smirks when we would enquire about certain "traditional" matters. The division

they made between "modern" and "traditional" domains of knowledge and concern was not, however, obvious to us. Marriage with bridewealth, for example, seemed to fall comfortably into the first category, but paying homage to ancestral spirits definitely fell into the latter, as I will now explain.

*Nyoka* (*manyoka*, pl.) means "snake" in the Shona language, and after seeing the slithering tracks that frequently cross the footpaths leading from village to village in Nemangwe, it is not difficult to understand why the area is also known by that name. Snakes play a larger role, however, than that of instilling a kind of permanent attentiveness to the environment of one's feet. One day, as John-Paul and I approached the Sessami river near the rest camp, we saw a large yellow and black banded Egyptian Cobra negotiating a leisurely route across our path. Within seconds, John-Paul was wielding a sizeable stick which he evidently intended to bring down on the snake's head (just as I was springing lithely away in the opposite direction). Out of nowhere, an elderly couple emerged from the bush, the man catching John-Paul's arm as the woman screamed at him that it was a *nyoka yemudzimu* or snake inhabited by an ancestral spirit, and must not be killed. It seemed that even John-Paul's local knowledge did not encompass the denizens of this place, both animal and human, living and dead, even though it was only a couple of hours journey on foot from his home.

Several months later in Goredema our friend and assistant Obert was able to offer this explanation for the origin of the name given to Nemangwe, and consequently, to illuminate the earlier incident with the cobra:

**Journal Entry: 18 November 1988**

The name "Manyoka" [Obert knew it in the plural form] comes from a mopane tree in Svisvi where spears were said to be hidden. There was another tree also with a special spear and a snake inside. The people burned down the tree; then they went to the spirit medium and reported that they had done something wrong. (He didn't say what happened). That is how the place came to be known as *manyoka*.

This explanation would not have seemed strange to John-Paul, who was always much more attentive to "what the older people believe" than Mercy, Nyarai or King, even though he was the only one who wasn't born in Nemangwe. Unlike Obert, however, but like us, John-Paul did not live inside the world where such explanations were of consequence. Had he proceeded to kill the snake, of course, there may have been consequences for all of us. But as it was, such explanations were merely interesting--a means of achieving a sympathetic understanding of the elders. John-Paul, we were often to reflect, was a born ethnographer.

In the intimate surroundings in which we travelled, cooked and slept together, our understanding of seemingly arcane matters increased--notably in the context of fierce debates over the proprieties of domestic life and the sexual division of labour. Our camp in Nemangwe slipped instantaneously into what our four young colleagues apparently

saw as conventional gender roles--with the women cooking, sweeping and fetching water, for example, while the men split wood and then sat around waiting for the food to be served. When we told them that this would be unacceptable, there was some argument from both sexes that any other division of labour would prove futile, since the men didn't know how to do women's work. It turned out that when pressed, either sex could draw upon a range of skills and knowledge that encompassed much of the domain of the other. John-Paul was a competent cook, having learned from his mother (although King, with three mothers and many sisters, had never cooked anything in his life and was acutely embarrassed by the prospect of participating). Both men could capably carry a twenty-litre tin of water on their heads, and, paradoxically, they even came to see fetching wood and building the fire as "their" tasks, although they would not be caught dead doing any of these things after marriage. In time we were to learn that many men who professed ignorance of women's work in the village context had performed precisely such work in town, either as domestic workers (where men were preferred by employers over women) or--among the younger generation--as boarders at school.

Mercy and Nyarai were much better equipped by their educational success to enter waged employment in town, or to teach school in the rural areas. In spite of this, the young women had in mind short careers as a prelude to marriage,

their aim being to augment the value of the bridewealth that would accrue to their parents and the status they hoped thereby to bring themselves. Men such as John-Paul and King fell far below their expectations as potential marriage partners, a fact they made known from the outset, much to the chagrin of King in particular who fancied Mercy's *tsvuku* (light brown) complexion and quiet sophistication. All of them were certain that polygamy was a shameful atavism, but just as certain that bridewealth payments were a necessary institution. Undaunted by these predispositions on their part, and keen to develop hypotheses about the exchange of money and commodities that attended marriage, I tried one evening to elicit from them an account of "traditional" bridewealth payments:

**Journal Entry, 19 June 1988**

I record here notes on marriage payments taken around the fire from Mercy, Nyarai, John Paul, and King: 1. *Vhura muromo*: a payment made (to the go-between?) to open discussion on the marriage. 2. *Matekenyandebvu*: paid to the father of the bride "because she played with his beard as a child." 3. *Rusambo*: paid to father of the bride for bringing her up (money). 4. *Kunhonga*: money the bride and her aunts request, then redistribute to younger sisters of the bride "so they know she is married." 5. *Mapfukadza dumbu*: "child leaping in the mother's stomach" (To compensate for the pain of childbirth?) 6. *Mombe yomai*: cow for the mother of the bride; if not paid before she dies, her spirit will haunt the children of the marriage. 7. *Majazi*: suits for the bride's parents bought by the bridegroom. 8. *Danga*: oxen for the bride's parents. 9. *Masangira*: when the bride becomes pregnant, she goes to the home of her parents for 6-7 months, arriving with two goats, one male, one female. The male goat is killed by the bridegroom, and he eats it with (her?) relatives. The female goat is

safeguarded by the bride's mother, lest the childbirth be difficult. The bride is given *musuwo* ("doorway"), or medicine to make the child healthy by her mother or aunts (perhaps to ease childbirth?). Typical *rusambo*, I think, was said to be about \$1000, and *danga*, about 6 oxen.

One of the things that struck me about this long list (other than its sheer length!) was how far it seemed to stray from the model I had in my head about bridewealth payments in "patrilineal" societies--that they were largely a means by which the elder men of two lineages circulated daughters (as wives) against cattle, which flowed in the opposite direction. In Zimbabwe, one most often heard and read about *rusambo* and *danga* payments (the only ones I bothered to record "amounts" for), perhaps because these were the items of exchange under the control of men. But as the complete list shows, women themselves were the recipients of several specific payments. The *kunhonga* payment (meaning literally, "to pick," as in picking cotton) went to female members of the bride's patrilineage (sisters and father's sisters); more striking still, a cow, the *mombe yomai* went to the mother--who is both female and outside of the bride's lineage altogether; and finally, this matrilineal link between the mother, the daughter, and the daughter's child seemed to be reaffirmed through a physical journey made by the bride to her mother's home at the time of her first pregnancy.

Satisfied that I had received a detailed account of "traditional" marriage payments, I closed my notebook and went to bed. Meanwhile, my four informants continued to taunt,



challenge, and scream insults at one other as the debate over the value of the items, their destinations, and the timing of the payments on the list continued around the fire late into the night. Clearly, these were matters of ongoing contention.

#### Nzungu's Story: Convolutions of Commoditization

We had occasionally heard of other deviations from the simplified formula of men exchanging cash and cattle for wives. One interview in particular shed light on the relationship between marriage payments, labour and commodity trade in Nemangwe over time. It was an interview as well that put a face, a voice, and a description of an actual labour process behind Kosmin's (1977) allegory of tobacco and commoditization among the "Shangwe" (Chapter IV, above):

#### **Nzungu M. (Survey Interview No.39, 10 June 1988.)**

We spoke to the elderly, but hardly feeble, Nzungu M.--the *sadunhu* of one of the five Nemangwe wards--while seated on wooden chairs in the courtyard of his home. The homestead was unusually large, with six sleeping huts, four kitchen huts, and five granaries. These provided a set of ready illustrations as he told us about the organization of his domestic life. Each of his three wives were allocated their own maize fields and stored their grain separately. This year, he would be selling 11 out of the 15 bags of maize harvested from his own field, since his wives had produced enough for themselves (5 bags each); but last year they harvested almost nothing and ended up exchanging *muriwo* (greens) from their garden for maize. They must have cooked separately for themselves and their children as well, with the fourth kitchen hut belonging to the wife of one of his sons who resided with him. All but two of his thirteen children were married and lived away from home. Six children--two from each wife--had died.

In the 1920s, just before he married for the first

time, Nzungu grew tobacco to sell in Bulawayo. They would plant in April, sowing the seedlings around the house so that the rain running off the thatch would make them germinate quickly; then they would transplant them under trees (to protect them from too much water and too much sun) and water them once. When the plants were a metre high and the leaves turned yellow they would cut and heap the leaves. This would be in late May or June. After 5 to 7 days in the heap, they would strip off the veins, then crush the leaves in a *duri* (mortar), press and dry them. After crushing the leaves a second time, they would mould them into balls. They would tie about twelve of these balls onto a knobkerrie using sorghum straw, and carry them to Bulawayo, a journey that could take two weeks each way. They went in groups of 4 to 6 men, eating dried goat meat and the mealie meal that they carried in a goatskin along the way. A man would typically earn £1 each year in this way, selling each ball for between 1.6 and 2 shillings at Machipisa's (a store?). Sometimes they were given *mapiza* (lengths of cloth) or a shirt instead of money. Sometimes they would exchange the tobacco for donkeys with the Madzviti (Ndebele people).

By 1928 they stopped growing tobacco because the price was too low and it was too far to go to sell it. That is the year Nzungu first went looking for work. After working from 1928 to 1931 as a waiter in Kwekwe, he married his first wife. He paid no bridewealth, but worked for five years in the fields of her father instead. Then, in 1936, he married again, working two years for the father of his second wife. In 1950, when he married for a third time, he was able to pay *rusambo* of £80 (a figure which sounds much too high). He last migrated for work between 1955 and 1957, when he was a cook in Bulawayo, earning £2 /10 per month. He started growing cotton in the 1960s, trained by extension workers and recently was able to buy a used tractor on instalments. Now he complains that the AFC takes all the money. "Old men have been paying the company for years," he complained. "Now they should get pesticides for free."

There appeared in Nzungu's story the traces of numerous tactical exchanges made in response to shifts in the local and regional economy as he built his career over time. Beginning

with the donkeys, clothes and tax money he might have acquired as a young man trekking to Bulawayo to sell tobacco, he twice bartered his independence in order to contract what we later learned were called *ugarira* (or brideservice) marriages, in which a man lives uxorilocally under the authority of his wife's father, labouring on the latter's behalf.<sup>3</sup> Ten years after fulfilling his service obligations, he had evidently saved enough money to -roora--"marry with bridewealth." Since cattle could not be brought into Nemangwe due to tse-tse fly at that time, cash was considered to be an acceptable substitute. After building a sizable family and doing well enough in cotton to buy a tractor, he was now embittered by what he felt were unfair terms of trade with the state: elders, in his view, should be provided for, not taken from.

It occurred to me that if one were to take cross-sections of this autobiography at regular points along its linear flow, set them side by side, and attach a classificatory label to each one, the man "Nzungu" would fragment into a kind of many-headed Hydra. In fact, it would then be relatively simple to hang the full range of familiar labels around his many necks:

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<sup>3</sup>From the man's point of view, marriage is rendered linguistically as an active process: *kugarira*, literally "to sit for" and extended metaphorically in the context of marriage to mean "to work for one's father-in-law" is directly opposed to *kuroora*, meaning "to marry with bridewealth." A woman, in contrast, does not marry, but is (passively) married (*kuroorwa*). We later learned that as late as the turn of the century, a *roora* marriage payment could still be made in iron hoes or beads. See Chapter X, below, for a more detailed discussion.

first a petty commodity producer and trader, then a migrant proletarian, then an exploited lineage junior, then an accumulating lineage elder, and finally an agrarian capitalist. Had we abstracted the results of our survey into a typology of agrarian classes, then Nzungu would probably have fallen into the last of these categories; but it seemed increasingly dubious that this procedure would do anything other than eviscerate the telling content of his life and its many transformations.

#### Cotton and Gender: Exchanging Secrets

Even leaving his narrative intact, however, there were still silences lingering between the lines. After all, this was not the story of his "household," but rather, a story about himself: How would any of his wives have told the story differently? How would they have told their own stories? Indeed, soon after we began our interviews at the depot, we realized that it would be difficult for us to ferret out what the ramifications of cotton production and trade might be for gender relations within households--relations of the kind that saw men such as Nzungu selling maize and pocketing the cash, while that of his wives went solely to provision the household with food. The problem arose not only because at first it was easier for us to talk to men (they were usually the ones who delivered the cotton at the depots, and the ones who spoke for the household at home), but also because we sensed that whatever matters men and women ordinarily kept secret from one

another, they would be unlikely to share with strangers such as ourselves. We asked our assistants to tell us what they knew. All four of them concurred with Mercy's incisive, if tendentious, assessment of the broad pattern of gender politics built around cotton in Nemangwe:

**Journal Entry: 31 May 1988**

Mercy has just uncovered for us a whole world of marital politics around cotton money. The men [she says] just eat the money, even though the women do most of the cotton work. Then they use the money to acquire more wives. The result is bitter strife; often suicide. The first wife is often left without money, or even clothes and food for her children. Their strategies for survival range from picking and selling cotton secretly when the husband is away, to buying clothes "on credit." Mercy's mother, who earns up to \$200/month knitting jerseys, will buy clothes from Power Sales, such as a pair of shorts, for \$1.25, and resell to local women "on credit" for \$7.50; the women take the clothes because their husbands won't give them cash for clothes, but they can insist that they repay credit. One husband and wife that live nearby met each other en route to the store, each trying to sell cotton in secret from the other. Some women do casual work (*maricho*) in exchange for clothes or food.

Why do men use their money so recklessly? "Perhaps they are just primitive," she said. "They should know by now how to use their money. Many have been growing cotton for 8 years." Still, she went on, they spend it all at once on beer. And if they are not working, they have no money the rest of the year. This is how they run short of cash for pesticides and are forced to borrow; or, to sell their crop against inputs or cash. Mercy's father, an Agritex extension worker, buys pesticides in the off-season cheaply, then sells at a higher price during the time of spraying. He will sell a package of 1 kg. Sevin and a half bottle of Rogor and a half bottle of *gukurahunde* (Dessis) for one bale of cotton [to be paid after the harvest]. Or, they [the farmers] sell him a bale for \$80 cash. They can't be told to save because they insist, "it is my money, and my cotton. I can do what I like."

Mercy had given us what was perhaps the most cogent account we were to hear of how control over paths of exchange, rather than considerations of profitability based on a strict calculation of monetary costs and returns, was linked to issues of power and autonomy in the domestic sphere. People seeking trading profits--especially salaried members of the local civil service--were apparently able to step into the opening afforded by these gender wars within the household, and provide a back door through which conjugal partners could slip and hence outmanoeuvre one another. Meanwhile these trader-officials were rapidly accumulating capital in this way on their own behalf.

#### Official Markets and Marketing Officials

As we were to discover in time, the fact that people like Mercy's father might be preying upon the very farmers they were supposed to be helping, was not recognized to be of any particular moral consequence on either side. While waiting for the bus one day, we met the local AFC loan officer, who also farmed in Nemangwe. We asked him how he was received by the community: Didn't they perceive him to be an agent of the state institution that was stealing their money in interest payments?

#### **Journal Entry: 29 May 1988**

We have just had another enlightening roadside discussion with Mr. Taputswa, the local AFC man, laconic, droopy-eyed, and pleasantly gentle for a man in his position. He explained that his trust in the community is secured: the collection

officers are only called in from Gweru to lean on those in heavy arrears--he himself only provides comfort and encouragement. His own cotton--perhaps 5 bales this year--is picked through two arrangements: [1.] *humwe* ("oneness") which is the local term for *nhimbe* or a rotating beer or *mahewu* (unfermented beer)-for-work arrangement that usually draws in 10-15 families. [2.] He also looks to see what people need that the local stores have run out of. Last week he brought 2x50kg. bags of salt and paid "50 cents" or a teacup of salt for picking a 20 liter tin of tightly packed cotton. (A 50 kg. maize bag will hold about 35kg. of cotton--he and Fuze picked 2 bags today). "A bar of soap, or \$2 its just the same." People prefer commodities to money, if the commodities are scarce and essential.

It was clear that in numerous ways, Taputswa had signalled his willingness to engage in forms of exchange that tied him to, rather than separated him from, the community in which he lived. On the one hand, participation in the *humwe* labour form (see Chapter XII, below), through which he was obligated to give of his own labour-time (or that of his household) on a rotating basis, worked as a sign of his unity with the people attached to the land and his embeddedness in the system whereby they circulated gifts of labour. On the other, he used his job-related mobility (he had a travel allowance, and was frequently recalled to town) and his economic position (one that gave him access to a constant flow of cash and urban commodities), to purchase labour with commodities he himself had been able to purchase elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"Soap" probably meant laundry soap, and there is little doubt that women might choose to be paid with it because it represented what Ferguson (1992) has called a "dam" on the flow of commodities. As we were to discover living in the village, men virtually never purchase laundry soap for their

Not all local civil servants took such a benign view of the real world of exchange that operated behind the curtain of official markets in capital and cotton. Some, like Mr. Mapere, the Agritex Supervisor for the Nemangwe region, still held fast to M.G. Reid's original dream--a dream in which the discipline imposed by exposure to the market would combine with the enlightened tutelage of the extension staff in order to produce a cadre of modern farmers engaged in the rational pursuit of wealth. Until the guerilla war, Nemangwe had been the showcase for that vision, a truly backward region brought to the fore of rural development. But since then, that dream had begun to dissipate; somewhere along the way, both the government and the extension staff had lost control:

**Journal Entry: 29 May 1988**

Just met Mr. Mapere again, the man we had found to be an alarmingly candid, and almost provocative, spokesperson for farmers at the Nemangwe CMB Open Day [see below]. Today he repeated what he'd told us then--that there was nothing but trouble ahead in this area; that cotton money was only getting farmers stuck deeper in the mud, whereas Mugabe [the President of Zimbabwe] wanted to pull them out. Often they spend their checks before their wives see a penny; the children go hungry. Women are "spraying themselves with pesticide"<sup>5</sup> (as John Paul humorously put it)--instead of their cotton. Those with husbands working away from home resorted

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wives to use; although in most instances it would be considered inappropriate for men to lay claim to women's earnings through casual labour, working for soap secures women's exclusive and immediate access to a commodity they desire in a way that cash, inherently more liquid and transferable, might not.

<sup>5</sup>He was alluding to women drinking pesticide as a way of committing suicide--a not uncommon occurrence in Gokwe.



to secretly selling cotton on the black market in order to gain access to cash. Cotton is converted into wives, while men without schooling are getting rich. But the more wives the men married the less money they had left over. Mapere spoke of one man with 12 wives who'd sold 110 bales last year. "Imagine," he said, "with 5 children per wife, that's sixty cups of tea each morning!"

Apart from his careless mathematics (he should have counted seventy-three cups), what is of special interest in Mapere's discourse is that once again, it is women who are made to work as the sign of the modern. From the time M.G. Reid started Gokwe's cotton program in 1963, he had in mind a model of the modern cotton farmer--a man, his (one) wife, and hired labour to overcome seasonal bottlenecks. Of course as Reid himself was acutely aware, the realization of this model assumed the slow and selective dissemination of knowledge so that high quality could be maintained, and so that different types of farmers could sort themselves into their appropriate niche in a transformed rural class structure. "The larger the acreage and the number of growers," he wrote in 1966, "the more difficult it is to maintain standards" (Reid 1966:10).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Anticipating academic work on "differentiation" among the Zimbabwean peasantry by a good fifteen years, Reid (1971:6) wrote that as a result of the cotton extension program, the Gokwe community was "developing recognizable social and economic strata which are not traditional." He lists five such "strata": At the top, (1), is the "capitalist, the large scale cash crop producer who has men in his employ for 12 months of the year. He earns a considerable profit and emerges as a man to be admired and envied by his neighbours." Then comes (2), the "above average farmer who makes a good living and will employ part time labour to spray and pick cotton and may employ one or two men permanently;" In the middle one finds (3), the "average cotton grower," who "will be making more money than three or four years ago and may

With the improvement of roads, the building of the new depots, and the rapid expansion of credit after 1980, Reid's neat assay of social strata, each of them following the necessary course of commoditization, was perverted into something else altogether. The farmers were reworking the possibilities offered by credit and cotton-growing in unforeseen ways that eluded attempts at rectification by officials. In fact, what Reid overlooked was that many officials themselves--men such as Mercy's father and Taputswa--became actors in the economy rather than merely directors.

In the view of some of Reid's disciples like Mr. Mapere, along with many others we met in the offices of the CMB, something had gone grievously awry with the scenario they had mapped out for making Gokwe farmers into moderns. Women were being "purchased" with cotton money, only to be used as unpaid labour thereafter; the categories of domesticity and commodity were being transposed, or conflated--with the result that profits were squandered in the unproductive realm of luxury consumption.<sup>7</sup> What Mr. Mapere did not say was that those who

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employ pickers." Then there is (4), the "small grower [who] will limit his cotton crop to what he and his family can cope with. He may share labour with friends and neighbours and he may brew beer at certain times to attract labour." And finally there is "the non-cotton grower," who "in most cases is not a man of ambition and will follow his traditional methods of subsistence agriculture. He may work occasionally for (1), (2) or (3). He may work permanently for (1) or (2) and leave his traditional subsistence agriculture to his wife or wives."

<sup>7</sup>"Tea," is a delightfully ambiguous symbol in this regard, since its consumption (not necessarily tea leaves, but also instant chicory coffee or chocolate) marks, for most

did attain the modern ideal--monogamous marriage plus hired labour--were investing in trade rather than production. We came to know some of these "leading farmers" very well, and I will be telling some of their stories shortly. But first let me say more about the attempts by agents of the state to regain some of the control that had been lost.

### **Open Days at the CMB: The Performance of Power**

The Cotton Marketing Board (CMB) had arranged "Open Days" at each of its transit depots during early May precisely in order to educate farmers about the way in which the system of credit, marketing, and other operations nominally under state control (such as resource management) were supposed to work. At the Nemangwe Depot Open Day, as at the other two Open Days we attended in Tchoda and Sanyati, we were seated at a table at the head of an outdoor shelter together with other CMB officials. The local depot manager was there, along with officials from some of the other depots, and even a representative from the head office in Harare. The visiting officials arrived in their fancy company cars, neatly attired in jacket and tie. About 200 attending farmers (only those within comfortable reach of the depot) were crowded onto benches, the ten or so women among them seated in front.

The officers went through a standard agenda, each taking

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elders in Gokwe, the transition to modern life. For Mapere it apparently registered an excessive drain on the farmer's fund for investment. I will return to the topic of tea in the context of a discussion of work parties in Chapter XII.

a turn to address a particular issue: this year's procedure for obtaining seeds and empty cotton packs from the depot, and the schedule for delivering bales by scotchcart; the correct way to label cotton packs (examples of illegible numbers scrawled on bales were displayed); how cotton is graded and how to understand the grading code that appears on the check the farmer receives after delivery (examples were circulated for inspection); and the statutory dates by which cotton stalks must be cut and burned (a poster warning of fines in the case of violations was held aloft).

A number of practices were singled out for special censure. For example, farmers were admonished not to try to deceive the CMB by putting stones in their bales or wetting the cotton to increase its weight; either practice, the officials said sternly, would render the bale worthless. Nor should they use empty bales for blankets or to construct tuck shops (makeshift food stands at the depots): the country didn't have foreign exchange to waste on importing more jute packs from Bangladesh, and if farmers were caught abusing the packs they had, they would be refused the right to deliver their bales to the depot. Special emphasis was put on explaining why it was foolish to sell cotton on the black market; an official held up illustrations showing how a farmer who promised a bale of cotton to another farmer or shopkeeper for \$80 in cash, was losing as much as fifty per cent of the value he would have received from the CMB. Finally, a special

guest speaker from the Department of Natural Resources reminded them of all the regulations he was responsible for enforcing: no river-bank ploughing; no using sleds for transport; no indiscriminate cutting of trees, and so on.

The scene became more lively midway through the presentation as soft drinks were distributed and the farmers were invited to ask questions. Before long we sensed an adversarial atmosphere brewing, or perhaps it had been there all along, but we had been unable to read it in the stony-faced visage of the farmers seated opposite. A ZAPU councillor spoke up first: Why, he asked, should people such as Mukomboreri, the businessman, or Mr. Phillips from the Mission, be given as much seed or as many empty packs as they liked, while ordinary farmers are given only two packs each? He went on to say that when farmers were desperate for seed at the beginning of this year, and the truck carrying seeds to the depot got stuck crossing the Svisvi river, the CMB officers refused to give the seed to people or even sell it to them; they just threw the bags of seed into the river bed and covered them up with a bulldozer. A CMB official protested that the incident had ever occurred, but our assistants privately averred that the story was true.

Next, a farmer rose to address the officer from the Department of Natural Resources: "If we are not allowed to cut trees, how can I plough a new field, or build a new home?" "Now you are to build houses in lines," came the reply, "so

you must get permission from the VIDCO." An old man spoke up to tell the depot manager that the predictions he had announced for total cotton intake based on the sale of seeds were foolishly high, since many farmers had to plant three or even four times before the seeds germinated. Another followed up by asking whether or not, since germination had been so late this year, the deadline for cutting and burning cotton stalks would be extended. "If you see the extension worker, and he writes to the Minister of Agriculture for permission, it is possible," the officer said, "but if not, I will arrest you."

On several occasions, Mr. Mapere, conspicuously seated in the audience among his own farmers rather than up front with the other officials, intervened on the farmers' behalf. "The CMB supervisor is not good to customers, and so they in turn are rude to him," he said. "Perhaps it is just because he is young that people don't show him respect. But some people have spent three days here waiting for empty bales. Why should they show him respect?" As the meeting drew to a close, another man rose from the audience to strike a conciliatory note. First, he thanked the CMB representative from Harare for choosing to come to Nemangwe, "since he only comes to Gokwe one time each year." He then went on to argue that the tension between farmers and the CMB managers was caused by some people who were not concerned with getting seeds or empty packs,

but just with influencing people. If the manager is boastful, people are going to be harsh with him. But some people are only trying to cheat the depot, asking for ten empty packs and then taking twelve. If they are caught, they say it was just a mistake. Your problems have been solved by these agricultural officers. Now it is up to you to put what they have said into practice. People should be told of these meetings, so that they are properly informed and so that they will not be arrested by the Natural Resources Officer. People of Nemangwe musn't be boastful of their depot; people from Sai, Chireya and so on also belong to the depot. You must not say, "I come from Nemangwe and should therefore be the first to deliver my bales."

At this point, we were still in the dark about the sources of the "tension" that this speaker described and then attempted to diffuse in the didactic fashion typical of all rural public meetings. Three weeks later, after we had completed our Nemangwe interviews in the villages and among farmers standing in line outside the depot gates, we had managed to learn a good deal more:

**Journal Entry: 19 June 1988.**

So now, let me reflect on the interviewing process, and the entire experience in the Nemangwe region. Several misconceptions on our part and on that of others, had to be ironed out straightaway. The CMB depot supervisor, Mr Muzuwi, made every attempt to be gracious upon our arrival, having received an authorising message from on-high, and now probably fearing that we would act as the eyes and ears for management at head office.

He had asked me in his office what the farmers "were telling us out there"--suggesting tall tales and outright lies. I mentioned--delicately--two complaints: one, that the excessive waiting time in line made farmers worry about watering their oxen and grazing them. Second, that he had not hired enough labour to keep things moving. The first point he dismissed as being a function of who we talked to in the queue--i.e. those who had failed

to arrive early--and to the greed of those who dumped bales at the gate over the weekend and hence monopolized deliveries. "I provide them with freely accessible water for their animals--whenever they like, they can come in and water them!" he exclaimed, but one could not help but wonder whether a farmer would be able to leave his cart in the queue, disengage his oxen and gain entry to the trough inside the gate at will. I don't recall seeing anyone do so. Gul Rukh reports that farmers told her some people could, but they had to be chummy with the guard; another said one needed "special permission"; another said that oxen didn't take water from the cement trough provided; and one wealthy man asserted there was "no problem" at all. On my mentioning the labour question, Muzuwi leapt out of his chair and said, "I tell them it is none of their business, finished! They have got nothing to do with it! I can't just hire on people to sit around and do nothing just so that things can move a little faster during peak season!"

Indeed he seems to feel the pressure from senior management to keep labour costs to a minimum, while maximizing throughput. Since he can usually handle the day's quota of scotchcarts by 4:30 PM, even when the pace is slow, he seems indifferent to the demand that the whole process be expedited.

All this bravado was evidently overtaken by events. The following Monday the gates hadn't opened by tea break at 10 AM, and when the situation was repeated the next day--the line of scotchcarts twisting around the perimeter fence nearly 100 deep on each side--Muzuwi was compelled to take on 23 more workers. This was greeted by thunderous cheers and applause at the gates, audible even at the very end of the line where we were interviewing, and the news was telegraphed almost instantly to the tail of the queue. Thereafter, carts and lorries were moved so expeditiously through the gates that we were barely able to complete more than one interview before the line in its entirety moved inside.

Muzuwi described his first 2 weeks on the job as Depot Supervisor as an interminable nightmare--he had no idea where Nemangwe was, and lived in terror of "dissidents" --he even wrote a letter to head office pleading with them to save him from certain death--to which he received no reply. At the 1987 Open Day, held 2 weeks after he took on the



supervisors, he was faced with hundreds of livid farmers, chastising him for not following his predecessor's system, for his youth, his arrogance, and ineptitude. He admits to being utterly devastated--"I couldn't even understand their language," he told me. Now he says he loves it out here. "Its power" he said. "Its having a hundred pairs of eyes looking up at you, waiting for you to make a decision, knowing that for all of their problems you will be able to say, 'I have one solution and you will have to live with it.'"

Muzuwi proceeded to tell me about his own meteoric rise through the CMB bureaucracy--he was only 28 years old--and then went on to describe how others of his generation had risen even faster, to take senior posts in the head office. My view of these men, judging from Muzuwi's own account of them, was not generous, as the remainder of my journal entry shows:

So the CMB emerges as a small tight-knit cadre of "arrivistes," fiercely competitive and, at least in some quarters, engrossed with their own power. It is difficult to avoid analogies like "lord and manor." From the farmer's point of view, the CMB manager serves roughly the same function as his medieval counterpart. He dispenses the seeds and sacks and buys the crop under conditions that he alone dictates.

The personalistic quality of his power is more relevant to those middle farmers who live within scotchcart distance of the depot. They are, of course, the relevant constituency that can make him look bad, even while they hold no power over his incumbency in office. The CMB Open Days are clearly intended for this group, since no one from Simchembu or Chireya could possibly attend (why not hold open days in these areas?). No propaganda is required to keep them soft--they are rather entirely beholden to transporters and/or the local buyers on the parallel market. Muzuwi explained the pains he has taken to "include" the community in CMB policy formation: he invites the farmer's liaison committee to meet with him on the first Thursday of every month and "say anything they

want. But as you can see, where are they?" Indeed, that Thursday they were nowhere to be seen--having probably concluded that there was little to be gained from such a meeting, following the "ask and be answered" pattern of the Open Days, in which the black market is denounced (this year's war front) or farmers are ridiculed for writing their numbers illegibly on their packs. Muzuwi enjoys putting them in their place.

Within a short time, we had taken sides--a process that was only accentuated by our equivocal feelings about being invited in through the gates at the head of the queue in order to speak privately with the manager on several occasions. After such visible demonstrations of our elite status, it became more important than ever for us to introduce ourselves to the farmers outside as advocates who might be able to intervene on their behalf.

My feelings about the CMB were alternately hardened and softened by our experiences at the other two depots--at Tchoda and Sanyati respectively. Without detailing these, suffice it to say that the Tchoda depot was under the responsibility of another very young man with much of Muzuwi's insensitivity but none of his nerve. When he tried to implement a head office order to reduce delivery days for scotchcarts from two days to only one each week--sending home hundreds of farmers who had come in from afar days before and who had spent the previous night shivering in a freak mid-winter rain--the farmers virtually rioted, blocking the gate to prevent the lorries from entering. A police sergeant had to be called up from Nembudziya in order to restore the peace. At Sanyati, in

contrast, the entire cotton delivery operation was run with consummate skill, efficiency and cooperation by a more senior supervisor. But the difference between Tchoda and Sanyati depots was only in part a reflection of the competencies of the management at each one; it also mirrored the different degrees to which the state had managed to extend its control over the respective communities, as will be apparent in the two narratives that follow.

#### **Nembudziya: Land of Immigrants**

Heading north through Jehana to the plateau's edge, the road plummets in two steep switchbacks cut into the red rock face down to the basin that constitutes the greatest portion of Gokwe's landmass. Some 300 metres below, it crosses the Sanyati road just outside Kuwirirana, and continues until the bus reaches the grain depot, primary and secondary school and Catholic mission at Nembudziya. It was Chief Nembudziya who is said to have first encouraged the settlement of immigrants from the Masvingo region in 1963 to settle in his area, although one might imagine that the government gave him little choice in the matter. Many of these families came in search of fertile land--most, but by no means all, of their own accord--and many migrated as entire village units. The chief apportioned land to immigrant family heads in continuous tracts that run at right angles from the main road; these "lines" or villages acquired colloquial names corresponding to

the migrants' place of origin in southeastern Zimbabwe, such as "Maselukwe" for people of Shurugwe. Many of the original settlers were now retiring from active farming, while their own children, who now called Nembudziya home, were busy building prosperous lives. The elders were eager to recall the early years with us:

**Survey Interview, No. 126, 3 July 1988**

Vengesayi is an elderly widow who was among the first people from Gutu to come to Nembudziya; her husband died in 1963, the year they arrived. She had been allocated a small parcel of land by the *sabhuku* (headman) for her own use, since her sons inherited the land originally given to her husband. Two years ago she stopped trying to grow cotton since the labour was too much--especially weeding and fetching water for the sprayer. That was a drought year, and, like most people in the district she did food-for-work: helping to construct a dam for a bucket of maize for each day of labour. She also did *maricho* (casual labour) picking cotton that year. Now she plants maize, sunflower, sorghum and finger millet in rotation--less than a hectare altogether. Her married sons plough for her and give her money to hire people to help with the weeding.

Vengesayi's desires are few, but specific: "Government should give money to old people to buy sugar so that they can drink tea morning, noon and night! That is what I am looking for!" she told us, laughing. "Also it is very cold so government should provide us with blankets."

Others gathered around the store at Bande township where we were talking and helped to fill in the story of the early immigrants from Gutu who settled this village. They told us that the original immigrants left Gutu in 1962 for many reasons: some had too little land, some were working exhausted soil, and some were working as labour tenants on white farms or in the African Purchase Areas (they worked three days a week on the owner's farm in exchange for land to plough for themselves). They first moved to Chidoma (Empress Mine, north of Kwekwe) where they heard the land was still open;

they were allowed by Chief Noah to stay there. Then Chief Noah was arrested and sentenced to three years in jail for having allocated land without authority from the government. Some say they were allowed to harvest that year, others were forced to leave with their crops standing in the field. The government put them in trucks and just dumped them anywhere, "like bales of cotton." They had no idea where they were. At that time, there was a game fence running through Bande. Others in Gutu were afraid to come because they were afraid of wild animals and malaria. Some say they had no oxen, even in Gutu, so they came without anything at all.

These kinds of stories were repeated everywhere we went in Nembudziya, as immigrants told us of the wild animals they encountered, the lack of water and roads, and the hospitality of the chief.

Today, such immigrants dominate economic and political life in the area. They are the schoolmasters, transporters, shopowners, master-farmers, and extension-workers. Many have made small fortunes purchasing the cotton of cash-poor farmers and reselling it at a profit to the CMB. Not all of the farmers--and particularly the indigenous farmers--in Nembudziya have been so quick to be drawn into the nexus of cotton production and debt; those who have held out, however, constantly feel the pressure to give in, as the case of Rakisini M. makes clear:

**Survey Interview, No.79, 24 June 1988**

We found Rakisini M., a locally born man, 40 years old, watching his wife and his widowed sister picking cotton in the field of his younger brother. They had only cultivated about 3 acres of land themselves--and had only started planting cotton last year. "Don't be fast at swallowing or you will choke," he intoned, when we asked him why he was so reluctant to grow more. His wife told us that in

addition to maize, their parents used to grow *mhunga* (finger millet), *mapfunde* (sorghum), and *nzungu* (groundnuts). They had stopped growing these crops because of "birds and money." Birds damaged the sorghum and millet if children were away at school instead of scaring the birds away; and neither crop could provide money which was needed these days for school fees anyway, she explained. (They had seven children at home, five of them attending primary school<sup>8</sup>). There were no jobs in the reserves, so you had to grow cash crops--i.e., cotton and maize. One alternative was to pick cotton on the Copper Queen farms; but there, she complained, you are paid by weight and the farmers fix the scales. It's better to find a new farmer who has just bought land and wants it cleared. Rakisini himself had spent the entire month of November clearing two acres of land on a Copper Queen farm, working six days per week, in exchange for pesticides.

More than anything else, Rakisini's account alerted me to the link between access to inputs and control over time--having worked in Copper Queen all November, he had been unable to start planting until December 3rd, between two weeks and a month later than most others in the ward. Without any tools of his own--plough, scotchcart, sprayers or draught animals--he had to wait and borrow from his father, or else hire someone else to cultivate his land.

#### Tchoda: Across the Fence

Farmers in the northern wards of Nembudziya deliver their cotton to the Tchoda depot on the northern side of the tse-tse

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<sup>8</sup>Although in principal, primary school had been free since Independence, in practice, parents had to contribute a fixed amount (determined by the local school committee) to the "building fund" every year. This amount ranged from Z\$30-60, and was required independently of the number of children a family had in the school. Uniforms added much more considerably to the cost of sending a child to school.

fence. The same depot draws cotton deliveries from Gumunyu and Gandavaroyi to the east, Chireya to the west and to a lesser degree, from Mashame to the north. Tchoda itself is currently in a veterinary buffer zone--lying between the old fence running just north of Kadzidirire (northern Nembudziya), and the new one which is being electrified that runs north of Mashame. Although it appeared that donkeys had always moved freely in the area, we were left unclear as to whether and when the movement of cattle across the tsetse gate was forbidden. This was a matter of obvious importance since the fence has long governed the legitimate use and distribution of draught animals in the northern region. Donkeys were relatively cheap, but a nuisance to train, and a source of social stigma. John Paul and King both found the idea of using donkeys for any purpose other than ridicule and scorn to be hilarious. They clearly identified themselves with the people who had cattle further south.

The Agritex Extension Supervisor in the area, Mr. Nyuchi, told us the history of Tchoda's development in the context of his own biography:

**Journal Entry: 5 July 1988**

Mr. Nyuchi's career began in 1965 when he was posted to Sai as the first Extension Worker in the Charama region. He conducted trials there on various crops including Virginia tobacco, which he later decided against in favour of burley tobacco (he seemed curiously ignorant of the old Shangwe tobacco trade, thinking we were speaking of *mbanje* [marijuana] when we mentioned it). He fled to Kadoma in the late 1970s during the war but periodically returned in secret at the bidding of

the community, who would write him, letting him know when it was safe. He was posted to Tchoda in 1980 when "it was just bush." "There was not even a store"--he claims. The airstrip is still of mysterious origin--perhaps constructed for the Mission mobile clinic. Today Tchoda has the standard line of 10-odd shops. Mr. Nyuchi himself conducts his cotton buying business behind one of them--he has already sold bales to the CMB, having bought his cotton from others.

At the time of our research, the development of Tchoda and its hinterland in Gandavaroyi, Chireya, and Mashame represented the deepest reach of the state-sponsored cotton programme into northwestern Zimbabwe. It was clear that the effects of such development, however, went well beyond the frontier marked by the tse-tse fence, itself a material and symbolic representation of the separation between cattle and buffalo, the domesticated and the wild. North of the fence, in a broad swath of land across the top of the district and extending into the Zambezi Valley itself, a new wave of immigrants was pouring in, hiring locals to clear ten hectare plots in the dense bush, to plough their land and to chase the elephants away. Some of them came from places like Goredema and Makore that had no room left for ambitious cotton farmers with capital to expand; others came from every part of Zimbabwe, including even retired professionals from Harare. All were tempted by the example of the pioneers who had come to Nembudziya twenty-five years before.

As I have already suggested, the rapid expansion of the cotton boom into these northern regions after Independence outstripped the capacity of parastatal institutions such as



the AFC and the CMB to retain control over the very processes they had set in motion. The chaos at the transit depots and the deep involvement of civil servants in the black market were ample illustrations of this. But the transformations brought about in the northwest had a profound impact on the markets in labour and credit in the older cotton regions to the south and south east, as we were to discover when we moved to conduct our last set of interviews in Sanyati.

**The Kadoma-Sanyati Road: Cotton, Casuals, and the New Agrarian Capitalists**

While the first journey we took by bus was through Kwekwe up the Mafungabusi plateau to Gokwe town, many of the bus trips we subsequently took to and from the eastern and northern parts of the district bypassed the Gokwe growth point and the plateau entirely. Instead, we would change buses in Kadoma, proceed northwest through the commercial farms and the mining town of Golden Valley, then turn westward through the sparsely populated resettlement lands of Muzvezve and the densely populated Communal Area of Sanyati and finally to Sanyati town. This turned out to be the easiest route by which to get to Goredema, the Gokwe ward that we had tentatively selected to eventually do our intensive village study. A single Munenzwa bus plied the Kadoma-Goredema route five times a week, leaving Kadoma from one of the Rimuka township bus stations sometime between 1:00 and 3:00 PM and usually arriving in Goredema at around sunset. It returned

the next morning, leaving just before dawn and depositing passengers in Kadoma at about 10:30 AM. The distance the bus would actually penetrate westward into Goredema ward depended on the season, since if the streams cascading off the escarpment were in flood at the road crossings, the bus was sometimes unable to ford them.

In time we came to know intimately the drivers, conductors and passengers on this bus. We knew well the sound of its engine in the strange silence and cool light of the breaking dawn, since we would have to arise at 4 AM and walk through the darkness for forty minutes to the road in order to catch it in time for the return trip from the village to town. But our first couple of journeys outward from Kadoma to Goredema, like all journeys to an unknown but fantasized destination, were intensely observed and felt affairs of seemingly limitless duration. Let me then return to our point of departure at Kadoma and trace out this second route and its significant places at the elongated pace appropriate to my memory of those early adventures.

I have already described the place from which one embarks on the Sanyati road--the bus station at Kadoma's Rimuka township--but I have said nothing of what we learned of its story. The ancient workers' accommodations in the township are known as "chimney" and "elephant back" houses--brick hovels roofed with a sheet of curved asbestos and having a single small window cut into the back. They still stand in the

neighbourhood separating the two long-distance bus stations, each of them crowded with several families, the dirt streets between them running with sewage.<sup>9</sup> Kadoma was founded along the rail siding in 1906. In the early decades of the century, the town flourished as the epicentre of over 150 gold mines; it expanded again during and after the Second World War as a locus of cotton spinning and textile manufacture that drew on the output of the surrounding white-owned farms.

Travelling northwest of the town along the road to Golden Valley and Chakari, the economic pillars of mining and cotton on which the regional economy stands are well in evidence, as are the intimate links between the state, the commercial cotton farmers and the multinational agrochemical industry that have shaped the development of the region over time. Just west of town, the bus passes by the carefully laid out and labelled fields of the Cotton Research Institute, an institution established in 1925 by the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation (and taken over in 1947 by the government) to develop more productive seed strains tailored to local growing conditions, and to respond more effectively to changing international markets. Nearby is the Cotton Training Centre (CTC), born out of efforts begun in 1972 by the Commercial Cotton Grower's Association (CCGA) to train supervisors and pest scouts for white farmers. Just before Independence, its

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<sup>9</sup>674 registered families were reported to be using a single communal toilet facility in 1980. See the Harare Herald, 14 January 1980.

mandate was expanded to include the training of small-scale cotton growers (this meant, of course, "Africans"). Selected farmers, extension workers, university students, and even foreign agricultural officers go through an intensive residential training course in crop, pest and conservation management. The CTC was built with money from the agrochemical industry (Windmill, Agricura, and Shell Chemical) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and continues to draw on operating grants from USAID, the European Economic Community (EEC), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).<sup>10</sup> The Commercial Cotton Growers Association apparently had everything to gain from embracing the small farmers in this way. It was certainly good politics, suggesting to the new government that white farmers were now willing to lend a hand and share expertise with their poorer brethren in the impoverished Communal Areas; at the same time, the CCGA may have already recognized the strength that thousands of black cotton farmers would add to their own efforts to lobby for higher crop and lower input prices. Less obviously, the training programme must have addressed the old fears of some white farmers that the cotton fields of untutored African growers would provide a haven for

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<sup>10</sup>See the Harare Herald, "Cotton in Zimbabwe" (Special Supplement), 17 June 1986; see also Agriserve (1987:81). 12,000 commercial farm employees were trained by the CTC between 1972 and 1987. By that time, over 17,000 Communal Area farmers had already been trained as well (ibid.:2).

pests that would endanger the "national" industry. But if any single interest sought to gain from the expansion of the cotton training programme, it was the multinational-owned fertilizer and pesticide companies that sought to develop the untapped potential demand for their products among hundreds of thousands of African cultivators in places like Gokwe.<sup>11</sup>

After travelling 17 km. through commercial farmland, the hoists and pulleys of the gold mines around Golden Valley and the crowded townships housing their workers come into view. With each journey through this area I wondered more intensely about the relations between those commercial farms, the old gold mines dotting the countryside and the new resettlement areas lying west and north of Chegutu and Kadoma. The familiar "sector by sector" accounts of the Zimbabwean economy we had read had been absolutely silent about any such interconnections, indeed seemed incapable of recognizing them at all. Even within descriptions of the "agricultural sector," the commercial farms (both large and small-scale) were separated from one another, and these in turn from the Communal and Resettlement Areas. It was as if labour and commodities, knowledge and power, had never breached these tenurial fences.

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<sup>11</sup>As the CCGA chief executive suggested at the time: "It is obviously in the interests of manufacturers of pesticides, fertilizers and other products for the agricultural industry to expand their markets. We will be introducing the use of these products to farmers, who otherwise would never know about their applications" (Harare Herald, 17 January 1980).

My suspicions aroused, I probed about for invisible bonds that I was certain must be present. I found them after encountering some of the fabled few blacks who had managed to acquire large-scale commercial farms since Independence. The popular perception in Harare was that it was primarily ministers and senior civil servants who had clandestinely made such investments.<sup>12</sup> But we discovered that Gokwe's cotton boom had generated its own regionally based class of aggressive entrepreneurs who were crossing residual historical boundaries in land tenure and labour markets to constitute a nascent class of large-scale black agrarian capitalists.

Two such cases appear in my notes. In mid-September, we went to the Chegutu cotton marketing board depot in search of a lorry-driver to carry thatching grass from a local farm to our village in Goredema so that we could finish building our hut (the little available local grass had already been cut). We met a man who had just finished running a load of cotton bales down from Gokwe in his lorry:

**Journal Entry: 16 September 1988**

Zinyimo and his older brother own a family store next to Mukomboreri's at Kuwirirana [see below] and had evidently used the profits from that source to purchase the lorry for \$15,000 in 1981. Only two

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<sup>12</sup>Among limitations on other forms of property, ownership of over 50 hectares of land was expressly forbidden under the leadership code imposed by Mugabe on higher echelon civil servants and party members in 1984. Many were rumoured to have registered properties in the names of wives, sons or other relatives. In fact, which ministers owned which farms and which bus companies was a matter of common (if unverifiable) knowledge even among peasants in Gokwe.

years later, he bought a large-scale commercial farm outside Kadoma. During the past season he had planted, or so he claimed, 140 hectares of cotton and reaped 1789 bales [grossing roughly Z\$250,000]. He hired pickers on a daily basis from Muzveze Resettlement Area and Falcon Mines (they were the wives and children of mineworkers), paying them 6 cents per kg. of cotton picked, plus lunch. He added that there was no problem getting labourers for his farm and that they had already finished picking cotton on the farm in July. Zinyimo himself had started the season transporting bales from Makore and Tsungai (Copper Queen Resettlement Area). Now, he was transporting 62 bales each day from Monday to Friday from the Kaobo area of Chireya at Z\$23 per bale.

I calculated that at these (albeit extraordinarily high) rates, cotton transport alone was yielding Zinyimo a gross income of well over Z\$5000 a week--an amount equal to the annual earnings from cotton of only the top 10 percent of the Communal Area farmers we interviewed in our formal district survey. The second such farm-owner/cotton transporter we met in the area around Chegutu agreed to carry our thatching grass from a local farm out to Goredema since he was on his way out to central Gokwe to pick up bales from the Nemangwe depot, and would be taking the road through Goredema to Nemangwe in any case. He had a slightly different history:

**Journal Entry: 21 September 1988**

Arrived in Goredema from Harare via Chegutu and Bosbury farm with Mr. E. Chuma, son of a Musengezi Purchase Area Farmer who now owns a ranch in Chemagora (the small-scale commercial area in the southwestern portion of Gokwe District) and a Chegutu farm where he specializes in growing burley tobacco. He keeps roughly 15 permanent employees on the farms, but depends on casual workers--100-200 annually--for the bulk of the labour. "My policy is: Hire and sack! Hire and sack!", he told us candidly and with a certain relish, adding that,

"I only pay people for what they do, and only after they do the job in the way I like." He collects labourers from the employment offices in Kadoma or Harare or wherever--then sacks them at will.

Chuma's "policy" was a common means of avoiding the higher labour costs entailed by post-Independence minimum wage legislation, applicable only to full-time farm employees. He also runs 210 head of cattle on his farm, with an annual off-take of about 30 head, mostly to feed his workers, or so he claimed. Having established himself as a capitalist farmer, Chuma had recently sought to draw on opportunities for profit that were becoming available as a result of Gokwe's cotton boom. He purchased his lorry in 1984, but was only now using it to transport cotton between the CMB transit depots in Gokwe and the ginnery depots at Kadoma and Chegutu, earning Z\$55 per tonne.<sup>13</sup> He was carrying 70 bales (14 tonnes) on each trip from Nemangwe to Chegutu earning Z\$770 gross, and, as a bonus, the right to freely enter the Chegutu depot with the bales of individual farmers at any time. With the critical shortage of transporters willing to brave Gokwe's terrible roads, and in the virtual panic to get the bales out of the overloaded transit depots before the rains, Chuma was making deliveries seven times per week.

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<sup>13</sup>The rate of intake into the transit depots depends upon the rate at which they may be transhipped out; during bumper harvest years, this has proved to be a serious bottleneck. Major transport firms compete for the transshipment contract every year, but sometimes either the contractor or the CMB itself must sub-contract additional, privately owned lorries, such as Chuma's to move the cotton out of the district.



The stories of these two men spoke volumes about the changes that were occurring in the regional agrarian economy. I knew, for example, that ever since the Second World War the larger mine owners had been interested in recruiting a more highly skilled, permanent labour force that would settle permanently on the mines with their families (see Bradbury and Worby 1985). Now, the presence of women and children on the mines was apparently supporting what is often referred to as the "casualization" of the labour force on the commercial farms. The flexible use of casual labour, however, is hardly an innovation in Zimbabwean agriculture. Later, we were to hear from elders in our village about their three-day journeys on foot to these same farms where they performed seasonal work as far back as the 1930s and 1940s. Now it was their cotton, rather than their labour, that proved to be of interest (and of considerable profit) to the lorry-driving large-scale agrarian capitalists of Kadoma and Chegutu. Other sources of casual labour had become available to their farms that were closer at hand.

### **Sanyati: Modernity in Reserve**

At Golden Valley the bus turns off onto the single-lane tar road winding its way through the Muzveze resettlement area. Some 60 km down the road at the border of the Sanyati Communal Land, the natural vegetation vanishes and the human landscape changes abruptly. The altitude has decreased steadily, if imperceptibly, and the sun burns down

relentlessly on the blindingly white sandy lots and the fields that lie behind them. The long crest of the Mafungabusi plateau appears vaguely on the western horizon.

Dozens of fenced off homesteads front the road, in the neat alignment that indicates the heavy hand of colonial resettlement and centralization policies in this area. In Sanyati, the term *marain* (or *rain*, sing., from the English "line") used to denote villages is no euphemism. Massive baobab trees often crowd the huts, which are usually only two or three to the lot, a sign that they are occupied by monogamous families or those headed by women, and that resident children are relatively few.

At the Baptist mission<sup>14</sup> with its A-level school and hospital, the road turns directly towards the plateau and heads for the Munyati river, Gokwe District's eastern border. Seven kilometres before the old District Administrator's Camp at the river, and just where the road surface changes from tar to dust and gravel, the bus makes a brief detour 4 km. south to Sanyati town or "growth point" and the CMB ginnery.

Sanyati boasts its own growth point, one that is in fact older than Gokwe, having been established with the TILCOR estate in mid-1970s.<sup>15</sup> In the decade before Independence,

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<sup>14</sup>The mission was established in 1963.

<sup>15</sup>TILCOR (renamed ARDA in 1982 and ADA in 1989) was a parastatal created by the Smith regime in order to promote development in what were then known as Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). Under the TILCOR model, a central irrigated estate devoted to the production of cash crops was established with

Sanyati was clearly envisioned as the future nucleus of development in the region, serving as one of the pilots for the "growth point" strategy of the Rhodesian government. That strategy aimed to maximize benefits thought to emanate from optimal concentrations of persons and economic activities in central places such as Sanyati. By integrating regional cash crop production with agro-processing, and by providing training and infrastructure to support a core of master farmers on irrigation schemes, the growth point strategy was intended to divert the surplus labour flowing to the towns back into the rural zones from which they originated (Tapela 1984; Wekwete 1988). The town population has grown rapidly since 1977 with the number of residents recently estimated at between 3000 and 5000, swelling to between 7000 and 8000 with the influx of seasonal workers, traders and transporters during the cotton harvest (Tapela 1984:75).

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the hope that it would provide both rural employment and associated "spin-offs". On some, including Sanyati's Gowe scheme, outgrowers were established on the periphery of the estate, utilizing the latter's irrigation and machinery, and marketing their produce through TILCOR as well. The estate now has about 1200ha. under irrigated cultivation, growing cotton, groundnuts and sugar beans in summer, and wheat and green maize in winter. It employs roughly 250 permanent staff and 1500 seasonal workers annually; the 36 outgrowers account for a further 50ha. The Sanyati cotton depot was opened in 1976, and upgraded to a ginnery in 1984 (the first in a Communal Area); the ginning capacity was doubled to 50,000 tonnes annually in 1989 (Agricura and Ronco 1986, Appendix 10; see also Whitsun Foundation 1977 and Tapela 1984). The growth point at Sanyati was first established in 1977, and 3864 persons were recorded in the 1982 census.

Multiple Strategies, Flexible Families:  
Labour, Food, and Household Form

Although the growth point at Sanyati has given rise to a variety of small-scale manufacturing, service and distribution enterprises and continues to serve as a major conduit through which crops and people flow to and from remote parts of Gokwe, Sanyati's orientation is undeniably still toward the major towns of the highlands to the southeast. Land parcels are small (averaging only some 5 acres, or 2 hectares, per household), usually contiguous with the homestead, and kept under continuous cultivation. Although soil fertility is enhanced by rotating crops (generally cotton and maize) and adding inorganic fertilizers, potential yields have reached a ceiling. As a result, one spouse (usually the male) seeks full-time employment either locally or in town, while the other manages a small plot of land in the crowded "reserve."<sup>16</sup> In this respect, the demographic and residential history of many Sanyati households illustrates the "split" family prototype that features heavily in "labour reserve" models of the rural economy (see e.g., Wolpe 1972; Bush and Cliffe 1984). Such models posit that women's labour in underdeveloped and resource-poor reserves like Sanyati

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<sup>16</sup>On maps showing variation in population density in Zimbabwe, the Sanyati Communal Land always appears among the most darkly shaded, indicating "great pressure" on the natural resource base (see e.g., Whitsun Foundation 1978:46).

historically served to subsidize the cost of reproducing wage-labour for employers in industrializing centres such as Kadoma and Kwekwe.

This model might have found empirical referents in Sanyati in the two decades before Independence. Since then, however, the picture has become considerably more complex. Take, for example, the case of Sophie M.:

**Survey Interview No.188, 25 July 1988**

Sophie M., a 36 year old woman with eight children (all but the youngest two are in primary school), lives in Kasirisiri, a relatively poor ward bordering the Chenjiri Small-Scale Commercial Area. She was born in Masvingo but came to live in Sanyati Communal Area after marriage since it was her husband's rural home (he had immigrated there from Mhondoro in 1962). Her husband was working as a railway mechanic for the ZISCO steel company in Kwekwe at the time, a job he held from 1971 until 1974. They have been planting cotton every year since then--between two and four acres per year--and an equal area of maize. They first learned about growing cotton from the local extension worker. In 1983, her husband went on a 3-day course to the Cotton Training Centre, and now she herself is learning better crop management practices from the women farmer's group she belongs to (see below).

They sold only 3 bales of cotton to the CMB this year, earning Z\$355. But in each of the last two seasons, she has sold additional cotton to shops and neighbours on the black market (she couldn't remember how much) in order to buy food. This year (1988) she was paid 45 cents per kg. for these *zvitsotsi* ("little stolen things," i.e., little bags of cotton sold on the side), ten cents more than the year before. At 20 bags, the maize harvest was good enough this year so that they will be able to sell five bags to their neighbours (at Z\$25 per bag); but in each of the previous two years the maize crop was a complete write-off, and they had to buy additional maize from the commercial farmers in Chenjiri (at the same price), or from a trader who drove through selling grain

from a lorry. In the drought year of 1986, they had to sell their three head of cattle (for an average of Z\$250 each) in order to obtain food. Since then, they have had to hire draught animals for ploughing at \$24 per acre, or exchange their labour for the use of a neighbour's animals. In the coming year, they have agreed to loan 3 acres of their own land to another farmer who will plough for them in return.

Sophie earns additional income by weeding or picking cotton with her children on the Chenjiri farms just across the river ("within shouting distance") from her home. If the river is in flood, she might even spend a week there, being given food and accommodation, and usually earning Z\$2-3 per day (20 cents a line for weeding; 6 cents per kg. for picking).

Three years ago she joined a 16-member women's group. Each member grows one acre of cotton and two acres of sunflower; part of the profits are redistributed as "prizes" to the best growers in the group at the end of each season. When asked what her main complaints were about growing cotton, Sophie replied that the pesticides cost too much and that cotton required too much work; farmers like herself, she thought, should be given loans to hire labour.

Sophie's case exemplifies the extraordinary range and complexity of exchange relations that Sanyati households are likely to be engaged in at any one point in time. Their strong links to the formal wage economy are obvious: over eighty percent of the Sanyati households in our survey had a history of wage-employment in the family, although the dominant sources of employment had shifted over the last ten years from the mines, towns and farms in the former European highlands to local jobs with the CMB ginnery, the ARDA agricultural estates, and the District Council. With limited land, it was clear that households in Sanyati were unable to

accumulate capital through cultivation alone. But in most other respects, the stories we were told by informants such as Sophie M. seemed to play havoc with the conventional wisdom about the substantive activities and wider economic functions of a rural labour reserve.

In Sophie's home, both food consumed within the household and labour deployed in its agricultural activities are partially commoditized. On the agricultural side, her family seems to be doing something very different than producing "subsistence" crops, which is for them, in any case, an unreliable enterprise. They are more than willing to cover maize uncertainties by continuing to invest in cotton--a crop that can be easily exchanged for cash which could then be used to purchase locally available grain. In the diversified wage-labour economy that embraces both the Communal and Small-Scale Commercial Areas, as well as the parastatal ARDA estates, farmers like Sophie M. are able to rely on the availability of casual employment opportunities to earn cash and cover food shortages; and they can also count on the availability of labour to hire on their own land for specific tasks such as ploughing. In fact, Sophie--who herself counts as a semi-proletarianized peasant by virtually any definition--can even express a demand for capital with which to hire labour, just like any "capitalist" farmer. The difference, of course, is that she is desperately short of basic means of production--cattle, in this case--so that she is unable to fully utilize

the little land she has, and is even at the point of giving away rights of usufruct in these fallow lands in exchange for someone to plough that which remains.

A wealthy farmer we spoke to on the other side of Sanyati near the rest camp by the Munyati river, shed further light on the factors that play into particular production strategies and the operation of complex markets in land, food grains, cotton and labour in Sanyati:

**Survey Interview, No.160, 19 July 1988**

We interviewed Charity C. in the cool interior of her brick-under-asbestos house, the largest of three such structures on her plot. A 20 metre T.V. antenna extended above the trees from the roof. She is 43 years old, and has seven children, all living at home. Until 1976, she and her husband lived with her husband's father on a small-scale commercial farm in Copper Queen just across the river. In 1978, two years after her husband began working as a clerk at the Sanyati CMB depot, they moved back to the Communal Land where her husband's family retained some land. (Although his father's plot had been reallocated by then, his sons had maintained rights of residence in Sanyati.)

In addition to the 12 acres (5 hectares) of land they already owned, they leased an additional 2 acres from a neighbour this year for \$40 per acre--an arrangement they expect to continue (although it is technically illegal in the Communal Areas). They planted thirteen acres of cotton to only one of maize, harvesting 45 bales of cotton this year. "We only plant enough for roasting green maize," she explained, "because cotton is a drought resistant crop and you will always get something, whereas with maize, in a drought year, you will get nothing. Others plough maize because they have more land. But if we plough some cotton and some maize we get little cotton and no maize." They buy their maize each July from neighbours--about 20 bags--just after people have shelled it and before they decide to sell it to the GMB.

With eighteen head of cattle and eight goats, they



had, until recently, hired a Tonga child to help with the herding. "The Tonga didn't know how to send children to school, but now they do, so you can't find them anymore," she told us. The children used to come from Simchembu to do *maricho* (casual work) at ARDA--so they would just take one until he would leave, whereupon they would find another. They paid these herdboys--who were very young, only six or seven years old--about Z\$12 per month. They paid casual workers to perform other tasks as well. This year they hired an ARDA tractor to plough 12 acres for Z\$180--a better deal than the year before when they paid Z\$30 an acre to a man with a tractor who "just came around" looking for work. Labour for weeding, picking and cutting down cotton stalks, however, is harder to find. They paid local men and women 30 cents for weeding a short row (70 metres) and 50 cents for a long one (100 metres)--the same rates as the previous year. But the wage-rate for picking cotton kept rising in the course of the season, "because others were paying more. When casual workers hear that the people who grow cotton are earning more, they ask for more themselves." The rate was five cents per kg. until 18 April; then it rose to six cents, and finally, in early July, to seven cents--by this time the bolls in the field were fewer, so the workers would pick less in a given period of time, and demanded a higher piece rate in compensation.

Charity's story brought out with graphic clarity the extent to which the entire labour market of the region was being restructured now that cotton cultivation had spread as far north as the Zambezi valley. In a bumper harvest year like 1988, workers were so scarce that they were able to drive up the price of their labour twice over the course of the season. In a somewhat longer time-frame, the expansion of cotton and education had stanchd the flow of cheap child labour from the northwestern frontier as well, recapitulating a process that had already occurred in the recent past in south-central Gokwe. At the same time, we took note that even an agrarian

capitalist like Charity had deigned to pick cotton for a week on the irrigated Gowe scheme during the 1986-87 drought. This underscored for us not only the flexibility with which labour moved between different agricultural sectors that might have different abilities to survive climatic and economic change, but also the fluidity with which individuals circulated through economic positions over time.

#### Card Games: Profits, Credit and the AFC

Charity's household was probably near the apex of prosperity achieved by cotton growers in Sanyati--although, since she professed neither to know her husband's CMB salary, nor the sum of their earnings from cotton, it would be difficult to estimate either their net income or the extent to which his earnings might have subsidised their agricultural investments. Indeed, many people in Harare asked us if they thought growing cotton was "profitable" for peasants in a place like Sanyati, with such limited land available (and theoretically, no land market at all through which people might be able to invest in production on a larger scale). For households like Charity's that drew on a constant, year-round source of income in order to finance the cash purchase of crop inputs and labour, the answer is probably "yes." For poorer farmers like Sophie M. and her husband, who no longer have a regular wage income, the question is more difficult to answer in the conventional terms of capitalist accounting.

Without the liquidity to put cash up front for inputs at

the start of the cotton season, such farmers depend upon a small-farmer credit programme administered since 1980 through the parastatal AFC.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Taputswa, the local AFC loan officer whom we met in Nemangwe, expressed his support for the programme, and described the trajectory the state had in mind for credit provision in the future:

**Journal Entry: 29 May 1988**

Small farmers are usually given packages of inputs which they are free to exchange or sell to one another. Taputswa seems to think this distributes the inputs more efficiently. According to him, the solution the government has in view for the loan repayment evasion problem, is to gradually collectivize farming on a VIDCO basis, "like ARDA estates," he said, while we reflected wryly on what we'd observed at Sanyati-ARDA. The idea is to organize the division of labour at the VIDCO level, and have the VIDCO executive contract loans for specified crops and acreages. This would obviously take time to introduce he admitted, "but that is the direction we are aiming for."

While the state may have envisioned an increasingly rationalized and regimented relationship with its peasant clients, those clients themselves did not have so clear an understanding of the obligations into which they were being drawn. In many parts of Gokwe proper, farmers seemed uncertain as to whether the AFC was the same as, or distinct from, the agrochemical companies that delivered their

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<sup>17</sup>The loans themselves are of 3 types: short-term loans were limited to \$348 per farmer (in 1987-88) and comprise seed, fertilizer, and pesticides: a special additional amount can be allocated for a ULV or backpack sprayer. Medium-term loans of 3-5 years are given for cattle, or a scotchcart--even a tractor. Long-term loans--usually 10-30 years and reserved for large-scale farmers, are for lorries, irrigation equipment, etc.

pesticide orders. We were able to grasp their confusion very well, since we were thoroughly confused ourselves--even after talking to representatives of the AFC and the agrochemical companies involved in the credit scheme.

The source of the confusion seemed to lie in the disjunction between the abstract accounting of value and the exchange of visible commodities that characterized the credit relationship. Although the loan accounting is done in terms of a money amount (in an office computer in Harare), the loan is distributed to farmers in the form of material goods--a "packet" of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and, if they use a ULV sprayer, molasses to make the pesticides adhere to the leaves of the plants. But the volume and value of these tangible things is registered quantitatively in yet another register: the farmers take pre-assembled input packages in proportion to the number of 1/2 hectare units of land they say they will put under cotton. The result of these ontological transformations that the loan goes through is that when one asks farmers, as we did, "how much of a loan did you take from the AFC?" they will respond by saying, for example, "One hectare only." Since few knew how to measure their fields in hectares anyway, this expression had a purely formal function. Literate and numerate farmers would often know the monetary equivalent of a "one hectare loan," but most others did not.

The contents of these packets are apparently designed on research stations in other districts, and although there is

some regional variation (because some effort is made to match fertilizers with the predominant soil type), within any particular region they are identical. This means that in areas such as Goredema with rich clay soils, farmers subscribing to the loan program are obligated to take deliveries of fertilizer that they have no intention of using. Not surprisingly, they sought to sell it in areas where fertilizer was in demand.

The local Agritex extension worker verifies that the farmer is capable of carrying out the "plan" to cultivate a given area of cotton. Farmers are then theoretically able to choose from among the four major suppliers (Shell, Agricura, ZFC, and Windmill) when representatives of these companies arrive at AFC loan meetings early in the dry season to give sales pitches to the farmers. But historically, different companies have pioneered sales territories in Sanyati and Gokwe, developing loyalties over time by fostering personal relations between a locally-based salesman and his clients.

The loan is repaid through a stoporder attached to the card number of the registered grower. The number sewn onto the grower's bales matches that on his or her card; thus when a number of bales are delivered under a single number to the depot and weighed, their total value is decreased by the amount of the outstanding debt. Further confusion arises because accounts between the AFC and the companies are settled independently of accounts between the AFC and the farmers. As

a result the companies never suffer the consequences of bad debts and are keen to push as much of their product as they can. The AFC, in contrast, covers its risk by charging just under 14 percent annual interest. In Sanyati, people tended to have a clear understanding that the AFC is a profit-seeking enterprise and that it represents the government; they are equally aware that the cost of inputs purchased with these loans has been rising faster than the buying price offered by the CMB for cotton, and that they are being squeezed:

**Survey Interview No. 170: 20 July 1988**

Ruza K., 56 years old with two wives and a total of sixteen children, is originally from Njelele, but in 1942 his mother was possessed by the *mhondoro* (ancestral spirit) of chief Neuso, and his parents were told to move here to Sanyati. Ruza himself settled in 1963 in Ganyungu, but came to join his mother after his father died in 1979. From the time he began growing cotton in Ganyungu in 1965, he took credit from the Highson company. He used to plant up to 12 acres (5 hectares) then, and harvested as much as 45 bales a year; but now his children are grown so labour is short, and pesticides are too expensive.

After coming to Sanyati, he took loans from the AFC but he was cut off this year because he couldn't pay back the two hectare loan he received last year ("the cotton was all burnt by drought"). His wife and his eldest son, however, obtained loans for one hectare (Z\$332.04) each. Following the drought in 1982, 1983 and last year (1987), the AFC apparently agreed to let them pay back only half the loan, but still, Ruza is outraged: "The AFC must understand that if I get 10 bales, they must leave me half-half (i.e., with five) so that I have something left for school fees and for food. Instead they take everything. Who is to blame if we can't plough after a drought year if they refuse to give us another loan? It can encourage someone to grow maize only, at Z\$17 a sack--nothing!" Then his son chided, "Our father had better work doing *maricho* (casual labour) for my brother and I, because if he

dies, his debt will fall on us!"

The solution is to avoid repayment by changing identities--a relatively easy matter when the fictive grower is but a cipher in some monstrous computer at AFC headquarters in Harare. This is the strategy followed by the family of Sophie M., whose case I discussed above:

**Survey Interview No. 188, 25 July 1988**

Until 1982, the family sold their cotton to the CMB on her father-in-law's grower's card. That year, her husband got his own card, and in 1987 she got hers. Each time the household got a new card, they could retire the debt attached to the old one. This year they sent two bales through the card belonging to Sophie's mother-in-law in order to avoid paying back the Z\$387 loan they had taken out from the AFC for a one-hectare packet of pesticides and fertilizers.

The profitability of growing cotton for farmers like Sophie is probably only maintained by playing a game of loan evasion with the state (represented by the Agricultural Finance Corporation), since if they ever paid up the accumulated loans, their net income would likely be negative. But from the farmer's point of view, the evasion of loan repayment by diverting cotton sales through cards unburdened by debt seemed to be a perfectly tenable strategy--that is, as long as new family members could obtain cards (we heard of one farmer effectively registering her twelve-year old daughter by falsifying her age). To send cotton through more distant relatives or friends required a high degree of trust, since the check is issued in the name of the cardholder who must then share the proceeds with others who have used the card to

send bales. How did people understand or justify their abrogation of the loan contract with "Finance" (as they called the AFC)? From the farmers' perspective, it is not a question of moral responsibility at all: the "rules" of exchange that govern their economic relations with the state are seen to be subject to political manoeuvres that may emanate from either partner in the relationship.

#### Working for ARDA: Up Against the Estate

Most of Sanyati's residents, both rich and poor, have in common a distinctively cosmopolitan outlook, and distinguish themselves readily from the people of Gokwe across the Munyati river. These perceived differences emanate not only from the local dominance of immigrants (the core of whom were transferred from the Rhodesdale Estates between 1951 and 1955--see below, Chapter VIII), but also from the particularity of their domestic forms (with fewer polygamous marriages, and more absent spouses), their long engagement with the wage economy, and their intensive exposure to the ideologies and ways of ordering daily life that the local Baptist missionaries introduced from the early 1960s onward. Women in Sanyati have worked in town hawking vegetables or tending shops, and they often have had at least some primary schooling. They tend to have a keen grasp not only of the nuances of their relationship with state institutions such as the AFC, but also of the market prices for their purchases, their products and their labour. The formation of non-kinship



based neighbourhood associations, such as the group of female farmers to which Sophie belongs, is common in Sanyati. So is participation in higher-level civic activities aimed at economic improvement. In fact, so keen were Sanyati residents to improve their access to markets after Independence, that they voted in 1981 to contribute one dollar for every cotton bale they delivered that year to pay for the construction of a wide tar road through the Communal Area to the Sanyati CMB depot.<sup>18</sup>

This degree of civic participation, or at least coordination, was manifest in other ways--particularly in the relationship between the community of Communal Area farmers and the ARDA estate. We became aware of this as we interviewed farmers in the villages and talked to tractor and lorry drivers lined up on the road shoulder outside the gates of the CMB depot on the outskirts of the growth point. We would sometimes shave several kilometres off our journey to the CMB from the D.A.'s rest camp where we stayed by crossing on foot through the vast fields sown with beans, wheat and cotton on the ARDA estate. Each day, we watched in amazement as the cotton bolls grew heavier and heavier until they began to drag the branches of the plants into the ground. Why wasn't the cotton being picked? Eventually we learned that there was an acute shortage of casual labour on the estate,

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<sup>18</sup>Meanwhile, the road between Golden Valley and the southern border of Sanyati remains for the most part a dangerous single-lane tar strip.

and that this was due to a boycott by the Communal Area residents who would ordinarily be earning extra money by picking there. Again and again we had been told of the resentment people felt toward the estate's managers, who seemed to come and go on an annual basis. The Regional Agritex Extension Officer (RAEO) based at Sanyati informed us that the labour crisis was so serious that the army had been called out to fill the gap; but even this drastic use of conscript labour had proved as costly as it was ineffectual:

**Journal Entry: 4 July 1988**

The army was dispatched some weeks ago to rescue ARDA's crop--out of 400 soldiers, only 200 lasted more than one and a half to two weeks. The rest chose to go home. Apparently armed labour is expensive since according to the RAEO, "they must be fed breakfast, lunch and supper every day, and they must be fed what they want, or you will be in trouble." He confirmed the story of the Sanyati community boycott of ARDA: "they got off the ARDA truck and ran straight for the Gowe Irrigation Scheme." The local chairman of the NFAZ (National Farmer's Association of Zimbabwe--which represented the Communal Area farmers) told him that it was a question of poor public relations on ARDA's part. The local CMB manager of course had told us that the children of ARDA workers had been locked up for two days for eating groundnuts that dropped off the back of a company lorry--also that ARDA was paying less than the prevailing piece rate in the surrounding Communal Area. They finally raised the rate, but only after also requiring that the workers grade the cotton into 3 separate bags as they picked, reducing the picking rate to under 10 kg. per day. The RAEO also confirmed that a trailer had been sent all the way to Binga to recruit pickers, but that the trailer had broken down and the truck came back with only 20-30 workers.

This was not the first time that ARDA had experienced such problems; each year, it seemed, the new managers mounted

similar efforts to police the casual labour force in this way. They did so in apparent ignorance or denial of the existence of a wider market with which the estate was in fact competing for agricultural labour.

The attempt to discipline labour was not confined to the estate lands, but extended to ARDA's fifty tenants in the attached Gowe Irrigation Scheme as well. These outgrowers, who leased four hectare plots from ARDA, were denied any control over their cropping practices at all, with irrigation and tractor services being supplied by the estate according to a predetermined schedule; the cost of these services was then attached as a stoporder on their cotton deliveries to the CMB, along with the cost of loans taken for fertilizer and pesticides. Since 1986, the tenants have been charged rent for the land as well, a source of deep grievances among the tenants. One tenant, Masauke M., explained the details of the tenancy contract in a tirade of complaints, each of them ending with the exclamation, "Niro!" It was a word I did not at first comprehend:

**Survey Interview, No. 161, 19 July 1988**

Things started to go bad in 1985/86, Masauke told us, when the extension workers on the scheme told them to wait too long before harvesting their irrigated winter wheat. The crop was damaged by early rains and lost most of its value. His first delivery of cotton in 1986/87 was worth \$3097.60 but all of it was deducted to pay off the stoporder to the AFC. Then he sent 5 more bales to the CMB, but received no check at all: they had simply deducted the proceeds from his outstanding debt. Then he sent two more bales; again, he received nothing. Finally, he sent 33 bags of maize to the

Grain Marketing Board (GMB), but the AFC again took all the proceeds, so he began to sell his remaining maize for 50 cents per teacup to other farmers. He still has Z\$655.26 in debt remaining from that year, and told us that he suspects that ARDA is keeping some of the inputs that have been charged to his stoporder. As we spoke, a woman walked up with a receipt for his latest cotton delivery. The account balance corroborated Masauke's story in the cold language of numbers. The total value of his cotton delivery of 10 bales, less rental on the cotton packs (Z\$55), was Z\$1585.63. The line after "AFC stoporder" read "\$1553.63" plus an additional \$30 for transport and a \$2 stoporder fee. The bottom line read: "Balance paid: Nil."

Some tenants, like Judy C., challenged these restrictions. When ARDA management ordered her to destroy the cotton plants growing in a portion of the field that her family had, in defiance of regulations, ploughed with their own oxen, she said, "you can come and destroy the plants yourself" (Survey Interview No.162, 19 July 1988). They challenge the estate in other, less overt ways as well--for example, by hiring casual labour at better rates of pay or with better conditions of work.

#### **Copper Queen, Ganyungu, and Makore: Cotton Pioneers and Immigrant Entrepreneurs**

The dust and gravel road leading east from Sanyati passes north of the Gowe cotton-scheme farmers, then bisects the old line of villages where the original inhabitants of Sanyati--the subjects of chief Neuso--still live. A couple of shops appear at Renji Township on the north side and then the road crosses the fifty-or-so metre bridge spanning the Sanyati river. Even at the height of the rains in February, the

shallow river never succeeds in completely covering the smooth bed of stratified red and brown boulders it has assiduously shaped and exposed over the millennia.

Copper Queen: Freeholders on the Frontier

On the other side of the river lies Gokwe District. Immediately, the vegetation thickens and a tall canopy of musasa trees rise on either side of the road, and for the next twenty-five kilometers one sees a continuous line of fencing and only rarely glimpses evidence of human habitation. These are the Copper Queen Small-Scale Commercial Farms. Their boundaries were drawn in 1962, three years after the Chenjiri farms on Sanyati's northeastern flank were similarly demarcated for African purchase and occupied.<sup>19</sup>

The jural conditions of tenure that obtain on these farms combine with the historical scarcity of capital for their occupants to produce visible effects on the landscape. The first generation of Copper Queen farmers were hand-picked from a small cadre of Master Farmers deemed capable of managing a

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<sup>19</sup>The most recently available map for the region produced by the surveyor-general in 1983 indicates 210 demarcated farms in Chenjiri and 282 in Copper Queen, although the latter figure has increased recently to 408 with the sub-division of large, unallocated farms in the northern section. 1982 census figures indicate a total of 19177 persons in 3220 households for both of these areas, plus the Copper Queen Resettlement Areas I and II, and the Sechuru Resettlement Area (Agriserve and Ronco 1986:64). An unknown number of "squatters" were probably not enumerated even though many, who entered these areas during the war, were eventually allocated plots.

farm as a business enterprise.<sup>20</sup> Many farmers still display some kind of insignia on the entrance gate indicating their membership at one time in Master Farmer groups under corporate sponsorship. Under the conditions originally set out by the Morris Carter Land Commission in 1925, occupancy of African Purchase Farms was restricted to single owners and the title deed was indivisible upon inheritance or transfer by sale or default on debt. The granting of full title could be delayed if unrelated persons other than hired servants were allowed to take up residency on the farms, or if the owner failed to make a range of improvements, including the failure to build "a reasonably good and sanitary house" (cited in Cheater 1984:6).

While some Copper Queen farmers have managed to evade such restrictions, informally subdividing land with brothers or sons, or permitting putative kin to "squat" in return for labour services, most farms have physical attributes one might associate with the freeholding homesteaders on the American frontier in the last century: the families that occupy them are isolated and rarely able to cultivate more than a fraction of the land available to them. The majority appear to engage in the form of domestic farm management that Cheater (1984) calls the "traditional idiom of accumulation," a labour-intensive strategy characterized by the recruitment

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<sup>20</sup> Cheater (1984:9) observes that this expectation only emerged explicitly in government policy after 1948, and that positive measures of farming viability were not really established until the mid-1960s.

of several wives, other affines, and distant agnates onto the farm to work as quasi-labour tenants. Those farmers who aspire to more "modern" forms of management and domestic life, especially sons in the second generation who have inherited the lease from their fathers, are now shackled by the absence of a ready supply of labour. Since loans became widely available to people living in Gokwe's northern interior (or jobs clearing land, weeding and picking for new immigrants there), the flow of workers that used to come annually from Goredema, Chireya and the Zambezi Valley has virtually dried up. Too isolated from one another to engage in non-wage alternatives such as work parties (*humwe*) or rotational work groups (*machangano*), the solution for some of these farmers has been to return to their "home" areas in land-poor Masvingo and recruit distant relatives to come live on the farm for the weeding or picking season. Others have been able to tap the resettlement area to the north for workers.

#### Ganyungu and Makore: Converts to Cotton

Just south of the Copper Queen farms, in an area that extends from the western banks of the Munyati river to the eastern edge of the Mafungabusi plateau, lies the flat, thickly wooded area of Ganyungu. Sands predominate here, though they change in colour from white to ochre as the clay content increases. Ganyungu is where, in 1949, cotton was first introduced to Gokwe District. Although pest problems proved insurmountable, and the effort was consequently

shortlived, the same area was chosen when a renewed, successful attempt to promote cotton was made in 1963.

With their proximity to the ARDA state farm and the Sanyati growth point just across the river, and with their common border with the small-scale commercial farms of Copper Queen as well, people in Ganyungu have long felt near to the focus of regional development. They point with pride, for example, to the fact that their secondary school was a prominent candidate for selection as Gokwe's first to offer A-level certification.

Immediately at the foot of the plateau and to the east lies Makore ward, settled by chief Makore's people who once lived in the area now occupied by the Copper Queen freehold farms. Others came from Piriwiri (a Communal Land far to the north in the district of Hurungwe) or from Chinoyi to the east. I never learned the story of their migration to their present domain--only that the original settlers were joined in the 1950s and 1960s by immigrants from the Rhodesdale Estates. In Makore, the soils of red loam and sand combine with fairly consistent rainfall and flat terrain to produce steady yields of maize, groundnuts and cotton. The senior extension officer for the area, an evidently wise and distinguished, if pleasantly informal man, named Mr. Hama, told us the following story of how cotton was adopted in Makore:

**Journal Entry: 18 March 1988**

In 1972 Chief Makore took people in his ward to the court at Gokwe because they grew cotton in



contravention of his regulations. He had prohibited cotton because, as he said, "it cannot be eaten." "Look at your own clothes!" he was told at the hearing. "What do you think they are made of? It is that crop which your people are growing!" So the next year the chief was provided with seed, fertilizer and pesticides in order to raise a crop on his own land. They made him fill out the application form for a grower's card so that he would receive the check for the crop personally. From then on there was no problem growing cotton in this place.

I was later to discover that such testimonials of cooptation-- in which the temptations of the commodity market overcome economic irrationality (the dead weight of "tradition" embodied in the person of the recalcitrant chief) is a stock element in the narrative practice of the extension service. But there is little doubt that Makore's people, like Chief Makore himself, had come to see themselves as a locus of the modern.

Makore has two main townships, each serving as a nexus of commerce and as a conduit for travellers. Chinyenyetu township is really only a through stop on the main road, but it draws an unusually dense crowd during the day because of the large primary and secondary schools located there. Kuwirirana township, on the other hand, owes its life to the crossing of roads--the one descending from Gokwe and Jehana to the south and passing through Kuwirirana on its way to Nembudziya and, eventually, to the Kariba basin; the other, originating in Sanyati and ultimately Kadoma, to the east, proceeds on through a keyhole in the tip of the plateau into the broken hills of Goredema.

### Kuwirirana: The Culture of Commerce at the Crossroads

The clearing at the Kuwirirana crossroads is usually covered in dust and gravel as the 20 tonne lorries carrying cotton bales and buses headed in all directions roar through as often as every ten minutes. Marketwomen sell vegetables at a series of shelters roughly constructed from logs on the northern side of the road. On the opposite side, a few of these women sell their produce out of wheelbarrows, relying for business on bus passengers.

#### **Journal Entry: 1 April 1988**

The first person we met in Kuwirirana, a man named Cosmos, was renting a council beerhall since December in Goredema Township--at \$150/month. In addition he owns a "tuck shop" in Gokwe that serves sadza in a beerhall, and another one in Kuwirirana which needed refurbishing since it was destroyed by the war...The guerillas destroyed all the shops, the beerhalls, and the cattle dips in both Makore and Goredema. The bombed out relic of the council beerhall lies on Mr. Matiratidza's plot [at Gwebo township in Goredema]. But this new beerhall, the new lessor believed, would be selling 1000 pints every couple of days, of which most of the proceeds would go to the Council, but he would retain a tidy profit. All this once the cotton checks come in.

Three of eastern Gokwe's more important businessmen-- "Mukomboreri,"<sup>21</sup> Chifambi and Ndamera--have stores at Kuwirirana: all stock the same range of goods--cold drinks, biscuits, maize meal, sugar, salt, flour, laundry detergent, bicycle parts, aspirin, and dozens of canned and dry goods-- though one might need to shop around for a special item in

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<sup>21</sup>*Mukomboreri*, meaning "Benefactor," is a trade name; it is not the actual one this man used, but the meaning, and the resulting irony, is equivalent.

short supply such as rice or even cooking oil. Farm implements such as ploughs and cultivators occupy floor space, as well as 50 kg. sacks of maize seed. Even prices of controlled goods are often fifty per cent or more above what one would pay in town. At first I wondered why people would ever buy, say, a plough or a shirt that could be bought in Kadoma at nearly fifty per cent savings, even after deducting the cost of transport. Soon I learned that all of these merchants offer credit, sometimes in exchange for a lien on the buyer's cotton crop. Mukomboreri was the first one of these men whose operations we learned of during our first trip out to Kuwirirana and Goredema, and the one whose relationship to the community we came to know best:

**Journal Entry: 1 April 1988**

Beer--*chibuku*--is also sold at Mukomboreri's store of course but his operations are centred primarily on debt-peonage with the local peasants, transporting, and even the acquisition of children's labour in his cotton fields in return for 'donations' of sand or bricks to the school. On Wednesday night Mr. Musarurwa [the school headmaster] took us to the locked annex to Mukomboreri's store to see the enormous mound of cotton already piled within; the shop assistant opened it for our inspection without compunction... assuming we were unaware of its illicit origin, or else just not caring. About 10 bales were already accumulated there--the price paid was 45 cents per kg. He would, we were told, accumulate up to 1000 bales this way, to be resold--if last year's price was a guide, at about 75 cents per kg. Sometimes payment was per bale--if it were advanced against a peasant's crop, then it would amount to about \$60--to be resold at up to \$187.50 if its weight were up at the limit of \$250 per kg.

"How do people feel about what Mukomboreri does?" I asked Musarurwa as we walked back to the school in

the moonlight.

"Some feel he is an oppressor," he replied, "But what can they do? In fact he is helping them--since they have nowhere else to get any money."

Mukomboreri collects cotton for resale to the CMB at 7 stores in the Gokwe region, though his base is in Mutare and he has another store in Kadoma. A fat man of apparently gentle demeanour, Mukomboreri always looked red-eye weary, his enormous unkept crown of hair looking inappropriate for a man of his wealth and age--though he may only be in his thirties. His business interests have multiplied with extraordinary rapidity since the end of the war--stimulated at least in the Gokwe region, it seems, by the opening of the cotton transit depots and the correspondingly reduced risks for the transporter, although the role of the transporter as a 'residual' (actually primary) buyer of cotton has been proportionately reduced.

How, I wondered, had this reorganization of the marketing structure affected the distribution of opportunity for investment between local cotton farmers and outsiders such as Mukomboreri? A man named Chifambi who lived near Gwebo township in western Goredema, was one of the few local farmers who had accumulated sufficient capital through cotton farming alone in order to invest elsewhere--first, in a small general dealership at Kuwirirana, and finally in transport:

When we first met Chifambi, whose fields spread fulsomely out from behind Gwebo business centre where he operates one of his stores, he was busy supervising the construction of a larger store at Kuwirirana. He stationed us at his tiny shop there and supplied us with cokes while we waited for the bus to Goredema. His wife, shy, self-conscious, and swollen with hypertension, minds the store at Gwebo. She reappeared on the Munenzwa bus during this trip clutching a 10 kg. sack of mealie meal like any other peasant coming from town. Chifambi comes from Chibi I think--one of the Masvingo influx in any case. His money--so says Matiratidza--comes entirely from production rather

than trade, though now he operates at least 3, maybe 6 lorries.

There was little doubt in our minds, or in those of the locals, that Mukomboreri, though a relative newcomer to the district, was both a more powerful and more effective patron than his rival; he was able to create a more encompassing atmosphere of trust and a sense of well-being that drew customers into a long-term relation of clientship, one that extended well beyond the store. Chifambi, on the other hand, didn't seem able to replicate the same ineffable style, though he tried almost too hard to install the signs of modernity in his business operations. This was confirmed when some months later we met Chifambi again in his spacious new Kuwirirana shop, recently refinished in fresh cement:

**Journal Entry: 17 February 1989**

As we waited for the late Munenzwa bus at Kuwirirana to take us home, we met the Chifambis at their new "departmental store," and were served cups of chocolate and nyimo beans, while Chifambi tried out John [a visiting American teacher] on the eternal question of sending him a 9-tonne lorry from America, and if not, how about a sedan, then a T.V. and at last, a knitting machine? I had to intervene and explain that we had no jobs in America, hence no money. Chifambi claims to have spent his last pennies constructing this new aseptic store with its glass counter with signs in Shona on every one saying, *Musatseyama pacounter kana kuti kuisa madrinks* ["Do not lean or leave drinks on the counter"] or some such thing. He came from Chibi in the mid-1960s, was originally given land in Masosoni [in southern Goredema]--a very good land it is said--but moved near to Gwebo township because of a lack of transport. There he built his first store in 1982, adding others at Gokwe (in 1985) and Kuwirirana (in 1986) before completing the present megalith this year. But it sits empty, devoid of customers, stale loaves of

bread arranged like a thin rank of sentries in the glass cases, and only candles to provide a dim joyless illumination after sunset---all this in contrast to the busy, riotous chaos at Mukomboreri's next door--generator rumbling and radio blaring.

Mukomboreri's relations with the people around Kuwirirana and Goredema were not all so well oiled, however; it was rumoured, for example, that he had bought up over a hundred head of cattle very cheaply during the 1983 drought, promising to sell them for slaughter in Kadoma. In the event, he simply hired a herdsman to graze them in eastern Goredema, where people are now outraged that the animals are "eating up all the grass." Young men in our village found that the bales they sent with Mukomboreri's lorries sometimes disappeared; too fearful to confront him, they watched their whole year's product vanish overnight. Finally, some said that he had managed, under questionable circumstances, to acquire several hectares of prime crop land in the area, hiring full-time workers to plough and plant cotton, and children from the local school to do all the picking.

#### Landed Immigrants: Sweating for Development

Some residents of Makore, all immigrants, turned out to have rather extensive land holdings as well. On the bus from Kadoma that landed us in Kuwirirana that first day in March, I had met a young man named Mark, now working as a security guard in Harare. I enquired about the extent of his father's lands in Makore:

**Journal Entry: 16 March 1988**

Mark's father ploughs 50 acres and although he had harvested only 42 bales of cotton last year (representing a gross income of over Z\$6000--roughly the annual salary of a low-ranking civil servant), he was expecting to harvest fully 100 bales this year. He ran 70 cattle and owned a Turnpan tractor--which he had bought in 1984 for \$35,000, financed, Mark claimed, "from this cotton thing." Only his younger brother remained on the farm to help. Two sisters were in secondary school and a third was married to a man working at Ziscosteel near Kwekwe.

I took these claims to be apocryphal, the idle boasts of a young man anxious to impress a foreigner. Makore had been "filled-up" with immigrants for some time. How could an individual acquire use-rights to land so obviously in excess of what was required to reasonably support his family? This was the well-established principle by which Shona "customary law" served to apportion rights of usufruct in the communal areas (see e.g. Holleman 1952:6-7). Yet I was to discover later that Mark's father was hardly the only man of such means and with such extensive land holdings in the area.

On many occasions I would pass through the Kuwirikana township crossroads, leaving my motorcycle parked behind the shop belonging to the family of Benson Ndamera, Gokwe's first council chairman, and an immensely influential man who later became the first Governor of Midlands Province. Ndamera was responsible for "converting" the Gokwe council to nearly universal ZANU-PF representation in the 1982 local elections, after a heterogeneous beginning that saw 16 councillors each elected from ZANU-PF and ZAPU. He also took the extraordinary

step of attempting to convene a "donor's conference" for the district in 1981. Calling for rapid investment in infrastructure, business facilities and transport, he stressed the need to decentralize industry and services:

We need shops here: it is ridiculous to have to go all the way to Kwekwe for something like a plough. That is why we want to push the development of Gokwe, why we want this conference. All we need is a start. Once we have that we can do the rest ourselves. We called this council "sweat" [cheziya] and we mean it. We are prepared to work. We are working. This area must develop. We cover a large part of the country and we have resources. (Harare Herald, 15 October 1981).

Ndamera's Protestant vision of hard work and self-reliance extended to encompass the entire northwestern quadrant of Zimbabwe, including Binga, Lupane, Nkai, and Hwange (Harare Herald, 14 November 1981). Although Ndamera died in 1984, his brothers continue to operate a bottle store and restaurant in Gokwe town as well as a shop and a (usually inoperative) filling station in Makore at Kuwirirana. Behind the shop they plough 38 acres of maize; family members explained to me that with most of the children boarding at secondary school, cotton would absorb too much labour.

#### A Field Day in Makore: Celebrating Modernity

The presence of families of notables such as the Ndameras, with their major business investments elsewhere in the district and their links to the national government, gives the residents of places such as Makore a sense of relative advancement, of contact with progress. This sense is



articulated and celebrated at Field Days such as the one we attended in Makore in April, 1988:

**Journal Entry: April 1988**

We turned right off of the Nembudziya road roughly 10km. north of Kuwirirana, at Nyatso school, past Mr. Chinyoro, the Agritex worker's house, then another couple of kilometres along a narrow track past neat red mud homesteads to the home of P. Nyika [the winner of the competition], in Makaranga village. The Area Chairman, a Mr. T. Mapanda, exceeded the chairman at Goredema East [where we had attended the same event a few days before] in showmanship and charisma. What originally appeared to be a smaller turnout soon grew to the same proportions --some 500 all told. We were seated on standard issue upholstered lounge furniture, while others occupied folding chairs, rough-hewn logs, or the ground. Officials in attendance included the judge, Extension Worker Masungwa, the Village Health Worker, and a ZFC [Zimbabwe Fertilizer Corporation] representative.

While the crops were perhaps not of the calibre we'd seen the previous week, the ceremony was remarkable for the unbridled enthusiasm of the participants and the apparent dominance of women in the award ceremonies. Prizes were handed out beginning with the seventeenth best maize producer, ranging from a tin mug to a bag of fertilizer to a plough for the winner. Since prizes are collected from community contributions, a rather different scale of wealth was represented. One young woman, looking for all the world like a university student with fashionable glasses and "town" skirt picked up awards in maize, sunflower, groundnuts and cotton. As each recipient danced forward he or she was assisted by a retinue of relatives or cooperators ululating and gesticulating in exaggerated, often comical displays of enthusiasm--old men lofting their legs to their ears, wheeling around in mid-air, hands clapping. In the end, P. Nyika, wife and son were virtually hoisted into the air by the mob and paraded around the grounds. The performances were highlighted by a kind of dance theatre enacted by a group of women, in which, if I can remember correctly, a woman goes into a trance after receiving her cotton check.

This parody of "tradition"--the metaphorical displacement of

the spirits of the ancestors by the "spirit" of the cotton check, possessing the subject's very body with its intangible force--eloquently condenses the sense of competition between tradition and modernity that Field Days repeatedly enact throughout Gokwe District. In Makore, the ritual works as a mirror more than as a pedagogical instrument; it reflects what the participants, all immigrants, want to see of themselves. "Don't you see?," Mr. Chinyoro, the Extension worker responsible for the area, told us at the conclusion of the event. "Not one of the local people has come today." He was referring to the indigenous people, those he would call VaShangwe. I wondered where these invisible people were, how one would identify them at a distance, whether we had passed their homes on the way.

#### **Goredema: End of the Road, Across the Ethnic Divide**

The first journey felt interminably long, that is, until we sensed that the endpoint was near. Then the bus moved too fast, as places whipped by where we felt perhaps we should have gotten off--Mushamba Way, Chinyenyetu, Kuwirirana--the red earth of Makore blowing up in a cloud around the bus as it roared through each township. With people packed into the aisles, the windows splattered with dust, I felt at first too shy to select a stranger from among the sweating multitude to whom the question might be addressed: "When do we get to Goredema? How will I know?"

We had chosen Goredema by looking at a map according to

the following criteria: sufficiently remote from "civilization" (my private ethnographic fantasy); not too remote (Gul Rukh's demand that we not indulge that fantasy-- and my desire to be within reach of the small-scale commercial lands); plenty of water (Gul Rukh's criterion); not too flat (important to both of us). On the map, Goredema seemed perfect: centrally located just north of the plateau with plenty of interesting contours indicating the escarpment, and dozens of blue lines suggesting water and maybe plenty of trees. The bus pulled away from the hawkers at Kuwirirana, passed through the level crossroads leading north to Nembudziya and south where it would shortly climb the steep slope of the escarpment before proceeding through Jehana to Gokwe town; then it accelerated up the thinning gravel road toward what looked like a keyhole through the northern tip of the plateau. On the other side we caught our first glimpse of Goredema's landscape, harshly lit by the sun setting directly ahead. It looked like another world. The land sloped sharply, deeply gouged by river beds that appeared to be bone-dry even in March, just after the height of the rainy season: the signs we had taken for water on the map had been a cruel mirage. Round, dilapidated huts were perched in haphazard bunches atop the fragmented hills on either side of the road. The bus paused first at the whitewashed shops of Mawari "township" and then, about five minutes further on, at a point somewhere south of Goredema township where the secondary

school and clinic are located along an older road. Finally, we came to a complete stop at Gwebo township on the western side of the ward--where we disembarked into the black night and asked for the extension-worker, whom we found drinking beer at the bottle store. He turned out to be the sensitive and generous Mr. Matiratidza, about whom I have already written. The next morning, we could see clearly the gray colour of the hard soil surface beneath the mopane trees, the end of our journey, the place we planned to call home.

It was only here, at the end of the cotton road, that we began to sense that we were in a place that people in Sanyati and Makore felt to be on the other side of an ethnic divide. Perhaps it was because Goredema rubbed so closely against Makore, and yet was so topographically distinct, that the contrast between the two places seemed to be projected into a model of ethnic difference, one that almost saturated the landscape itself. But it was the constant references to the "Shangwe" in almost any discussion we had with immigrants and officials about cotton and development in Goredema that cried out for explication. Why was Goredema figured in the eyes of outsiders as the repository of the primitive, the irrational, the *VaShangwe*? This is the puzzle I address in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER VII

### MAPS AND NAMES, CHIEFS AND TRIBES: ETHNICITY AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

In tracing the contours along which the shape of social labour has been transformed over the last century in northwestern Zimbabwe, I want to draw attention to the ethnic subjects of that process--to at once pose the question, "Who are the people of Gokwe?," and at the same time to challenge the intuitive simplicity of most answers to that question. In this chapter and in the next I will be exploring how it is that subjects in Gokwe have been made and how they have remade themselves in turn--and I will show that this process is integral to both the visible, documented trace of the colonial encounter and its more evanescent manifestations as a localized process.

In trying to capture the history of the colonial encounter and its post-colonial aftermath in Gokwe, we must inevitably look through the shifting kaleidoscope of ethnicity. Ethnicity may fruitfully be regarded as both a discursive practice and as a social and political process: its surface appearances emerge from a complex dialectic between acts of naming collective subjects on the one hand, and acts of reconfiguring political authority and relations of

production on the other. There are many places to look in discourse for this dialectical process, including everyday acts of ethnic reference as well as more systematic acts of description and classification. And there are non-discursive vehicles to look for as well. One of these is the use of "tribal" maps to represent relations of political power over social space. Maps, as I will argue below, have been an important means through which academic constructs have been used as instruments of colonial administration and domination; and the place of the "Shangwe" in maps, as well as in ethnographic texts, provides a ready way of reading the relation between subjectification and subjugation over the ninety-odd years of the colonial presence in Gokwe.

Yet there is a more specific argument that I will also be making as I discuss the intertwining of ethnicity with history in Zimbabwe as a whole and in Gokwe in particular. It concerns the points at which colonial acts of ethnic invention and attribution have redefined the local semantic field in which Gokwe's inhabitants name others in relation to themselves. The axis of that semantic field is most easily glossed as "modernity," since it is the signs of the modern, I will argue, that have gradually come to be indexed by the use of contrasting ethnic labels in Gokwe. To be a *Mukaranga*--one of the six major sub-categories of Shona ethnicity--in Gokwe, for example, demands that one embody a certain modern style; it entails an ongoing performance of Karanga identity

through the display of certain kinds of evidence: wearing cleanly pressed and fashionable clothes; using recognizably "Masvingo" speech forms and urban speech styles (both of which incorporate an admixture of English); eating with silverware; drinking bottled beer; living in rectangular, cement block houses with asbestos roofs. All of these are distinctive ways of living that are simultaneously emblematic of being "civilized" or "modern," while to be otherwise is to be at once "primitive" and to be a *Mushangwe*.

As we shall see, it was during the late 1950s that these connotations or discursive effects of terms such as "Karanga" or "Shangwe" were made possible. But I want to begin with a more recent and more personal journey, one that clarified for me the way in which acts of ethnic discovery--the reading of the signs of ethnic difference--are pre-figured by a history of discourses, indeed arguments, about ethnicity that are already extant. It provides a way to situate myself in a long process of naming identities that is at the centre of how history is made, imagined and remembered. For there is no history of Gokwe that does not name names, and there are many vantage points from which the naming takes place. There are, therefore, many histories to be told.

### **Seeing Ethnicity: First Journey**

On Boxing Day in 1986, Gul Rukh and I set out in a northerly direction from a camping site near Kadoma in a rented Ford Escort. We were headed for Gokwe, the area where

it seemed increasingly likely we would end up doing our research. Eager to get off the tarred road which seemed to run efficiently, if unimaginatively, for 120 km. straight to Gokwe town, I navigated a tortuous route, weakly marked on the map, from Empress Nickel Mine into the heart of Zhombe communal land.

The day was heavily overcast, lending a palpable gravity to the whole adventure. We knew that while we were not technically in Matabeleland, we were nevertheless in an area that was largely inhabited by Ndebele-speaking people; it was thus possible, though we thought it unlikely, that there had been "dissident" activity in the area, and that we, as a mixed White and Asian couple were potentially at risk.

A young woman flagged us down for a lift, and we rode together for about 15 km. as far as the rural township of Blue Gum. From there, we proceeded alone, splashing through river beds and struggling up slippery embankments, passing through villages and two-store "townships". People on the roadside froze and stared at us as we passed. Children seemed to stiffen with fear when we smiled and waved. We chatted nervously about the "Ndebele-style" thatching and then fell silent as the sky grew darker, the muddy road less certain. Clearly, we were more than just out of place; we were in some way directly threatening--naive characters unaware of the larger scenario we were acting within. Thus it was with an enormous sense of relief that we found ourselves eventually



ascending the plateau through the uninhabited forest preserve and arriving in the raw, open sandy expanse of Gokwe township. We did not remain long: the township felt cold, unwelcoming, indifferent. We had expected at the very least, I think, to be noticed. After a brief, futile search for a cold Coke, we turned around and hurried south, clinging this time to the main road back to Kwekwe. Our exhausting sojourn had only taken us as far as a soul-less frontier town, the starting point from which Gokwe district, now seeming more hostile and unfathomable than ever, expanded a further 150km. to the north and west.

It was only two years later that we learned more of that scenario, of the dangers it held for us, and of the undocumented war that the people of Gokwe as a whole had endured long after the war of liberation had officially ended. The post-Independence "dissident" problem that plagued western Zimbabwe until the unity agreement was signed between ZANU-PF and ZAPU in 1987, had a complex etiology and pattern of development that has yet to receive adequate analysis. It emerged when some armed factions of the guerilla army refused to give up their arms after the signing of the Lancaster House agreement in 1980. Some elements were undoubtedly armed and trained by South Africa as a counter-revolutionary fifth column. Others almost certainly had the support, or at least the tolerance, of the ZAPU leadership and many of the people in Matabeleland who felt their needs would not be adequately

addressed by the Shona-speaking majority elected to run the government.

The reading of the dissident problem as a specifically ethnic phenomenon, one that pitted the minority "Ndebele tribe" against the majority "Shona," was much favoured in the western press and gained a kind of currency within Zimbabwe itself as people were drawn into these two categorically opposed identities. At the height of the "war against dissidents," Terence Ranger (1985b) provided a timely demonstration that these ethnic categories were indeed recent inventions of colonial provenance rather than tangible tribal "groups" still locked in primordial combat (see also Rich 1983), although some parties to the conflict certainly did interpret their involvement in just these terms. But we were still as eager as anyone to reproduce this binary ethnic schema, so readily available, in an attempt to gain the only control we could possibly hope for in an alien social terrain--as my attempt to visualize the hidden ethnic terrain by the thatching-style of huts attests.

The difficulty for us in coming to grips with Gokwe's shifting social landscape--what we might call, with Appadurai (1990), its "ethnoscape"--reflected in part the existential difficulty of its inhabitants; for Gokwe is in a profound sense neither here nor there, neither "Mashonaland" nor "Matabeleland," the two great socio-geographical moieties into which the British divided the territory of Southern Rhodesia

after conquest.<sup>1</sup> The greatest concentration of Ndebele-speakers live in the Chirisa wards on the Mafungabusi plateau; they were moved there with their chief, Jehana, from Filabusi in 1965. Among those earlier immigrants who might have spoken Sindebele as a first language--such as those who settled in Kana (in southwestern Gokwe District) or in Sanyati as a result of their forced displacement from the Rhodesdale Estates in the 1950s--some might not choose to call themselves "Ndebele" at all. Indeed, at the time we made our first journey to Gokwe, being identified as "Ndebele" was a distinct liability, one that greatly increased the likelihood of detainment, beatings, or worse at the hands of the notorious Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe National Army.

Still, there is little mutual antagonism or invidious ranking of the "Shona" and "Ndebele" macro-identities in Gokwe itself (although the distinction continues to gather political force elsewhere in Zimbabwe, particularly where people choose

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<sup>1</sup> The northwestern region enclosing modern Gokwe district was included in Mashonaland, but for all practical purposes it was marginal to colonial concerns until well after the Second World War. Today, Gokwe constitutes the northern wing of Midlands Province, a name befitting its "in between" status. The 1969 census recorded Midlands as containing 78.3% Shona-speakers, 16.5% Ndebele-speakers, and 5.2% other linguistic groups (Rich 1983:54, fn.9). The linguistic breakdown for Gokwe District alone is unavailable, and would, given the massive increase in immigration to the district since 1980, be of limited value in any case. The Tonga language is widely spoken in the north. Most residents, in my experience, are functionally bilingual; some are trilingual. Men with experience in migrant work and young people with at least two years of secondary school education can often communicate in English as well.

to measure the distribution of state resources in terms of these categories). It is the indigenous people, widely referred to as the "Shangwe," who suffer this fate in Gokwe. As I suggested earlier in Chapter III, VaShangwe are classified by other Shona-speakers as a kind of bastard Shona, historically marginal to the great Shona states of Zimbabwe's pre-colonial past and more recently diluted by thousands of immigrants of more "authentic" Shona and Ndebele stock. The people so designated do not willingly accept being labelled in this way. They either ascribe more mainstream identities to themselves--many, for example say they are "Korekore"--or else they strive to show how the term "Shangwe" describes the place in which they live rather than who they, in essence, really are.

These tensions and shifts became more apparent as I listened to various conversations about "Shangwe" identity. Even during our very first visit to Goredema, the topic seemed to arise with surprising frequency. We had camped under a large baobab tree in the playground of Mudondo Primary School. The three class-rooms, built from cement blocks, had a partially finished appearance:

**Journal Entry, 28 March 1988**

"Now the parents are learning that it is good to give money to the school," said the headmaster, "but it is slow." He explained that the first building--roughly conglomerated from stones and now rather tenuously supported by wood poles--was the product of earlier "Vashangwe" thinking to the effect that they should keep their money to themselves. Originally built in 1977, the school

was moved to this spot in 1980--that's when the Headmaster came here. His homestead is still in Nembudziya--in an area called Mutewe; his wife stays here [in Goredema] but the children stay there "with some workers." Nembudziya, he says, is much more "advanced"--people there come from all over: Belingwe, Zvishavane, Chivi [i.e., from the Masvingo region in southern Zimbabwe]. That, in his opinion, makes the difference.

One young teacher, whose family was in Masvingo and who had recently come from school in Bulawayo to take up a post in Goredema, expanded on this theme on our way to an Agricultural Field Day<sup>2</sup> in northern Goredema ward:

**Journal Entry, 28 March 1988**

"The people here we call *VaShangwe*," he said. "But they themselves say they are *VaKorekore*."

"Why do they use a different name?" I asked.

"If you call them *Vashangwe* they will be very angry," he said.

"Is it because that means something very low?"

"Yes, that is it."

"How do you know that somebody is a *Mushangwe*?" I asked.

"It is the words they use," he replied. "Instead of using a proper Shona word such as *maoko* for 'hands', they use a Shangwe word such as *manja*."

Later that evening we witnessed the way in which such conceptions worked as a frame for the construction of daily social dramas in Goredema:

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<sup>2</sup>Field Days are highly ritualized events organized jointly by Agritex (the agricultural extension service), local farmer's groups, and in some instances the manufacturers of farming inputs. Their ostensible purpose is to award prizes for crop and animal husbandry, as well as home improvements and to demonstrate successful techniques and results to others in the community (see p. 249, above).

**Journal Entry, 30 March 1988**

We promised to return to the Mukomboreri store and buy Chibuku<sup>3</sup> for the male teachers who were "resting there." Joseph Chekeya "invited" us by lamenting that he had no money for beer--so we bathed in the overgrown interior of the unfinished classroom, dusk and mosquitos advancing mercilessly--then proceeded down the moonlit road to the beerhall. We met two teachers--Philip and Crispin--and managed to turn them about face and have them accompany us back to Mawari township. The Manoti store was already closing, as was the new one we had first entered. We found the others in the candlelit interior of Mukomboreri's place. Joseph and Alphaeus leaned despondently against the counter. "Are you drinking?" I asked. "Ah no," came the reply. I ended up requesting beer "for four" but the congenial women behind the counter didn't understand what was required. (The confusion arose because I was buying, hence they couldn't help me to make the actual request.) "We want beer," Joseph, finally shouted with contempt, cap sliding coolly over his eyes. A two-litre plastic container was filled in an adjacent room and then passed around--the taste was cool, smooth and sour. Gul Rukh drank coke. On the other wall four men sat with a woman. They were drinking, as Gul Rukh put it, seriously. Then the woman arose to make some exuberant remarks and dance--feet thumping rhythmically on the hard floor, looking with her sagging dress and cap like a Dr. Seuss character, eyes and teeth laughing. She paused now and then to make a short speech to the teachers--eliciting great guffaws. Joseph explained that they were laughing because of "the language she was using--that of which we were talking earlier today."

As it turns out, Joseph's choice of linguistic markers to signify ethnic difference says more about the pragmatic ways in which such markers are chosen than about the nature of

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<sup>3</sup>Opaque, commercially brewed beer that is sold either in one-litre cartons, or else distributed from a bulk container by the beer-hall proprietor.

those differences themselves (cf. J.L. Comaroff 1987:303).<sup>4</sup> The compilers of the standard Shona dictionary (Hannan 1984:324) found *manja* to mean "palms of the hands" for representative speakers of no less than three of the major Shona dialects--Karanga, Manyika, and Zezuru. By this one "objective" test, then, the *VaShangwe* would pass very nicely as mainstream "Shona"--even as "Karanga." As we shall see, however, the use of language as a litmus test to identify and differentiate Shona-related ethnicities is hardly parochial. It has a long, even constitutive role in the creation of those very ethnicities.

There is yet another side to this story that enlarges the implications of our conversation that day. Joseph came from Zaka Communal Land in the Masvingo region and would probably have identified himself as a member of the "Karanga" sub-group of Shona peoples. But the people he called *VaShangwe*--such as the old woman who was the object of such amusement that evening--would have named him differently. They would say he was one of the *Madheruka*--a term whose noun prefix (*ma-*: a class six plural form) classifies him not with persons at all but primarily with useful objects and undomesticated animals. I will explain the etymology of this term in the following

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<sup>4</sup>Rousseau's (1990:50) remarks are apposite: "Ethnicity is not defined, but justified a posteriori by criteria: once people have been ascribed to an ethnic category, some traits can be adduced to justify this attribution." For further discussion of the pragmatic use of ethnic markers in eastern and southern Africa, see Galaty (1982, 1986) and Worby (1984a).

chapter, but here I would merely point out that it is the reciprocal practice of naming immigrants *Madheruka* and of being named *VaShangwe* by them in turn that has formed the most vital, as well as the most volatile dimension of ethnicity in Gokwe over the last forty years.

### **Maps and Models: Locating the "Shangwe"**

I made many efforts to locate the "Shangwe" within both the cognitive and the cartographic maps of Zimbabweans--not only those of stranger-schoolteachers, but also those of anthropologists, immigrant farmers and the so-designated *VaShangwe* themselves. The "Shangwe" turned out to be a slippery entity, hovering on the fuzzy margins of the more focused classification of the Shona peoples. Reviewing the published evidence at hand, it seemed to me at first as though a fairly straightforward taxonomy of names had consistently been assumed by colonial officials and regionally-based ethnologists--one I have diagrammed below (Figure 7.1).

A fundamental opposition would be assumed between "Africans" (formerly "Natives") and "European."<sup>5</sup> Together

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<sup>5</sup>These categories had a status that was the subject of legally differentiated rights and obligations under the Southern Rhodesian constitution. The small "Asian" and "Coloured" categories, which exist at the same taxonomic level, were differentiated for purposes of census, settlement, education and conditions of employment in the civil service, although they enjoyed political rights as part of the "European" community as long as they could pass a literacy and a property means test (for the case of Asians, see Dotson and Dotson 1968: 311-320). Informal divisions isolated the Afrikaaners from other "Europeans," and the latter were further divided upon the basis of national or regional origin



with the marginal categories of "Coloureds" and "Asians," these defined the semantic field of "races."<sup>6</sup> "Africans" would then be broken down into a fundamental tribal opposition between "Shona" and "Ndebele." The "Shona" were then divided into sub-groups (the now familiar set of macro-identities that includes the "Kalanga," "Karanga," "Korekore," "Zezuru," "Manyika," and "Ndau"), and these might then be sub-divided again into "tribes" on the basis of chiefly territories or even clan-names. The other major "tribes" such as the "Tonga" and "Venda," were of minor political or numerical consequence and hence not subject to further analysis. And the vast numbers of rural farm-workers of extra-territorial origin--probably constituting with their families nearly 20 per cent of the population at Independence--were essentially invisible in this schema. Known most often by the names of their countries of origin (Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Angola), and being virtually without recognition by the state, they were excluded entirely from the ethnic map that served to arbitrate arguments over territory, heritage and patrimony.

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(Irish, Scottish, Greek, etc.); these divisions were gradually subordinated to a broader Southern Rhodesian nationalism by the 1950s (D.J.Murray 1970:2,14).

<sup>6</sup>The "Coloured" category, reserved for the offspring of unions between the "Africans" and "Europeans", makes it evident that more is at stake at this taxonomic level than the continent of ancestral origin (many "Europeans" in modern Zimbabwe and South Africa proudly emphasize that they are, in this sense, "Africans"). It is, rather, a theory of biological distinctiveness that is being asserted.

| Level I<br>("Races") | Level II<br>("Major<br>Tribes")        | Level II<br>("Shona Groups") | Level III<br>("Tribes/Clans")              |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Africans             |                                        | Kalanga Group                | Kalanga tribes/clans                       |
|                      |                                        | Karanga Group                | Karanga tribes/clans                       |
|                      | Shona                                  | Korekore Group               | Korekore tribe/clans<br>(inc. the Shangwe) |
|                      |                                        | Zezuru Group                 | Zezuru tribes/clans                        |
|                      |                                        | Manyika Group                | Manyika tribes/clans                       |
|                      |                                        | Ndau Group                   | Ndau tribes/clans                          |
|                      | Ndebele                                |                              |                                            |
|                      | "Other Tribes"<br>(Tonga, Venda, etc.) |                              |                                            |
| Europeans            |                                        |                              |                                            |
| Coloureds            |                                        |                              |                                            |
| Asians               |                                        |                              |                                            |

**Figure 7.1. Taxonomy of Shona peoples, derived from map in Kuper, Hughes and Van Velson (1955).**

This taxonomy would seem to fairly represent the classificatory logic at work in the minds of those who produced the map accompanying the ethnographic survey of the Shona and Ndebele in 1955 (Kuper, Hughes and Van Velson 1955; see Figure 7.2). Note that Level 1 in my taxonomy--which categorizes "racial" difference--is invisible on this map, but an assumed precondition of the entire mapping exercise.

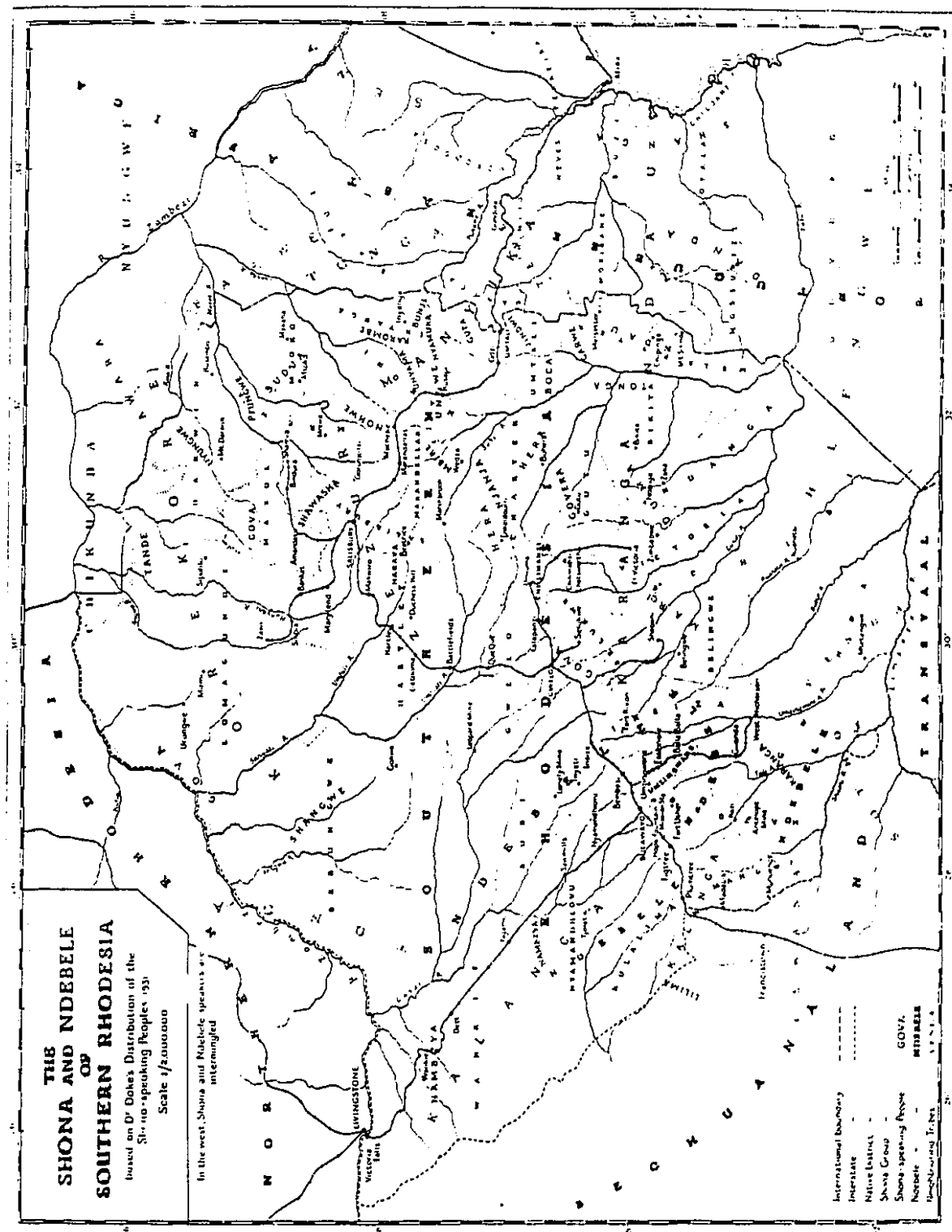


Figure 7.2. Ethnic Mapping in 1954. Source: Kuper, Hughes and Van Velson (1955).

It was the "Africans," conceived in a racial sense, who were being mapped here, not the total field of political entities and social identities.<sup>7</sup> The map represents tribal attachments to land as natural, eternal relations. The fact that it lays a continuous net of tribal appellations over vast areas of land that had already been in European hands for one or two generations suggests a wilful suppression of history. The map speaks in a hypothetical voice, "as if" the jural alienation of land on the basis of racial difference had never occurred. Yet in other discursive contexts--particularly those in which questions of political entitlement were at stake--this naturalization of ethnicity in its relation to space was just as vehemently denied by the Rhodesian settlers. It was often argued, for example, that the Europeans had rightfully displaced the Ndebele people by virtue of conquest in the same way that the Ndebele displaced the Rozvi Shona rulers half a century before. "History" and "Ethnography" thus were often drawn upon as discrete rhetorical resources in settler colonial discourse. The former was used to justify settler entitlement to sovereignty according to rules they presumed to share with the Natives, while the latter was used to convert the Natives into an object of distanced contemplation,

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<sup>7</sup>Ironically, it was only such a "total social field"--including other "racial" groups--that constituted an acceptable framework for a proper sociological analysis in the view of the major ethnographers of south-central Africa of the time: Clyde Mitchell and others trained under Max Gluckman at the Rhodes-Livingston Institute. See below.

knowledge and manipulation.

What of the place of the "Shangwe" in all this? In the map reproduced above, which is based upon the linguistic classification developed by Doke (1931; see also Cole 1961),<sup>8</sup> the boundaries between "Shona Groups" are marked, and the "Shangwe" are shown to occupy the western reaches of the area occupied by the "Korekore Group." But there seemed to be some disagreement among ethnographers on this point. A very similar, perhaps even derivative map produced by Mitchell in 1957, for example, showed no markings whatsoever that might indicate the boundaries between "Shona Groups" and "tribes." As a result, it is impossible to tell on his map whether the "Shangwe" are part of the "Korekore Group," or a "tribe" on their own without a larger group affiliation. By the time the first edition of Michael Bourdillon's now standard ethnography, The Shona Peoples, appeared in 1975, the "Shangwe" were iconographically displaced again. On the map printed in the book's endpapers, the boundaries between "Shona Groups" reappear, but this time the "Shangwe" are left outside of the territory demarcated for the "Korekore Group."<sup>9</sup>

The elusive "Shangwe" category, although perhaps more

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<sup>8</sup>Doke himself disavowed the utility or even the validity of making strong distinctions between dialects. See my discussion at the beginning of the next chapter.

<sup>9</sup>Whether this exclusion is based on linguistic or other criteria is not made explicit, although one is tempted to speculate that Bourdillon's "Korekore" informants in Mt. Darwin were eager to differentiate themselves unequivocally from the "Shangwe" to the west.

resistant than others to being definitively located in any ethnic schema or map, turns out to be diagnostic of a generic shift in the colonial practice of mapping ethnicity that gradually took place after the Second World War. For in the pre-war efforts to survey the origin and distribution of tribes in the colony, the "Shangwe" were attributed a historical lineage linking them to the Rozwi, the powerful Shona rulers of the highlands in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Posselt 1978[1942]:39; see also Hemans 1971[1935]:138-40). By the 1970s they had effectively been mapped out of "Shona" history altogether in ways that parallel the fate of other ethnicities on the margin of the settler colonial political economy. As Lancaster (1974) has shown, most of the ethnic identities that have long had currency in the Zambezi Valley--a set comprising names such as "Goba," "Chikunda," "Nyai," and "Tonga"--originated as devices for marking relative political status--relations that have shifted with the political tide, and often with little regard for the attachment of persons or lineages to geographical place: they are names, in other words, that serve to locate jural and economic relations between categories of people within an encompassing political system.<sup>10</sup> Most important, they are

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<sup>10</sup>I deal with these relations at greater length in Chapter IX. For various attempts to relate ethnicity to the constitution of relations of production and inequality in Africa, see Galaty (1982; 1986), Worby (1984a), O'Brien (1986), Comaroff (1987), Wilmsen (1989:274-81), and Wilmsen and Vossen (1990).

identities that transgress the boundaries that defined, from the colonial perspective, who was properly "Shona" and who was not. These sorts of ambiguities discomfited the model of ethnicity imported by the British, who preferred to posit a series of mutually exclusive, nation-like ethnic entities with which individuals identified unequivocally and for all time.<sup>11</sup>

While that model served the settlers well enough in their relations with the relatively centralized Ndebele state, it was imposed with some difficulty on the fragmented Shona chieftaincies of the late nineteenth century; and it fared altogether poorly when used to capture--either conceptually or administratively--the relevant allegiances and identities in the Zambezi hinterland. This last region historically lay on the fringe of larger political aggregations such as the empire of the Mwene Mutapa centred in the Zambezi valley south of the

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<sup>11</sup>Hart (1990:6) observes that the guiding assumption of functionalist anthropology, that "each anthropological study must be of a local homogeneous people...reflected the nationalist bias of 20th century politics, with its ruling idea that the whole world can be divided up into territorial segments each with a distinctive and exclusive common culture." Kopytoff (1987:4), elaborating on the ideological link between "tribe" and European nationalism, writes: "To the many frustrated nationalisms of nineteenth-century Europe, this notion gave a sense of deep roots in the past and it made their history into a progression from tribes to peoples to nations. As the embryo of the nation, the tribe served as a charter for national independence--the nation being the natural historical self-realization of common descent, common blood, and common unique character." The link between theories of ethnicity and the context of European nationalism is explored in a recent paper by Rousseau (1991; see also 1990:44).

river. It was a region that harboured "Tonga"--a term meaning "grunTERS, dissatisfied people who complained and rebelled against the chief" (Lancaster 1974:724).<sup>12</sup> As a result, and also because of the absence of extensive missionary activity, peoples in these ethnic border zones (Lancaster 1987)--peoples now known as the "Shangwe" and the "Tonga," among others--fitted poorly into attempts to map the ethnic composition of the colony in a definitive way.

This entire discussion may well seem beside the point, since I have already suggested that the so-called *VaShangwe* often disavow the very ethnic label that is applied to them, preferring to call themselves *Vakorekore*, a mainstream "Shona" identity. Why not simply accept these self-attributions at face value, and dismiss the colonial effort at discovering a definitive ethnic classification as at best misguided or at worst a deliberate manipulation? The reason, I would argue, is that what might appear to be a series of sterile debates in colonial and post-colonial ethnography and ethnocartography speak eloquently to a central problem--that of the relationship between the power to name others, on the one hand, and the power to introduce new forms of agrarian social

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<sup>12</sup>Earlier ethnographers made the same observation about the sociological meaning of these ethnic terms. The "Batonga," Posselt (1978[1945]:15) remarks, "were tributary to the Barozwi, who called all tributary tribes by that name. The name appears to be derived from 'ku tonga,' to judge, hence 'ba tongwa,' those judged, from the fact that they had to obey their over-lords, the Barozwi; or again it may mean the people without a chief--those who judge themselves."



practice on the other. As we shall see, the motivations behind as well as the consequences of ethnic naming practices are inseparable from the larger context of polity-formation and the logic of administration--political, economic and even spiritual<sup>13</sup>--that evolved during the ninety year period of colonial sovereignty. The fact that ethnic entities (what I prefer to think of as instances of a practice of ethnic naming) on the periphery of the colonial state are less easily affixed to maps is in no way accidental; it directly reflects the degree to which the extension of state power and the refinement of ethnographic knowledge are processes that reciprocally reinforce one another.

In the section that follows, and in the next chapter, my aim is to review the history of these processes during the colonial era and the decade of independence that followed, showing at each point how the classification of identities in texts and maps contributed to the articulation of relations of power, ethnographic knowledge, and agrarian practice.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>The English verb *to administer* has a deep etymological irony. Deriving from the Latin *administrare*--"to serve"--the term has yielded the two kinds of modern minister--politician and priest. Both of these figures, it is widely recognized, administer to needs they themselves may in large part create. I am interested not only in this process of need creation in the colonial context, but in asking how the subjects of those needs are constituted in ethnic terms.

<sup>14</sup>I do not at this point take up the question of how such maps were viewed and interpreted either by the audience for whom they were produced, or by others who might happen to see them. See Orlove (1991) for such an analysis in an Andean context.

### **Power and Identity: Mapping the "Shona," Naming the "Shangwe"**

Soon after they occupied the Zimbabwean plateau in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the white settlers opposed the "Ndebele" to the "Shona" even though the former term named a polity and the latter merely identified those who lived outside of and in a subordinate relationship to it. The principle of naming amorphous regions such as "Manyikaland" or "Karangaland" and attaching some kind of primordial ethnicity to them was largely an invention of missionaries between 1890 and 1910.

The emergence of macro-Shona dialect groupings as an exhaustive set of sub-ethnicities turns out therefore to be quite recent, as Ranger (1989) has recently made clear. "Two of the terms," he writes, "had long significance ['Karanga'/'Kalanga' and 'Manyika'], two were topographical ['Korekore' and 'Zezuru'], and one was a slang term invented by an enemy ['Ndau'] (1989:121-2)." Some ethnic terms, such as "Manyika," served at the time of colonial conquest as ways of designating territories held under the authority of particular rulers. Both the Portuguese and later the British creatively enlarged the political realms named in this way in order to maximize the territory they felt entitled to command after conquest. The geographical labels "Mashonaland" and "Matabeleland" were used in this way to iconically represent the extent of the dominions acquired on behalf of the British Crown.

Rhodes and his colleagues also imagined political relations between the tribal entities they invented in order to extend the compass of their own conquests. The idea that Ndebele suzerainty over the "Shona" comprised virtually all the peoples living between the Zambezi and the Limpopo rivers, was an easy way to claim eventual authority over a vast area between the two great river valleys (see Palmer 1977:227; and Beach 1986:17). After the signing of the Rudd concession in 1888 and the defeat of the Ndebele in 1893, the British South Africa Company was, by this logic, able to assume control at the helm of a single ethno-polity. They named it "Rhodesia," at once a mnemonic and metonymic device attaching the person of their own founder-conqueror to the territory his imperialist vision had embraced for all civilized posterity.<sup>15</sup> Matabeleland and Mashonaland remained the state's two primary administrative sub-divisions. By the Order-in-Council promulgated by Britain in 1898, a Department of Native Affairs was established through which the Imperial Government intended to directly safeguard the interests of the African population. A separate Chief Native Commissioner was

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<sup>15</sup>Rhodes wanted to use the same kind of political fiction in order to claim what is now eastern Botswana for Company rule. He suggested that Lobengula, the Ndebele chief who signed the Rudd concession, controlled land as far west as the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, an area claimed by Chief Kgama of the BamaNgwato. Kgama's counter-claim was supported after he and two other Tswana chiefs petitioned the British Government in 1895. See Best and Zinyama (1985:422).

appointed in Mashonaland and Matabeleland to oversee a cadre of native commissioners posted at district level; in 1913, these two offices were amalgamated into a single position at the apex of the hierarchy of native administration (Holleman 1969:15,17).

Meanwhile, the Anglicans, American Methodists, and Catholics (and among them, the Jesuits) all competed to name ethnic subjects in Southern Rhodesia; simultaneously, these missionaries produced written languages to correspond to ethnonyms they had selected or invented to represent the pool of Natives from which they drew their flock (Ranger 1989). In this project, to read a bible in ChiManyika, for example, was to engage in a practice of ethnic self-attribution, one that both enacted and revealed one's status as a particular kind of ethnic subject. There were, however, no missions at all in the area occupied by the people who came to be known by early Native Commissioners as members of the "Shangwe" tribe until 1963, long after a fixed number of Shona "dialects" had been established by missionaries and authorized as legitimate by linguists. The *Vashangwe* thus remained an ambiguous entity, neither within nor fully outside of an encompassing notion of Shona ethnicity. Unlike the major "Shona groups," the "Shangwe" identity never gained any currency at the level of national politics. In fact, in recent times at least, it has never been used as a term of self-reference by those to whom it has been applied.

Now the "Shangwe" had been identified as such by colonial traders and district officers shortly after the turn of the century. These settlers were apparently adopting the name *Abashankwe*<sup>16</sup> in current use by the Ndebele to refer to the peoples of Gokwe from whom they extracted a tribute in tobacco up until the time of the British conquest. As an ethnic name, the Ndebele term therefore served to locate a people who stood in a particular spatial and political relation to themselves.<sup>17</sup> In early colonial discourse, the term "Bashankwe" found its place among a system of equivalent terms that apparently defined a common semantic field, that encompassing "tribes." "Tribes" were first and foremost a way of marking relations of obligation to the colonial state under circumstances where control over people could best be exercised through control over chiefs rather than over

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<sup>16</sup>Farrar (in ZNA 1906) translates *Abeshankwe* as "people who live alone."

<sup>17</sup>The popular etymology of the noun root *-Shangwe* current in Gokwe today among those to whom the term is applied, suggests that it derives from the word *shangwa*, which for some Shona-speakers conveys the related senses of "drought," "famine" or "misery." *VaShangwe* would then be taken to signify "people of the place of drought." In the oral history collected by Marr from the incumbent Chief Chireya, the latter explains the origin of *MuShangwe* in terms of the event of original conquest of the autochthonous people of Nyamusasa by the Rozvi Chief Chimera: "He [Chimera] came here and chased the Nyamusasa out, and that is why they call themselves [*sic*] *Mushangwe*" (Marr 1962:81). Marr's interpretation is that *MuShangwe* derives from either *shangwe*--"shield" in ChiManyika; or from the verb *kushangura*, "to beat into shape, to slap" in ChiZezuru. See Marr (*ibid.*) and Hannan (1984:600). Much more will be said about these mytho-historical links in Chapter IX.

territory. This was especially true in Sebungwe. As the Native Commissioner, Bulawayo, wrote in 1910, "even now [it] is a wild district and for many years villages hidden away in the hills remained unknown to the N.C.s" (ZNA 1910).

The colonists' model for how indigenous relations of political subordination and control operated in the Sebungwe region was derived from the Ndebele, whose system of tax farming they were attempting to displace by commoditizing the administrative labour of chiefs. Thus Chireya was identified as the "principal *induna*" of the district (ZNA 1906b). Only minimal efforts were made, however, to identify any indigenous hierarchy of authority in Chireya's land. From the point of view of early Native Administration, Chireya was on the same footing as his subordinate *indunas*. All were made responsible for collecting a head tax, for which they were paid a very small stipend, although Chief Chireya was paid at double the rate of his subordinates (see Figure 7.3).

In the event, the coopting of indigenous leaders by putting them on a salary (or just as often by threatening to withhold or reduce it) was not so simple a matter. The original stipend offered of 10 shillings per month was insufficient to solicit the cooperation of many of the Sebungwe headmen, as the first Native Commissioner in the district, Val Gielgud, recounted in 1906:

| <i>Tonga Chiefs</i> | Monthly<br>Subsidy | <i>Shangwe Chiefs<br/>and Headmen</i> | Monthly<br>Subsidy |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Tsabi               | £1                 | Sileya[Chireya]                       | £2                 |
| Siatshilaba         | £1                 | Nebiri                                | 10/-               |
| Sansali             | £1                 | Negande                               | 10/-               |
| Binga               | £1                 | Nenyunka[Nenyunga]                    | 10/-               |
| Sigalenke           | £1                 | Nemangwe                              | 10/-               |
| Sinamagode          | £1                 | Njelele                               | 10/-               |
| Silubu              | £1                 | Sai                                   | 10/-               |
| Sinempande*         | 10/-               |                                       |                    |
| Sinakoma*           | 10/-               |                                       |                    |
| Mola*               | 10/-               |                                       |                    |
| Sampakaluma*        | 10/-               |                                       |                    |
| Simariyampongo**    | 10/-               |                                       |                    |

**Figure 7.3. Subsidised Chiefs and Headman: Sebungwe District: 1908. Source: ZNA 1908a.**

**Notes:** \*Subsidy reduced from 1£ to 10/- monthly.  
 \*\*Regent for Siatshilaba

[T]he indunas Njelele and Nemangwe did not receive the news that a payment of 10/- a month would be made to them with much satisfaction; and they pointed out that if they came or sent for the money the journey to and from Tsheti [at that time the District headquarters] would take even in fine weather at least ten days of every month. (ZNA 1906b).

Other headmen, such as Nebiri and Negande, simply made themselves "invisible" upon the arrival of the NC's messengers. A certain Chief Molo, thought to be accountable for 150 taxpayers, proved particularly intractable: "Ever since this District was first taken over by me in 1898," Gielgud complained in 1911, "Molo and his people have given trouble and only recently Molo's 10/-subsidy was stopped for six months. I find on enquiry that every year great trouble is experienced in collecting Molo's tax" (ZNA 1911a).

Although Gielgud tried to pin his difficulties on the incompetence of the man in office, the real source of the trouble with Molo evidently lay in the tenuous relation between power, territory and legitimacy on the farthest frontier of colonial control, a situation Gielgud himself was forced to acknowledge:

Molo is a very stupid, feeble old man and has no influence over his people whom he does not attempt to control. He has allowed them to scatter and some of his so-called people live more than a two days journey away from him, in a dry mountainous and very inaccessible country.

These conditions make control by the chief impossible, even if he were a man of strong character, anxious to use his influence on behalf of the administration.

In the end, however, Gielgud finds a more compelling argument, one that arranges Batonga "types" into an ethnic hierarchy:

Higher up the river the Batonga have paid well, and there is no reason why Molo's clan should not have paid equally well.

It must be borne in mind that the Batonga of the lower river are a wild low type of native; little in touch with Europeans, and I am of opinion that in the interests of effective Government, the Administration should differentiate in their treatment of those natives who obey and those who collectively disregard its commands (ibid.).<sup>18</sup>

Gielgud's ethnosemiotic thus has a pragmatic purpose: the

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<sup>18</sup>It is interesting to read Gielgud's remarks in light of the following statement by Max Gluckman, in his forward to a collection of essays on the Tonga by Elizabeth Colson: "The Tonga are highly mobile: they move to settle with many different kinds of kin, or with mere clan-fellows, or even with strangers. The village headman has little if any authority. When before 1918 the British tried to set up chiefs, they recognized 116 leaders, for a population which by 1945, despite rapid increase, lay between 70,000 and 110,000. This shows graphically how little instituted authority there was" (Gluckman 1962:ix).



commanding touch of Europeans domesticates, he suggests, taming the native who is "wild" and "low." In this scalar metaphoric scheme, those "higher" up the river are also "higher" up the social ladder rising from savagery to civilization.

But Gielgud wishes to draw a more general lesson from the Molo affair. The Administration must "differentiate" among Native subjects if it hopes to effectively win their obedience. He thus creates a link between what were to become two preoccupations of colonial practice: correctly discerning the signs of essential ethnic difference; and instilling discipline in the colonial subject. That link, as I will shortly demonstrate, was to re-emerge in various guises as a central theme in the coming decades.

Gielgud's solution to this particular problem was not only to withdraw recognition from Molo as Chief (whose ritual authority he was willing to allow), but to shift the principle of control over persons to that of control over space:

I therefore suggest Molo's pay be done away with and he be no longer recognized as a Government Chief.

He would still be the High Priest of the clan, and as he is an old man he could be exempted from tax if necessary.

If this be done I recommend that Molo's people [who are] now so scattered as to be quite beyond control except at the expense of much time and labour be ordered to return to the locality from which they have removed without permission. Once concentrated their control would become possible and a capable native could be selected to act as Molo's deputy and as such recognized by the

Administration (ibid.; emphasis in original).<sup>19</sup>

Here we can glimpse an interest in not only mapping the field of ethnic differences but in acquiring a knowledge of native customary practice as well.

### **Colonial Administration and the Pursuit of Ethnographic Knowledge**

Within the primary mandate to discover the most expedient mechanism through which tax could be collected, and control maintained, some minimal ethnological knowledge was required and therefore sought. As his treatment of the Molo case indicates, Gielgud seemed willing to concede that the legitimacy of government appointed chiefs and headmen in the eyes of their own subjects was likely to make a difference in the degree to which discipline and obedience among remote tribal subjects could be expected and achieved. One more illustration from this era in early colonial Gokwe suggests just such an evolving concern. Just before issuing his recommendations with regard to Chief Molo, Gielgud questioned the wisdom of allowing the appointment of Simariampongo as successor to the title of Chief Satshilaba to stand. The appointment had apparently been based on the presumption that the same principles of patrilineal or collateral succession prevailing, respectively, among the Ndebele and Shona would

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<sup>19</sup>The model of centralization that Gielgud proposed was adopted as a national policy after 1926 (Garbett 1963:190); ironically, with the exception of the planned settlement of immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, the centralization of villages was never widely carried out in Gokwe itself.

also apply to the Tonga peoples in the northern part of the Zambezi valley. As the Native Commissioner explained to his superior in Bulawayo,

The chieftainship can only be inherited by the son of Satshilaba's sister who is the person into whom the "Spirit" of the Chief Satshilaba will enter on his decease. Simariampongo can never take the name of Satshilaba and never be the acknowledged chief of the clan... Simariampongo...has been placed in a very unenviable position by his appointment and is anxious to resign the office to which he feels he has no right and designate Simbubi as the rightful heir (ZNA 1911b).

In just this way, the Native Administration in Gokwe continued to solve ethnological puzzles in an essentially ad hoc fashion, tackling them only when specific problems of authority or of legitimate succession to office might arise.

Several attempts were made to trace a distinctive "Bashankwe" ethnohistory, sometimes rendered as fact, sometimes as myth (e.g. Mrs. H.N. Hemans 1918; Coley 1927; H.N. Hemans 1971[1935]; Tapson 1944; see Chapter VIII, below). But these writers--all Native Commissioners save the first, who was the spouse of one--evidenced little concern with specifying the geographical spheres of chiefly authority. Nothing indicates this more clearly than the way in which the first three "Reserves"--Pashu, Sibaba, and Mpampa--were drawn on early maps of the district (see Figure 7.4) as geometrically perfect circles. When the administration needed to locate eligible tax-payers or to recruit labour for public works, it was sufficient to try and find and then delegate responsibility to the relevant chief or ward-head. The names



of the tributary chiefs were the crucial variables, rather than either the territories they controlled or even the "tribe" to which they were perceived to belong. The most complete list available from the early colonial period identified 30 chiefs in Sebungwe, 12 of whom are deemed to have headmen beneath them who in turn control specified kraals (see Figure 7.5). Curiously, tribal status appears under the "Remarks" column for some headmen but not for others. The names listed include Mshankwe [*MuShangwe*], Mtonka [*Mutonga*], Mlozwi [*Murozwi*], Mnanzwa, and Mlolo, the last two of which soon disappeared from the local colonial taxonomy. This incompleteness may be for any one of several reasons: the District Commissioner may have received ambiguous information, or may simply have been unable to ask the headmen in question. In any case, it was evidently not important at that time, as it was to become later, to elaborate an exhaustive set of tribal categories into which every headman might be placed.

When they were ceded criminal and civil jurisdiction over Africans in their districts in 1910, the Native Commissioners effectively became the absolute rulers of their districts, and came to think of themselves as such (Weinrich 1973:10; see also 1971:38). The explicit intention was to reproduce the kind of absolute paternalist relationship toward tribal subjects that was thought to have obtained when chiefs held independent power (Holleman 1969:16). This substitution was, in the view of the administration, successful. As the Chief

| <u>Chief</u> | <u>Headman</u>                         | <u>Remarks</u>                  | <u>Controls<br/>Kraals at:</u> |
|--------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Sileya       | 1.Nembudzia<br>2.Goredema<br>3.Majombo | <i>Mshankwe</i>                 | Masowe<br>Kabongo<br>Karongwe  |
| Tshabi       | 1.Siyatshila<br>2.Demba                | <i>Mtonka</i>                   | Jinkaninka<br>Masigili         |
| Pashu        | 1.Sinemzunga<br>2.Makonya              | <i>Mnanzwa</i><br><i>Mtonka</i> | Mlindi<br>Esiga                |
| Siatshilaba  | 1.Simariya-<br>pongo<br>2.Sibuyu       | <i>Mtonka</i>                   | Mwala<br><br>Etshenje          |
| Nemangwe     | 1.Mfungo<br>2.Nebumu                   | <br><i>Msankwe</i>              | Mfungo<br>Sasami               |
| Nebiri       | 1.Tshamu<br>2.Mataluka                 | <i>Mlozwi</i><br><i>Msankwe</i> | Mkoyo<br>Sitewkwe              |
| Negande      | 1.Kwerere<br>2.Siamsanje               | <i>Msankwe</i><br><i>Mtonka</i> | Edela<br>Mabonkola             |
| Njelele      | 1.Nyanubemba<br>2.Gumberi              | <i>Mlolo</i><br><i>Mlozwi</i>   | Mnyati<br>Zikombila            |
| Silubu       | 1.Njabanjaba                           | <i>Mtonka</i>                   | Ngwalala                       |
| Sansali      | 1.Manjolo                              | <i>Mtonka</i>                   | Masibindo                      |
| Siabuwa      | 1.Mjatakulula                          |                                 | Mpamba                         |
| Sinesitonka  | 1.Gunyanku                             |                                 | Matobola                       |
| Sigalenke    | 1.Fulunka                              |                                 | Msanka                         |
| Binga        |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Sinamagonde  |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Simtshembu   |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Sinempande   |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Sivakona     |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Mola         |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Sampakaluma  |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Nenyunka     |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Sai          |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Nkoka        |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Masaba       |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Siamupa      |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Singatanke   |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Sinamsanga   |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Sinasenkwi   |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Sinamwenda   |                                        |                                 |                                |
| Dobolo       |                                        |                                 |                                |

**Figure 7.5: Government Appointed Chiefs and Headmen: Sebungwe District. Source: ZNA (1908b)**

Native Commissioner expressed it in 1913,

Chiefs complain that they no longer control their followings as they did in the past and that the young people are gradually breaking away from tribal control...The increased powers granted to Native Commissioners materially assist in breaking up these tribal methods of control, and I am glad to say results have so far proved satisfactory (quoted in Weinrich 1973:11).

The first published ethnographic treatise on the "Bashankwe" appeared, together with an account of the neighbouring "Batonka," in the Proceedings of the Rhodesia Scientific Association in 1918. It was written by Mrs. H.N. Hemans, wife of the Sebungwe District Native Commissioner whom we encountered in Chapter IV. Her presentation begins with a concise account of the migration of the Barosi [VaRozvi] ancestors of Chief Chireya into the Mafungabusi region and their conquest of the indigenous Bashankwe tribe.<sup>20</sup> From there her gaze (and her ear) turns toward her subjects' physical qualities. With the heathen of the Christian Holy Land as her classificatory guide, and exercising her independent faculty of aesthetic judgement, Mrs. Hemans is able to discover the universal signs of rank inscribed in the appearance of the Bashankwe body<sup>21</sup>:

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<sup>20</sup>I will discuss several versions of this story in Chapter IX, below.

<sup>21</sup>Ranger (1985b:7) notes that physical anthropologists from the British Association of Science meeting in Bulawayo in 1905 requested specimens of "typical" natives from Native Commissioners; though some Native Commissioners were reluctant to comply, it undoubtedly helped to affirm the notion that tribal status could be scientifically determined by isolating and identifying distinctive physiognomic features.

The Barose headmen are in marked physical contrast to the rest of the tribe. They are exceptionally tall and thin, and have high-pitched voices. They have Semitic features, some Jewish, whilst others have the rather finer features of the Arab. The rest of the tribe have coarser features and are of short stature...

The women of the Bashankwe have fairly pleasant features, some of the girls being quite good looking (1918:6).

Her assessment of the neighbouring "Batonka tribe," whom she believes to be descendants of the same stock, also links voice quality with bodily form as well as social rank and ethnicity:

The headmen, who are descendants of the original Barose, are in greater contrast to the rest of the tribe than in the case of the Bashankwe. The Batonka are thick-set with massive limbs, and have remarkably unpleasant and harsh voices, while the headmen are of slight build and have tenor voices (ibid.:7).

Faced with describing an instance of truly "savage" bodily expression, however, any remaining scientific pretension in Mrs. Hemans's own voice suddenly vanishes: "The Batonka knock out the four upper front teeth which does not improve their appearance, and the women," she adds maliciously, "are perfectly hideous" (ibid.).

The account touches only momentarily on matters of economic practice that seem directly to concern the state. She mentions that the "Inyoga" tobacco the Bashankwe grow and manufacture "finds a ready sale among all natives, who prefer it to any other. The men therefore do not go out to work for white people to any large extent" (ibid.). The Batonka, on the other hand, may already be identified by the categories of wage-work they characteristically perform:



Practically every man of working age goes away to work every year. Some do mine work and others railway and sanitary work, and are the well-known "Zambesi boys" employed by the Bulawayo Municipality. They seldom do house work (ibid.:8).

This is but a passing observation, sandwiched in between paragraphs describing the dangers of crocodiles and the crafting of dug-out canoes, but it has the effect of contributing to an already well established strategy of matching "tribes" to natural niches in the labour economy of the colony. Still, the intent of the piece clearly lies elsewhere, since in conclusion she attempts to put her information toward the service of a larger project of grander historical import, the identification of the true builders of the Great Zimbabwe ruins:

Both tribes are quite convinced that the Barose built Zimbabwe, and it may be possible to reconcile both schools of archaeologists. The original buildings may have been erected by "Phoenicians" and the other and admittedly later structures may have been built by the Barose in imitation of the originals (ibid.:9).

Having added one more piece of evidence to the existing edifice of "scientific" opinion concerning the anomaly of the ruins, she affirms what everyone in settler society wished to believe, that the Barose "are among the happy peoples who have no history" (ibid.), and that "history" must therefore be given to them by the beneficent hand of colonialism.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Her historical "proof" is more remarkable in view of the 500 mile distance separating the "Bashankwe,"--her "Barosi" descendants--from the Great Zimbabwe ruins. It was the persistent stories of an epoch of Rozwi statecraft and imperial dominance over much of the Zimbabwe highlands that

By the time her husband offered his book-length memoir on his experiences among the "Bashankwe" and "Batonka" in 1935, such excesses of aesthetic and historical opinion were no longer quite so admissible in ethnography (see below), though they remained acceptable in the chronicle of a retired civil servant.<sup>23</sup> Hemans's memoir is itself a very uneven pastiche—one in which narratives of game-hunting and tax-collecting expeditions are interrupted by forays into ethnography and bold reflections on the moral condition of mankind. Yet the book is decidedly more sentimental and less heroic in tone

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were being desperately deconstructed by ethnographers of this early period, even if it meant extracting testimony from the most far-flung outposts of Rozwi migration and descent. The notion that the "Shona" had formed significant conquest states prior to the Nguni invasions of the 1830s threatened the fundamental analogy that made "Shona" stand in relation to "Ndebele" as "weak/passive" to "strong/militaristic".

<sup>23</sup>Hemans was himself no stranger to the ethnographic genre, having written an extended treatise in 1912 on the history, sociology, religion and folklore of the "Abenanzwa tribe" in the Wankie [Hwange] region, just west of Sebungwe district. The topics it covers closely parallel those of Mrs. Hemans's text—including matters of relative physical refinement--and may well have served as a model for the latter's structure. Of interest in his account, however, is the inclusion of truly extraordinary sections pertaining to the relationship between sanitation, personal hygiene and disease: "They have no special pits or anything of the kind for the deposit of night-soil, but men and women go to stool at different places outside the kraal, the same place never being used by the opposite sexes. This rule is most strictly observed...With regard to ablutions, they do not often wash the whole of the body with water, but more generally smear the limbs with oil which they extract from the castor-oil bean...Dirt diseases are, strangely enough, in spite of the absence of sanitation, the exception, owing, perhaps, to the strong sun and sandy nature of the soil which speedily render excreta and other noxious matters harmless" (H.N. Hemans 1912:102).

than some others of its genre that date from the previous century (cf. Pratt 1986; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:chap.3). His natives are a disaggregated subject, not the timeless, faceless figures whose personalities have been reduced to the Manichean alternative between innocence and evil that was to be evoked in the imagination of readers of the Rhodesian Herald several decades later (see above, Chapter IV). Although in his explicitly ethnographic moments he feels compelled to pass judgement on bodily form, particularly among the Batonka ("among whom are to be found some really fine specimens of savage humanity"), comparison with the "Semitic races" is omitted this time. The native messengers who accompany Hemans on his ventures into the Gokwe bush often have personal names--though only his faithful dog "Kipper" is allotted an eponymous chapter all to himself; he both trusts and likes them, and he tells us why. Some are attributed moral and intellectual qualities, as are the chiefs and headmen he encounters. Loyalty, however, always earns singular praise. Reflecting on a close brush with a herd of charging buffalo, he remarks:

From many years of association with natives I have come to realise their good points as well as their bad (after all they are human beings like ourselves only not so sophisticated), but I never admired two men more than I did Nkani and Johnny that day for they stood as steady as rocks, one on either side of me, facing the oncoming herd, and never uttered a sound nor raised their weapons until I gave the word, although they knew they faced an almost certain and messy death (ibid.:100).

At times, perhaps overwhelmed by the evidence in his own text

of such periods of prolonged camaraderie and even intimacy, Hemans is at pains to radicalize the difference between himself and his subjects. He does so by referring back to incontrovertible distinctions in bodily form and odour. Faced with a dance performance by Chief Simariampongo's people, which he compares in form to "a sort of Sir Roger de Coverly," he hastens to add that he was finally forced to withdraw his chair "from the discomfort and the smell of brown bodies" (1971[1935]:65).

Apart from anything else it might tell us of the colonial imagination in his time, Hemans's text is certainly "experience-near" (Geertz 1979); the "tribes" he describes are loosely specified, while the encounters with particular chiefs and headman, their manners and character, are brought to the fore.

More distanced efforts to comprehend the Natives of Southern Rhodesia as a total field of knowledge did begin to appear during this era, efforts constructed through acts of classification and ever-more exacting differentiation. But they were self-consciously fluid in their exposition, and almost "post-modern" in their studied use of pastiche and in their unwillingness to draw a neat line between historical or ethnographic "truth" and fiction. Listen to F.W.T. Posselt writing of his efforts to secure an accurate history of the Barozwi--the parent stock, in his view, of the "BaShankwe"--in the introduction to his book, Fact and Fiction: A Short

Account of the Natives of Southern Rhodesia, first published in 1935:

In its final form this essay is really a kind of mosaic of fact and fiction: for portions have had to be rewritten from time to time in the light of fresh information obtained. Nor is it unlikely that further alterations would have been made, for the accounts of Native historians and antiquarians agree only to this extent that they are all conflicting. But the author...offers no apology therefore in presenting this account of divers colours and composed of different materials (Posselt 1978[1942]:Introduction).

Posselt's unwillingness to offer a definitive account of the historical origins of, or the relations between, "tribes"<sup>24</sup> was matched by that of his contemporary and fellow Native Commissioner, Charles Bullock:

Some of these tribal appellations have been changed within living memory. They are not static, nor can the tribes themselves be said to be distinct...[T]ribal fusion must have been going on for centuries; and it is thought that a detailed classification of alleged distinct tribes is of little scientific value, and leads chiefly to inexactitude of statement (1928:13).

Neither of these men excluded from their conception of acceptable scientific procedure, however, the making of unashamedly evaluative observations of "tribal character." Indeed, as already evident in the work of Mr. and Mrs. Hemans, such observations constituted an established and fully legitimate category of ethnographic descriptions of the time. Thus Posselt was able to opine that, "The salient

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<sup>24</sup>In fact, Posselt's reticence in this regard was to be championed half a century later when his book was reprinted in the Rhodesiana series (see the discussion of H.N. Hemans's work in Chapter IV, above).

characteristics of the Vazezuru are cowardice and a consummate mastery in lying (1978[1942]:110)," and to go on to attribute these "national failings" to the Vazezuru's political weakness in the face of constant threat from more "militaristic" Ndebele neighbours (see above, fn.20). Reference to the "inherent weakness" of the Shona tribes extended, of course, a much older missionary and abolitionist discourse concerned with "healing" a weak, defenceless, feminized Africa (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:115-16). But the specifically colonial practice of "healing" entailed a program not only of providing "protection" to "weak" tribes, but also of civilizing the body through productive, disciplined labour. Although the early Native Commissioners still had their liberal sensibilities aroused by the "enslavement" of one tribe by another,<sup>25</sup> by this time the white employers of black labour in the towns, mines, and farms had already begun to apply the grander metaphors of tribal strength and weakness to the capacities of the individual body to "sustain effort" in labouring for wages, and in progressing out of a state of

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<sup>25</sup> Bullock (1970[1928]:169), for example, writing of "the querulous intonation [in Shona] that mars an otherwise beautiful language," that "we can hear in it centuries of oppression killing pride of race and self-respect. I have heard a Chief say '*Ti ri Wa Nyai*,' and, to him, that seemed a sufficient explanation for refusal of leadership, for cunning pretence, and for cringing abasement." In a footnote, Bullock translates "*Ti ri Wa Nyai*," as "We are Wa Nyai--people of a slave tribe."

primitive lethargy:<sup>26</sup>

The inherent weakness of character shows itself in the fact that they soon tire of sustained application; even when they have achieved a certain measure of progress, they require to be propelled onwards, otherwise they readily relapse into their primitive state (Posselt 1978 [1942]: 110).

Posselt's insider assessments could only contribute to this mode of conceiving of the Native in terms of a kind of energetics of the civilizing process. As we shall see in the next chapter, it was a mode that rapidly gained momentum in the 1940s and 1950s.

With regard to whether or not the Natives in question were good candidates for becoming Christian subjects, the opinions of the two amateur ethnographers were adamantly opposed. Bullock prefaces his work by paying deference to other warriors on the frontier of darkness and light:

Place of honour to the army of Christ, which is neither conscript nor hireling, which seeks only the welfare of those it conquers--the substitution of Christianity, with its pure and selfless ethics, for the black cloud of superstition and daemonism which overwhelms the turbid intellects of the barbarian Mashona. Not here shall we discuss possible errors of tactics in that great campaign, nor question the truth of its battle-cries (1970[1928]:6).

Posselt, in contrast, was not so willing to separate spiritual battles from temporal ones, and took such "errors in tactics" to be precisely his business. He was highly critical of colonial and missionary efforts to "propel the Native onwards"

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<sup>26</sup>Folk theories concerning the natural suitability of tribes in relation to certain kinds of wage labour were well established by this time (see Ranger 1985:10-11).

too rapidly, especially if such efforts were undertaken in ignorance of the Native's essential nature. The results of such haste were inevitably to encourage moral decay and tribal disintegration, as the chiefs became "degraded in their authority and status" and as missionaries preached "a spiritual and ethical code wholly foreign to Native minds" (ibid.:110-11). The moral teachings of the latter,

too frequently conveyed in the form of abstruse theological disquisition, have hardly made an impression...The consolations of Christianity and the discipline it implies in its teachings are but feeble opponents to the forces marshalled by the ancient belief in ancestral spirits, witchcraft and other occult agencies. It could hardly be otherwise! Many generations must pass before primitive beliefs can be eradicated. Until a higher standard of ethics is firmly implanted, such inherited beliefs are the only restraining forces on lawlessness and vice (ibid.:114).

He goes on to assail the confusion caused by the "rival claims made by sectarian competitors in the field of religious enterprise," claims that are "positively bewildering to the Native mind." Then he ridicules the hypocrisy of condemning the very institutions--such as polygamy and "occult" beliefs--that are,

enshrined in the ancient institutions of those people held up as a chosen race, and whose records form part of the basis of religious instruction given to the Natives. With unanswerable logic, the Natives point to this fact as a confirmatory proof of the inherent excellence of their own institutions, which it is now desired to change (ibid.:114-15).

Notice that Posselt is back in the realm of the Native-in-general, whose collective Mind is sometimes logical, sometimes



utterly confused by the mixed messages being proffered by the sundry agents of the civilizing mission. The failure in understanding, however, works both ways:

The desire to do good, without understanding the nature of him whom it is intended to benefit nor clearly appreciating the methods used, must mar much of our labour; however laudable the intentions, many are but arrows shot in the dark (ibid:115).

Ultimately, Posselt argued, such blind, misguided labours may only result in the "quickenning of race consciousness ...faintly felt by a people groping in the dark, bewildered by a foreign race." And it is "our detribalized, landless Native proletariat, ever growing in the towns and labour centres," Posselt gravely warns, that is "open to ready exploitation by the professional demagogue" (ibid.).

The spectre of the two principal antagonists in the colonial drama shrouded in darkness, the one aimlessly firing the arrows of Christian charity, the other aimlessly groping for a lost identity, probably captures the settlers' desperate sense that they had lost their "fix" on the Native, and that the geographic and ethnographic boundaries separating them had grown vague and porous. From 1930 onwards, the image of an urban Native, prematurely stripped of tribal custom, and just as prematurely beginning to imagine his entry into the world of modern democratic politics, was to reverberate more and more loudly throughout settler colonial discourse. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930, which imagined the eventual segregation of white and black by definitively allocating

lands on a racial basis, provided conceptual and jural clarification for the troubled "European" mind, but failed to forestall the sense of impending dread at the rise of a modern black political consciousness (see Palmer 1977:chap. 8). In 1934, Chief Native Commissioner Carbutt even went so far as to propose that a separate state be carved out of other British dominions (he suggested "underpopulated" areas of Tanganyika) and the Natives induced to move there, where they might fulfil their potential to develop unhindered by the inevitable limitations imposed by white settlement (Carbutt 1934).

As we shall see in the next chapter, there were others in the government--particularly those in the Department of Native Agriculture--who had long taken a more sanguine view of the future of the Native, envisaging his deconstruction as a plurality of tribal types and his remaking into another set of modern subject identities. But before the Second World War, most of the Native Commissioners, including the amateur ethnographers I have been discussing, were more in favour of restoring the integrity of tribal life in the Reserves over which they had jurisdiction than in the kind of grim solution proposed by Carbutt or the fast-paced modernizing regimes of agricultural and spiritual missionaries. Yet as we have seen, men like Gielgud, Hemans, Bullock and Posselt were sceptical of efforts to determine with ethnographic and historic precision the relation between chiefs, subjects and broader tribal identities such as the "Bashankwe" or the "Batonka."

Their focus remained on the personalities and pliability of the chiefs they dealt with in the everyday contexts of taxation, conscription, and judicial intervention. Tribal genealogies, histories, customs and folk-tales were reported partly as a means of exhibiting a specialized, insider knowledge of one's subjects, using a rhetorical style designed to suggest a degree of intimacy achieved with the Native around the camp-fire.

There was thus a gap during the pre-war period between the production of ethnographic knowledge by colonial civil servants and the putting of that knowledge to use in the enactment of administrative functions--a gap that was only to be fully closed in the 1960s. In the years in between, a new cadre of professional anthropologists came to dominate the production of ethnographic texts in south-central Africa, many of whom addressed themselves directly to the perceived paradox of the tribal man in modern guise. Although the old style of ethnographic reportage was never entirely to subside, the use of such expert knowledge to map relations of power came to assume a new significance in the years immediately following the war.

To conclude our discussion of the pre-war period we might address an implicit question I have allowed to linger: To what extent did these campfire ethnographies and ethnohistories capture an element of the experienced reality of the subjects to whom questions were addressed? Their informants--almost

exclusively chiefs, headmen, and government messengers, and always men--undoubtedly used these opportunities strategically, making history retrospectively in ways that might enhance their political futures as intermediaries between the colonial power and their own constituencies. In some respects, the model that undergirded these narratives was not unlike the model linking political (or "royal") office to descent that the Native Commissioners took partly from the Old Testament and partly from their native Britain. In Gokwe, as elsewhere in Zimbabwe, the British were able to identify chiefs whose power apparently derived from the combined fact of historical conquest with the rules of succession based on unilineal descent, and whose suzerainty extended over well-defined territories. In this sense, the making of these official ethnohistories may be seen as a collaborative project based on an overlap in conceptions held by colonizers and colonized of the relationship between power, conquest and kinship. Where the models diverged was in the colonial attempt to map these specific political entities (chieftaincies) as if they were ethnic groups or "nations"--entities that embodied distinctive histories and cultural attributes. In the next chapter, I will take up the history of this practice and its use of maps as a vehicle of expression after the Second World War.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NATIVES INTO PEASANTS: REMAPPING AND REMAKING IDENTITIES AFTER 1940

Between 1930 and 1960, a shift occurred in the pairing of administrative practice with the knowledge of ethnicity in Southern Rhodesia--a shift registered in the production of ethnic maps. The mediating figure in this transition was the South African linguist Clement Doke, who presented his Report on the Unification of the Shona Dialects to the Legislative Assembly of Southern Rhodesia in 1931. Doke was adamant that the appearance of discrete Shona dialects was the illusory by-product of missionary efforts, carried out in isolation from one another, to produce competing translations of the New Testament. There was no reason now to perpetuate what he characterized as a "financial and labour wastage":

Even a cursory study of the publications in these dialects convinces one of their inherent unity, a unity which, unfortunately, has been sadly camouflaged by vastly divergent systems of orthography and methods of dividing the words. The differences between the dialects have been grossly exaggerated by these artificial means, and I believe that there is no insuperable difficulty to their absolute unification in one literary form (Doke 1931:3).

Based on field investigations into variations in Shona phonology, syntax and lexicon (carried out over a full year

and in every part of the colony) Doke recommended that a single, literary Shona language and orthography be promulgated.<sup>1</sup> In the course of his presentation, however, Doke classified the recorded linguistic diversity into six "groups" (on the basis "mainly of vocabulary and phonetics"). As I have suggested, these were to serve as the template for the reproduction of the ethnic categories that became salient after the war. Ironically, nothing could have been further from Doke's intent:

In this investigation I am not in any way concerned with the ethnic affinities of the various tribes and sub-tribes. Analyses of these have been published by Messrs. Posselt and Bullock whose works may be referred to. A comparison of the language map in this report and the ethnographic map published in Posselt's *Survey* will show that in very many cases ethnographic and linguistic considerations by no means coincide. I am concerned merely with the language [sic] spoken by the people (ibid.:28).

The map by Posselt, to which Doke makes reference, was produced as part of a monograph he wrote in 1927. Posselt uses colour and shading to indicate the "approximate distribution of tribes and languages in Southern Rhodesia." The twenty "tribes" thus differentiated are not confined to discrete, uniform territories on his map; some are shown as overlapping, others as inhabiting widely separated

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<sup>1</sup>Although a standardized grammar would be based upon Karanga and Zezuru texts, he recommended that only the Kalanga dialects would be specifically excluded from consideration in the establishment of the unified dialect. A dictionary would be compiled drawing principally upon Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika and Ndaou.

geographical regions.<sup>2</sup> In the accompanying text, moreover, it becomes clear that even these divisions represent summaries of what Posselt understands to be a much more complex picture. "Tribes," although nowhere explicitly defined, are apparently conceived by Posselt to be political entities defined by the identification of a chief and his subjects. Wider affiliations, such as those that exist among the various "Rozvi" tribes, are a result of common subordination to, or descent from, a ruling paramount chief at some time in the past. As descendants or subjects split off from parent tribes, migrating elsewhere either to become rulers over or subjects of other chiefs, they left traces of their origins behind.

Why didn't this version of the political basis of ethnic identity persist? Why was Doke's explicit caveat that his linguistic classification should not be mistaken for an ethnic one over-ridden? How did Doke's linguistic map become the official basis for ethnic attributions? The complex answer to this question constitutes one part of my task in this chapter;

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<sup>2</sup>Posselt indicates in the key that these "tribes" may be sorted into four larger "groups" and then regrouped into five major "languages" but these are not indicated on the map. It is interesting to note, however, how different his "groups" are from those that were adopted by ethnographers in the 1950s and after (see above, Chapter VII, and also this chapter, below). The groups he identifies are: 1) the Mashona, Karanga or Batonga Group; 2) the Barozwi Group; 3) the Anguni Group; and 4) the Basuto Group. The "Bushmen, or Masili or Batwa or Matwa" are not honoured with a "Group" designation. Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain a copy of Posselt's map that is fully intact for reproduction here.

the exploration of how ethnic attributions and identities actually operate in Gokwe constitutes the other.

### **The Language of Legislation and the Discourse of Development**

The 1940s and 1950s saw the reformulation of Native Policy in response to fundamental shifts in the structure of the colonial economy. The Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1951, which represented the culmination of policy deliberations that originated prior to the war, was a piece of legislation designed to end the migrant labour system with its attendant social disfunctions and political dangers by privatizing land in the African Reserves and upgrading the skills of the urban labour force. It was a period when maps allocating lands to individual and collective subjects assumed a special utility in the exercise of colonial state power over civil society. It was a time, moreover, when a distinctly modern discourse of development was still being forged and when ways of labelling suitable subjects for such a discourse were still being sought.

"Natives," the name given to the collective Other when seen from the position of the "European" colonizers, had previously been known confidently through the attribution of assumed tribal identities. Now, a new array of subject identities had to be superimposed upon the old. Broad, universalist attributions had to be invented in order to naturalize colonial subjects in an economic calling and to locate them along a historical trajectory, one that pointed



toward progress. A distinction between "Modern" and "Primitive" Africans, "Progressive" and "Backward" Farmers, or even between "Farmers" and "Workers" was fashioned in order to seize hold of and transfigure the particularist identities of an outmoded era (see Duggan 1980:229). In 1941, Prime Minister Huggins announced the mandate for a new era: "It is essential for the preservation of the European civilization" he wrote, "that the African should be advanced."<sup>3</sup>

The key predecessor of the NLHA was the Natural Resources Act of 1941, which was, above all, a programme of constraints or prohibitions imposed on existing agricultural practices; it empowered native commissioners to "depasture stock, give orders on methods of cultivation, prohibit the cultivation of land, and control water" (Murray 1970:305). In 1944, the Commission on Native Production and Trade (also known as the Godlonton Commission) deemed it necessary to go beyond the establishment of negative sanctions in controlling the wanton practices destroying the agrarian base, and formulated a sweeping program of native improvement that was to be realized under the NLHA. The prescriptions formulated by the commission were explicitly framed by a larger thesis on natural law and development, one that might place in proper perspective "the relative obligations of the European and African races" (Government of Southern Rhodesia 1945:9). The

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<sup>3</sup>Huggin's remarks are quoted at some length in the Terms of Reference of the Report on Native Production and Trade (Government of Southern Rhodesia 1945:9; see below).

displacement of the African occupants of the land by Europeans was justified in terms of the "natural laws which inexorably govern human existence" (ibid.), to which Africans must either adapt or else face extinction. As Holleman (1969:46) acutely observes, the commission in this fashion

reconstituted the Rhodesian social order as a product of the law of nature...Europeans thus being identified with progress and progress being enshrined in an inexorable law of nature, the legitimacy of white progressive leadership now becomes fully sanctioned by law and logic.

Duty and discipline were introduced as the new vehicles of African self-improvement from their backward condition, these characteristics being the mark of civilized persons bearing allegiance to modern states. The commission went on to express the opinion

That forward peoples while preserving their settled economy have a duty by all reasonable and proper means to assist backward peoples to progress and for that purpose to enforce discipline without oppression. It is also the duty of forward peoples to adapt themselves to the presence of such backward peoples in their midst.

That it is the duty of backward peoples to contribute to their own advancement to the limit of their powers and to observe proper discipline (Government of Southern Rhodesia 1945:10).

The duties of "forward" and "backward" peoples were thus seen to be reciprocal, but asymmetrical. The former had to "enforce discipline without oppression"; the latter, to embody that discipline themselves.

**"Discipline without Oppression": The Body, the Family and  
the Labouring Subject**

Indeed, a pre-occupation with the disciplined body as the diacritical sign of civilization was everywhere apparent during this period. The recurrent panic over the "peril" posed to white women by the black body, the latter understood to be driven by primitive sexual urges, was only one manifestation of such concerns (see Kennedy 1987:chap.7; Pape 1990). Closely connected was the view that the male Native's surfeit of sexual energy was matched by a deficit of the will when undertaking productive work. As one commission member--W.M. Munro--felt compelled to make explicit in an addendum to the Commission's report: "The male Native in the Reserves appears to suffer from an extraordinary form of lethargy" (Government of Southern Rhodesia 1945:7). The sources of such lethargy were seen to lie jointly in the absence of the efficient use of energy in productive agriculture, the physical health of the native population, and the "discipline and responsibility" that only adequate leadership could ensure and inspire.<sup>4</sup> In the same year, Michael Gelfand (who was

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<sup>4</sup>We can trace the origins of this field of discourse to western Europe in the eighteenth century, when medicine assumed a pivotal function in the novel concern to "police" the social body. The purview of such policing, as Foucault (1980b:170-1) explains, was delineated in Delamere's classic treatise on the subject, and encompassed "three main sets of aims: economic regulation (the circulation of commodities, manufacturing processes, the obligations of tradespeople both to one another and to their clientele), measures of public order (surveillance of dangerous individuals, expulsion of vagabonds and, if necessary, beggars and the pursuit of criminals) and general rules of hygiene (checks on the quality

later to become a renowned physician and amateur ethnographer of the Shona) made the correspondence between the health of the Native body and that of the national economy explicit:

None will deny the economic importance of the Native... From the economic aspect, it is essential that the labourers should enjoy a maximum standard of health. Poor health must inevitably result in poor work. It is here that the medical profession is directly concerned. (Gelfand 1944:33).

Gelfand sets these observations within a discussion of the prospects for economic growth after the war, and his aim is to justify increased state expenditure on African health care:

To continue the economic development of this colony and to ensure that post-war plans will come to a reality it is essential to have an adequate labour market. The bulk of the heavy work, on the railways, in the mines, on the farms and in building and construction work, is done by Natives. Many of the Natives come from other territories, such as Portuguese East Africa, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. As these countries develop, after the war, the labour market will become more difficult (ibid.).

In other words, with the prospect of a shrinkage in the absolute number of bodies available, each Native body would have to be utilized with maximum efficiency. Gelfand suggests that the native body is not only useful in the context of development; simultaneously, and more insidiously, it presents dangers of contamination, since

the health of the European is closely bound up with that of the African. Typhoid carriers amongst the Natives soon give the disease to the white man. Tuberculosis and venereal disease are easily spread

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of foodstuffs sold, the water supply and the cleanliness of streets)." These concerns are almost exactly congruent with the terms of reference of the 1944 Commission.

by contact, from one race to another. Even leprosy can be acquired from the Native. Bilharziasis and hookworm disease are spread by improper disposal of excreta. Thus the Native, knowing little of sanitary hygiene, inadvertently infects the rivers and veld. Many years ago, certain regions of the colony were free from bilharziasis. However, since roads have been made and farms opened up, these areas have been polluted by infected Natives. Thus, even if only to safeguard the health of the white man, it is necessary for the African to receive adequate medical facilities (ibid.).

Development not only brings the Native closer to hand by drawing his labour into the abode of the white race, the industrial workplace; it actually leads to the reticulation of invisible pathways outwards toward the abode of the Native, pathways along which pathogens can be transferred between races.

In giving legislative shape to the Godlonton Commission's proposals, the NLHA was aimed to redesign agrarian practice in ways that visibly embodied the spirit of discipline of both body and landscape required. There were essentially two dimensions to this process. First, by forcing Africans to deploy their labour in new ways on their own lands (constructing contours, fencing off grazing areas and so on), order in the landscape could be used to both mirror and monitor the disciplined application of bodily effort.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Order in the landscape was in the first instance to be generated through a process of data collection by field officers in the Department of Native Agriculture: "Teams will carry out stock counts, obtain population figures, measure up the land under cultivation and collect accurate information on soil types, grazing land, waste land and woodland. They will then go on to land classification, demarcating and mapping arable land, grazing land, forest land and waste land.

Second, by installing a regime of private property, rewards accruing from the disciplined and efficient application of labour and proper management of a plot of land would go directly to the owner of that land. These "technical" procedures, implemented through a regime of "discipline without oppression" would transform backward tribesmen into disciplined modern farmers.

A remarkable government document laying out a five-year plan for the implementation of the NLHA illustrates these transitions acutely. Its title--"What the Native Land Husbandry Act Means to the Rural African and to Southern Rhodesia: A Five Year Plan that will Revolutionize African Agriculture"--gives away both its authors and its intended audience. Authorship clearly must be located in the Native Agricultural Department, which, under the leadership of E.D. Alvord (a former American missionary) had been zealously advocating a "revolution" in African agrarian practice for three decades (see Ranger 1985:60, 70-1). "From 1926 onwards," we read early in the document,

the history of Native agriculture in Southern Rhodesia has been that of a continuous battle between the steadily increasing pressure of a growing population on the restricted land resources, and the efforts of the Native Department to establish those methods which would check the soil erosion and human degradation which are the inevitable concomitant of the old system [i.e. shifting cultivation] under the new conditions. By the middle forties it began to be recognized that propaganda, instruction, and voluntary acceptance

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(Government of Southern Rhodesia 1955:22)."

of the new methods were inadequate. With restricted funds and limited staff the Native Department was doing most valuable work and had achieved some remarkable results, but, faced with the background of centuries' old tribal custom embodied in communal systems of land use, progress was slow. (Government of Southern Rhodesia 1955:1).

The audience for this retrospective narrative consisted of three elements, each of which had potentially distinct sets of perceptions and concerns. The first, the white settler farmers, required assurance that the costs of the "revolution" would be borne by Africans and not themselves, either through taxation or shrinking markets for their own produce. The second, the representatives of the burgeoning post-war manufacturing sector, needed to be convinced that the higher cost of paying a family wage to workers would be offset by increased worker productivity and political stability. And the third, the Colonial Office in Britain, required reassurance that the privatisation of land was in the long-term interests of Africans, whose welfare was still nominally under the protection of the Crown.

The tone in which the case for the NLHA was made, and the way in which subjects were nominated in the text, indicate that the authors had this last audience primarily in mind. The relevant unit of social analysis was shifted from the "tribe" to the "family" while the internal locus of authority and moral responsibility was transposed from "chiefs" to "fathers," the latter reconstituted by the institution of free-hold into "industrious" farmers:

Where to-day there are many thousands of families where the husband and father is absent for long periods and existence is almost literally hand-to-mouth the position would be changed to one of settled occupation with farming recognized as a vocation and not merely a precarious means of filling the bellies of those left to wield the hoe. The responsibilities of land holding would breed further responsibilities and a new and solid respect would be founded in the industrious cultivation of the soil and the rewards that came from it (ibid.:14).

Implicit in this reworking of names for subjects, though not without contradiction, was a topological rupture: the modern subjects of development, in contrast to the Native tribesmen they replaced, were divorced from any necessary association with particular places. A "worker," after all, could only be mapped abstractly onto "industry" and into "townships"; a "master farmer" became a potential occupant for land within the abstract jural and geographical category of African Purchase Areas.

But in a sense the rupture had already occurred. Africans were out of place: having escaped the authority of the tribe, they lived in an amoral liminal space between village and city, astride primitivity and civilization. The disorder of existing categories and their failure to capture the colonial subject was projected onto the subject himself in the figure of the rootless, undisciplined African male.<sup>6</sup> Here

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<sup>6</sup>This process was pre-figured in an older part of the Empire--India--where "criminal tribes" and "castes" were subjected to complex practices of classification, internment and reform in late-nineteenth century India. See the illuminating discussion by Tolen (1991).



again, it was discipline that had to be restored--this time in the figure of the modern yeoman or proletarian family:

In no aspect of Native culture have the effects of the part-time system been more deplorable than upon family life and morals. The frequent and often long absence of large numbers of men from the reserves has led to a preponderance of the one sex over the other in both the European and the Native areas. The evils of this are too obvious to need elaboration. In the European areas the men turn to illicit and often impermanent unions, the offspring of which tend to grow up without discipline and in unsatisfactory surroundings. The absence of fathers makes for marital instability and deprives the children of that necessary paternal discipline and the wives of that help and support without which family life cannot be satisfactorily maintained (ibid.).

Thus the newly framed subjectivities of worker and farmer were seen to be the constituent elements of a newly imagined, orderly social space, reborn out of an unruly, immoral, indolent African society--a society that in any case was "known" to be in decay. The vision was articulated with an almost utopian ardour:

Thriving villages and Native townships would begin to take the place of the clusters of wretched huts dotted over the Reserves. These would form active cells for the development of local government under the councils, and for the establishment of an increasing network of social activity (ibid.).

In this distinctly Benthamite vision (cf. Foucault 1979:195-228; T. Mitchell 1991:24), the Native "population" could be rationally redistributed between city and countryside, between factory and farm, its "social activity" increased and canalized into self-regulating "cells." The economic and political stability of the imagined whole would be restored,

with private title to land being the instrument through which individual men would become the interested conservators of moral progress. The result would be the realization of a "stability" that was at once both demographic and political:

A settled and thriving agricultural population is probably one of the best sheet-anchors of political stability, in particular when the land user has ownership rights, with appropriate safeguards in his own interest, in the land he occupies. Full implementation of the Native Land Husbandry Act will do more than stabilize the Native agricultural population. By discontinuing a system which allows the Native to vacillate between spells of work in the European area and spells of semi-loafing in the Reserve it will do much to stabilize also the industrial working population. An important factor in this context is that in general under the new conditions the families will be with the workers in the non-agricultural occupations and the workers will be with their families on the land, in contrast to the present position. Stabilized populations based on the complete family unit offer the soundest prospect both for the social advancement and the political stability of the African in the future (ibid.).

The modernist aesthetic drive that could envision "complete family units" replacing the ragged, fragmented pieces of industrialized African social life, had its effects in the reordering of rural administration and the mapping of rural subjects as well. At the heart of these efforts lay a reworking of the relationship between tribes and places.

### **Redrawing Maps, Restoring Authority**

In the bureaucratic enthusiasm for ordering, regulating, and stabilizing the native population authorized by the NLHA, the "natural" association between ethnic subjects (known by tribal names) and particular places had to be dissolved; it

was at least partially replaced by a jural association between economic subjects (owners of farms and owners of labour-power) and either a land contract or a wage contract. By reinforcing the relation of each category to a bounded rural or urban space, and by binding in turn each individual to a "family," a form of discipline that was at once moral, economic and political would be achieved.<sup>7</sup>

The administrative means to accomplish this remodelling of tribesmen into producers, was to augment certain powers of the chiefs even while withdrawing from them the primary rights of land allocation. Rather than commit resources to voluntary or elected associations that might represent the voice of rural communities more effectively, a few half-hearted efforts were made such as allowing for the formation of African Councils. Before long it became clear that these were gestures of form rather than substance, aimed largely at presenting "the Colonial Office in Britain a picture of a progressive native policy" (Murray 1970:309).<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the position of chiefs was redrafted in accordance with many of the recommendations made by the Godlonton Commission

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<sup>7</sup>The words of Foucault (1979:138) once again resonate here: "Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)."

<sup>8</sup>Chiefs in fact served as *ex officio* vice-presidents of the Councils, with the district commissioner acting as president (Jordan 1984:10).

(Government of Southern Rhodesia 1945:chap.5). Their number was reduced, their territories were equalized and demarcated, and their sphere of jurisdiction was, to a large extent, increased. The District Commissioners were effectively asked to relinquish their position as personal rulers and to become part of a technocratic regime of less visible, but more highly rationalized power; the chiefs, meanwhile, were elevated from bureaucratic functionaries to re-assume a façade of "traditional" authority, partly in the hope of forestalling the spread of nationalist sentiments in the countryside (see Garbett 1966; Holleman 1969; Weinrich 1971:11-13; Ranger 1983:21).

Now we are in a position to understand both the motives underlying the production of tribal maps at this time and the form in which they appeared. As I have already indicated, it was during the mid-1950s that the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute began to publish a series of monographs on the peoples of central Africa, giving rise to the first comprehensive mapping of tribal groupings of the region. In 1957, a map similar to that drawn in the monograph by Kuper, Hughes and Van Velson (Figure 7.2, above) was published by the Department of Native Studies at the University College of Rhodesia. This map, compiled by the anthropologist J. Clyde Mitchell, was accompanied by a gazeteer of tribal names, pairing each name with a set of precise geographical coordinates. (The name "Shangwe," for example, is listed opposite the coordinates

17,30S and 31,20E). Mitchell's map, as I indicated in the last chapter, displayed a comprehensive array of tribal names, but without any boundaries drawn to indicate the extent of the territory they were intended to encompass or any hierarchy in the categories represented. Thus the map illustrated a peculiar juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory intentions: on the one hand, an unabashed willingness to assign precise geographical coordinates to "tribes," and on the other, a reluctance to firmly relate those "tribes" to a determinate cartographic space. Both for what it includes and for what it leaves out, Mitchell's map reflects the contradictory forms of knowledge about Natives being generated at the time: they were understood, on the one hand, to retain access to a discrete system of norms and values, a system derivative of some named and bounded tribe; yet at the same time they were recognized to be increasingly involved as individuals in social networks that cross-cut the rural/tribal and urban/modern worlds. Mitchell's view was that the individual African now made situationally-determined choices between interacting with others *qua* "tribesman" or *qua* "industrial worker" (1960:25).<sup>9</sup> These were options of course that precisely reflected the ambivalence about African identity felt by colonial

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<sup>9</sup>For a broad ranging discussion of Mitchell's contribution to theories of ethnicity and "tribalism" in south-central Africa, see Epstein (1977:8-40)--himself an important contributor to the "situational" theory--and Werbner (1984). I am not claiming that Mitchell viewed the rural setting in which people lived as "tribesmen" as frozen in pre-colonial time. See e.g. Mitchell (1967).

administrators at the time. More acutely, it reflected the contradictions of the NLHA mandate to create modern men (the male subject was the focus of this discourse) in productive, nucleated, property-owning families while preserving the fiction of a legitimate "tribal" authority linked to a named geographical space. Would-be ethnocartographers such as Mitchell were caught on the fence.<sup>10</sup>

If the contradictions in the broad strategy to map (and thus maintain) discrete spheres of tribal authority were many and manifest, their consequences for the people known as VaShangwe were especially profound. The ethnoscape these people inhabited was literally remade as the state sought to extirpate whole "tribes" from areas where legislation forbade them to reside and replanted them in the one region of Southern Rhodesia that was, from the point of view of Native

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<sup>10</sup>Let me add a caveat here so as to avoid misinterpretation. I do not mean to suggest that the "tribal maps" (such as those produced by Mitchell) were part of an explicit strategy to demarcate future rights in land, since land was in any case put under the nominal control of hundreds of chiefs and headmen, not the larger "tribal" entities these maps identify. I am arguing, however, that the historical alienation of land is made completely invisible in the ethnocartographic project, which may well have been, on its own view, a purely "academic" exercise intended to invoke a notion of "traditional" areas of occupation--with "tradition" presumably standing for the moment of colonial contact and occupation. It is the simultaneity of the production of these maps with the remapping of land rights in the 1950s by the government to which I am drawing attention, rather than their intentional causal connection. The effect of such an exercise, however academic its intention, was to reinforce an epistemological stance, one that made the rearrangement of national land in terms of the "tribes" it contained a justifiable exercise.

Policy, still off the map. That region was Gokwe.

**From Rhodesdale to Gokwe: The Advent of the Madheruka**

Shortly before the onset of the rains in 1950, and not so long before Mitchell and his colleagues were mapping tribes, a team of senior officials from the department of Native Affairs was busy with an existing set of tribal maps. Their task was not one of ensuring some kind of accurate representation of the existing distribution of ethnic entities but rather one of implementing a massive relocation of Africans who were already "detribalized." They were mandated to submit a five-year plan for the forced removal of seven thousand families, most of them labour tenants who had been residing on the Rhodesdale ranching estates (owned by Lonrho, a British multinational) near the town of Kwekwe (see Ranger 1985:126). The immediate reasons for doing so consisted of the need to make commercial farmland available to reward white officers returning from service in the Second World War. But the long-term goal of such removals was to overcome anomalies in the form of tenure enjoyed by Africans in areas that had been scheduled for white freehold tenure or individual purchase by blacks under the terms of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. Responding to a suggestion that a portion of the Estates could be converted to "Native Village Settlements"--meaning labour-providing townships--for Que Que and Gatooma, the Chief Native Commissioner replied simply that it was

"politically necessary to remove all Rhodesdale Natives as planned..." (ZNA 1950). The letter of the law had now to be followed.

On this occasion, the planning methodology of the officials in question was not premised on a concern to reunite tribal subjects with their homelands, but rather to balance population numbers with what they called the "carrying capacity of humans and stock" in order to optimise the productivity of the land base. In the event, however, a certain pragmatism, born of the political necessity to move persons as expeditiously as possible, over-rode the positivist rationale governing the entire exercise: "As it is politically important to get the Natives off Rhodesdale," concluded a meeting of Native Commissioners and agricultural officers after a discussion of stock numbers and land allocations in the Gokwe Special Native Area, "they must be got in with less stock" (ibid.).<sup>11</sup> The Rhodesdale residents were loaded into

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<sup>11</sup> Minutes of their meeting record what sounds more like horse-trading than the systematic application of principles of scientific range management or population ecology: "The Pasture Research Officer reckons that in this area the basis must be 30 acres per beast and the Director of Native Agriculture was of the opinion that the basis of settlement should be 300 acres per family, being 30 acres per beast with 10 beasts per family, but he was prepared to accept a basis of 20 acres and 10 beasts as a start. This would give a carrying capacity of 1,067 families. The Provincial Native Commissioner stated there were already 300 families in this area and his would allow only 767 families to be moved. The Chief Native Commissioner suggested that if the acreage per family were reduced to 100 acres with cattle holdings of 6 head, it would accord with what the Natural Resources Board indicate as desirable. After discussion a compromise of 150 acres with 7 head per family was agreed. This basis would



lorries on short notice and transported into the hot malarial lowlands of the Sanyati and Sebungwe districts.<sup>12</sup> The immigrants were called "Madheruka" by the people in whose territory they were resettled, an onomatopoeic word intended to evoke the sound of the lorry engines that brought them.

The advent of the *Madheruka*--immigrants who had been church members, town-labourers, and Master Farmers before being uprooted from the Midlands high plateau--refigured the sense attached to the name *VaShangwe* in terms that I will gloss as "anti-modern." To refer to the *VaShangwe* was to draw not only a portrait of the Other, of people who were living, as some immigrants recalled, "naked, like animals"; but it was also to implicitly characterize a *MuShangwe* as someone who is everything that the speaker is not: ignorant, and even defiant, of the culture of modernity.

Within Gokwe District, many of the *Madheruka* immigrants

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allow 1530 families carrying capacity. There are 300 families already there so 1,230 would be able to come in. This will cover the 1,100 families from Rhodesdale." (ZNA 1950). Cynical as their remarks may sound, it must be remembered that many of the technical personnel were indeed committed to finding the magic numbers that would ideally balance population with stock and grazing land. They were under extreme pressure from central government to modify their recommendations in accordance with political imperatives (see Ranger 1985:126-7).

<sup>12</sup>It must be said that they did not go without protest, particularly the large stockholders, who stood to lose large numbers of cattle in terms of the limitations on "carrying capacity" being worked out by resettlement officers. Members of Benjamin Burombo's British African National Voice Association lobbied the Provincial Native Commissioner to suspend destocking measures and forced resettlement, failing which, they would cause trouble. See Ranger (1985:122-7).

were settled in villages under their own headmen, but formally under the ultimate jurisdiction of indigenous chiefs. In such areas they often came to constitute a majority of the population in that chief's territory.<sup>13</sup> In other Gokwe wards, such as that under the authority of chief Goredema (our primary fieldwork site), the great majority of residents are regarded by others as *VaShangwe*. As a result, Goredema as a place tends to be attributed a "backward" identity, one that makes itself visible in what the *Madheruka* perceive to be emblems of the *VaShangwe*'s essential qualities as ethnic subjects--their mud and thatch houses with uncleared yards, their archaic language, their impure stands of maize or cotton. In conversations over beer at the townships that dot the gravel and dirt roads crisscrossing the district, schoolteachers and local government officers (all of them *Madheruka*) would express shock upon learning that we were working in Goredema. Often *Madheruka*, recalling the people they found living in Goredema when they arrived, would tell us disdainfully (as more than one *Dheruka* extension worker did) that "we had to teach them [the *VaShangwe*] to clear their homesteads of weeds and rubbish." These remarks echoed those of Mrs. Hemans some seventy years before, for whom the villages of the *Bashankwe* presented "a very untidy and mean appearance" (1918:7).

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<sup>13</sup> Examples would include the wards of Kana, Sai, Jiri, Gumunyu, Nembudziya, Makore, and, east of the district boundary along the Muniyati river, Sanyati.

The sense of difference that the immigrants imported upon their arrival in Gokwe was partly a result of their exposure to the brunt of the disciplinary programme devised by the Native Agriculture Department over a period of three decades beginning in the mid-1920s. At the core of this programme was the replication of an orderly aesthetic in which the practices associated with domesticity, cultivation and herding were visibly segregated in space.<sup>14</sup> Attempts to "centralize" rural settlement patterns according to this plan began under Alvord's direction as early as 1929 in the Selukwe (now Shurugwi) Reserve and were soon duplicated in the other reserves of Victoria (now Masvingo) Province (see Palmer 1977:220-1). Only ten years later, "approximately 3.6 million acres had been centralized and over 1,100 villages laid out along 'improved lines' by community demonstrators" (Phimister 1988:235-6). In other words, long before the implementation of the Native Land Husbandry Act, many of the eventual immigrants to Gokwe had already been exposed to the modernizing regime of the Native Department--a regime aimed at sifting out the "forward" from the "backward" natives; and

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<sup>14</sup>The need felt by missionaries and agriculturalists (Alvord embodied both identities) to contain discrete spheres of activity within bounded spaces mirrored the perceived need to keep the body itself--its odours, its secretions, its nakedness--marked off from the external environment. Both were means by which civilization (as opposed to the wild, savage and natural world) was reproduced and embodied as an iconic sign of itself. Both concerns are apparent in the writings of early ethnographers of the "Shangwe" (above, Chapter VII). I am indebted to a presentation by Jean Comaroff (1991) for making this connection.

many had already adopted new identities within the hierarchy of achievement and practice laid out by Alvord: they became "Cooperators," then "Plot-holders," and finally "Master Farmers."<sup>15</sup>

In Gutu, another major source of Gokwe immigrants in the early 1960s, the activities of missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church provided another institutional apparatus for the imposition of modern disciplined habits and dispositions. Between 1914 and 1934, thousands of young people--many of them unemployed labour migrants--were drawn into mission schools. Some became teachers or preachers, withdrawing themselves firmly from the net of social obligations enforced by community elders, which they came to regard as "demeaning." Others, less fortunate, became an unpaid labour force under the rigid command of the missionaries themselves (Davis and Döpcke 1987:75-80).

In contrast to the experience of Africans in these Reserves in the southern and eastern parts of the colony, most of the indigenous inhabitants of Gokwe had not even seen one of Alvord's demonstrators before 1960, when the *Madheruka*

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<sup>15</sup>Johnson (1964:181) gives the following definitions: "Cooperator, any farmer who uses manure or fertilizer, carries out some rotation, and plants his crops in rows (other than broadcast cover crops); Plotholder, a farmer who is under tuition by a demonstrator in order to become a Master Farmer, and whose cropping program is recorded; Master Farmer, a plotholder who has reached certain minimum standards of crop and animal husbandry laid down by the Agriculture Department."

began immigrating to the area in droves.<sup>16</sup> The first mission school within reach of Gokwe was opened by the Baptists in 1963. For the VaShangwe, the agricultural extension workers (known locally as *madhomeni*--from "demonstrators") and, later, the teachers who came from areas like Selukwe and Gutu, were the embodiment of everything *Madheruka*; they bore the same discourse of progress and development, the same conceit of living in advance of those they had come to live among.

Yet, as I have already suggested, the move to modernize tribesmen existed in tension with the political mandate to rebuild an imaginary lattice of tribes with a reinvigorated cadre of chiefs at their helm. There was never any question in the 1960s and 1970s of displacing Gokwe's chiefs, who were, in any case, to provide a crucial measure of local discipline in the face of a guerilla insurgency encroaching across the Zambian border just to the north. The task of instilling modern sensibilities was seen increasingly to entail a sophisticated comprehension of tribal custom. In 1967, only a year after the Battle of Chinoyi heralded the beginning of armed insurgency in Rhodesia, the Alvord Institute assembled a collection of excerpts from the recent classics of central African ethnology, by Evans-Pritchard, Mitchell, and Holleman among others; extension staff were authorized to study the

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<sup>16</sup>Some by force (e.g. the people under Chiefs Sai, Huchu, and Gumunyu) and others, on a more piecemeal basis, by choice (e.g. in Nembudziya's area--see above, Chapter VI).

materials "in Official Time as an Official Duty."<sup>17</sup> By the 1970s this project had achieved a kind of morbid success: the local extension workers and the chiefs they were expected to "know" were treated by the guerillas as morally equivalent in Gokwe, and the guerillas threatened to, and often did, shoot them as agents of the settler state.

Within the strained political economy of sociological knowledge that emerged during the last quarter-century of colonial rule, the *Madheruka* and *Vashangwe* addressed one another largely in terms of a set of discourses that not only originated from beyond the situation of their own encounter, but that also proved to be highly inconsistent over time. This only made the attribution of identities to oneself and to others in Gokwe more complex, more negotiable, and in the end, more consequential.

#### **Being "Shangwe" Today: The Dialogue of Identity and Experience**

As elsewhere in post-colonial Africa, the achievement of Independence in Zimbabwe reduced the scope for the scholarly production of a uniquely ethnological knowledge. Nationalist discourse has sought to displace invocations of distinctive tribal identity, and the rational planning discourse of the state has sought to displace the parochial practices supposedly instilled by "custom," although tension persists

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<sup>17</sup>The collection was edited by J.D. Jordan (1967); the authorization came from C.D. Humphrey in a Preface.

over what may and may not be said with regard to "ethnic" differences--particularly across the Shona-Ndebele divide. It is interesting in this context to see how such shifts have been reworked at the level of the local state. Consider the section on "Cultural Facts" in the account of the Gokwe Region written by the Regional Agricultural Extension Officer in 1987 that I discussed in Chapter Two: "Customs are very varied and are dependent on tribal grounds," he writes. "The four major tribes are the Dherukas, who are mainly Shona-speaking, Ndebeles, Batongas and Vashangwe." In terms of local officialdom, then, the "Dherukas" have achieved "tribal" status, although such a classification would have struck any of the ethnographers of the colonial period as absurd.

In the final part of this chapter, I present two excerpts from the ongoing local discourse of ethnicity, both of which illustrate how the relationally constructed sense of "Shangwe" and "Madheruka" identity have played a role in constituting social relations in Gokwe today. The first speaks to the role of these categories in constituting the "self" in the wider ethnoscape; the second speaks more to the way in which the meaning of local politics is reflected upon and articulated through the politics of ethnic meanings.

Our friend and sometimes research assistant, Obert Chidimu, once told us a story that illuminates the way in which he had attempted to make sense of the meaning of the term "Shangwe" when it was applied to himself. Obert was one

of the few people who openly wrestled with his identity in this way. His relatives, when pressed, used either their clan name to identify themselves or the more prestigious macro-ethnic term "Korekore." Obert recalled that his headmaster in primary school, one of the *Madheruka* who had immigrated from Chivi in 1968, explained to the children that being called "Shangwe" was nothing to be ashamed of, that it simply meant "place of drought"; that explanation, Obert told us, was consistent with what the old people said.

When Obert went to complete his secondary school at Empress Mine (in Zhombe communal land which lies immediately southeast of Gokwe District) he thought that the people there would look different from himself, since he had always been told that he was a *MuShangwe*, hence different from "Shona" people on the high central plateau. The fact that they did not look different surprised Obert. For their part, the students at Empress said that all the people of Gokwe were *VaShangwe*; this surprised Obert still more, since he knew that the *Madheruka* would never accept such an appellation. On one occasion he joined the other students from Empress on a visit to another school at Venice Mine in the town of Golden Valley not far from Kadoma. Their hosts at once referred to all of the visitors--Empress Mine students included--as *VaShangwe*! "So," concluded Obert with great laughter, "there are no real *VaKorekore* or *VaShangwe*--only people who talk differently from one another."



Obert's narrative records his own experience of the shifting semantics of the name "Shangwe" when applied to himself. Initially, he felt that the identity conferred upon him marked an essence that would make itself visible in his distinctive physical appearance. Then he discovered that for others, the term "Shangwe" denoted, as it had for the Ndebele a century earlier, the persons who lived within a territorially and politically marked "other" space. And finally, he is made aware that even this criterion fails to illuminate the sense of how the term is pragmatically put to work to signify difference. It is this realization--the realization that ethnicity is about the power to name others, and not about who those others really are--that made Obert less uncomfortable with the ascription of the "Shangwe" label than were many of his older relatives, many of whom felt it had been applied with invidious and derisive intent by the *Madheruka*.

It was, as I have said, those self-described bearers of modernity--the *Madheruka*--whose arrival heralded the beginning of the regimentation of agrarian practice under the banner of "development." While these immigrants rapidly established themselves as key intermediaries in the provision of transport, consumption goods and credit, they were not able to impose unilaterally the ideology of their allegedly superior way of life on the previous inhabitants of the land they came to occupy. They had to arrive at some kind of negotiated

position--one that took full advantage of the backing they had from the Rhodesian state as agents of modernization, but that also paid sufficient deference to the (equally state-authorized) authority of local *VaShangwe* chiefs and headmen and the Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) that came to share in the chiefs' power over land distribution and agrarian practice after Independence. The second case I wish to present will say something about how the *Madheruka* have had to make localized tactical adjustments to the political effects of their own discourse. But first I will need to briefly sketch how the politics of land are formally structured in Gokwe today.

At the time of Independence, Gokwe district was divided into units of local government administration based upon distinctions of land tenure and the consequent sphere of application permitted for "customary law" under the authority of chiefs and headmen appointed by the state. While some areas (Copper Queen and Chemagora) were designated for settlement by African freeholders and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of chiefs, by far the largest portion of the district was made up by four Tribal Trust Lands (now Communal Areas)--Gokwe, Kana, Sebungwe and Gandavaroyi. In these areas land was considered to be "owned" by chiefs. As such, the chiefs (*ishe*) or their subordinate headmen (*sabhuku*--literally "keepers of the tax books"), aided by the local Tribal Land Authority, were charged with regulating access to land and

grazing rights as well as granted the authority to collect fines for the violation of conservation laws. The establishment of these rights, as I have already suggested, was intended to pose as a restoration of traditional (i.e. pre-conquest) powers and hence, rather cynically, as a means of appeasing rural discontent with the Rhodesian state.<sup>18</sup>

After Independence, the powers of the chiefs with regard to land were once again abrogated considerably. Despite having been widely discredited as collaborators during the war, chiefs or their deputies are still paid the formality of being notified when newcomers wish to settle on their lands, and are invited to major ceremonial occasions as well as meetings of the Ward Development Committee (WADCO) which has adopted most of the administrative functions he once had.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the chief sits at the apex of the system of limited jurisdiction governing civil disputes (over issues such as adultery, unpaid bridewealth, or compensation for damage to fields by stray cattle) that have not been resolved at the level of family heads and village chairmen.

In the course of the twenty-five years since the *Madheruka* began to arrive in Goredema in appreciable numbers,

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<sup>18</sup>I will deal with the actual nature and extent of chiefly powers over land in Part III.

<sup>19</sup>On the second day after we settled in Goredema, for example, we were taken by our hosts on a 20 km hike across the ward in order to make our presence known to the chief. The chief, in turn, walked the same distance in order to be present as a guest of honour at our departure festivities organized by the village.

life has changed dramatically. The *Madheruka*, as strangers authorized by the central government to inhabit the land, were the visible embodiment of a shift in the chain of territorial authority away from local chiefs and spirit mediums (see Chapter IX). But it was as bearers of a new set of agrarian practices and as collaborators with district officials and extension workers in the articulation of a new discourse of development and modernity that the *Madheruka* were to have the greatest impact. Tsetse fly clearance, initiated in the late 1950s, enabled the new immigrants to bring in draft animals and to bring upland areas under extensive plough cultivation for the first time. Meanwhile, the legislation applied under the NLHA enforced a whole series of drastic conservation measures in Goredema including the prohibition of hunting and streambank cultivation. Finally, in 1963, Gokwe was selected as the primary area for an extension programme to encourage small-holder cotton production. Taken together, these extraordinary changes amounted to a profound reordering of the structure and loci of social and political power.<sup>20</sup> In the context of this reordering, to be named *VaShangwe* was to be located on the side of a social presence that was to be annihilated by the force of development and the distinctive style of modernity. To name others "Vashangwe" was to be

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<sup>20</sup>See Ferguson (1990a) for a demonstration of how, in the case of a regional development project in Lesotho, development discourse has served to decentralize power and diffuse the possibility of an oppositional politics.

situated on the side embodying both that force and that style.

During and after the liberation war, the alignment of power, encapsulated by the dialectic played out between *Madheruka* and *VaShangwe*, shifted. The discourse of modernity was tainted by its association with the white Rhodesian state and many *Madheruka* fled to the towns in advance of the guerilla forces. Yet some "Shangwe" chiefs were by this time tainted themselves, having accepted checks for growing cotton and having extracted fines from their subjects for the violation of conservation laws. The ruling Chief Goredema himself was shot by ZAPU guerillas in 1979.

The new Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), farmers' committees and local ruling party structures were elected in Gokwe amidst the ambiguity of identities that survived the war. Many *Madheruka*, forming a kind of educated elite, worked their way into positions of local authority. But any arrogant assertion of superiority gained through ethnic attributions was often met with resentment; in areas such as Goredema, *Madheruka* are now being thrown out of office with increasing frequency. Those who wish to survive must play their ethnic language games with care.

In one meeting that we attended, held to adjudicate a land dispute between two groups of *Madheruka* in Goredema ward, the direction of alignment of speakers along the *VaShangwe-Madheruka* axis was effectively reversed in a way that reflects

the shifting local political context. Only one of the parties to the dispute had bothered to turn up<sup>21</sup> and he took the opportunity to demonstrate his allegiance to the largely *VaShangwe* audience.

"So much fuss is made because the population is *VaShangwe*," he said. "I'm *Mukaranga*. I am among the *VaShangwe* because they gave me land. I'll never betray the *VaShangwe* even if we have differences. I'll never end our relationship."

Still more interesting was the rhetorical strategy pursued by the following speaker, an old *Madheruka* man serving as the ZANU-PF ward chairman:

Some of the things people say here shouldn't be said; because you can't tell if the person really doesn't know, or if they are just pretending not to know. If he says "*VaShangwe*," I don't know what he is trying to say. Since 1966 when we arrived here, we saw [Chief] Goredema. He said that this place is called *Shangwe*--not that the person who lives here is called *Shangwe*. Goredema explained that this country [*nyika*] is called *Shangwe*. He said there were some events that occurred that led the place to be called *Shangwe*. That is what I know. If these other "languages" [*ndimi*] say so [i.e. refer to *VaShangwe* as people, not land], it is because they don't understand the origin of the word. What happened is that *Madheruka* is not like a "name" but explains a group of people who grew up together at one time. It seems as though it's a meaning that's insulting but you don't know.

The speaker continues by showing how the identity attributed to him shifts when he locates himself in other spatial and political contexts:

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<sup>21</sup>In fact, much of the meeting was preoccupied with denouncing the local government officers from Gokwe town who had failed to appear.

I am a MuHera Nyashanu.<sup>22</sup> But wherever I go they call me "Goredema."<sup>23</sup> But am I Goredema? I am not Goredema!--I only reach his waist! [i.e., I am much lower in status]. But still [when I arrive in other districts] they say, "Goredema has arrived! Goredema has arrived!." When I go to meetings as far as in Bikita, Gutu, or Sabi [in southeastern Zimbabwe] people will have been asking, "Have the people from Gokwe arrived?" to which they reply, "No, not yet". But then when I come, they say, "Goredema has arrived!" Do you think it is the real Goredema? No, I am his son-- because everything he says, I do it.

In this part of the discourse the speaker achieves a truly remarkable feat of ethnic repositioning, and a deft bit of political manoeuvring as well. As a *Madheruka*, and as the local party chairman, he would seem to stand doubly for alien sources of power in Gokwe. Yet he overcomes both of these potentially inimical identities. First he shows how, when he is outside of Gokwe (indeed when he is near the land of his own ancestors), he is "named" according to the district (Gokwe) or the land of the chief (Goredema) from which he has come. But he goes further than this by saying that he is

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<sup>22</sup>A clan name that links him with people in central-eastern Zimbabwe. Ironically, Bullock (1970[1928]:34) writing sixty years earlier, suggested that "WaShangwe" of the *shave* clan in Sebungwe [i.e. Gokwe] are "kith and kin to the WaHera of Charter, and still exchange visits." So it may indeed be that the speaker's ancestors would have welcomed him as a spatially distant relative rather than as a returning emigrant.

<sup>23</sup>"Goredema," it should be noted, is a hereditary chief's title that was not extinguished with the assassination of the incumbent during the liberation war.

Goredema's "son."<sup>24</sup> This assertion metaphorically relocates his own ancestry, establishing kinship with the *VaShangwe* who are present in his audience, and in a gesture of filial piety, subordinating his own political authority to that of the chief: "I am his son, because everything he says, I do."

The speaker continued with a biblical allegory intended to establish the supremacy of Goredema's local authority in relation to his own:

Even if a person says, "I am from Peter, I am from Paul, I am from Titus," these would be people that you believed in [i.e. followed]; [but] the one who watered and the one who planted is the greatest-- Jesus. So *VaGoredema* is the root of everything. Now if anyone else decides to follow a different root, it's just that he doesn't understand.

Here, in another remarkable reversal of sequence, the sources of "traditional" authority are revealed and reasserted through the use of a conventional repertoire of Christian tropes<sup>25</sup> with which the audience is assumed to be thoroughly familiar.

There is, as this last case suggests, a realm of knowledge about power, space and identity that is rooted in the "traditions" of the pre-colonial era, one that I will now contend with at length. And, equally apparent, is a realm of locally appropriated "Christian" traditions. All I have meant

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<sup>24</sup>Although there is the latent suggestion in the tone of his narrative that others know he is not necessarily the real chief Goredema. Rather, he is taken synecdochically to stand for any of the people of chief Goredema's realm.

<sup>25</sup>The use of the "horticultural idiom" in the missionary discourse of southern Africa is incisively analyzed by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:206-13).



to show by these examples is that such "traditions" are still the object of active, pragmatic argument about who is who in the here and now. They are "known" as much through the local politics of the present as through the reconstructed memories of the past, or the dissemination of Christian theology. And they are made known through acts of speech, formal and public as well as informal and private, that draw upon cross-cutting domains of meaning and experience.

I have, in this chapter and the last, plied a long and somewhat circuitous route through mixed terrain, having touched first on my own experienced need to classify those I encountered in ethnic terms, then on the textualized attribution of tribal and modern identities to Natives by colonial officers and professional ethnographers, and finally on the kind of ethnic rhetoric and reflexivity I listened to in the Gokwe village where I lived. My primary aim has been to show how, by pursuing the elusive position of the "Shangwe" across Zimbabwe's ethnoscape and within the shifting politics of ethnographic knowledge, we gain insight into the subtle but central mechanisms through which social identity and difference have been fashioned in Gokwe. This is both a necessary precursor to, and an essential part of, any attempt to understand transformations of labour organization and allocation. The process by which the "Shangwe" have been and continue to be mapped and named, reflects a complex local politics of identity that gives form to economic relations of

all kinds. The practices of remaking subjects in an ethnic idiom<sup>26</sup> that I have been exploring are one of the principle means through which such "economic" relations are negotiated, contested, and finally constituted (Worby 1984a; Comaroff 1987; cf. Strathern 1985); for there is always an active, ongoing dialectic between agrarian practice and social identity in Gokwe--between what one does and who one is (cf. Rosaldo 1980:60; Gose 1989).

In this argument of identities, social and economic power is on the side of those who exhibit and embody modernity as a cultural style (Hebdidge 1979; Ferguson n.d.). Those who are stigmatized as "Shangwe" implicitly constitute the anti-modern, a rhetorical foil against which progress and prosperity may be measured and attained, and through which the *Madheruka* discursively arrogate power to themselves. There are, however, other ways of constructing the relationship between names and places, and between power and territory in Gokwe, that I have yet to consider; these will be the subject of Chapter IX.

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<sup>26</sup>I am not suggesting that such practices are all equivalent in their modalities (which must be seen to include, as I have shown, the printed views of government commissions of inquiry, as well as casual remarks at a bar) or in their effects (which range from playful ridicule to the geographical displacement of a named category of jural persons by force).

**PART THREE**

**REMAKING LABOUR: POLITICS AND PRAXIS, TIME AND FORM**

### INTRODUCTION TO PART THREE

In this, the third and last part of the thesis, I take up a more ethnographic exploration of the politics and experience of labour, land and identity from the point of view of a single Gokwe ward--Goredema--and within it, the village of Tazivana in which we lived for a period of about ten months. My approach is initially historical, but in a way that attempts to show how history is made selectively from the entwining of several narrative strands. In this broad sense, my method in this part is continuous with the chapters that have preceded it; here, however, I will be trying to shift the locus of critical perspective to a different social position--that occupied by Gokwe's indigenes.

I have already spoken at some length about the discipline sought in agricultural practices by modernizing agents of the colonial and post-colonial state. One of my aims in this section is to show how the ascendance of that modernizing regime of knowledge and practice was only partially achieved, and even then, only in a dialogue with endogenous views of labour, property and power. In order to make sense of the ways in which property relations have been reordered in the course of Gokwe's recent cotton revolution, both of these conceptual orders have to be taken into account, but taken

account of in a way that remains conscious of how they provide contexts for one another's production, significance and relevance.

Such a procedure, however, risks turning a dichotomy between "cultures" or "world-views" that is essentially a fictional product of analysis into a reification;<sup>1</sup> the trick, it seems to me is neither to assume that people shift cognitively between two discrete worlds--one traditional and cultural, the other capitalist and driven by economic calculation--nor to assume that they draw upon randomly available interpretations in order to pragmatically advance their interests; it is rather to see how new relations of meaning are constantly remade out of those that are already there, as new situations that call for interpretation arise (cf. Sahlins 1985).

Our arrival and incorporation in Tazivana village was just such a situation, an occasion for the work of mutual interpretation that both we and our hosts would undertake over nearly the next year. By way of introduction, then, I present below an account of the sequence of social processes and events through which our hosts attempted to locate us in village society and to situate us within the various political

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<sup>1</sup>The dangers are highlighted in different ways by Spiegel (1989) and by de Sardon (1992). Following the lead of Keesing (1987, 1989) both suggest that by making exotic readings of language and ritual, or by citing them as evidence of survivals of a pre-capitalist world-view, such analyses reduce the situated pragmatism informing their use.

levels that encompassed it. I do this partly because I want to illustrate the working out of a cultural schema with ourselves as its subject matter; but also because I can think of no better illustration of a larger point. Culture is often thought of as a set of models, rules, or schemata that at least chart, if not dictate, the kind of public identities and roles that individuals will secure or have ascribed to them in domestic groups and larger polities. But if the previous chapters have suggested anything at all, it is that it is in the very process of realization and enactment that models are made. In so far as we presented a problem for Mbano and others, we also provided an opportunity for the reassertion of often conflicting values. In being enacted--however incompletely--such "rules" leave behind a trace or precedent that can be referred to and reworked in order to justify some other model in the future.

#### **Village Arrival: Puzzles of Incorporation**

In July, 1988, as we were finishing up our survey of the district, we attended the District Agricultural Show at Gokwe town. There we once again met Moffat Mbano, to whom we had been introduced during our first visit to Goredema in April. As it turned out, he was the chairman of the farmer's show committee. We stepped aside and conferred briefly in private, then decided to ask him if we might be able to live in his village--ideally with his family--for the next year or so. Over the previous four months we had considered many

candidates for this imposition, but none made the impression Mbano had made on us. We recalled his exclamation at the time of our first meeting: "Canada! You have come from Canada to Zimbabwe, from Zimbabwe to Gokwe, from Gokwe to Goredema, and from Goredema to my home in Tazivana village!" He was to repeat this formulation many times (even in letters to us after we left), situating our presence in terms of a journey we had made through a nested global space--a journey that led literally to his doorstep, a chance in a billion! We had to agree--it was incredible. Mbano's knowledge of the district and his connections with the district agricultural bureaucracy were beyond that of any indigenous person we had met, and we had decided that it would be better not to align ourselves with the ostensibly more powerful *Madheruka*, since we already had been given ample access to them in the townships, schools and beerhalls, and thought it likely that they would be seeking us out in the future.

We promised Mbano we would appear on the 10th of August, but as usual, it took longer than we had anticipated to finish up our survey work and return to Harare, and longer still to make preparations for the village phase of our research. When we finally boarded the Munenzwa bus in Kadoma one hot afternoon, we were already five days late. It was late afternoon before the bus passed through the notch at the northern tip of the Mafungabusi Plateau and began plunging up and down through the deeply carved stream-beds cutting their

way sharply and circuitously down the western escarpment. Once again, we were struck by Goredema's stark and rugged beauty, its canopy of leafless mopane trees barely shading the hard-baked clay. A corpulent man with slitted eyes whom we recognized from our previous visit alerted us when we arrived at Mawari township. Mawari's four white-washed shops, strung out along the north side of the sandy roadbed, looked decrepit, windblown, and almost abandoned in the fading light of early evening.

We got off the bus and followed the tse-tse track (so-called because it was cut in 1958 to enable the authorities to spray for tse-tse flies) south of the main road and up the hill to the half-finished primary school where we had pitched our tent the previous March. (see Map III.1) There were no signs of life--the principal's yard looked as though it hadn't been swept in days. We walked on past the first two groups of huts, following the curve of the path through fields of desiccated cotton stalks and then down toward the dense bush occluding the Goche stream.

Just then, a small, wiry man appeared walking towards us along a narrow path parallel to the bush. He was dressed in a patterned button-down sweater and brown, polyester trousers, widely flared at the bottom and hand-stitched at several places up the sides. As he drew near, we realized with relief that it was Mbano himself, bringing *muriwo* (edible greens) from his garden in the Goche flood-plain lying just to the



east. He seemed slightly subdued in his greeting--as if touched that we had, after all, decided to live up to our promise and come, or just piqued that we were so late. As it turned out, he had planned a journey with his two wives to Chegutu in order to collect supplies for the upcoming rainy season--sacks of salt, sugar and tea, fertilizer and maybe pesticides--and now he would have to disappoint one of them who would have to stay at home and look after us.

We crossed the streambed, much cooler in the dense tree-cover but completely dry at this time of year, and emerged on the other side into the gray saline mud-flats dotted with mopane trees. It was about another kilometre before we passed another homestead and then veered off to the left toward the distinctive hillock on which Mbano's *musha*, or homestead, was artfully placed. Passing through a gap in the fence, we scrambled up the eroded slope to find Mai Wanda and Mai Dzorai preparing the evening meal in large iron pots over a fire in the centre of the courtyard. Surprised and slightly ashamed at their lack of preparation, they nevertheless greeted us enthusiastically while the nine children--aged two to fifteen years--gathered and stared in the same stunned astonishment that we recalled from our previous appearance. Now, they were told, we would be living at their home. As the little ones cried fearfully, we had to wonder what on earth that proposition might mean to them. This is how I recorded what happened next:

**Journal Entry: 16 August 1988**

I was led away through the twilight in the direction of drumming coming from his father's *musha* still quaintly visible to the West. He seemed anxious to accomplish some formal duty with regard to the elders. "If you fall ill, and I have not told them of my visitors, they will say 'why have you not told us? How are we to help you now?'" This explanation was repeated in front of each of the elders we subsequently met. At his father's house, beer was circulating--*chibhuku* or *mazuva manomwe* that is a specialty of his mother's.<sup>2</sup> Roughly 20 men were seated on benches placidly, while 6-8 women, mostly older, danced energetically around the drum, singing "a-way-a-way-a-way." They paused to kneel and greet me while the drumming continued--ululating after I shook their hand. I was greeted by Mbano's father and father-in-law, and at least one younger brother. Avoiding the grasp of some others who were drunk, we slipped through the bales strewn densely around the rear of the courtyard onto a path that led to his elder brother's home. He, like Mbano, doesn't drink with the others, but in his case, it is because he is a *mupostori* [apostolic] with 4 wives and some 15 or so children--(Mbano said something about "17 sons.") This brother is chairman of the new farmer's group they have formed since February--the one they were formerly a part of had bought a tractor for transport, but problems developed in its administration I think, so they broke ranks with them.

There is much that I never registered in my journal about that evening--my anxiety, self-consciousness, and excitement at somehow entering the inner life of the village; the fear when Gul Rukh and I were separated in the darkness, then led in separate directions to unknown destinations; the swelling,

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<sup>2</sup>*Chibuku* is commercially produced opaque beer. *Mazuva manomwe*, literally "seven days," is the favoured type of home-brewed millet beer. The latter is produced exclusively by a few elderly women for sale at a *doro*, or village beer-drink, an event that usually lasts for two days.

hypnotic sound of the drums as we drew nearer; the sour smell of the beer and the sweet odour of the cooking fires; the loud, slurred, drunken greetings of the old men and women, leaning close to my face and grasping my hand, their hands rough, lumpy and hard like sandpaper wrapped around knotted wood. After all, for the previous five months we had been able, more or less, to steer our own course--it had been our interview schedule, our research agenda, and to the extent that was possible, our timetable. From now on, we would be passengers on a ship whose destination we could neither determine nor control. By omitting from my journal any acknowledgement of what that experience felt like, I was attempting, I think, to regain my footing, my composure, and my private identity as someone standing outside of, and making sense of, it all (cf. Geertz 1973). I struggled to frame anthropological questions and searched for signs that might refer to ethnological features of which I had read, but the gap between these texts and what was visibly before me never seemed wider. In their equally tattered, beer-spattered clothes, I wondered, how would I tell which elder was important and in what ways? Was one of them the village headman, another a spirit medium (*svikiro*) or a healer (*n'anga*)? I knew that each introduction that evening had significance, that Mbano had followed some kind of formal protocol, and yet in the dim light of dusk I had found it impossible to fix faces or to recall the relationships as they

were ceremonially announced. I had, in any case, only understood a fraction of what was said, although I pretended otherwise.

In the weeks that followed, our initial puzzlement and uncertainty gradually gave way to a tentative assuredness as we corrected misunderstandings about our purpose, filled in the blanks on our social map, and began to find our place in the social landscape. Things that had once seemed almost too exotic to record as such now seemed prosaic. We learned, for example, that the older brother, Musavaya, was in the process of marrying a sixth wife at the time--and that he had in fact fathered thirty-six children, nineteen of whom were still surviving (sixteen of them were boys!); that the farmer's group of which he was the head was now largely defunct; that Mbano's father, Kapita, had once in fact held the headmanship but that now it had reverted to his half-brother, Tazivana (to whom I had also apparently been introduced that night, although I didn't realize it at the time), but that Kapita still retained the prerogative to consult the local spirit medium on behalf of the village.

Still, it was a long time before I was able to make much sense at all out of these relations of authority and seniority, of the complex ways in which power seemed to be nested hierarchically, and at the same time contested laterally, at the level of the village, the ward and the chiefdom in Goredema as in Gokwe as a whole. Much of it in

fact never "made sense" at all. I was always picking up what seemed to me to be fragments of a whole story or structure. Much as I tried to convince myself that given enough time and improved facility in the language I would be able to piece together that whole, the moment of synthesis seemed to recede with each apparent advance in my knowledge of facts and my grasp of social relationships.

Within the first week I was diagramming genealogies of villagers in my notebooks and asking about the origins of Chief Goredema and his relationship to the many other chiefs in Gokwe I had heard about during our tour of the district over the previous several months. I knew, of course, that many of the ward-heads who were known as "chiefs" (such as Jiri in the west, Gumunyu in the north, and Jehana on the plateau) were *Madheruka* chiefs or headmen who had only arrived since 1960. But what was the relationship among the others, the *Vashangwe* chiefs? People often mentioned that they were seven in number (there was a rumour that atop the Nyamororo kopje on the northeast side of Goredema, one could find the names of these chiefs inscribed in a stone monument); but who precisely was to be included in this list depended very much upon whom I asked. All agreed that Chireya was the *mambo* or "paramount" as the colonial records attested. But what functions could such paramountcy now entail? Chiefs Nemangwe, Nembudziya and Sai were always mentioned as authentic *Vashangwe* chiefs in their own right. We had, in fact,

interviewed the widow of the recently deceased Nemangwe during our survey, finding her to be pathetically isolated and impoverished; we found the brother of Nembudziya, well into his forties but still unmarried, to be in similarly desperate straights. Membership in the royal family, if not the chieftainship itself, seemed to offer little in the way of tangible powers or rewards. Other "chiefs" only appeared on some lists and not on others: Nenyunga and Madzivazvido in the northwest of the district, and Njelele in the south, for example (see Map 5.2).<sup>3</sup>

And then there was the chief of our own ward, Goredema. No one seemed to be clear about his status at all. Some said he was merely a *sabhuku*--a "headman." Others claimed that the original Goredema had been appointed by Mzilikazi, the Ndebele Chief who had driven north of the Limpopo in the 1930s, to oversee the collection of tribute in the area in the middle of the last century. We soon learned that the man most recently chosen to assume the title of Goredema--a man named Mushambadze--had not been chosen unanimously; indeed the whole VIDCO (Village Development Committee), of which our village was a part, had supported a candidate from a rival lineage--an ancient man named Jairos Mugomeri who was the senior elder of

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<sup>3</sup>Only afterwards did I come upon the thesis by Bates (which I discussed in Chapter IV), in which appear maps purporting to show the territories commanded by "VaShangwe" and "Rozvi" chiefs and headmen in the district before 1951, and the new areas occupied by *Madheruka* chiefs and headmen between 1951 and 1970.

Mugomeri village, north of the main gravel road that ran through the ward.

It was not only the problem of discovering relations of power and the spheres within which they might be operative that seemed so daunting; it was the problem of figuring out where and how we were being fit in to them. As it turned out, reflecting on the problem of our incorporation and its resolution helped us to grasp hold of the overlapping models of politics and social relations that seemed to be at work. There were few precedents for dealing with strangers such as ourselves in the village context. We had given up our more easily accommodated identity as university-based survey-researchers, roving about the district, using government rest houses and schools for accommodation (although we continued to be introduced, even in the village context, as *vana vechikoro*--"schoolchildren"). We were not like teachers, traders, or government officials--all of whom were brokers in knowledge, commerce and power and who lived, inevitably, on the fringes of the communities that they served and rarely sought membership within them. Nor were we like immigrants--*Madheruka*--who sought land from which to make a living. And finally, we were not coming to the village as kinfolk or as the in-laws of people who lived there. In fact, we were not "settling" at all, at least in a long-term sense; and yet we insisted that we wanted to live for a year as if we were part of a family, to share their food, to work their land. Mbano

was clearly willing to accommodate us, perceiving opportunities for enlarging his own horizons, his status and his access to various kinds of resources; but he was puzzled and troubled by the lack of any normative logic by which we could be incorporated into the community. Gradually his method for dealing with the problem we presented became clear to me: by making the formal introductions at the beer party that first evening, Mbano was being careful not to alienate anyone who might suggest that he had shown disrespect or breached etiquette. The realm of his concern in this respect extended well beyond the village. Over the next two days we were taken on a tour of the ward, a 30km. journey on foot in the course of which we were presented to Mbano's *sekuru* (his relatively wealthy mother's brother), to Chief Goredema, and to various locally based civil servants (village health workers, Agritex workers and so on). By acknowledging several overlapping, even conflicting spheres of authority, he was being careful not to foreclose any options.

But at the same time, we became aware that by choosing to live with Mbano we had foreclosed options, or at least alternative identities, and the knowledge such other identities might have given us access to. Even though no one in the household had apparently had anything to do with an organized church for many years, Mbano's affiliation with a mission school as a young man had left its imprint. It created a boundary separating us in certain key respects from



those in the community who, on the one hand, belonged to the Apostolic church, and on the other, from those who drank traditional beer and participated wholeheartedly in the ceremonial events devoted to the spirits of the ancestors.<sup>4</sup> It rapidly became known that we were persons who "did not drink"--an identity we were pressed into assuming almost from the first day, and which meant that we earned the respect of some in the village and the distrust of others. Beneath these three options, however, there lay a common set of assumptions about how residing in and working on the land entailed a set of ritual commitments--and this became apparent when we built a permanent dwelling among those in Mbano's homestead.

For several weeks after our arrival, as the heat built up before the rains, we lived in a tent in the courtyard of the homestead. It being the end of the dry season--the season for building and repairing huts--there was no thatching grass remaining on the escarpment with which we could cover the hut we planned to build. Eventually, as I mentioned in Chapter VI, we arranged to have some grass cut on a Kadoma commercial farm over 100km away and transported to the village in an empty cotton lorry. By the end of September we were moulding and drying mud bricks, and, with the help of the family, an assortment of young men from the village, and Mbano's younger

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<sup>4</sup>No one in the village could afford to drink clear, commercial beer at the townships, although this was often part of the social itinerary of persons associated with mission churches--including most teachers, shopkeepers, traders, and government officers.

brother Masiras as chief builder, we set about constructing our own hut. It was while we were doing this that we began to be told of the relationship between land and power, and to glimpse what our membership in the community would, in this respect, entail:

**Journal Entry: 26-27 September 1988**

Masiras related the following story to us two days ago during a tea break from brick laying--concerning the way in which chief Chireya took control of this land from the real owners, the Mavhumbas. The Mavhumbas had a *svikiro*--a young girl--who was able to bring rain by milking a special cow. Chireya's people tricked her by coming and saying they were very thirsty and needed some milk. While she was milking the cow, they captured her, and hence, control of the territory. He added that Chief Goredema was not the original owner of this land either--that the Ncubes or Kasvosve had lost it during the First Chimurenga war (something about their not wanting to be taken as soldiers). They are pursuing their claim to the ownership of the land to this day--and have, I think, their own *svikiro*.

Did Masiras himself believe the story of the magic cow? Given his background, it seemed unlikely. After all, he had completed the seventh grade and expressed a special interest in geography and history--especially the slave trade. He had a certificate that qualified him as an adult literacy trainer (he still had the attendance roll from the course he gave to 30 participants in 1984), a certificate from the Builder's Coop, and one that acknowledged his attendance at a course at the Cotton Training Centre. These competencies were recognized by the community, which had elected him to be the VIDCO secretary. Yet in spite of his exposure to--indeed mastery of--these various systems of "modern" knowledge,

Masiras didn't bracket the account of Chireya and the cow by saying that it was a "tradition" or a "myth" or something that only the elders believed in these days. He recounted the story without comment, in a matter-of-fact sort of way, while we heaved bricks and mortar into place. Evidently, the story made sense to him in the context within which it had application, or the situation in which it might be appropriate for him to tell it.

It was only later that it occurred to me why he told the story then, and why he told it to me in particular. I had been asking Masiras to tell me who exactly all of the Shangwe chiefs were and where precisely they lived. Despite his knowledge of school geography, Masiras did not find it appropriate to relate that information in terms of a set of political relations fixed in space. Instead, he seemed to be telling me some kind of riddle, or allegory. Gradually it dawned on me that when attempting to convey the relation between people and place, between rights in land and rights over labour, and between indigenes and immigrants, the people of Gokwe have recourse to a distinctive mode of description. Rather than describe the geography of power in the static, visual language of a map, they usually choose to describe it in terms of journeys, the actual movements that they and their ancestors have made through space. Such descriptions evince a conception of power--including the power to control access to land, to command tribute, or to commandeer labour that is

usually identified with states--not as an absent or silent force, but as a visible, embodied process.

As Mbano himself had suggested, we too had made a journey to Tazivana village, and since we intended to take up residence and to work its land, we were necessarily implicated in the ordering of power that had constituted and reproduced the community in mythical time. In the weeks immediately following the completion of the hut, and our taking up residence within it, those implications were made manifest: we began to discover scorpions under the sleeping mat in the morning, and, far worse, giant black stinging centipedes<sup>5</sup> scurrying menacingly in through the window and down onto the floor at night. One evening just as we approached the homestead we saw a small spitting cobra cross the path of our flashlight a short ways in front of our feet. By the time these incidents had just about eroded our composure completely, Mai Toda (Mbano's mother) quietly let it be known that since we had built our hut and were now living in the land of the ancestors, the time had come for us to pay five dollars to the *svikiro*, or medium of the local ancestral spirits. The money would be conveyed by herself or her husband, since they were the *vanyai*, or go-betweens for the local medium. This request was easy enough to comply with,

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<sup>5</sup>The local word was *dvatsvatsva*, which elsewhere apparently denotes a jerrymunglum (another very fast and scary, but in this case harmless, insect that also makes its appearance at night).

and having done so, the dreaded nocturnal visitations by scorpions, centipedes and snakes came to an end.

Although no further explanation seemed necessary, we understandably began to probe further into the relations between the *svikiro*, the land, and the power held by the ancestral chiefs over its inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> To our disappointment, however, we were only invited to possession ceremonies held for the ancestors of local families, not for the *mhondoro*, the ancestors of chiefs. But in this we seemed to differ little from most residents of the village, who allowed selected elders such as Mbano's parents (Kapita and Mai Toda) to represent the village when it came to the rituals held to appease the ancestral owners of the land.

In any case, large segments of the village community--the *Vapostori* (Apostolics) in particular--were ambivalent about, if not hostile to, the spirit mediums and the theory of power that they embodied. Yet they found other ways of acknowledging our incorporation into the stream of civic life. For example, one morning in October we were alerted by Mai Wanda and Mai Dzorai that Chipangura, the intimidating *Mupostori* headman of the village immediately to the west of Tazivana, was overturning buckets of water that women were

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<sup>6</sup>We continued to entertain some of our own "rational" explanations for the cessation of these fearful events: that we had not yet sealed the gap between the eaves and the walls, or that we must have disturbed a centipede nest while digging the foundation. Still, we found a greater sense of resolution--as apparently others did--in the consummation of our obligations to the medium.

filling at the borehole. Those households that had not paid a contribution of seven dollars to have the borehole repaired, he announced, would no longer be allowed to bring away water--and that included "Sisi" (as Gul Rukh had come to be known), since she and VaWorby were a married couple residing in the village and using its water. Eventually Mbano came to our defense, suggesting that since we did not have our own cooking hut, we were not effectively a separate *musha* (household), and hence ought to be covered by the fee paid by Mbano himself.

In the end, it was perhaps the ambiguity of our position in time that some people found disturbing: Why didn't we want to have our own land, and to remain in Tazivana to plough and plant cotton? The anomaly of our being married, yet without land of our own, suggested a kind of extended dependency, just as the fact that we as yet had no children suggested our stasis in social time. On the day we left the village the following June, Obert's mother--a granddaughter of Chief Goredema--asked Gul Rukh if we would return to stay one day. "How can we, when we have no land here?" Gul Rukh answered. "Don't worry," the old woman comforted, "I will give you land." It was perhaps only in this poignant moment that we knew for certain of our acceptance into the community. We knew that it was only if we had been accepted in perpetuity by the ancestors, the chief, the village headman, and the villagers themselves that it would be possible for an individual to offer us land of our own to plough and to pass

on one day to our own children.

### Themes of the Chapters

The chapters in Part III begin at some remove in space and time from the village scene I have just described, then focus closely back in upon it, and finally draw away once again to analyze village labour forms within a regional perspective. In Chapter IX, I first situate Gokwe's indigenous political structure--and specifically the chieftainship of Chireya--within the broad sweep of pre-colonial political economy on the Zimbabwean Plateau.<sup>7</sup> The analysis at this point will rely largely work of other historians who have themselves used the analytical tools of archaeology and political economy. For my part, I do little more than synthesize their descriptions of the rise of class-like relations between chiefs and dependents, and the movement of commodities across political boundaries and through the frontiers of power in a succession of states that emerged on the Plateau over the past one thousand years or so. But at the same time I try to indicate how a historical gaze trained on discovering "states" effectively deletes much else from the political landscape, leaving places like Gokwe as gaps in the pre-colonial map as well. Thus the narrative of state

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<sup>7</sup>To avoid confusion, "Plateau", capitalized, will stand as the abbreviation for the great Zimbabwean Plateau that runs in a southwest-northeast axis through the centre of the country at an altitude above 1200 metres; and "plateau," in small case, will abbreviate the Mafungabusi plateau.

formation and dissolution that I do provide is really only intended to provide a background to the key episode, or journey, that stands as an epochal watershed for the indigenous people of Gokwe, and that Masiras only gave me a very condensed version of that day when we were moulding bricks: the conquest of the northern lowlands by the ancestral "Rozvi" chief named Chireya. At the centre of my analysis of this episode will be a set of recorded myths that recount Chireya's conquest. Here, the dialogue with material remains and with the textualized voices of European explorers that historians have used to reconstruct the past on the Plateau will have to yield to another kind of interpretive strategy; it is a structuralist strategy, and yet one that recognizes that the way stories of power are told about the past may serve as a politics of knowledge in the present.

When analyzing and interpreting the set of Chireya myths, my interest is not so much in reconstructing an accurate historical record of Gokwe's political development as it is to discover the portraits of political power and the prescriptions for social practice that might be registered in the mythical genre. In particular, I look for what the myths might be saying with regard to three major themes: the first concerns who has power over the land and over labour, and how this is related to the casting of unequal relations between affines; the second deals with the significance of commodity exchange in mediating relations of power; and the third



specifies the relationship between living chiefs on the one hand, and ancestral chiefs and their mediums on the other.

Chapter X extends these themes, but focuses them more narrowly onto the lives of people living in Goredema ward and Tazivana village. I take as my guiding motif the different ways in which time is related to social process and agricultural praxis. In particular, I explore the ways in which the organization of agrarian labour may be understood in terms of the several dimensions of social time that conjoin generations, and that shape the paths taken by particular commodities in social space. I begin with a dimension of time that is acknowledged largely in ritual terms--a dimension through which people express their relationship with the ancestors who control fertility and punish immorality. Of interest here are a number of ways in which commodities--particularly iron, salt, and beer--circulate as a means of confirming a hierarchy of authority extending through transgenerational time, from the present into the past, from the living to the dead.

Then, I turn to inter-generational time, seeking to discover through the self-narrated lives of elders how, within their own lifetimes, the forms of labour have been transformed in conjunction with Gokwe's shifting relationship to wider regional economies. This serves as an occasion for a telling of the history of Tazivana village, and in particular of the devolution of authority over, and access to, land and labour

from one generation to the next.

In Chapter XI, I turn to yet another dimension of time--the daily and seasonal round of agricultural tasks--in order to return to the experience of agrarian labour in its most grounded, immediate, qualitative sense. Although detailed descriptions of the labour process constitute the core of the chapter, I try to indicate how the timing of tasks over the year is inseparable from the timing of commodity transactions; and moreover, that both of these are affected by the timing of the transfer of assets between generations.

If the first three chapters in this part show how politics, property and the labour process are all equally embedded in time, then Chapter XII attempts to show how considerations of time are central to the understanding of labour forms. I begin with a description of the several ways in which villages and households are linked together. As we shall see, this connectedness takes a form analogous to knots in a hammock or a fishing net: when the knots are spread out, they are discernable as distinct entities; yet at the same time, it is obvious that they are inseparably linked to one another--indeed, part of a larger whole--as relations of kinship and marriage, or of debt and dependence, provide pathways along which persons, commodities and labour move between them. At other moments, they are entangled with one another so closely as to form knots in themselves.

Why do the knots agglomerate the way they do, when they

do? I look in particular at three named forms of labour, which knot households together in distinct ways: the first roughly designates community work-parties (*humwe*); the second, reciprocal or rotating inter-household contracts (*machangano*); and the third, casual labour paid in cash or kind (*maricho*). In summarizing these three forms through which labour creates larger knots in time out of otherwise individuated households, I want to suggest how forms of social praxis in agriculture are highly localized and temporally situated affairs, ones that grander theories of proletarianization or cooperation fail to illuminate. By the end of the chapter, I hope I will have been able to tease out some of the many ways in which agrarian labour is embedded in relations of kinship, affinity and authority; and still more, to have shown how labour continues to serve as both "gift" and "commodity" in a way that undermines the dichotomy between the two.

Note: Symbols in the genealogical diagrams that appear in the chapters that follow below should be read as follows:

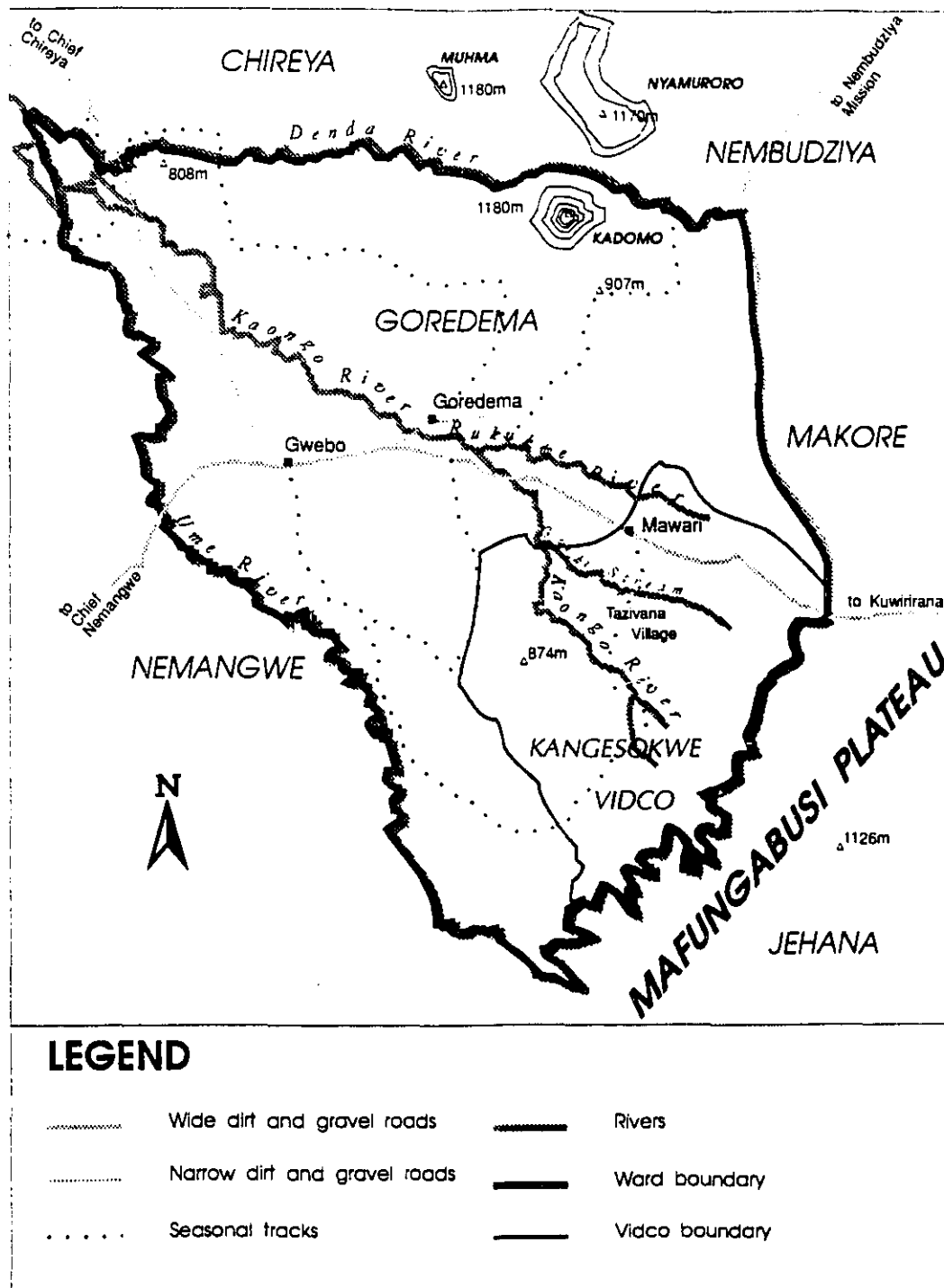
|                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| ■ Deceased Male | ● Deceased Female |
| □ Living Male   | ○ Living Female   |

A → B      "A" assists "B"

A = B      "A" marries "B"

A → B      "A" kills "B"

A  
↓      "B" is politically subordinate to "A"  
B



**Map III.1. Map of Goredema Ward, showing position of Kangesokwe Vidco and Tazivana Village.**

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **JOURNEYS OF POWER, GIFTS OF RAIN: CHIREYA'S LAND**

A locality is the trace of an event, a trace of what had shaped it. Such is the logic of all local myths and legends that attempt, through history, to make sense out of space. (Bakhtin 1981:189)

#### **The Politics of Myth**

Modes of description not only reveal a way of conceiving relations of power; they also display, give order to, and serve to institute those very relations. But there is never only one such strategy that may be brought into play: myths and legends, as Bakhtin suggests, "make sense out of space" and the relationship of persons to one another with respect to space in ways that may be fundamentally at odds with other modes of description, such as those given by the state (or its local representatives), or those that arise in situations of everyday reference. The last thirty years have seen a multiplication of such orders of conception as well as the modes of description that bear them, though as we shall see, there has never been a consensus on how to represent relations of power over time in Gokwe. In any case, it is not possible to adequately come to terms with how rights in property, land and labour are asserted and debated in Gokwe without taking these alternative narrative forms into account.

If the colonial officers assigned to Gokwe sought to affix cultural units to physically bounded territories, the people who called Gokwe their home conceived, and at least in some respects and in some contexts continue to conceive, of the relation between space and identity rather differently.<sup>1</sup> For them, territory is infused with the personality and power of persons who exist in genealogical relationships extending through time. These relationships link the land with the dead, and the dead with the living. The significance of space is thus grasped through a reckoning of social time, and especially through the imagined and narrated movements of royal ancestors in myths.

Ironically, there is a formal congruity between settler and indigenous myths of conquest that provided both with a common ground upon which to wage struggles of interpretation over rights in land and persons, and obligations of tribute in exchange for protection.<sup>2</sup> At one level, the white settlers who established the Rhodesian state thought of themselves as inheritors of the modern British tradition of parliamentary

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<sup>1</sup>Once again, I should emphasize my intention not to overplay the absolute difference between colonial and indigenous thought on such matters. As I note below, the way in which white settlers construed the origins of their own territorial authority was similarly cast in terms of myths of conquest and descent.

<sup>2</sup>The "moment" of this dialogical struggle at the time of contact in the late 1880s and early 1890s has proved to be extraordinarily fecund as a source of interpretive historiography and historical literature. See, e.g., Samkange (1966), Keppler-Jones (1983), and Beach (1986).

democracy; the Africans, in the view of many, lived either under the stewardship of despots or in a state of virtual anarchy. Yet there were symbolic processes at work indicating that another system of legitimating authority was simultaneously operative in settler culture. That system acknowledged, on the one hand, the power of conquest in the appropriation of control over territory, and, on the other, the transmission of such control by virtue of an ideology of royal descent based on the presumption of shared "blood." Rhodesia almost uniquely illustrates the enduring tension between the dynastic-imperial and nationalist moments in nineteenth century European ideology that accompanied the bourgeois industrial revolution (cf. Anderson 1991:chap.6). Cecil Rhodes embodied this tension perfectly: as a master manipulator of finance capital and imperial force on the margins of British colonial expansion, he stood for the ascendant epoch of bourgeois, anti-aristocratic freedom. Yet at the same time, Rhodes acted as an agent of the British "Crown," itself a synecdoche of royal power and descent. By conceiving, authorizing and organizing the act of conquest, he functioned as a mediating figure between the blood of British royalty and the imperium the British felt entitled to command. And when his name was permanently enshrined in the very name given to the colony, Rhodes assumed, in the mythology of white settlers, a symbolic role as a founding conqueror-ancestor, one with whom they could share in a kind of fictive kinship

(as "descendants" of The Pioneer Column that Rhodes selected to lead an initial incursion north of Limpopo in 1890) and thus entitlement to the conquered lands and the labour of its inhabitants.

It should be apparent, then, that I do not introduce the myths of Chireya's conquest of Gokwe because they are quaint or curious vestiges of a peculiarly "African" pre-colonial tradition, but because they continue to be reproduced along with exogenous modes of description in a dynamic interaction that gives rise to a distinctively modern way of viewing the world.<sup>3</sup> In this interaction, "tradition" itself is generated as a by-product of the modern--indeed, this is the context for such myths being collected and reproduced by colonial officers since the first decade of this century. As such, those oral texts (or their performance) which are marked as "traditional" become a self-conscious object of reflection and means of argumentation.<sup>4</sup> Myths, whether or not they are reframed as "tradition" in this way, not only record, but argue for

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<sup>3</sup>Here again, see Keesing's (1987, 1989) critique of the tendency to make overly "exotic" interpretations of cultural texts at the expense of seeing how they are formed and informed by a global nexus of meaning and power.

<sup>4</sup>This theme is addressed at length in Clifford (1988). Selim (1991) has recently explored how men in Gokwe invoke a modernist notion of "tradition" in order to explain and justify their control over women. At a different level of analysis, Cohen (1991) presents a fascinating analysis of the uses a "native" author, George Wamimbi, has made of a modern textual form--an ethnography of the Gisu of Uganda by Joan La Fontaine--in constructing a "traditional" historical text for a colonial government audience.



another angle on the reality they purport to convey. It is an angle neither more nor less true; yet as a way of grasping and transmitting forms of knowledge about the relations of power within which people negotiate their everyday lives, the mythic genre may be uniquely persuasive (cf. Willis 1969, 1981:188-9; Scott 1983).

But how, if at all, do the propositions these myths make possible contribute to the making of relations of labour and commodity exchange? I will argue they do so in two ways. In the first place, we shall see that the relationship between land and social identity is mediated by acts of specifically agrarian labour--by literally cutting the surface of the earth in the territory of particular ancestral "owners." As the process of our own incorporation into Tazivana village illustrates, one becomes a member of a social community in Gokwe by working the land, and doing so requires both the permission of the ancestors who look after it and that of its living inhabitants, as well as submission to their moral authority.

Secondly, we shall see how historical narratives provide a moral map for how persons (or the labour they embody) and things are obligated to move together or against one another in journeys through social and political space. The examples of such minor journeys are innumerable: A son-in-law without bridewealth cattle moves to the home of his father-in-law and puts his capacity to labour at the latter's disposal; a new

bride, brought away from her patrilineal home with the promise of cattle, moves silently in the dawn from homestead to homestead among her husband's near agnates, sweeping their yards with meticulous care, setting out hot water for them to wash and setting water to boil for their tea; the seven daughters-in-law of a headman's wife, congregate at her cotton-field to weed for her; the *vanyai*, or intermediaries between villagers and the spirit mediums, offer labour, cloth, or money to a senior medium in the month of *Nyambudzi* in anticipation of the rains, moving from diffuse points within a bounded territory toward a ritual centre. Each of these movements presume relations that are already known because they are given expression in a variety of discursive genres, ranging from *shumo*, (proverbs) and *ngano* (folktales), to the carefully structured historical narratives we think of as myths. It is the narrative map provided by this latter genre that I will be focusing upon here, as I try to show how myths embody questions, ambiguities and contingencies in their propositions about processes of polity-making and social power in Gokwe.

Three such processes in particular will come under discussion. In this chapter I deal with the first of these: the coming into being of the Chireya chieftaincy, the indigenous polity that controlled the land between the Sanyati and Sengwa rivers. In the chapter that follows I take up the latter two processes: the establishment of Goredema as a ward

within the Chireya chieftaincy and the making of Tazivana village within Goredema ward. These levels of locality may be thought of as spatially nested in accordance with a hierarchy of political authority over territory; from a different point of view, they may be thought of as nested in time as well, with the relations of authority at each level being articulated within a narrative framework that is used to explicate analogous relations at the next highest level.

Following Lan (1985), I will be suggesting that a cultural model for the constitution of political and social relations may be discerned in the plot structure that informs myths of ancestral conquest, and the alternative outcomes the plot provides for. For example, we shall see that the plot of some myths suggests that Chireya and the Rozvi conquerors he represents seize both the land of Gokwe and the power to make it fertile; in others, however, Chireya's people are obliged to subordinate themselves to the autochthonous "owners of the land" by taking their wives and remaining dependent upon them for the fertility of the land and the fertility of its occupants. These themes and others to which the myths collectively speak are not, I will argue, arcane matters of concern only to indigenous philosophers; rather, they may be drawn upon as commentary or explication of fairly mundane and ongoing processes--the formation of political communities, the circulation of particular commodities, and the recruitment of labour--in Gokwe today.

Before launching into a discussion of the mythical construction of Gokwe, however, I want to set it in context by looking at how states were made and unmade on the central Zimbabwean Plateau over the several centuries leading up to Chireya's mytho-historical journey into the northwestern lowlands. I use a more distanced style of ethnohistorical writing here, one that looks more at the significations of material evidence and eyewitness testimony than at the meanings implicit in the structure of narratives. My primary purpose is to establish both an analytical language and a historical landscape in which to situate more localized processes and idioms of polity-making in the area that is now known as Gokwe. At the same time, I do not shy away from observing how ethnohistorical judgements of this kind have also operated as myths or allegories with reference to other orders of power.

### **Cattle and Stone, Blood and Spirit: Allegories of Conquest**

The Mafungabusi plateau and the hinterland that stretches north toward the Zambezi escarpment barely figure at all in historical accounts of pre-colonial communities of Zimbabwe. The reason is simple enough: no ruins of stone structures have been found so far to lie within this region, and it is primarily such material signs of "high culture" or state organization that have been the object of twentieth century speculation on Zimbabwe's past. As Beach (1977:37) has observed, "the smaller political units have almost been

ignored" (see also Lancaster 1987:102; and Sylvester 1991:23). This fact should alert us to a more general concern with how histories are made. The telling of the past in the present is always accomplished allegorically; the way history is told, the events and evidence it selects for narration, depends largely on who does the telling and who is meant to be listening. Over the course of the past century, stories about Zimbabwe's past have always served as nationalist allegories: they are about who has the historical right to be politically enfranchised within the nation-state and on what terms.<sup>5</sup> The remains of an evidently sophisticated "civilization" centred on the Great Zimbabwe complex on the southern portion of the Zimbabwean plateau served as a screen upon which the ideological charter of the Rhodesian settlers could be projected backwards in time. As I suggested in the first chapter, a popular, if extreme, view saw Great Zimbabwe as an artifact of an ancient Mediterranean civilization that had washed over the primitive African landscape and then receded,

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<sup>5</sup>Recent debates over the rules of citizenship and the boundaries of incorporation into the nation-state, have been suggestive. Most recently, Zimbabwe has seen proposals that the off-spring of Zimbabwean women and expatriate men should not be entitled to citizenship, but that in the reverse case, citizenship would be automatically granted. This patrilineal/patrilocal model partly explains the exclusion of hundreds of thousands of immigrant farm-labourers from exercising rights as full citizens in Zimbabwe, not only because they have married Zimbabwean women, but also in some instances, because they are thought of as "matrilineal" people. The Rural and Urban Councils Act of 1989, by making land ownership a prerequisite to participation in local council elections in the former white farming areas, confirmed the support for the disenfranchised status of these people.

leaving only its stately monuments of stone behind as a trace (Chanaiwa 1973; Garlake 1983; Hall 1987).<sup>6</sup> Cecil Rhodes was particularly keen to popularize this theory, since such an imaginary conquest served as an allegorical charter, one that would complement the legal charter he received in 1889 from the British Crown to occupy and administer the lands between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers.

The Shona-speaking peoples inhabiting the area when the time the Pioneer Column marched onto the plateau in 1890 were deemed to be without the experience of, or potential for, such civilizational achievements; the amateur archaeologists of the time classified them as a debased and undignified people who had succumbed rather pathetically to the savage raiding of the Ndebele.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the "Shona" were seen to lack the economic organization that might make possible an accumulation of wealth. "Wealth," in this case was most often identified with enduring material objects (such as "temples" and gold

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<sup>6</sup>The original theses were propagated by Cecil Rhodes himself and by his chief propagandist, Richard Hall, whom Rhodes appointed to be curator of the ruins, from which position he could expound to visitors on their provenance in the Holy Lands of antiquity. Both Chanaiwa (1973:125-33) and Garlake (1983) point out that diffusionist or migration theories of Great Zimbabwe's origins continued to dominate archaeological discourse even after "professionals" had ascertained that the ruins were of "Bantu" origin.

<sup>7</sup>Benedict Anderson (1991:181) records how the archaeology and reconstruction of monuments was used in an exactly parallel fashion in south-east Asia prior to 1930: "Seen in this light, the reconstructed monuments, juxtaposed with the surrounding rural poverty, said to the natives: Our very presence shows that you have always been, or have become, incapable of either greatness or self-rule."

ornaments) that held a prominent place within regimes of value established within the familiar late-nineteenth century Orientalist tradition. Such material emblems of achievement were taken to signify the presence of a ruling political or religious elite, and accordingly, of a pre-modern state.

In a political climate in which these kinds of uses were being made of the visible past, the question of what forces-- or rather which people--brought such state-forms into being became central to debates over the legitimacy of the Rhodes's own colonial enterprise and future aspirations in the area north of the Limpopo. At points of crisis in nation-making during the pre-Independence period, the importance of the question was augmented. Thus in the 1960s and 1970s, after decades of less tendentious archaeological research (virtually all of which suggested that state formation took place in situ by Shona-speaking, or at least by closely related African peoples), the Smith government banned the publication of any material unequivocally attributing an African origin to the Great Zimbabwe ruins (Frederickse 1982:10). In response, African nationalists argued just as emphatically for an unbroken tradition of "Shona" culture traceable through genealogical links directly back to the ruins themselves. Not only the origins of Great Zimbabwe were accounted for in these latter tellings; seen through the nationalist prism, Great Zimbabwe was further imagined to have been a "socialist" society. In this way, yet another motif from the colonial

stock of ideas was pirated<sup>8</sup> and put to rhetorical use, just as "nationalism" itself had been, in the name of an anti-colonial historiography (see Garlake 1983:14-15; Hall 1987:144). Other nationalist narratives (e.g., Chigwedere 1980) appropriated the old settler motif linking civilizational achievements with the grand migrations of heroic ancestors from "Ethiopia" during the Biblical epoch. In their form, such narratives synthesized elements from Western secular and Christian conceptions of history with an indigenous narrative genre of origin myths, some examples of which I will shortly provide.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a new generation of professional historians and archaeologists--sympathetic to the need to indigenize the great accomplishments of pre-colonial societies in Zimbabwe, while believing themselves to be more subject to the discipline of the evidence at hand--have been willing to make "Shona-speakers" the bearers of those early peaks in political scale (see, e.g., Chanaiwa 1973; Beach 1980; Garlake 1983). These scholars have allowed linguistic and cultural continuity to stand as a proxy for direct genealogical links that cannot be conclusively established between modern chiefs and those who commanded the construction of the ancient stone enclosures that dot the central Plateau. Now that those committed to the indiginization of antique states have firmly seized the high ground of academe, debate has centred more on

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<sup>8</sup>The term is Anderson's (1991).



how the archaeological remnants of settlements and commodity trade are configured in space, and about how those configurations can be interpreted so that they say something meaningful about the structure of social, political, economic and spiritual relations in these early states. My purpose in reviewing some of these efforts is partly to provide a context for my discussion of pre-colonial politics and trade in the Gokwe region. But it is equally to draw attention to way in which the traffic in particular kinds of objects--such as cattle, cloth or copper--became implicated in the establishment or signification of social relations of production, exchange and political control. As I have already suggested, political power in Gokwe did not leave traces worthy of note from the position of the historians of the Zimbabwean Plateau; nevertheless, many of the symbolic motifs through which states were formed find, in Gokwe's history, either their double or their inversion.

State Formation and Commodity  
Relations on the Zimbabwean Plateau

From at least the tenth century onward,<sup>9</sup> social and

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<sup>9</sup>Substantial archaeological evidence indicates that centralized chiefdoms emerged as early as 900 A.D. at several points along the eastern margin of the Kalahari (west of the Zimbabwe plateau). Denbow and Wilmsen (1986:1512) develop the hypothesis that rulers were able to seize control over the widely dispersed flow of trade goods from the Indian ocean into the Kalahari, and extract tribute from peoples who pursued a mixed strategy of trading, hunting, foraging and herding. The result was a hierarchy of centralized settlements. I have elsewhere analyzed the dialectic between relations of production and institutions of power in these

economic power in the agro-pastoral chiefdoms along the edges of the Zimbabwean Plateau periodically became concentrated in the hands of a ruling estate, residing over many generations in quasi-urban settlements. The basis upon which hierarchical social relations were established in each of these polities can for the most part only be guessed at, but the process most likely involved an increase in strategic control over various kinds of rights in objects, livestock, and persons. To summarize a complex area of theory, ethnohistory and archaeology, we might say that such power seems to have been realized through three primary modalities: first, the accumulation of cattle that could be deployed as bridewealth, and thus used to aggregate and control the labour of wives and dependents (Garlake 1978: Kuper 1982; Hall 1987:chap.5); second, the restricted acquisition of luxury items signifying elite status (Sutherland-Harris 1970; Beach 1983, 1984);<sup>10</sup> and third, the symbolic manipulation of natural and monumental

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polities during the later pre-colonial period (Worby 1984b: chap.2; see also Hall 1987:88-9).

<sup>10</sup>There has been a tendency to fetishize these commodities as keys to social and political structure of pre-colonial states, a condition that Beach (1977) has attempted to rectify by stressing the more mundane processes and relations of production, centred on riverine agriculture, stock-raising and the specialist production of iron, salt, gold, ivory and skins. Still, no-one contests the complex role of a long-distance trade in "luxury goods" underwriting power relations both materially and symbolically. Appadurai (1986:38) usefully suggests that "we regard luxury goods not so much in contrast to necessities (a contrast filled with problems), but as goods whose principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs. The necessity to which they respond is fundamentally political."

space (Hall 1987).

The earliest evidence of such a concentration of wealth and power appears at sites such as Mapungubwe and Schroda located on hill-tops in the Limpopo-Shashi river basin southwest of the central Zimbabwean Plateau. These were inhabited between the ninth and twelfth centuries, serving as the first suppliers of trade goods (such as ivory) to the coastal settlements of Chibuene, Sofala, and Kilwa that served Arab traders along the southeast African coast at the time. In addition to their agro-pastoral, hunting and trading economies, these communities evidently supported part-time specialists in pottery-making, bone and iron-working, and perhaps cotton spinning and weaving.<sup>11</sup>

From the eleventh until the fifteenth century, a powerful state centred on the valley and hill-top stone enclosures of Great Zimbabwe dominated local and long-distance trade on the Plateau; it was here that the most dramatic uses of massive stone architecture were combined with principles of centrality

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<sup>11</sup>The presence of spindle whorls at Mapungubwe provides the earliest evidence of cotton cultivation, spinning, and weaving in this part of Africa, although there is insufficient evidence to specify the production processes involved, much less those of distribution and consumption. According to Hall (1987:81-2), the presence of spindle whorls suggests "that the cotton plants *Gossypium Herbaceum* and *Gossypium Arboreum* had already been introduced from central Asia or India and were either cultivated or growing wild." Looms "were probably of the low, fixed single-heddle type on which either narrow or wide cloth could be made" (ibid.:81; see Davison and Harries 1980).

and relative altitude in order to signify various dimensions of the power of the state--presumably relations of inequality, dependence, and reciprocity between rulers and ruled, men and women, and ancestors and descendants.<sup>12</sup> State power at Great Zimbabwe evidently had a material foundation in the control its rulers were able to secure over trade routes carrying gold and ivory to the Indian ocean, over the circulation of regionally-produced commodities such as iron and copper, and over cattle and grazing lands on the Plateau. All of these implied control not only over valued objects, but also over the persons who produced them or obtained them through trade.

Recent archaeological and historical interpretations suggest that the location of the centres of power on the edges of the Plateau was tailored to conform to both an ecological and an economic logic. Rainfall on the whole is more voluminous and reliable on the Plateau than on the hot, dry lowlands that surround it, and the higher altitudes and cooler

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<sup>12</sup>The problem, of course is that no one is able to say precisely what was being said about these relations, although the interpretations tend to reflect contemporary trends in social theory, or serve as occasions to unearth nineteenth century ideas that have renewed force in the context of a modern discourse on class and gender inequality. Thus Garlake, who stresses the need to see the ruins within a regional context of economic relations and emerging social forms, has put forward an argument reminiscent of Bachofen, MacLennan, Morgan and Engels (see Kuper 1988:chap.2): the ruins for him mark the moment of transition from an egalitarian, matrilineal society, in which the dominance of women as grain producers was acknowledged, to a patrilineal society in which "cattle became a method of storing, accumulating and increasing private property, generating inequalities in wealth, and eventually, political power" (Garlake 1983:13).

temperatures exclude tse-tse fly infestation. Fluctuations in the tse-tse boundary zone occurred seasonally and according to the density of human and wild animal populations, which probably varied inversely as new settlers cleared the bush, destroying game habitats as they did so (Garlake 1978).<sup>13</sup> In some areas, grazing areas on the Plateau could be used to graze livestock in relatively high concentrations while taking advantage at the same time of permanent water run-off in the lowlands in order to irrigate alluvial gardens.

Large, concentrated settlements could develop in these boundary zones as communities united transhumant pastoralism between the plateau and the lowlands with cereal cultivation, hunting, mining and craft manufacture. In this way, distinct ecological zones, as well as areas in which raw materials such as iron, copper and salt were concentrated, could be articulated into an interdependent, regional political economy (Beach 1977; Garlake 1978). Most interpretations of the evidence suggest that it was the accumulation of cattle that was somehow central to the formation of states at the centre

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<sup>13</sup>The relationship between livestock and tse-tse fly, still often thought by historians to be one of absolute incompatibility, was subject to radical reevaluation in a pioneering study by Ford (1961) some thirty years ago. Ford's research pointed to the development of host resistance to trypanosomes over periods of prolonged, intermittent exposure, a view which has received recent support from immunological, epidemiological, and epizootological research (see the summary by Giblin 1990). This strengthens Garlake's (1978) contention that pastoralist strategies could flourish in the ecological tse-tse border zone.

of these regional networks (Garlake 1978; Hall 1987; Maggs and Whitelaw 1991). On the whole, cattle would have been a better hedge against drought than cereal production: whether kept for milk, reserved for emergency or ritual slaughter, protected as part of a breeding nucleus, or marked for exchange, they would have represented key long-term investments. Transhumant pastoralism, however, requires access to territories and resources that are dispersed in space and accessed at different points in time (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1940)--and this implies social mechanisms linking distinct political communities, or else political forms that incorporate herders at some distance from the centres of power. Either might be realized through ties of exchange, descent, marriage or clientship (see Bonte and Galaty 1991). The very mobility of livestock enables those entrusted with them to seek autonomy, presenting a limitation on the concentration of stock and its control by any dominant social stratum.

How, then, did state forms in which labour could be commanded for large public works such as Great Zimbabwe arise? Strategic control over trade routes may well have enabled ruling lineages to secure access to the returns from a regional trade in salt, iron and copper as well as the export trade to the Indian Ocean in ivory, gold and skins. Protection may have been exchanged for tribute in these products. Meanwhile, exotic imports provided emblematic symbols of status and power: porcelain from China, cloth and

glass beads from India (Sutherland-Harris 1970; Mudenge 1975; Beach 1977; Ranger 1978; Wright 1979).

Speculation about the organization of the Zimbabwean state in the fifteenth century yields questions that will prove relevant for my discussion of the more recent politics of space and commodity circulation in Gokwe. How was control realized in areas that were, to a large extent, land and political frontiers? There is no way of knowing for certain, of course, so the kind of answer we might give depends once again upon the kind of allegory we wish to make about the rise and fall of states such as Great Zimbabwe. For my purposes, it will suffice to emphasize that commodities involved in the reproduction of social power in the "realm" of these polities--gold and iron, salt and cloth--almost certainly did not circulate freely in a marketplace of universally commensurable values (see Wright 1979). It was not only that the value of commodities, as such, might have been the object of constant negotiation, but that the very paths they might follow through political and commodity space were matters of contestation.

Ivory is a classic example. Considered as a raw material, abstracted from its origin in a process that involved complex relationships between hunters, chiefs and ancestral spirits, one might attempt to assess the fluctuating distribution of value (the "terms of trade") between, say, Portuguese buyers and the Plateau states. But when we consider more closely what "commodity trade" actually entails

as a social process, the problem becomes considerably more complex, even when the producer was a single (and singularly daring!) hunter, as Beach tells us on the basis of several oral texts relating to the East Coast trade:

Individual enterprise brought an individual reward: the ruler usually took one tusk, the meat was distributed to the community, but the hunter kept the tusk that protruded uppermost from the dead beast. The hunter and the ruler faced the same problems in disposing of the ivory. Locally, a tusk would pay the bride-price of a wife, thus allowing more croplands to be opened up and planted by the addition of her labour to the family. Alternatively, an area poor in iron such as Bocha might use the tusk to buy good iron ore from places such as Wedza (Beach 1977:53).

The association between the ground-tusk, on the one hand, and the chief (as the ruler of the territory which the tusk literally falls upon) on the other, is widely found in southern Africa, and was reiterated in histories I collected in Gokwe. The lesson of such examples is that individuals involved in the production, exchange and consumption of these items could not, in the end, have done so in isolation from the social relationships in which they were implicated--relations that tied them to kin, to patrons, and to the territories and polities in which they had citizenship.

The precise character of these relations for various commodities--both at the centres of power and on its fringes--can only be attested to by the objects themselves and their relationship to one another in space. The location of miniature replicas of the types of stone enclosures at various distances from the centre suggests a pattern either of



devolution--perhaps to houses of the ruling line--or of fission. The causes recently attributed to these kinds of processes have been ecological (the dispersal of herds over wider grazing areas), or political-economic (the need to post trusted kin or clients at key nodes in the outlying trade network extending to the coast).

Great Zimbabwe was eventually eclipsed by two new centres of power, both of which were of consequence for the Mafungabusi plateau and its hinterland. The Mutapa state was founded originally in the sixteenth century along the northeastern escarpment of the Plateau. Some have speculated that it was established by a rival faction among the nobility at Great Zimbabwe, known as "Karanga."<sup>14</sup> Known after the title of its ruler, the Mwene Mutapa, this "state"<sup>15</sup> was in

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<sup>14</sup>The term "Karanga," a well-established ethnonym in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe (see Chapter VII, above) was used by the Portuguese when referring to the people they first encountered on the eastern part of the plateau. Beach (1980), Rennie (1984) and Bourdillon (1988) take this to be indicative of the existence of an ancestral "Karanga" lineage or proto-ethnic group, although it may equally have been a name applied by those outside the ambit of its power. From the point of view of the Tonga peoples of the Gwembe Valley in Zambia (recalling that "Tonga" itself means "renegades") the term "Karanga" is used to designate "babblers"--aliens who speak an unintelligible language. (Colson 1970:36).

<sup>15</sup>Lancaster (1980:133) argues that both the Mwene Mutapa polity and that which was centred on Great Zimbabwe, seem "to have been an alliance of comparatively low-density descent group systems...The many ruins of stone enclosures...probably represent the relatively short lived village sites of chiefs and sub-chiefs, along with their land shrines and ritual areas. Like the internal organization of precolonial Goba chiefdoms, the loose and situational confederacy was probably held together by an intermittent traffic in tribute (or trade), diplomatic and military missions and religious

direct contact with the Portuguese from soon after the latter established their first settlement at Sofala on the southeast coast of Africa in 1505; as a result, the history of Mwene Mutapa is rather better represented than the polities that were its predecessors and contemporaries, albeit through the eyes of Portuguese chroniclers.

The Mwene Mutapa was recognized by the Portuguese as the paramount ruler--they intervened to stabilize the polity in the early sixteenth century by restoring the Mutota dynasty to secure their trade monopoly--but secondary, rival states arose to the south and along the Zambezi river (Rennie 1984; Lancaster 1987). It is among the more transient and temporary aggregations of power and wealth that arose in the interstices of more established states that it is possible to glimpse the dynamic relationship between marriage and trade, warfare and ethnic identity, and labour and political dependency. Thus according to contemporary Portuguese chroniclers, in the sixteenth century state of Teve (located just across what is now Zimbabwe's eastern border), the "king" enjoyed a substantial staff of courtiers--including a bodyguard of 500

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congregations coming to the shrines (mazimbabwe) at the various confederacy headquarters..." His conclusion is that, "Rather than a 'centralized empire' or 'state,' as it has been called by historians and archaeologists, this society should simply be called a 'segmentary society' like those found in many other regions dependent on long-fallow, low-density shifting cultivation" (ibid.).

men, singers, jesters and messengers--and was able to accumulate considerable private wealth in gold, cloth, ivory and cattle. Such goods were obtained not only by means of a trade monopoly (a trading fee of 200 cloths was collected from the Portuguese), but also through the collection of fines and the taxation of judicial proceedings and even *rites de passage* such as burials (Rennie 1984:170). But the control these leaders exercised over clients was not unilateral or despotic, and labour tribute as such was not a prominent means of demonstrating subservience:

A man could become a *muranda* (servant) either by capture as a hostage in a 'case' or in a war, or voluntarily, by becoming the client of a rich man in time of distress. He might well become the client of a chief, in which case he would expect land, a wife and in return would give loyalty and service to his protector. Nyamusangos [local chiefs] and kings had certain servants who were entrusted with considerable responsibility, such as the collection of tribute, the conveying of messages, and the announcing of court decisions. Such a man was known as 'Mutume' [from *kutuma*, to send]. Men could also become the clients of a prospective father-in-law as a temporary arrangement if they could not find enough for bridewealth (ibid.:171).

The sort of reciprocities between rulers and followers that were typical of these politically volatile border zones were founded necessarily on a measure of trust and mutual interest.<sup>16</sup> In a multi-centred political field, clients might always switch loyalties, and those who built their own followings based on some combination of peaceful trade and

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<sup>16</sup>On the relationship between trust and commerce in West Africa, and more generally, see Hart (1987).

brigandage might grow to threaten their former patrons. These sort of dynamics seem to have been endemic in the lower Zambezi valley that lay in the shadow of the Portuguese *feira* at Zumbo (see Lancaster 1974; 1981; 1987), where ethnic categories record historically shifting relations of opposition (*Tonga*) or dependence (*Nyai*).

#### The Rozvi: Chireya's Conquest of the Northwest

If these "secondary states" lay in the shadow of the Mwene Mutapa and constituted along with it an inconstant "confederacy," then the chiefdom of Chireya north of the Mafungabusi plateau was located in its penumbra. This area was probably sparsely populated with diffuse village settlements along the rivers flowing off the Plateau northwards toward the Zambezi. Even in the centuries before the colonial conquest, the land of Chireya was probably well off the beaten track of trading and raiding. But its very isolation from the heavily monitored and controlled routes of commerce from the southwest to the northeast may have made it an attractive alternative for those wishing to circumvent the nexus of commodity traffic and political control that linked the Portuguese to the interior and vice versa. To the south, lay the ruins of the Torwa state, of which little is known except that it had its headquarters at Khami and later at Danangombe on the southwest of the plateau. According to Portuguese documentation, it collapsed at the end of the seventeenth century when it was overrun by the Changamire Rozvi.

The term "Rozvi," which is sometimes translated as "destroyers" describes those who claim descent either from a legendary figure usually referred to as Dombo or by the honorary title Changamire who led a faction of the Mwene Mutapa dynasty out of the northeastern Plateau in the late seventeenth century; or else it refers to those who claim a historical attachment to the state that was founded at that time (allegedly by Dombo) in the southwest. The Rozvi armies managed to terrorize the Portuguese to such an extent that the latter passed on a portrait of the Rozvi that probably exaggerated their military prowess and the extent of control their leaders or vassals exercised over other peoples on the Plateau.<sup>17</sup> But there is little question that local traditions narrated in many parts of Zimbabwe find the anchor of their dynastic histories in some decisive moment of Rozvi conquest. What makes the power of the Rozvi between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries particularly intriguing is that its history is largely only accessible through such traditions. As an independent concentration of power lying in the Zambezian interior, the dates and historical figures

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<sup>17</sup>Although in fact they did succeed in keeping the Portuguese from establishing any trading posts (*feira*) on the Plateau save for that at Manica in the east. The most careful historiographic review of Rozvi power is that carried out by Beach (1980:chap.7). See also Sutherland-Harris (1970) and Mudenge (1974).

accounted for in Portuguese records are relatively few.<sup>18</sup> Certainly in the case of the land lying north and west of the Mafungabusi plateau, it is these traditions that constitute the only means of telling that history at all.

As part of a mythic genre that occurs widely among Shona-speaking peoples, traditional narratives such as those I will analyze below, purport to recount the journeys and conquests made by the ancestors of living chiefs. As a means of expressing the relationship between conquest, descent, and entitlement, they encode, and attempt to resolve, the tension between two primary social categories. The first of these categories comprises the autochthons of a bounded area--the "owners of the land" (*vene venyika* or *varidzi venyika*). Through the vehicle of living mediums (*svikiro*), the spirits of the ancestral chiefs (*mhondoro*) of the autochthons are held to retain control over the fertility of the land and to be capable of bringing sanctions to bear on violators of the moral order (particularly those who commit incest or murder). The second category designates conquerors--*vatorwa* ("those who have taken"). But as the myths themselves show, the question of who are the owners and who are the conquerors is not only contested, but can even be blurred, depending upon who is telling the story.

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<sup>18</sup>Although the collapse of the Rozvi confederacy can be fairly precisely dated to the Nguni conquests from the south under Zwangendaba in the 1830s.

### The Chireya Myth

Richard Tazivana, headman of Tazivana village, was recounting the history of the land of Goredema in an interview at his home on 28 November 1988. We prompted him further with the question, "Who was the original owner of the land?" He leaned forward, craning his neck and bald head, and began to tell the story in an intense, almost conspiratorial, voice:

The owner of this land was Muvhumba Nyamusasa. He had a cow. If it happened that the sky was dry, and no rain could be seen, the daughters of Muvhumba would begin to sing and to spin round and round the cow. Then clouds would form and the rain would fall. They would take their vessels and fill them with water, saying that the rain could now dry up.

Now, Chireya was on his way from Guruuswa, drinking, for water, the urine of his cattle as he went. Chireya's army arrived at that place where Chireya was staying and some of them continued on to the land of Muvhumba.

Upon meeting his daughters, they said, "Please give us water to drink." So the girls brought water to give to those soldiers. And the soldiers said, "Ah! Where did you find water like this--water as fine as the place we come from? How did you get it, girls?"

And the girls replied, "We have our father's cow, and when we sing to it dark rain-clouds fill with water and it rains."

"Are you being truthful?" asked the soldiers.

"It is the truth," the girls replied.

"Could you sing this way for us so that we might see for ourselves?" the soldiers asked.

But the girls said "Ah no! Our father wouldn't like it!"

"Please do it just a little," pleaded the soldiers.

"We are your relatives [*Tiri vamwe venyu*--literally, "we are others of yourselves"]."

Meanwhile, Chireya remained behind with some of his soldiers. These were other soldiers who were asking the questions. But these girls--you can see

why girls are not wanted in times of war. They will sell out your secrets! [*Hondo haidi vasikana. Vanotengesa!*].

Now those girls began to sing. The cow began to spin round and round. The rain started to fall. The rain fell and flooded the ground. The soldiers drank their fill and thanked the girls. They went back to their chief [Chireya]. They told him of what they had seen:

"There is a cow at that place--and when it is sung to, the rain falls!--Here is the water! [Tazivana showing how they gave some to Chireya.] How are we going to get hold of that cow? How shall we take it?" So they sat down together and planned that they would kill the girl's father.

"When you have killed him," [said Chireya] "take the cow."

"Very well," the soldiers agreed. "When we have killed that father, we will take the cow." That is how the army arranged to do their work. "Ahh!" they said. "Let's go and start this fight such that we might take that cow!"

Now old man Muvhumba Nyamusasa and his wife are in the field, they are tilling the land. The cow is at the homestead with their daughters.

The army came again now, and this time they showed the girls no kindness. They had come only to fight. Now the old man became aware that something was happening and he said to his wife, "Mai, let's go home. Something bad is coming there. My head is not feeling well!" So the old man came from the field and arrived at the homestead. The army was now on its way, and so the old man and his wife mounted the cow and started to ride away, with all their children running after them.

The soldiers followed. They arrived at a place known as "*gomba remhere*" ["pit of screams"] and there they sank down into the ground with their cow and all their children. Then the pit turned into pools of water, those that are called "*madziva aparware*" ["rock pools"], and which can still be seen today. When the soldiers arrived, the water had already come, and they had missed their chance. Those pits had been covered with water. The soldiers who had lost Muvhumba Nyamusasa stopped and thought, "Ahh! How?" They all returned to tell



the others what had happened and they were told,  
"It's all right. We set out desiring the country  
[nyika] and we took it. It has become ours."

And that is how they took the country and how it  
came under Chireya, who has been the leader until  
this very day.

Tazivana's narrative is a variation on an oral tradition that recounts the Rozwi conquest of Gokwe's original "owner of the land" and the assumption of temporal power by Chireya and his descendants. Several versions of this tradition or legend<sup>19</sup> have been recorded, and there is ample reason to view the set of what might be called "Chireya myths" as continuous with the much more extensive series of well-known "Guruuswa myths" found throughout northern Zimbabwe (see Beach 1980; Lan 1985). In these myths, a founder ancestor from Guruuswa [literally, "tall grass"] is said to have journeyed northward from the central Zimbabwe plateau into the Zambezi lowlands (or at least as far as the edge of the Zambezi escarpment) and seized political control of the land.

Two kinds of interpretive strategies have been used to decipher the meaning of these narratives: one makes a literal-historical reading of the texts, while the other follows a structuralist path of analysis in the tradition of Levi-

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<sup>19</sup>Willis (1981), in his masterful analysis of a similar narrative genre in Ufipa (Tanzania), recommends the term "legend" for myths such as these that have an overtly symbolic import. He distinguishes them from "nonsymbolic narrative reports" that are taken to have a "direct relation to events or states of affairs in the world, past or present" (1981:xviii).

Strauss. As recent work on similar genres elsewhere in Africa has shown (e.g. Willis 1981), however, there is no reason to see these two readings as mutually exclusive alternatives, since the elements with which symbolic thought works may well be actual events, reimagined and represented in order to make meta-commentaries on contemporary social relations (cf. Malinowski 1954[1926]).

The *guruuswa* myths convey messages simultaneously on several levels. Polysemous in their representation of cognitive oppositions and in their specification of moral injunctions, they may also work as political tracts or as simple histories--stylized accounts of what happened before anyone living can remember.

Apart from the debates over the historical veracity or symbolic efficacy of orally rendered texts, a few other observations might be made about their role as social knowledge. One concerns the question of whose knowledge such accounts represent, and who it is knowledge for. The partiality of my own comprehension of these stories finds its counterpart in most people who live in Gokwe. I never heard women recount any such narratives, although this may have had to do with the kinds of questions I asked of them. Most young women and men professed little if any knowledge of the relationships between political personalities in the "traditional" system either present or past. Another observation concerns the context in which such stories were

told. Other than in the informal chat with Masiras while we built the hut, Chireya myths only surfaced in the interview with Tazivana, at which only myself, Gul Rukh, and Obert (who had previously arranged the interview) were present. When I tried to elicit a version of the same story from Mugomeri, he hesitated, claimed not to remember, and finally offered a rather tentative genealogy of the Goredema chiefs instead. That interview was conducted before virtually every member of the extended family compound (with some 20 huts, probably the largest in the ward) who happened to be present at the time. Whether or not the audience was the reason for his inability or unwillingness to tell the story of Chireya, or whether it was simply because I asked the wrong questions, or because he was suspicious of my motives, I am unable to say. But the fact that he had been on the losing end of a recent contest for the chieftaincy was probably not without significance. The long trail of Chireya texts recorded by District Commissioners are reason to regard them as being much more than "twilight tales" (a favoured characterization of the colonial period). It seems more likely that both their telling and their recording were charged moments of political inscription--opportunities for a mutual construction of political relations that united storyteller and interlocutor in a process of elaborating and legitimating an ever-evolving sub-system of "traditional" authority within the imperial embrace.

These oral traditions speak to yet other issues that lie beyond the grand charters of political right and genealogical seniority that they seem to be obliquely arguing for. It is possible to read them as taking real struggles that emerge in daily life--contests between the relative power of wife-giving lineages and wife-taking lineages for example--and transposing them onto historical terrain; "history" here illuminates the origins of relations of power and at the same time presents an exposition not so much of social rules, but of the tension between rules and their possible inversions or subversions. With these caveats in mind, let me now explore what the Chireya myths might reveal about the social dynamics of the past as they are rewritten into the present.

#### The Myths as History: Literalist Readings

A literalist reading would suggest that the mythic narrative directly relates, or at least indirectly encodes, actual historical events (e.g. Beach 1980). In the case of Tazivana's version of the Chireya myth, this would minimally lead us to believe that a group of armed marauders from the central highlands did in fact seize hold of the Gokwe lowlands adjoining the Mafungabusi plateau and that the present Chief Chireya is the direct descendant of the original Chireya who led these conquerors. By Tazivana's own genealogical reckoning, this event would have occurred only three

generations ago<sup>20</sup> shortly before Lobengula's Ndebele started extracting tribute from the region in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Tazivana's genealogy, however, clearly telescopes the many historical Chireya's into the few whose names that he is able, or cares, to recall. Genealogies collected along with the earliest available accounts of Chireya's journey, recorded by Farrar (ZNA 1906) and Mrs. Hemans (1918:5), identify between eight and twelve individuals succeeding to the title of Chireya after the initial migration. Farrar argues that the migration occurred two hundred years ago (i.e. about 1700), "as the present chief is the eighth ruler of the tribe since it settled in Mafungabuzi and, he succeeded to the Chieftainship during the reign of the Matabele King, Mzilikazi [d.1868]." Mrs. Hemans, apparently ignorant of the rule of adelphic succession to the chieftainship, treated each Chireya as if he were the lineal descendent from the previous title holder.<sup>21</sup> As a result, she estimated the conquest to have occurred "between 300 and 350 years ago [i.e. between 1568 and 1618]" (1918:9).

Coley's (1927) narrative places the moment of Chireya's

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<sup>20</sup>Tazivana told us that the current holder of the title "Chireya" is Mapani, who inherited (*akazogara nhaka*) it from Chihoko, who in turn inherited from Gwkwato ("Gwakatu" in Marr's [1962] genealogy).

<sup>21</sup>The indigenous adelphic theory of succession common to all Shona-speaking peoples suggests that the title would pass to the original Chireya's younger brothers in descending order of their birth, and, after these candidates were exhausted, would rotate among the senior males of each house descending from these sons.

journey at "about the time when the Abezungu (Portuguese) had ceased bartering guns for ivory, other people had ceased raiding villages for the capture of maidens, and the Bashankwe had been driven from the banks of the Zambesi by the Batonka..." (1927:65), but these "events" are too vague to be reliable indicators of chronological dates. Tapson (1944:32) is more confident: "it needs only a cursory glance at the family trees of the Mrozwi-Shankwe chiefs to show that Mziligazi entered the territory during the rule of the fifth Chireya, the second Nemangwe and the eighth Sampakaruma, which would put the Mrozwi occupation of the Sebungwe District at only some one hundred and fifty years ago [i.e. in the 1790s]." In fact, mention is made of "Chief Chireye's Land" in Portuguese accounts of the Rozvi trade routes through the region as early as 1784 (Sutherland-Harris 1970: 257). Since the emergence of the Changamire Rozvi can be traced from Portuguese documents to the period between 1670 and 1700, and it is not likely that further oral or documentary evidence will shed light on the question of either the factuality or the precise date of Chireya's conquest, it seems reasonable to assume that if the conquest occurred at all, it took place sometime in the eighteenth century. This is perhaps less noteworthy than the fact that Tazivana wishes to bring it nearer to the present, and to associate it with the epoch of Ndebele suzerainty in the century that followed.

### The Myths and their Meanings: Symbolic Readings

A second reading of the myth would set aside the question of historical authenticity in favour of a symbolic interpretation. David Lan (1985) has applied a structuralist strategy (following Levi-Strauss; see, e.g., 1979) to unravel the meaning of the best known *Guruuswa* myths--those found in the area of the Zambezi escarpment north of Korekore country (some 200 km. northeast of Gokwe) and featuring the conquering ancestor Mutota. In these myths, Lan finds not a literal narrative of historical actors and events--a narrative that others have used to piece together the origins and course of the kingdom of the Mwene Mutapa--but ways of signifying answers to central questions of cosmology, political power, and moral authority.

Following Lan's lead, we might arrive at a different understanding of what Tazivana's story is saying by setting it alongside other accounts of Chireya's journey. I begin with the earliest textualized version by W.E. Farrar, then Native Commissioner, in 1906. Farrar provided the following account of Chireya's journey (rendered as "history," not "myth") in response to a request from his superior to provide information on the historical background of the tribes in his area. In Farrar's account, Chireya left "Mambo's tribe" (then known as "Balozwi" rather than VaRozwi) when it was raided from the south by a horde led by Sipipi:

On reaching the Mafungabuzi [Mafungabusi] the tribe divided into two sections; those owning Nemangwe as

their Chief, with him settled on the Sasami [Sessami] river, while Sileya [Chireya] (Simela [Chimera]) settled at the Sibodza and his followers spread over the country between the Sanyati and Sengwi [Sengwa] rivers; and the Batonga whom they found scattered about became their subjects... "Sileya" and "Nemangwe" are the ruling titles of the two sections... There is no information of the Tribe ever having indulged in warfare, their chief occupation seems to have been hunting. Mzilikazi's warriors are said to have raided the tribe on two occasions and killed and taken many as slaves. During Lobengula's reign the Basankwe [VaShangwe] were accepted as subjects on payment of tribute consisting of tobacco. (ZNA 1906).

The political parity between Nemangwe and Chireya expressed here is either modified or vanishes entirely in later accounts, a fact that may be an outcome of the selection of Chireya as "paramount" by the colonial authorities. On the other hand, it is possible that Farrar's informants were supporters or clients of Nemangwe; since he doesn't acknowledge his sources, we don't know.

In the more detailed "histories" published by Mr. and Mrs. Hemans (in 1912 and 1918, respectively) the name of Nemangwe does not appear at all. I combine and paraphrase their accounts here, since they differ little in detail.<sup>22</sup>

Under pressure from the invading Swazi and Zulu, one of the last Mambos of the Rozwi sent out two of his sons, Siawanka and Sibutuli, with their families and possessions to find a new land in which to settle. The first season, they camped at the confluence of the Shangani and Kana rivers; here, one of Siawanka's wives bore a son who was

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<sup>22</sup>Mr. Hemans provides more detail on the beginning of the journey, but Chireya drops out of his account rather quickly since he was more interested in tracing the "Abenanzwa tribe" living to the northwest in what is now Hwange District. Mrs. Hemans's account follows Chireya into what is now Gokwe.



named Pashu and who was appointed chief of those who stayed behind there. Siawanka and Sibutuli continued their journey, camping for a time at Nyoka [in modern-day Nemangwe]. Here, another one of Siawanka's wives<sup>23</sup> bore a son, whom they named Chireya, and who, like his half-brother Pashu, was named Chief of the area. A number of important Rozvi men remained behind, acting as Chireya's councillors and dividing the realm between them so that they might serve as headmen. Chireya, for his part, paid tribute directly to the Mambo.

Genealogically, this version presents the background to the establishment of Chireya's authority in the region as in Figure 9.1.

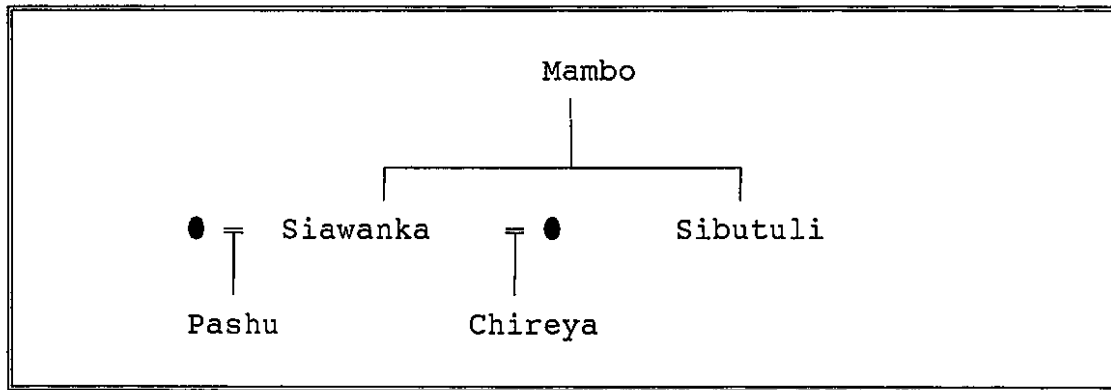


**Figure 9.1. Genealogical relationships between key protagonists in the Chireya myth--Mr. and Mrs. Hemans's Version.**

What is noteworthy about this historical overture is its proposition that Chireya is the patrilineal descendent (son's son) of the Rozvi paramount ("Mambo") and that he remains the Mambo's tributary. In this model of polity-making, junior agnates ("sons") may be dispatched to enlarge the realm by establishing tributary chieftaincies at the political frontier. The maintenance of a tributary relationship--of

<sup>23</sup>In Mrs. Hemans account, it is Sibutuli's wife.

doubtful significance in underwriting the economic strength of the Rozvi rulers (see Beach 1980:246)--probably served a key mnemonic function in the maintenance of levels of state organization. Tribute served as a ritualized, performative act, one that demonstrated the relative rank of rulers controlling distinct territories. Repeated over time, future generations were periodically reminded in this way that the Chireyas were both genealogically and politically subordinated to the geographic and historic centre of Rozvi power. This is a point I will return to later.

#### Hungry Drums, Magic Bees: Coley's Narrative

An alternative model of the state is presented at the outset of the version collected by Coley (1927) the first recorded text that focuses exclusively on Chireya's conquest and presents it in mythical form. Coley's informants identified Chireya not as a descendent of the Mambo or "Changamire" (the honourary title of the Rozvi paramount), but as a "young captain" in Changamire's army. Here, the competitive politics of agnation are resolved through bureaucratic innovation;<sup>24</sup> and it might well be observed that

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<sup>24</sup>This view accords closely with Mudenge's (1974) rather anachronistic characterization of Rozvi political structure, abstracted from the oral traditions and Portuguese records related to the Rozvi empire. Thus Mudenge (1974:377,383) cites evidence that "royal clans" (probably houses declared ineligible for succession to the paramountcy) were given hereditary title to offices in the Changamire's court, including those of commanding the army and overseeing the collection of tribute.

The terms commonly appearing in oral histories for

the existence of so-called "provincial governors," appointed by the Rozvi ruler to mediate local succession disputes, collect tribute, and enforce trade monopolies is attested to by many sources (Mudenge 1974:383-4).

Coley recorded his text from "Mtilanwenda--late Chief Nemangwe--and Mtena, a gaol guard in the Government service; the former a Barozwi native and the latter a native of the Bashankwe tribe" (1927:65). He does not mention whether or not they were interviewed together or if he is responsible for the synthesis of their stories. The following account is my summary, and I have altered the original spellings of the names in order to make it easier to make comparisons across myths:

Changamiri, a powerful Rozwi chief living near a mountain called Guruuswa heard of salt-pans in Sebungwe and the wealth in ivory of the VaShangwe. He chose Chireya, a young captain in his army, to lead the expedition, accompanied by his two younger brothers, Njelele and Nemangwe, and his half-brothers Sai and Nkoka.

Chireya sought assistance of his ancestral spirits and a drum, shrouded in mist, appeared to lead the army. The Vashangwe, under their chief, Mfungu,

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"tribute" include *mupeta* (or *mupeta wamambo*, the term used to describe tribute paid to the Rozvi Changamire; see Mudenge 1974:383) and the Nguni word *mutero* (which would correspond to obligations imposed by the Ndebele after 1830). In their verb forms, both terms encode key social relations that serve as models of moral and political authority. Thus *-peta* may mean (1) to give a gift for one's wife to take with her to her parents' home on her first return visit after marriage, or (2) to appease spirit elders (Hannan 1984:517). The term thus suggests subordination to wife-givers and to lineal ancestors, respectively. The verb root *-tera*, in addition to meaning "to pay tax," can mean "to submit, surrender" (ibid.:643); here, the political sense dominates.

fled from the drum in fear, their medicines powerless to stop its advance. The drum would become invisible in daytime, but could sometimes be tracked to the half-eaten carcass of an eland. Eventually it reached the salt-pans near Mfunga's last mountain stronghold. There, Chireya's men built a platform for it, on which it rested until the Europeans arrived when it disappeared.

Mfunga fought off two attacks by Chireya by releasing bees and then shooting them with poisoned arrows.

Chireya's sister devised a plan to defeat Mfunga. She approached Mfunga's fortress, saying that her brother wished to make Mfunga his brother-in-law by offering her in marriage. Mfunga accepted, but while they slept together that night, she stabbed him through the heart with a dagger hidden beneath her apron, cut off his head, and took it to Chireya. Mfunga's disconsolate men were then easily routed and Chireya settled near the salt-pans where his descendants have resided as paramount chiefs of the VaShangwe ever since.

According to this text, the genealogy of conquest may be represented as in Figure 9.2.

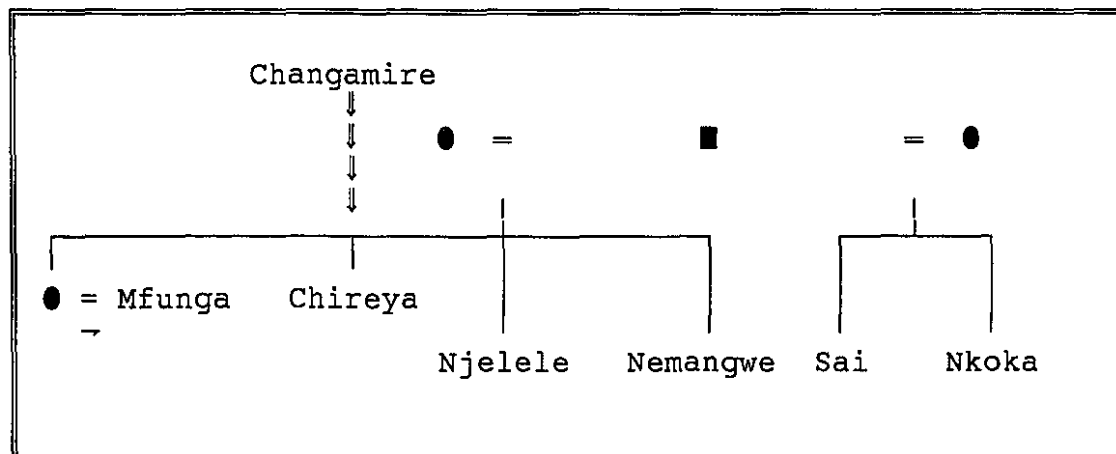


**Figure 9.2. Genealogical relationships between key protagonists in the Chireya myth, Coley's Version.**

Two features of this genealogy are noteworthy: the first is that Chireya is an older uterine brother to Njelele and

Nemangwe, and a half-brother to Sai and Nkoka. If we recall that the principal of succession in Plateau chiefdoms is adelphic, this essentially suggests a rotation of authority between the genealogical "houses" of each brother over time. This is not surprising given that the contemporary holder of the title of Nemangwe was one of Coley's informants; the model suggests the entitlement of his house to a turn at the chieftainship.

The second feature of interest is that Chireya's Rozvi lineage establishes itself as wife-giver to Mfungu's lineage, although we should also note that it is a sterile relationship terminated by murder. Wife-giving lineages (*vatezvarwa*) throughout the Shona-speaking region always exercise power over wife-takers (*vakwasha*). This power is given visible expression every day: a *mukwasha* will always make an exaggerated display of deference to his *tezvarwa*. I was myself to discover this soon after we settled in the village. During a walk with Mbano to inspect the gardens along the Goche stream which lay in the direction of the village of his younger wife's family, we met an elderly *gogo* (grandmother) tending her vegetables. Mbano promptly dropped to one knee and clapped his hands while I, in my well-meaning, if ignorant way, proceeded to imitate him as closely as possible. This prompted both of them to break their formal posture and, laughing hysterically, inquire as to whether I, too, was interested in finding a second wife!

There are several other distinctive elements that appear in this text. One of them is the self-animated drum; what can its meaning be? In Gokwe, the word for "drum," *ngoma*, like the word for "finger piano," *mbira*, is used as a synecdoche for a spirit possession ceremony. This differentiates the occasion from a *doro*, or "beer"--which refers to an event at which home-made beer is purchased. Both occasions are characterized by beer-drinking and drum-playing; what differentiates them is the use to which these activities are put, since drums are always used together with *mbiras* in spirit possession ceremonies to call the ancestral spirits. In the myth, the invisible power of the drum parallels the invisibility of the ancestors; but the ancestors are not always invisible--like the drum in the myth, they present themselves at night when they possess their mediums and make their power both visible and accessible. What of the mist shrouding the drum? One plausible interpretation would be that the mist links the sound of the drum--an index of the ancestral presence--to the production of rain, an ancestral prerogative.<sup>25</sup>

Another confusing anecdote in the myth is the point at which it is implied that the drum eats the eland or *shava*. This is particularly puzzling since Chireya's totem today is *shava*, and as a consequence, his clan members are strictly

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<sup>25</sup>Mist as a disguise or trick commonly figures in *Guruuswa* myths, serving as a ready sign of ancestral rain-making powers. See, e.g., Lan (1985:105).

forbidden to eat the animal so denoted. (Totem affiliation would be expressed as *vanoera shava*--"they avoid/respect the eland" by not eating it); the myth, however, suggests that Chireya's ancestors are positively not *shava*--indeed, the eland is singled out as the food of the drum *par excellence*. How can this be? As we shall see in subsequent versions, there are suggestions that Chireya's commitment to this totemic group is ambivalent--or that his totemic identity is itself subject to transformation.

Finally, let me consider the completion of the drum's journey when it is placed on a platform in the defeated Mfungu's land. Rozvi myths often culminate in the building of a platform, tower, or mountain to the sky; in so doing, they reiterate a distinction that appears frequently between high and low, uplands and lowlands, rain and drought--the kind of contrast made between Jehana and Goredema which I referred to in Chapter V. In uniting the Rozvi quite literally with the sky, the placement of the ancestral drum on a platform in the dry lowlands of the Vashangwe would seem to confirm the ability of the Rozvi conquerors to bring the rain to the land.

This last observation may also shed light on the role of the bees, since bees make their homes in trees which metonymically unite earth and sky. More than this, bees make honey (the term for bee--*nyuchi*--is a mere elaboration of what the bees make--*huchi*), and it is probably not too far-fetched to suggest that their power to make liquid in trees is

analogous to the power of making rain in the sky. While Mfungu controls the bees (which we can read metaphorically as control over the rain), this tactic eventually fails to save him from defeat.

I leave aside for the time-being the deceit perpetrated by Chireya's sister and turn now to the version presented by R.R. Tapson.

#### The Deceitful Daughter: Tapson's Narrative

Let me turn now to the version of the Chireya myth presented by R.R. Tapson. A Native Commissioner in Gokwe, Tapson acknowledges "a special debt to Chiefs Chireya, Sampakaluma, Nemangwe, and Sai, besides several other old men more obscure (1944:29)," for contributing to his account over a period of two years.<sup>26</sup> "Not all were willing," he remarks candidly, "to share with me the memories their fathers had

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<sup>26</sup>Tapson's overstated modesty regarding his methodology is worth quoting in full: "These notes are not offered in order to controvert or even to support the conclusions of other and better equipped investigators," he writes. "They are the result of two years of fascinating camp-fire talk with those old natives of the Sebungwe District who were willing to share with me the memories their fathers had left them...In order to get the accounts from the purely Sebungwe Native standpoint I have carefully abstained from consulting published accounts of the Mrozwi invasion and so have been able to resist the temptation to query statements made by my informants. When old memories of a subservient race become faint, it is unfortunately only too easy to divert them along paths you think they should travel. These notes must be accepted in that spirit. They may seem easy to refute; that will not distress me. They may reveal some hitherto unpublished facts; my gratitude to my informants will be the greater."



left them." Some,

seemed to suspect designs on their status or lands and these were neither enticed nor cajoled to divulge the knowledge which might die with them since the old men no longer call around the younger generation and hand on to it the traditions of its fathers (1944:29).

Unfortunately, after waving this red flag regarding the complex political factors constraining conversations with a District Commissioner concerning these matters, he doesn't allow any of his informants speak as individuals in his text. We are thus deprived of the opportunity to link the content of particular tellings with the position of each informant. What Tapson does provide is an extraordinarily detailed synthesis of what must have been many individual (and overlapping) myths covering the entire northwest quadrant of Zimbabwe. He is concerned to bring to light facts that may have gone unrecorded, and claims to have insulated himself from the influence of any pre-existing accounts. For our purposes, it is only possible to repeat Tapson's own procedure and to isolate those elements of his text which bear directly on Chireya's conquest of Gokwe.

Tapson names thirteen chiefs who, he suggests, left Guruuswa at the same time. Their supreme commander was Chiporiro--although this was an assertion that the current Chief Chireya apparently disputed. Among these chiefs were two brothers, Chimera and Kurikona, the ancestors, respectively, of Chireya and Nemangwe. Kagwese (now Nembudziya) and Chirombe (now Nebiri), were given land by

Chimera after the conquest. The first section of Tapson's account focus on the conquest of Mfungu.

Two brothers, Chimera and Kurikona, entered the low country north of the Mafungabusi plateau and found it to be occupied by two peoples: the Shangwe under the senior Chief Nyamusasa (of the *shave*, or eland totem), as well as Chiefs Mpali and Muvumba; and the Renge, under Mfungu (of the *membwe* or duiker totem). They decided to divide the country between them, with Chimera taking Nyamusasa's territory and Kurikona taking that of Mfungu, but at first Chimera decided to assist his brother in the conquest of Mfungu. Every attack on Mfungu was repulsed by magic bees that he kept, or by thick mist that shrouded his mountain stronghold. Confounded, the brothers consulted Nyamuhwa, the *mhondoro* (spirit of a chief) of Makonde to the east. Chimera's messengers returned with a plan in hand. Chimera's daughter Wanedope was suitably adorned with beads and bracelets, anointed with oil and then sent off, accompanied by her little sister, to Mfungu with instructions to offer herself to him as a token of her father's submission. In the night, she slew Mfungu with a knife hidden in her sister's sleeping mat, cut off his head and carried it back to her father's camp. The next morning, enraged at finding the body of her husband in the blood-spattered hut, Mfungu's wife and her nephews followed the drops of blood and overtook Wanedope. She pleaded for her life, asking that they cut off her hands and feet instead of killing her. This they did, not realizing that Wanedope had in fact led them into an ambush. Mfungu's people were routed and eventually asked for Chimera's protection; Chimera appointed his brother Kurikona as their chief, although they still look to Chimera as their proper overlord, who receives tribute and tusks from them.

The key relationships thus far are depicted in Figure 9.3. The climactic event--Mfungu's deceit and murder at the hands of Chimera/Chireya's daughter--is virtually identical to Coley's, although this time we know her name: Wanedope or "you are

muddy."<sup>27</sup> This is not the only name which suggests the mixing

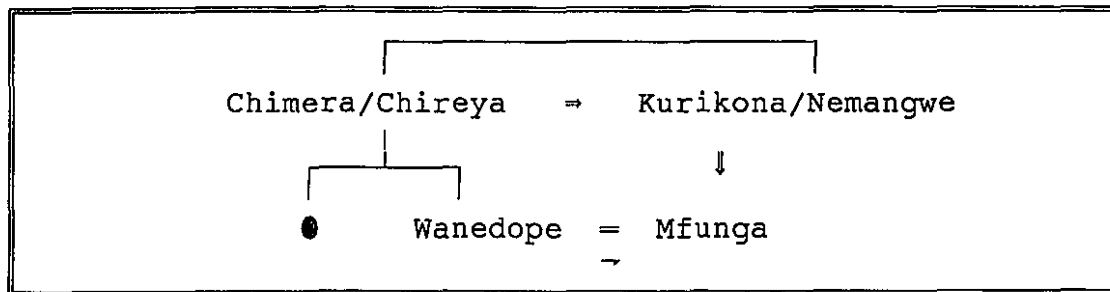


**Figure 9.3. Genealogical relationships between key protagonists in the Chireya myth, Tapson's Version.**

of soil and water. "Chimera" is the word for sprouted grain or malt used to brew beer, the quintessential "food" or offering given to ancestors. Chimera is made by adding water/rain (*mvura*) to grain<sup>28</sup> that has grown from the earth and dried; as the name of a founding ancestor, Chimera condenses the power of the ancestral spirits to bring life to what is dry and dead, initiating a cycle in which their descendants return the gift of the ancestors as "food." This is shown by pouring beer or mash on the ground at the beginning of spirit possession ceremonies. (Although any mention of the drum is omitted at this point, it reappears at

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<sup>27</sup>A character with a cognate name, Matope (the plural of *dope*, or mud) plays a key role in some versions of the Mutota myth in the lower Zambezi valley; in this case he is the son of the conqueror Mutota, and continues the journey down the escarpment into the Zambezi lowlands after his father has stopped at the edge. Lan (1985:103), noting that "Mutota" may mean the "wet one," suggests that the journey of Mutota and his son symbolizes a movement from "wet" to "dry," of the rainy, fertile plateau to the arid valley.

<sup>28</sup>The word for individual grains used as seed is *vana*, "children."

the end of Tapson's narrative in the exploits of Chimera's descendants in the Zambezi Valley.) The account proceeds to deal with the conquest of Nyamusasa and his people, "who lived mainly between the Bumi [Ume] and Sanyati rivers," an area that would today include the lands of Chireya, Goredema and Nembudziya:

Chimera set off in pursuit of Nyamusasa, who managed to elude him for months. During the hunt it was observed that Nyamusasa's people were seasoning their food with salt, a substance unknown to them. They were told that it was obtained from the evaporated urine of two cattle kept by Nyamusasa's people. Nyamusasa's two children betrayed the location of the cattle, and disclosed that Nyamusasa and his wife were hiding within the animals. Chimera had the animals cut open, whereupon the couple emerged from the carcasses. They pleaded that they should be spared, or that Nyamusasa's body should at least be covered with a basket, an instruction which was ignored. When Chimera's men stabbed him, Nyamusasa's body swelled until it reached a great height, and finally burst; the salt water that poured from the body formed the Bari Salt Pans.

This section resonates with Tazivana's story that I recorded personally, but I will save these comparisons until later. For now, let us merely observe that the role of salt as the goal of Chimera/Chireya's journey is now made more explicit. Lan (1985:80) makes the observation that in sacrifice, ancestors are always offered unsalted meat. Salt is thus associated with human beings and human needs, while its absence is associated with the ancestors.

We are also told for the first time in this version of the myth that the conquered peoples are in possession of cattle. This seems surprising, since the ownership of cattle

is everywhere considered to be the epitome not only of power, wealth and statehood, both of which are associated with the highlands. The tse-tse ridden lowlands, in contrast, would seem to be inimical to cattle, or at least to the keeping of large herds. Why should cattle, then, be shown to be a possession of Nyamusasa? One way of understanding the role of cattle in the myth is to consider its role, not as the wealth of rulers per se, but as potential bridewealth. Unlike Mfungu, who becomes a *mukwasha* (son-in-law) of Chimera through the deceit of being given a daughter, Nyamusasa becomes a *mukwasha* through the appropriation of his cattle. But in both versions of the myth, these are one-way, rather than reciprocal, transactions. Both end in killing, rather than in reproduction, which is the goal of marriage. As we shall see, this is a conclusion that is repeated time and again.

Before leaving Tapson's text, I want to refer briefly to some of the events it recounts after Nyamusasa's defeat.

Chimera apportioned areas of the conquered territory to Kagwese (Nembudziya) and Chirombe (Nebiri), but they were made to pay with their lives for this magnanimous gesture: Kagwese was crushed while excavating a pit for the main pole of Chimera's hut; Chirombe was slaughtered and his blood collected in order to anoint Chimera's head.

These episodes serve, if anything, to memorialize Chimera not as an ancestor, for whom blood is abhorrent, but as a real human being, like a living chief, who acquires and confirms power through the shedding of blood. But paradoxically, in this episode, it is not the blood of his enemies that he is

shedding, but that of his own deputies. Tapson's interpretation (or that of his informants) is that "Nembudziya and Nebiri had to pay for what they had been given" (1944:31); but to pay for land with one's life seems like an odd way of expressing reciprocity.

How else might we explain this paradox? Similar episodes in the Mutota myth of northeastern Zimbabwe present a difficulty for Lan's analysis. Lan argues that such episodes serve to point out that "chiefs and ordinary people are profoundly different from one another." In the realm of myth at least, chiefs may shed blood, or even commit incest, in a way that is utterly forbidden to commoners. As for the *mhondoro*, or dead chiefs,

they are the source of the fertility of the territory they are believed to have conquered when alive. By their very nature *mhondoro* are conquerors, warriors, killers. It is through their violence that the fertility of the earth is made available to their descendants (Lan 1985:152).

I am not entirely satisfied with this explanation, since it fails, I think, to adequately accommodate the abhorrence of the *mhondoro* for blood; indeed, a *svikiro*, or medium of a *mhondoro*, is not allowed even to see anything red, much less to be in contact with blood itself. Lan suggests that it is the way in which blood is shed that is of importance; thus the murder of close family or lineage members is morally outrageous, to be condemned as witchcraft, while the conquest of "others" is not only permissible, but honourable. How then to explain Chimera's lust for the blood of his own deputies?

Perhaps this incongruous twist reflects the point of view of Tapson's informants, who included chiefs Chireya, Nemangwe, and Sai, but not Nembudziya and Nebiri. The myth effectively converts the latter into "enemies" or in any case outsiders, rather than as members of the original conquering lineage.

The remaining parts of Tapson's narrative recount the exploits of Chimera's successors in the Zambezi valley when they attempt to seize the lands of the Tonga and the Gova. In the conclusion to these stories, an alliance of Tonga peoples successfully capture Chivundika, the sacred drum that has led the Rozwi forces. Of the drum, Tapson writes (and here I quote him directly):

Chivundika was a drum brought by the Mrozwi from Gunu-uhwa [Guruuswa]. It moved, generally by rolling or crawling of its own volition, but at night would borrow the feet of wild animals to take itself about. It was a famous hunter and when amiable would supply the people with meat it had killed. On the death of every third paramount chief, Chivundika's parchment would burst and a man would then be killed and his skin used to replace the broken one. Although Chivundika was usually drummed through the agency of spirits, on occasions of special celebration it would allow men to beat it for dancing; it and the hands beating it had to be covered and the player had to keep his head averted. Chivundika lived on a platform on a *msiga* tree near the Kasirisiri Pan, just East of the Bare Salt Pan. When its injunction that no kraals were to be built windward of its retreat (it hated the smell of humans) was disobeyed, the drum disappeared and has not since been heard. This was in Lobengula's time, when Mkotosi was paramount chief (Tapson 1944:32).

The drum Chavundika here acquires an even more extraordinary set of characteristics and abilities than in Coley's narrative. Many of these qualities ally it with great chiefs

of the past. Ancestral chiefs are always regarded as having been great hunters when they were alive (the Mbanos stressed this point about their own ancestors to me repeatedly). Moreover, its generosity to humans is compatible with the responsibility chiefs are expected to take for their people. But the spirits of dead chiefs (*mhondoro*), like wild animals, are emphatically not human<sup>29</sup>; in fact, *mhondoro* are said to inhabit the bodies of lions, and sometimes (as we saw in Chapter VI), snakes. The syllogism is completed in the myth: wild animals, such as lions, are *mhondoro*; the drum, like the lion, hates "the smell" of humans; therefore, the drum must be a *mhondoro*.

#### Cow of Salt, Drum of Blood: Parkinson's Narrative

The last available version of the Chireya conquest myth we have (before the one we recorded from Tazivana in 1988) was collected in 1968 by D.K. Parkinson. He credits two district messengers as well as "elders of the Chireya Chieftainship" with supplying the narrative, "which at times varied a little" (Parkinson 1968:21). He begins by telling us that the *Vashangwe* were originally *Varozvi* whose *mutupo* (totem) was *Moyo*, with *chidao* (sub-clan or praise name) *Ndizvo*. These facts are interesting insofar as they echo the theme of totemic transformation that we encountered in the previous account. *Moyo* is the *mutupo* widely associated with the *Rozvi*

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<sup>29</sup>See Lan (1985:152).



identity; if Chireya's conquerors were "originally" Moyo/Rozvi, why are they now Shava/Shangwe? The narrative unfolds in a series of episodes which I paraphrase as follows:

Following a chieftainship dispute between Chimera (also known as Chirongamabwe ["arranger of stones"]) and his rivals at Guruuswa, Chimera's faction was defeated and they set out in a westerly direction.

They followed a drum named Chivundika that rolled by itself "like a living thing": it could sound itself, climb trees and cross rivers. "If stabbed, blood poured from the wound." A relative of Chimera's named Pashu split off following edible locusts (*mhashu*) toward Hwange. Meanwhile, Chimera, using magic connected with Chivundika the drum, was able to get lions to kill game for him and leave meat for his people. Otherwise, he would take dust from spoor, mix this with tobacco and medicine and smoke the mixture, enabling them to track the animal to where it slept, place medicine on its heart, and kill it.

They arrived at the Nyamafuro, a small tributary to the Ume river, and a place that they knew from previous trips to acquire Nyoka tobacco, grown there by Chief Nemangwe's people. The chief of the Shangwe, Nyamusasa, lived across the Ume where the Bari salt pans are today. He had three headmen: Manyawi, Mubvumba and Mufungo. Nyamusasa and his wife had a special cow that they often lived within. It was white with a black spot on its side. The spot served as a door, through which they could enter the cow. Salt was extracted from the cow's urine.

While at Nyamafuro, Chimera often sent meat to Nyamusasa, who sometimes cooked it and returned it after adding salt. The girls who brought the meat divulged the secret source of this special taste, and Chimera sent his men to kill the cow and acquire its salt. When this was accomplished, Nyamusasa died of grief, and both his own body and that of the cow swelled until they burst; the liquid of the cow formed a pan and the two bodies, together with the whole kraal, sank into it. Liking the salt that remained in the pan, Chimera and his people decided to settle there.

Chivundika had been living on a platform constructed by Chimera. After the death of Nyamusasa, the drum moved about beating, and wherever it went, people dropped dead. The three headmen of Nyamusasa were all killed this way. A few of their descendants survive today with the totem Shava, and the *chidao* Deva. After trying to cross the Zambesi, Chivundika was beaten back with spears by the Batonka and returned along the path it had come, presumably to *Guruuswa*.

Parkington concludes the account by saying that after being accepted as chief, Chimera took the title "Chireya," meaning "one who twisted and turned to avoid pursuit and the Matabele, as Chimera and Chivundika had done leading the people from Kunauhwa [*Guruuswa*]" (ibid.). After leaving *Guruuswa* they changed their totem to Shava Mpofu, in honour of Chimera's favourite meat (the eland). They took the *chidao* of either "Nyahunu," after an ancestor, or "Maswingo," after the hill in the new area that became a burial ground of the Chireya chiefs. "The Vashangwe never suffered from the Matabele raids," he concludes, "as they regularly paid their taxes to Lobengula in salt from the Bari Pan, just as Nemangwe to the south paid taxes in his Nyoka tobacco" (ibid.).

The relations of kinship and political authority in this text are depicted in Figure 9.4. Here again the drum is the instrument of conquest, but special emphasis is placed upon its being "a living thing" that sheds blood. In other words, it stands in as a double for the living, conquering chief. As the association with lions once again makes explicit, the drum is a great chief of the past who generously "leaves" meat

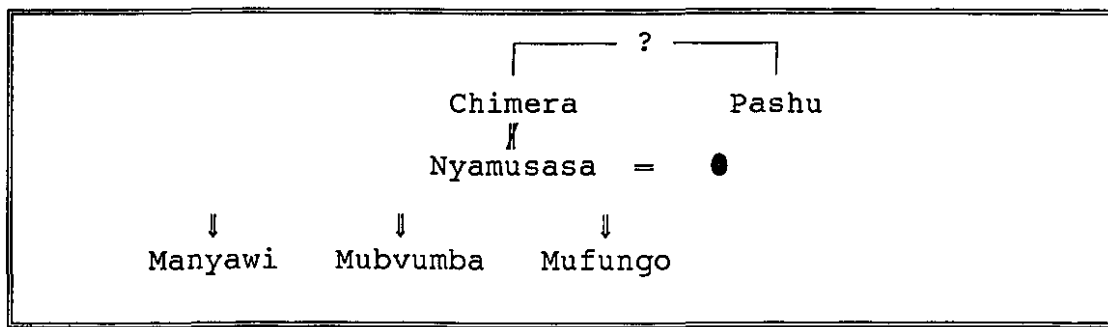


**Figure 9.4. Genealogical relationships between key protagonists in the Chireya myth, Parkinson's Version.**

for people to eat. This scenario resonates with what people believe today, that a successful hunt depends upon the beneficence of the *mhondoro*, the lions/chiefs of the past who "own" all the wild animals and plants of the bush.<sup>30</sup>

We might also observe that this is the first text in which tobacco receives any notice at all. It serves as a magical substance used for killing animals; and, later on we are told that it served as a means of paying tribute to (and thus acknowledging the authority of) the Matabele. Its role as a mediator of relations of relative seniority becomes clearer if we recall for a moment the way in which the hierarchy of authority is ritually acknowledged in Gokwe, with the passing of tobacco (in the form of snuff) from one medium to the next until the medium of the most senior *mhondoro* is

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<sup>30</sup>The relationship of host and guest between the *mhondoro* and hunters is stressed through the following metaphor recorded by Lan (1985:161) in the Zambezi valley: "With hunters as with warriors, killing is permitted if the *mhondoro* agrees. Strangers or newcomers must ask permission to hunt before they set out and...if they so wish, the *mhondoro* may make it especially easy for them to catch game. Game given in this way by the *mhondoro* is known as *huku* or chickens, the customary gift given to visitors."

reached. The temporal authority of the Matabele was acknowledged in the same way as the spiritual authority of the *Mhondoro*.

The next theme of interest in Parkington's version concerns Nyamusasa and his family, who live inside the black and white cow. Here the symbolism is especially rich. Spirit mediums are immediately identifiable in Gokwe, as elsewhere in Zimbabwe, by the black or black and white beads they wear. The gift of choice given to a medium, moreover, is always a black or white cloth, with which they cover themselves while possessed, or while the spirit of the dead ancestor is literally inside them. This is precisely what Nyamusasa and his wife do--they live inside a black and white cow. A demonstration that these are ancestors could hardly be made more clearly. But then a contradictory element appears: the myth states that the conquerors, Chireya and his men, eat meat without salt, and it is precisely this "food" that is offered to the ancestors as well. The myth seems to set up a dramatic tension--almost a competition, if you will--between pretenders to the title of real ancestors/owners of the land. Both carry with them substantial credentials--the authochthons, who live inside a "medium", and the conquerors, who eat unsalted meat. Yet both carry signs of "humanity" as well--the authochthons eating salt and the conquerors shedding blood.

Who wins? Before deciding, let us note first of all that although it is implied that Chireya's people have been eating

unsalted meat, it is after all, they who give meat to Nyamusasa (who then adds salt and returns it). Thus the direction of the ritual relation between descendants and ancestors (the former offering the latter unsalted meat) seems to move from Chireya to Nyamusasa. In fact, after the cow is killed and Nyamusasa dies, Chireya's people become salt-eating humans, political victors, but in a land that remains ultimately under the control of ancestors who are not their own.

What of all the swelling and bursting? One reading might be that these are signs of original fertility. As Lan argues (1985:103-4), the human journey is characterized by a gradual process of desiccation; born utterly wet (*dziva*, the word for fontanelle, also means a pool of water), people dry out as they age. When a chief dies, his body is literally dried out before burial. Unlike chiefs, Nyamusasa and the cow swell with water after death. Like true ancestral "owners of the land," however, they play a role as bringers of fertility. This is obvious in one sense: Nyamusasa's death begets a flood of *mvura* (water/rain). Cows contribute to the fertility of human beings; by begetting wives they not only make marriage and reproduction possible, but establish the identity of the children as members of the patrilineage as well.

#### Power and the Conquest of Affinity

Let me try to summarize both the unities and the divergences of meaning that emerge from these accounts, strung

out as they are over a period of about eighty years, and reflecting the filtering, amalgamation and representation of voices in several different ways. The myths are fairly obviously about power, and in all the versions it seems reasonably clear that power is variously vested in those who control fertility, symbolized in water and women. The major events that make up the story have an underlying unity. Two brothers/agnates set out on a journey in search of salt. They offer their daughters in marriage to the owners of the land/salt/cow. The daughters deceive their new husbands and kill him. In this version of events, Chimera/Chireya deceptively tenders his sister/daughter and then keeps her to himself. The conquerors not only assert their dominance by assuming the posture of wife-givers (reducing the autochthons to wife-takers) but then by renouncing the need to create alliances at all. They keep their sisters/daughters to themselves, and since we notice that they never have wives, we can assume that at some level we are looking at a self-reproducing, incestuous family. Just as Lan argues so cogently in relation to the Mutota myths of the lower Zambezi Valley, the effect of the Chimera/Chireya myths seems to be to deny the conqueror's need for affinal relations.

If we return to Tazivana's version of the myth, however, we find that the key roles are in some respects reversed. Recall that it is Muvhumba Nyamusasa, the autochthon, who has the daughters in Tazivana's narrative; and although they

deceive him, in the end he retains them, as well as the cow, as they melt together into the salt pan. Chireya gains the land, but neither the rain nor the women. Fertility of both crops and persons remains a prerogative of the autochthons.

Why should Tazivana tell this version of the myth, or is his telling simply an arbitrary permutation of the relations and events that occur in the older texts? Here I would argue that Tazivana's political position in relation to the protagonists in the myths is ambiguous. As we shall see in the next chapter, Tazivana's people--members of the *Mbano* clan--are neither conquerors nor autochthons, but pre-colonial immigrants who came to live in Chireya's land at the discretion of Chief Goredema. Although the Goredema chiefs were represented by the colonial authorities as subordinate headmen in relation to Chireya, in their own legends, they tend to be represented either as deputies of the Ndebele, or even as conquerors who preceded Chireya. In either case their subordination to Chireya is a matter of submerged contention, a perspective that Tazivana--a councillor at Chief Goredema's court--tends to reflect in his version of the myth.

What finally does this analysis yield in terms of our understanding of the relations between land, labour and power in Gokwe today? The Chireya myths emerge, in my view, as one of the vehicles through which struggles over social knowledge take place; they serve as allegorical demonstrations of that knowledge and suggest the implications that knowledge holds

for political power in the present. The contests between conquerors and autochthons, as well as those between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law, that are narrated in these myths, are easily transposed as maps for the interpretation or enactment of similar struggles on historical terrain. Similarly, the mythical gifts (or thefts) of daughters, cows, salt and rain that mediate these struggles in myth, reappear as objects charged with power and value in the ritualized transactions of daily life. It is to some of these issues that I now turn.



## **CHAPTER X**

### **GOREDEMA AND TAZIVANA: A WARD AND A VILLAGE IN TIME**

#### **Chiefs, Mediums and the Ancestors: The Flow of Power and Commodities through Time**

I have suggested in the previous chapter that the myths told about the ancestors in Gokwe speak in some important ways to the context in which power is exercised in the present. Here I wish to indicate more precisely how this is so, by showing how some of the mythical themes lend order to, or inform persistent arguments over, the relationship of present communities and their members to one another and to those of the past. This is not to say that the practice of living political actors does not also shape the distribution of resources and persons over social space in Gokwe. As I will show later on, chiefs, ward heads, and village heads all play a role in giving form to communities and in the allocation of land and labour within them--and that this role has been modified or directed in turn by the encompassing power of successive states. But first, I am interested to show how it is that relationships between ancestors and descendants, between the chiefs of the present and those of the past, are made visible in the movement of commodities across trans-generational, social time. We have already seen in the

Chireya myths how commodity transactions are given a moral cast in the narratives of conquest, supplication, and betrayal between immigrants and autochthons. Now I wish to explore some of the ways in which these transactions are replicated in exchanges that occur in the present, but which actually cross the barrier between the living and the dead. I begin with a discussion of the relationship between Chief Chireya's power and its confirmation through ritual exchange with the ancestors. Then I show how these relationships are mirrored and transformed at lower levels in the hierarchy of power--in the ward of Goredema and in the village of Tazivana.

"The Dead Have More Power than the Living":  
Chireya, the Ancestors, and the Mediums

How do the living Chireyas relate to the ancestors whose conquests the myths recount? They do so in a manner that is found generally in the Shona-speaking areas of Zimbabwe, and that may be described in the following way.<sup>1</sup> Living chiefs, who are themselves descendants of chiefs who conquered the land sometime in the past, retain ultimate authority over rights of residence and access to land. As arbitrators of last resort in disputes between the residents of their realm, living chiefs are empowered to adjudicate both civil and criminal cases, to apply remedies, and to punish those who violate community norms. Spirit mediums (*masvikiro*, pl.;

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<sup>1</sup>See also Lan (1989:191-200) for a particularly lucid synopsis of similar relationships in the Zambezi Valley.

*svikiro*, sing.) are always strangers to the land over which their possessing spirit (*mhondoro*)<sup>2</sup> has control. Possessed by a spirit to whom they personally trace no genealogical relationship, a *svikiro* is ideally supposed to be a passive, politically neutral body through which the spirit may speak; in practice, however, the medium and the spirit are often referred to by the same name. A legitimate medium is expected to dress, behave, and interact with the world in the manner expected of an ancestor. In contrast to living chiefs, the power of ancestral chiefs who speak through these mediums is not so much over the affairs of daily life, but over the fertility of persons and the land. They oversee, and are responsible for, the long-term reproduction of the community of their descendants (cf. Bloch and Parry 1989).

This division of powers and responsibilities between mediums (or the spirits who speak through them) and chiefs--often read on the analogy of a separation of powers between church and state--is unusual in Southern Africa.<sup>3</sup> Both

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<sup>2</sup>*Mhondoro* specifically refers to the spirit of a dead chief, and also means "a small lion." The term for ancestral spirits in general is *mudzimu* (sing.; *midzimu*, pl.).

<sup>3</sup>At least in some Shona-speaking areas, the separation of the roles of chief and medium may be of relatively recent origin, although the historical evidence for this seems to me to be rather thin. Citing the account of a Portuguese witness to the court at Quiteve, Lan (1985:44-5) argues that chiefs interceded directly with their own ancestors as recently as the first decade of the seventeenth century, when the Portuguese established trade and diplomatic links with the Mwene Mutapa. By the time of Livingstone's travels along the Zambezi in the 1860s, specialist mediums had apparently taken on this responsibility.

control territories, and are at the apex of a hierarchy of power. A senior or paramount chief such as Chireya delegates control over sub-territories to chiefs who are genealogically junior to him. They in turn delegate such control to *sadunhus*, or wardheads. In parallel fashion, a senior spirit medium--the medium for the ancestor who is most genealogically senior in time--effectively delegates authority over provinces within his realm to more junior mediums--those whose spirits are chiefs who were born or arrived later. The territories over which chiefs and mediums have control are not congruent, although they usually overlap; the differences between them are therefore inscribed in the very earth over which they are believed to hold moral and political authority.<sup>4</sup>

Communication between the two hierarchies of power is facilitated through a special category of persons and a

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<sup>4</sup>In noting that "spirit" provinces do not necessarily coincide with domains of secular chiefly power, Garbett (1969:110) neglected to acknowledge the opposition that this implies--an opposition between the territorial representation of an eternal order predicated upon relations of descent, on the one hand, and, on the other, experienced political history--the sequence of conquests, divisions and alliances that people know to be an inevitable feature of the political life of the society. As Lan (1985:68) is able to make clear through the hindsight of the liberation war, the experiential, historical charter can be subverted through the mobilization of the alternative model. By transforming themselves in trance into living ancestors before the very eyes of their supplicants, the spirit mediums, in Lan's evocative words, "present what amounts to a non-stop historical spectacle: the dead ancestors of the present chiefs returned to earth, the history of the land displayed and acted out, the heroes of the past available once more not only to rule but to give the benefit of their wisdom, to tell the truth which only they, being dead, understand."

special category of things. *Vanyai*<sup>5</sup> ("go-betweens") have as their special task the maintenance of links between mediums/*mhondoro* and people in the community (including chiefs) who wish to consult them.<sup>6</sup> These intermediaries always bear some form of payment or gift on their journeys to the medium; in some contexts, the medium reciprocates by transforming the object sent to them in some way that is seen to make it fertile--and then returning it to the community via the *munyai*.

Let us listen to Chief Chireya himself express his understanding of these relationships in a text recorded (apparently verbatim) by Marr in 1962.<sup>7</sup> The text begins with

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<sup>5</sup>The term *mutapi* is also used to describe this role in northeastern Zimbabwe, although there it seems to designate more narrowly an assistant to the medium. See Lan (1985:59-68).

<sup>6</sup>The term *munyai* (sing.) is extremely plastic, being used variously to denote a servile, dependent, or client status (such as cattle keeper, soldier, or even son-in-law) or else a role as a mediator (such as a messenger or dependent trader). In the Mutapa state, it seems, in some contexts, to have had the characteristics of a hereditary jural estate. Perhaps mistaking status labels for polities, the Portuguese, among other foreign interlopers from the sixteenth century onward, apparently believed that the lands beyond the "kings" with whom they were dealing were occupied by a "tribe," or polity called "Nyai," or some variant of that term. See Lancaster (1974; 1981).

<sup>7</sup>I have altered the text in two minor ways in order to eliminate some of the idiosyncrasies of Marr's inscription and make the text more consistent with others that I present. First, whereas Marr puts some vernacular terms in upper-case, some in lower case, and some in italics, I have put them all in lower-case italics. Second, I have altered the spelling of these terms as well as the titles of individuals in order to conform to modern Standard Shona. Thus, for example I have written *svikiro* instead of TSWIKIRO, and Chief Chireya instead

a preface in which Marr summarizes Chireya's story of his ancestral origins--that they were VaRozvi people who had come from Guruuswa ("near Bulawayo") to Sebungwe where they conquered the people of Nyamusasa. A genealogy appears, followed by Chireya's own story:

I have been Chief Chireya since the Native Commissioner's camp was moved from the old site to the present one. Kamba named me as the new chief. The selection took place at tax time when all the people were gathered together, and after the matter had been fully discussed. I was then carried by the men to the Dzimbabwe [stone enclosures], and there two sheep were killed by the *dunzwi* ["ritual assistant"] Kabarapati...[They roasted the meat and] all the people partook of the meat, but I did not eat any. What was left was taken by the *dunzwi* who went off with it by himself. After this [they took the *ngundu*, or head-dress, and put it on my head; then they went home singing *ngondo*, songs of war]. The *ngundu* was put on my head by the *dunzwi*. Afterwards our *mhondoro* was consulted and a messenger [*munyai*] was sent to the great *mhondoro* Nyadati (of NemaKonde) near Chinoyi with a small quantity of tobacco snuff. The *mhondoro* accepted this and sent back a small quantity of other snuff. This showed that he approved of the selection of the new chief. Had he not approved he would have refused the snuff and not sent any back, and the new chief would soon die. The *mhondoro* chooses a new chief in this way. It is definitely the *mhondoro* who has the final say in the election of a new chief. It is not the people. We have our own *mhondoro* called Nyagocha who must also approve of a new chief, but the reason why we send to Nyadati is that he is a very big *mhondoro* and also when Chimera moved to this district Nyagocha had not then come out. [Nyadati followed Chimera, Nyagocha had not yet come out].

Nyadati has a *svikiro* through whom he speaks. The *svikiro* is a male. It is not a hereditary office, but the *mhondoro* chooses its own *svikiro* by

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of Chief Sileya. In addition, those longer phrases which Marr inexplicably has left untranslated appear with my translation in brackets.

possessing him. The man will become ill, and will wander about not knowing what he is doing. Then in due course he will become possessed and the *mhondoro* will speak through him. Nyagocha also has a *svikiro*, called Marariromba, who has been a *svikiro* for very many years. His selection was peculiar. He was brought from another district, "Mfungu." In his own district he became ill and started wandering about and appeared to be possessed by some spirit. He went about singing and appearing unusual. Finally all the men sat down near him and honoured him by clapping hands, and then the *mhondoro* Nyagocha spoke through him. I, Chief Chireya, refused to believe this, and as a test I pulled out £1, and put it on the ground saying, "If this is true let rain fall today." Rain fell almost immediately, and then I was satisfied and sent for Marariromba, and he has been the *svikiro* ever since.

When I wish to consult the *mhondoro* I usually send my *dunzwi* Kabarapati to Marariromba with some white beads and sometimes money. He honours him and then the *svikiro* becomes possessed by Nyagocha. Nyagocha really rules the country. If for instance I ruled badly and Nyagocha was angry, all the people would go to Nyagocha and he would speak and I should be forced to act as required. I could not refuse the commands of the *mhondoro*. It would be unthinkable. If I did the whole country would dry up and the rains would fail. The dead have more power than the living. In the ordinary course, people must come to me first before consulting the *mhondoro*, otherwise he would not speak. There is an exception, however, which was agreed to at a meeting, that *vachinda* (sons of chiefs) may consult the *mhondoro*. This is because of the great size of the country, and the long distances to be walked.

Chireya's account reveals with startling lucidity many of the ways in which commodity flows index relations of relative power in the present, as well as between the ancestors and their descendants. At the start, for example, we learn that Chireya's selection took place "at tax time", i.e., that the rituals of chiefly power were themselves confirmed and encompassed by rituals of money tribute to the colonial state.

The chief himself is identified with the blood of sacrifice and the songs of war.<sup>8</sup> This of course distinguishes him absolutely from the *svikiro*, who loathes both blood and war. Yet the chief's power is clearly subordinated to the *svikiro*, or the *mhondoro* who speaks through him: his selection must be confirmed by Nyadati, the spirit of the ancestor who is the ultimate owner of the land.

The confirmation, we might note, occurs through a journey made by an intermediary (*munyai*). The journey is not only a passage through space, however; it is quite literally a journey into past-time, a journey that in a sense re-enacts the journey made by Chireya's ancestors to the land of the autochthons.<sup>9</sup> *Munyai*, as I have already said, is also the title given to an intermediary in the transaction of a marriage. Here again we see the doubling of two processes: the journey of the wife-takers into the land of the wife-givers is reenacted in the journey of the living chief to receive confirmation from the autochthons.

The journey, moreover, is not made by a person alone; he

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<sup>8</sup>While the meat of the sheep (a domestic animal) is shared among the chief's people--an index of common substance--the chief himself abstains. Not only does this visibly distinguish him from ordinary commoners; it reinforces his identity as a hunter-conqueror, as one who kills and eats only wild animals, and metaphorically, enemies as well.

<sup>9</sup>Nowhere in this account does Chireya specifically indicate whether Nyadati is his lineal ancestor, or an unrelated autochthon. In a genealogy collected by Marr (1962:81) at the same time, the only *mhondoro* represented to whom Chireya refers is Chimera (see Chapter IX, above); but Chimera is not the *mhondoro* charged with his confirmation.



carries with him a special kind of commodity--tobacco--and as we have already seen, tobacco has borne a range of peculiar significations at different periods in recent historical time. In the nineteenth century, tobacco was sent to the Ndebele chief as tribute--a sign of political subordination. With the eclipse of Ndebele power, the circulation of tobacco evidently became less restricted and less charged with political significance; during the first three decades of colonial rule, when markets for tobacco expanded in Bulawayo, it became perhaps the most general means of exchange between people in Gokwe and people to the south (see Chapters IV and VI, above). Now we learn that in the 1960s, decades after the markets for locally produced tobacco had collapsed, tobacco was made to bear a different symbolic load--one which indicated the direction of the flow of power between a living chief and the ancestor who entitled him to assume control of the land and its peoples; and one which affirmed a level of authority invisible to the governance of both colonial markets and rulers.<sup>10</sup> The power of the chief was thereby stated to be provisional--not because he was appointed at the behest of the District Commissioner; but because ultimately, it was the ancestors who were shown to hold power over rain and crops, and over the reproduction of life itself.

Chief Chireya claims for himself and his family

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<sup>10</sup>When we asked informants in Goredema if anyone grew tobacco any more--we never saw any at all--we were told that it was only grown for the *svikiro*.

(*vachinda*--presumably meaning those chiefs in related, junior houses, such as Nemangwe and Sai) the exclusive right to mediate between people and the most senior mediums who are the vehicles for this power.<sup>11</sup> Once again, this mediation is borne by special classes of objects: white beads and money. Why these things in particular? Spirit mediums, as I said in the previous chapter, are always seen to wear black and white (associated with clouds and lightning: i.e., rain), but never red (blood); and indeed the quintessential gifts to mediums are black or white cloth, or black or white beads. But there is more: gifts of beads, as we shall see shortly, are one of the two major means (the other being hoes)<sup>12</sup> by which marriages were transacted in Gokwe before the appearance of money and then later, of cattle. The prestation of beads by the living Chireya to the ancestral Nyadati is thus yet another signification of their being related to one another as affines, as wife-taker to wife-giver.

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<sup>11</sup>Although he himself depends upon a *dunzwi*, or ritual assistant to transfer gifts to the medium. The *dunzwi*, I might note in passing, seems to be the mirror of the *mutapi*, or medium's assistant, described by Lan for northeastern Zimbabwe. The former assumes a mediatory role for the living chief, the latter, for the dead chief.

<sup>12</sup>Lan (1989:198) notes that in Dande, any gift to a medium may also be referred to as *badza*, a hoe. The same word is still used in Gokwe to stand for bridewealth payments or for payments to a chief in return for passing judgement on a petition or in exchange for an allocation of land.

### Salt and Seed

Let me draw briefly on another reference to the relationship between Chief Chireya, the mediums and commodities that circulate in the special register that accentuates the links between them. We may recall from the last chapter that in most of the mythical accounts of Chireya's conquest, it is salt that figures as one of the central objects of contestation. Tazivana told us that the Bari pans were the source of salt for people across a wide region; anyone was free to travel to the pans to obtain the salt from the ground, and then to bring it home and filter it for consumption. We asked him if anything had to be paid for the salt that was acquired in this way:

#### **Interview with Richard Tazivana: 28 November 1988**

You could not buy the salt; you simply got it from the ground. It was not the salt of a person but of *mwari* ("god"). You could not just get it though. You first had to ask permission of the chief [Chireya]. Nowadays there is a *svikiro* over there near Harare, Vanehwohwa; each year she sends somebody here to collect some of the salt and bring it to her. At this time it has already been given to her so that she can make her preparations with it. She puts some of it in some relish and some she takes and mixes with seeds. She gives this mixture to someone to return with to Chireya. When this has been done, we know that another year has passed.

The contrast between the everyday and the ritual circulation of salt highlights the contrast between the power of the chief and the power of the autochthonous ancestor, and his *svikiro*, Vanehwohwa. The living chief controls the allocation of land and its resources; the autochthonous ancestral chief controls

the reproduction of life itself by anointing seeds with salt, making them fertile. The latter transaction recapitulates the mythical event in which Muvhumba Nyamusasa gives salt to the conquerors but retains control over the fertility of the land; indeed he swells and bursts like a seed, leaving salt behind as a sign of fertility.

### **Power on the Periphery: The Making of Goredema**

Chireya's account represents these relations of authority as seen from the centre of temporal power. What is the view from the periphery? It is in fact the peripheral view--the view from a commoner village in Goredema, on the margins of power--that we had access to during our fieldwork. We never had the opportunity to speak to the present Chief Chireya, nor even to interview Chief Goredema at any length about these matters. Instead we were privy to glimpses of the partial knowledge held by ordinary people in the village, as various events gave rise to speculation or actions of various kinds.

The first we heard about a local *svikiro* was shortly after our initial tour of the ward with Moffat Mbano. Mai Wanda informed us that Mbano's *sekuru* or mother's brother, with whom we had spent the night was married to the medium of a *mhondoro* spirit:

### **Journal Entry: 24 August 1988**

He has 6 wives, one of whom became a *svikiro* in Nemangwe about 3 years ago, after a terrible illness. According to Mai Wanda she retreated into the bush and ate leaves; when she recovered, the lion spirit spoke through her. Now she sleeps

under the sky, wears only black, and can generally only be in the company of women, though her husband comes and sleeps with her from time to time.

Three months later, they described another medium to us, paying special attention to the medium's behavior with respect to material tokens of the modern and anti-modern world:

**Journal Entry: 18 November 1988**

Mai Wanda and Mai Dzorai discussed the *svikiro* named Matenedza. She wears only black cloth, black beads, a hat of feathers and goes without shoes. She won't take a bus or get into a motorcar or enter a store, but she will drink tea and sugar and eat bread. Last year, when the maize was being burnt by the sun, people went to Gokwe to buy beads, and an *nguwani* (hat), for her. Then the rains came.

As the time of the rains approached, we wondered whether or not this was the medium to whom people would go in order to request ample rains and good crops. Who was the *svikiro* for the people of Goredema?

**Journal Entry: 1 November 1988**

Early in November, 1988, we asked Obert about the *svikiro* or spirit mediums who had authority over the Goredema region. His explanation revealed that there was a hierarchy of authority among mediums that was expressed through the annual passing of a gourd (*mukombe*) from one medium to the next through the offices of a go-between or *munyai*. This gourd contained magic water, and was fitted with a stopper so that the fluid would not spill. Under no circumstances should the *munyai* open the gourd; otherwise, the *mvura* ("water"/"rain") might spill and the resulting flood could prevent the *munyai* from completing his mission. The gourd is passed from Nevana through his *munyai* to Nyandoro (who lives in Chisunga village, the village of Mai Wanda's father) whose middleman (Mukoro, from the *sango* [forest] just to the east) passes it to the *svikiro* in Makore ward, whose *munyai* then takes it to the most senior medium of all, Vanehwohwa, who lives somewhere between Sanyati and Chinoyi.

Vanehwohwa used to live in Makondi, but people had problems with her, and the land was not good, so she moved away. When anyone else tried to build their home on that land they would wake up only to find that they had been moved somewhere else. Vanehwohwa controls the area from Chinoyi up to Piriwiri, west through Gandavaroyi and over through Chireya and Gokwe West down to Kana.

|                     |   |                        |   |                              |   |                        |
|---------------------|---|------------------------|---|------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Nevana<br>(Chireya) | ⇒ | Nyandoro<br>(Goredema) | ⇒ | Makore's svikiro<br>(Makore) | ⇒ | Vanehwowa<br>(Sanyati) |
|---------------------|---|------------------------|---|------------------------------|---|------------------------|

**Figure 10.1. Ritual Passage of Water through Spirit Mediums. (First Version).**

Later, we were to learn that the order of transmission described by Obert did not ascend levels in the hierarchy of the mediums--that Nevana was senior to all except Vanehwohwa, as Chief Chireya's own description suggests.<sup>13</sup>

|                                      |   |                        |   |                     |   |                        |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------|---|---------------------|---|------------------------|
| svikiro at<br>Mugomeri<br>(Goredema) | ⇒ | Nyandoro<br>(Goredema) | ⇒ | Nevana<br>(Chireya) | ⇒ | Vanehwowa<br>(Sanyati) |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------|---|---------------------|---|------------------------|

**Figure 10.2. Ritual Passage of Water through Spirit Mediums. (Revised Version).**

For this reason, the residents of Goredema addressed their requests for rain to Nyandoro, or even before him, to the new

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<sup>13</sup>We did not learn in this instance whether the gourd of water, or some other object, was sent back to complete the circuit of ritual exchange; in either case, it was probably transmitted back through the mediums in reverse order.

medium at Mugomeri. Except on rare occasions, Nevana himself seems only to have been consulted by chiefs.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Chief Chireya's, the villagers' contemporary, post-colonial account of ancestral power in the present seemed to bypass the living chiefs altogether<sup>15</sup> (although we did hear later that they knew the chiefs to be involved in a dispute over the authenticity of a medium--see below). Village supplicants were linked through a chain of mediums, linked by the movements of *vanyai* and the magic objects they carried with them, to the most senior *mhondoro* of all, Vanehwohwa.<sup>16</sup>

#### Money and Water: Morality and the Flow of Ritual Objects

I inquired on the same occasion about the ways in which people made offerings to the medium:

##### **Journal Entry: 1 November 1988**

Every year money is collected from each household and presented to the middleman to take to the

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<sup>14</sup>As Obert told us, "When people go to Nevana for the rain ceremony, they say that their footprints from dancing must be covered by rain within two or three days." During the guerilla war, the Rhodesian armed forces, recognizing Nevana's authority, took special pains to avoid bombing his residence.

<sup>15</sup>Lan (1985; 1989) notes a similar shift in allegiance from chiefs to mediums in Dande during and after the liberation war.

<sup>16</sup>Vanehwohwa, "they have/ he (honourific) has mushrooms," is another suggestive metaphor for aboriginality, since mushrooms grow spontaneously from the earth after it has been dampened by rain. The edible species in the area of our village had a height and cap diameter of over 30 cm.--a single specimen being sufficient to provide relish for a meal in our 15-member household.

spirit medium (svikiro). The money is put into the largest clay pot in the house of the spirit medium. The medium is not allowed to open the pot until permitted to do so by the spirit, who may say "give the middleman \$100" or "give the medium so many dollars." Some of the money in that pot is very old, not like money of today. If you have the spirit's permission you might be allowed to exchange some new money for old.

The money to give to the svikiro (5-10 cents per family) has already been collected. Today Kapita will go to the svikiro to give it to him.

There is an intriguing convergence here between money and water, at least when they move in the rarefied circuit linking people with mediums, and mediums with the ancestors who speak through them. (Recall how Chief Chireya tested the authenticity of the medium's powers: "I pulled out f1, and put it on the ground saying, 'If this is true let rain fall today.'") When serving as tokens of the chain of authority linking people and the ancestors, both water and money are in danger of leaking out of their prescribed channels; they must be sequestered out of sight (notably in a gourd or pot--associated with women, the womb and fertility generally) until such time as the ancestors allow them to be made available as a means of obtaining life.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>For a very enlightening and tightly woven attempt to answer the question, "Why do Shona mediums avoid items of contemporary European manufacture, but not money?," see Lan (1989). He suggests it has to do with the degree of security money might provide against the predations of the colonial government, but adds that the answer is probably more complex than this. See also Shipton's (1989) intriguing and wide-ranging analysis of "bitter money" beliefs in Africa and beyond. In Gokwe--unlike the Luo case on which Shipton focuses--the origin of a given sum of money seems to be of no consequence in terms of the moral consequences of its use in



Ordinary people in the village observed with great interest the behaviour of the main players in this sphere of ritualized transactions--especially the *vanyai* and the *masvikiro*. For Mai Wanda, Mai Dzorai, and Obert, with whom we discussed these matters most often, the legitimacy and morality of the mediums were registered in the consequences of their acts; just as ordinary people themselves were punished for immoral behaviour, so too might these ritual intermediaries be punished for violating the rules of exchange that acknowledged respect for the power of the ancestors. Take for example, Obert's story of what happened to a local *munyai* from Masosoni (in southwest Goredema) when he diverted money intended for the medium from its intended path (note here again the relationship between flooding water and money):

**Journal Entry: 18 November 1988**

Nyandoro or "Guronegwisi" ("The one who follows the path of the river"), was an ancestor of the Jack family from Masosoni. Jack was an elderly man who cared for the *svikiro*. His *mutupo* (totem) was Mpofu. Recently the people of Masosoni offended the ancestor spirit by trapping a strange fish with the head of a fish and the lower parts of a male (i.e. the genitals of a man). When they saw that it was strange, they cut its head off anyway instead of consulting the medium; and those male parts were then washed away by the flood waters of the Ume which rose suddenly. The people paid money to Jack to try to prevent their being punished by the medium. But Jack kept the money and failed to report the incident to the medium. Still, the medium was informed of the incident by the presence of eagles hovering overhead. Jack subsequently died (in 1988) and the people of Masosoni must now be very careful lest they be punished by the

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particular contexts of exchange.

withholding of rain.

Obert went on to explain that there was a more pervasive moral tension in Goredema, one that derived from the contradiction between the aspirations of youth to be modern and to abjure the power of the ancestors, and the need that elders felt to include young people in the rain ceremonies more fully, however ignorant and disrespectful they might be on these occasions:

In fact, all over the area, people--young and old--are disrespecting the spirits and bad things are starting to happen. In the old days, young people were not allowed to be present when the medium went into trance, because just before he comes out of his house, lions and snakes appear and everyone must keep quiet and not run away. Also young men and women must not propose love to each other in the presence of the medium....

The date of the ceremony to bring the rains is decided by the *munyai*. Unmarried people were not allowed to attend before 1977. Now they are allowed because the elders are afraid they will die without anyone knowing how to carry on these ceremonies.

With reference to rain, the medium will speak in opposites--if they say "this year you will eat your children," it will mean there is plenty of rain. But if they say "there is plenty of rain," you can be sure that there will be none at all. People can ask questions, such as, "why did Jack die?" Or, "how can we get good yields from our crops?" (they might be given special seed); but mostly they ask about rainfall. If they are young and foolish they might also ask, "how can I get so many wives?" "How can I get good grades in school?" But nobody, not even elders, gets straight answers--sometimes they may have to return to get the answers they are looking for.

No beer-drinking or "anything bad" is done.<sup>18</sup> People dance and play drums until they tire; then the medium will become possessed. Sometimes he is very angry, but Jairos Mugomeri can pacify him by speaking special words of long ago and clapping his hands in a special way.

Jairos Mugomeri was the aspirant to the Goredema chieftainship who had lost out to Mushambadze when a new chief was elected after 1980. In his own mind, however, and those of his followers--including the people of Tazivana village--the contest was yet to be decided at the level at which it really mattered. As the month of November advanced into December without significant rainfall, we began to hear rumours of a great series of competitions (*makwikwi*) between mediums that reflected on the contested chieftaincy as well. Mai Wanda told us that Nevana and Majerezere were competing with one another to see who can bring the rain. Nevana, she said, was able to control the wind and blow away the rains brought by his rival. It was two months later that we learned of the outcome from Kapita, himself a *munyai* for our village:

**Journal Entry: 22 February 1989**

Mushambadze had been supporting a *svikiro* claiming to have the same *mhondoro* spirit as Nevana. But only Mushambadze's own people supported this claim. The others continued to believe in the established medium (Nevana). The competition between the two led to the failure of the rains in November and December (it was later discovered that a pot with a snake inside had been strategically placed by the

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<sup>18</sup>The absence of beer at *mhondoro* ceremonies (we attended possession ceremonies for family ancestors in which beer played a prominent role) seems anomalous in the wider Zimbabwean context, and may be a recent innovation.

pretender in order to nullify the rainmaking powers of the legitimate svikiro). So Chief Chireya and the chiefs from Binga came to resolve the matter, calling upon a *n'anga* (healer) from Nemangwe to judge. Hearing that he would be killed if he were found to be a fake, the pretender fled to the headman at Kuwirirana to seek protection, but has now apparently returned, his inauthenticity revealed. And of course since these events took place in January, the rains have never ceased.

#### Allocating Authority, Making a Ward: Mugomeri's Story

We had by this time already interviewed Mugomeri. An ancient, half-blind man, dressed in rags and with only a few wisps of white hair clinging to his head, he sat surrounded by several wives and seemingly dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren near a hut in the centre of his sprawling *musha*. We asked him to tell us the history of how the original Goredemas came to Gokwe. At first he seemed understandably reluctant to talk to us. "What do these people want to know and why?" he must have wondered, "and what version shall I tell them?" Obert, who accompanied us, tried to reassure him that we only wanted to record the history of the land for members of the younger generation who would otherwise never know; as a matrilineal descendant of the Goredemas, and a recognized ritual adept, Obert was uniquely trusted by elders such as Mugomeri.

At first, Mugomeri vacillated, as though he couldn't decide which story to tell; and then he seemed to get the possible versions mixed up--at first claiming that the Goredemas were autochthons, then withdrawing from that

position and setting them in relation to the conquering Chireyas and the autochthonous Muvhumbas. His narrative continued to wander back and forth as he struggled to find the strength to achieve coherence out of the fragments of his memory in a way that might meet the expectations of this peculiarly mixed audience--one that included his own descendants and a couple of very strange foreigners:

**Interview with Jairos Mugomeri: 12 January 1989**

It is we who are the people born in this place. Our fathers were the first to be born here... I don't know who these first people were. We were given the picture that these people came from Guruswa. No, of these things I am unable to know for certain. What I do know is what we ourselves have done. The first was Rotunda. From there to Matemajere. From Matemajere it comes to Muzhuzha and from there to Shopewa. From there to Muzira and from Muzira to Kadzomba. Today there is the sixth--eh--seventh: Mushambadzi, who is the one earning money today. It was Shopewa who was the first to earn money along with Muzira and Kadzomba, the people of whom I have spoken. The others were not earning money. It was only a chiefdom [*ushi*] then. They were chiefs. They held their positions as heirs to the chieftainship [*Rakangogara riri dzinza ramadzishe*]. They already had established that position. It was brought by those who first came here. No, they were here...no, they were given...It was the most senior of them to come, Chireya, who took this place. No...at first it wasn't that one who was here. Many Chireyas had already come and gone. [He seems to mean that the line of Goredemas occupied this area after several generations of Chireyas].

It was the Chireyas who gave out places [*nzvimbo*]-- "You! you stay here..You! you stay here!" Yes, it was Chireya who conquered the whole country [*nyika yose*]. He removed the people such as the children of Muvhumba. They fought with each other to take the land, because everything of that time was of war...was of the war to take the country. Yes, Muvhumba Nyamusasa of Nemangwe, he had become weak. Everything was taken from him by Chireya and by

Nemangwe, the child of Chireya. He took us as well. All of these places had belonged to other people. All of the great elders were here in the country--they came following Chireya who gave them each their own places: "You! Yours is this place. You! Yours is this place." The place of the conquest was Mupare [in the Bari Pans]. He wanted to start a fight at Mupare, and then it was seen that Mupare had been dried out by his magic [*mapipi*]. That is how he conquered this land. That is how our forebearers came to settle in this place.

There were born...I don't know how many of our grandfathers have died since we first came here. Yes the people of Muvhumba Nyamusasa were staying far from here. Goredema was the country of other people and there are other stories to be told about it. They were called Vadzimba; those were the people who were here. Yes, this is how the land was taken, how it was conquered, how Chireya took the whole country. Muvhumba--when Muvhumba died the country was now known as belonging to Chireya, yes, that's when he was saying, "You, your seat is here; you, your seat is here." It was Chireya who did this, who was saying, "stay here, stay here, stay here." This is how people were settled... Yes, they had a lineage of spirit mediums [*masvikiro*]. The lineage of mediums is the one that is represented here today. Nevana, yes, he was the first one here; yes, he was called Nevana. It was the ancestral spirit [*mudzimu*] of Chireya who was first here, yes it was Chireya's spirit. Chireya said, "Spirit of mine, where do you stay?--At Mwene-Ziko-Nezanda [owner of the place of swelling]." "I want my spirit to stay where?--At Zande." And he asked, "Spirit of mine, it cannot stay where?" And he said that Goredema cannot take that spirit and make it his, because that spirit is of this place here.

Goredema had no spirit and neither did he have a medium. He had to show deference to [literally, "clap hands respectfully to"] Chireya, since [the medium of] Chireya had become the greatest of all. All the other mediums came as they were required, because things were like this in the *nyika*, things just happened this way. All the other mediums were spread about as they came. Nevana is the greatest *svikiro*. Mugaricha, yes, Mugaricha came from the other side [i.e. across the Sanyati river]. I don't know precisely where, but that is the one possessed by the *mudzimu* who then came here to Chireya. Chireya welcomed him, saying "Ehh! The spirit of my

ancestor has arrived!" Yes, there was nothing else to be done. He was only to lead the chiefs from then on.

There is much that remains confusing in Mugomeri's account--as it should since his own position with respect to the mediums involved is particularly delicate. He seems finally to capitulate to Chireya's claim to be the one from whom all subsidiary rights in land and estates of authority were issued to those who came later--*sadunhus* who were told to "sit" as wardheads in one province of Chireya's land or another. And he accepts as well the preeminent position of Nevana as the medium of Chireya's senior ancestor (recall that he supported Nevana against Mushambadze's candidate in the contest to make the rains fall). But there remains the shadowy presence of a medium in Sanyati whom he calls "Mujaricha" (he did not mention Vanehwohwa), and the question of the residual powers of the ancestors of the original owners of the land.

In turning now to the perspective on these relationships held by Tazivana, the headman of our village, it is important to bear in mind that he himself continued to serve as an advisor in Mushambadze's court--a sign of allegiance that must have set him against Mugomeri's claim to the chieftainship. It is also of interest that Tazivana both served (and survived) as *sabhuku* of the village during the 1970s, the peak years of the guerilla war.

#### Captains and Bossboys: Power and Labour in Goredema

Tazivana cast the original Goredema in a different role

than did Mugomeri. Not only did he tell us that the first Goredema was Muzhuzha (the third listed by Mugomeri), but also that he was Tazivana's own maternal grandfather, his *sekuru* (a kinship relationship characterized by special closeness and beneficence). He portrayed this Goredema as a captain in the army of the Ndebele who was given the land as a province to administrate on behalf of Lobengula, the Ndebele chief. Although the Ndebele had come to fight, Tazivana told us, they had been appeased by gifts of tobacco; thereafter, he said, Goredema had only made peace with the inhabitants of this land.

When the white people came, however, all this was to change:

**Interview with Richard Tazivana: 28 November 1988**

They arrived here, along the road through the mountain on their horses and carrying weapons. They said there was tse-tse fly in the area, that can bite people and kill them. Now Goredema said that there weren't any such flies here. Still, they said that Goredema must move. "I will not move," he said. So they arrested him. They made him carry a heavy pole on his head until he would agree to move. But still he refused. Finally, they placed eggs on his head and shot them off with a gun. But still he refused to move.... [This procedure was repeated with the other chiefs in the area.] When they came to Chireya, they said, "Your country is good but you need eyes to help you to see such a big country. Who can be given as your bossboys?" And Chireya gave four names: he gave the name of Goredema, and Mashame, and Makore and Nembudziya. These were to be the bossboys for Chireya.

It is particularly interesting that Tazivana uses the



term *bhasabhoi* ("bossboy")<sup>19</sup> here to unfavourably compare the deputies appointed by the settler administration to serve under Chireya, with the pre-colonial "captains" appointed by the Ndebele. It is a term that resonates with many dimensions of the relationship between the colonial regime and the indigenous power structure in Gokwe; thus the analogy Tazivana makes between headmen in the pay of the colonial government and bossboys seems to have been carefully chosen.<sup>20</sup> The African bossboys or foremen on farms and mines were not likely to have been kindly regarded during the early phases of colonization, since they held a tangible power of coercion over people like themselves, yet were working at the behest of an alien authority. *Sabhukus* were in an equally unpopular position--extracting taxes from their subjects, and thereby forcing them to labour for Europeans. The wage labour they were obliged to seek and perform, of course, was carried out under the supervision of actual "bossboys." Moreover, chiefs and headmen during the colonial period were often authorized, or ordered, to call out their subjects to labour on public works projects: they became real "bossboys" themselves.

This latter role was not entirely novel, since it was apparently a pre-colonial prerogative of chiefs and wardheads

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<sup>19</sup>The term ultimately derives from the Afrikaans *baas* ("boss"), by which any white person visiting a commercial farm in Zimbabwe is still likely to be hailed today.

<sup>20</sup>The analogy is all the more astonishing since Tazivana was himself a *sabhuku*.

to request a contribution of labour-time on their fields from their subjects.<sup>21</sup> We were told that in Goredema this practice had long since lapsed. People did, however, continue to work the fields, build the homes, and perform other tasks for spirit mediums. This is a yet more explicit demonstration of allegiance to the chiefs of the past, as opposed to those reigning in the present; in this case, it is expressed in the selective allocation of gifts of labour by those subjected to their authority. Obert, Kapita, and Kapita's half-brother, Mbizvo, reported to us one day on the following meeting with the medium which they attended at Mugomeri village where these obligations were discussed:

**Journal Entry: 5 January 1989**

On December 22nd, people went to the home of the spirit medium at Mugomeri. People were told that they had neglected building a proper home for the spirit medium (the previous home had been eaten by cattle when he was at his father's home in Hurungwe [northeast of Gokwe] and his possessions were "left out in the rain"). The people were also told not to work on Thursday [the *chisi* day].

The mediums, and through them, the ancestral owners of the land, may both oblige and restrict the performance of labour, depending upon the appropriate context. People must offer

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<sup>21</sup>It is not clear to me how prevalent this practice may have been in Gokwe. Lan (1989:201), however, proposes that labour offered to the chief might be read as "labour in exchange for economic security either in direct exchange for access to land or grain," since the chief allows subjects to use the land and is obliged to provide grain to the needy in times of drought; or, that since the chief's grain goes to make the beer that is offered to the royal ancestors in exchange for rain, then working for the chief is effectively working for rain.

their labour to the medium when it is required, and yet they must abstain from working the land on a specific day each week (formerly one day each lunar month) out of respect for its ultimate owner. The abrogation of either commitment will result in the withholding of the reciprocal gift that only the ancestors can give: the rain.

We learned from the same meeting about the relationship between land and the moral authority of the ancestors over the behaviour of those who live upon it:

They were also told that the rains were not falling because a son of Mugomeri was ploughing the spirit medium's field without permission. The son had moved because he'd been accused of adultery with his brother's wife. Now, his old field was being ploughed by that brother. But it was suggested that the same field be given to the spirit medium in exchange. At first the *svikiro* refused; but he then agreed, if the son would see him personally.

Adultery with a brother's wife is considered to be a morally abhorrent act, virtually tantamount to incest and hence potentially subject to sanctions by the ancestors. In this case, a resolution of the crime between the brothers (compensation with land) was insufficient to appease the *mhondoro*. A further exchange had to be made, one in which Mugomeri's son compensated the ancestral owner of the land himself by giving back the land to the *mhondoro*'s medium.

I want to conclude this discussion with a caveat. I have intentionally made no attempt here, as others have for other regions of Zimbabwe (e.g. Garbett 1977; Lan 1985), at working out a map of either the precise territorial boundaries over

which the various ancestral chiefs and their mediums hold authority, or a diagram of the genealogical and hierarchical relationships in which they see themselves in relation to one another. The reason is twofold. One is simply because I did not meet and interview the mediums of the *mhondoro* spirits in Goredema and its environs in order to ask them for their views of the extent of their authority. (Although we expressed an interest in doing so, the occasion was repeatedly deferred by Kapita and Mai Toda--the *vanyai*--until we knew that they felt it to be inappropriate. We therefore made no effort to press the matter.) The other reason is that I want to leave the reader, as we were left ourselves, with the same sense of doubt and confusion that most villagers, including office holders and royals such as Tazivana and Mugomeri, expressed concerning these matters. They continually redefined their own tentatively held conceptual map of these relationships as rumours of the relative performance of mediums such as Nevana and Majerezero were circulated and evaluated in terms of their effectivity. Similarly, the boundaries of moral behaviour in the community were constantly redrawn, as signs from the ancestors (drought, a lightning strike, infertility) were interpreted and the proper remedies attempted through gifts of tobacco, money or labour. This uncertainty at the boundaries of knowledge and ambiguity at the boundaries of morality left both arenas open for ongoing negotiation--a process that the fixation of relations in a map or diagram can only serve

to disguise.

### **Making a Village: Migration, Marriage, and Domestic Form**

Yet other dimensions of the relationship between labour, land and authority will become apparent if we turn to an examination of the historical process by which Tazivana village and its neighbours came into being and were transformed over time. At present, there are five major exogamous clans in the area now occupied by Kangesokwe VIDCO, each identified with the members of a patrilineage at the core of a village; but this is only a snapshot view of what should really be understood as a process of continual village creation and clan immigration over time. It is revealing to observe in this respect that the word for village--*musha*--is also used to refer to an individual homestead. As we were to discover, the villages of Goredema are essentially homesteads writ large, since they encompass and give expression to the development of a single household over several generations.

The various versions we were told of the settlement of the ancestors of the Mbanos (the clan identity of the core patrilineage in Tazivana village) begins in much the same way as the myths of Chireya's conquest. Sometime during the reign of Lobengula, two cousins named Chisunga and Chibayamarangwe came from Goromonzi on the highlands near Harare. Chisunga's paternal uncle was Chief Chikwaka of the Mbano-Matemavi clan. Chibayamarangwe was of the Ngwenya clan; his mother was the sister of Chisunga's mother (see Figure 10.2). The two young

men were excellent hunters, and decided to settle in the lands of Chief Goredema where animals were plentiful.

Goredema not only gave them land within his realm; he gave them wives as well. Although they are never explicitly remembered as such, these early marriages were on the model of the *ugariri* or brideservice marriages I have discussed before: the sons-in-law (*vakwasha*) who had come from afar were essentially living uxori locally, exchanging their labour for wives. Here is how Obert's mother tells the story:

**Interview with Mai Obert: 2 May 1989**

Chibayamarangwe came here first, killing buffaloes. He met a girl and married her. Now Chisunga was concerned about his not returning from going to kill buffalo. "What happened to him?" [he thought] So he came looking for Chibayamarangwe, and found that he was married here. Now Chisunga was persuaded to marry a wife of his own. So he remained there [*akagarira*--which also suggests brideservice marriage, or uxori local residence] with his wife, Mbipo, but she died. So he took another wife by *kugarira* and again did not return to his home. She gave birth to my father, Gukurume [*Masiyambiri*]. They stayed at the baobab tree that is over there, the big baobab where we pass through [at Goche stream]. That is where the grave of my father's father may be found. That is where my father's father first lived. They moved from there after he died; that is when they moved over there, where the school is now. That is where we were born, at the school there, up above where Mukweipi stayed, that is where we went when we were very small. We were playing drums then. We were playing drums, the drums of the grave [to bring back the spirit of one who has died]. If no one has died, there are no drums like that. When a person has died is when the drums are played.

Chibayamarangwe married...who? I have forgotten. He married Nyati, yes. There are relatives down there, grandmother Bhiza...We were swimming in pools of water; we were bathing and swimming in

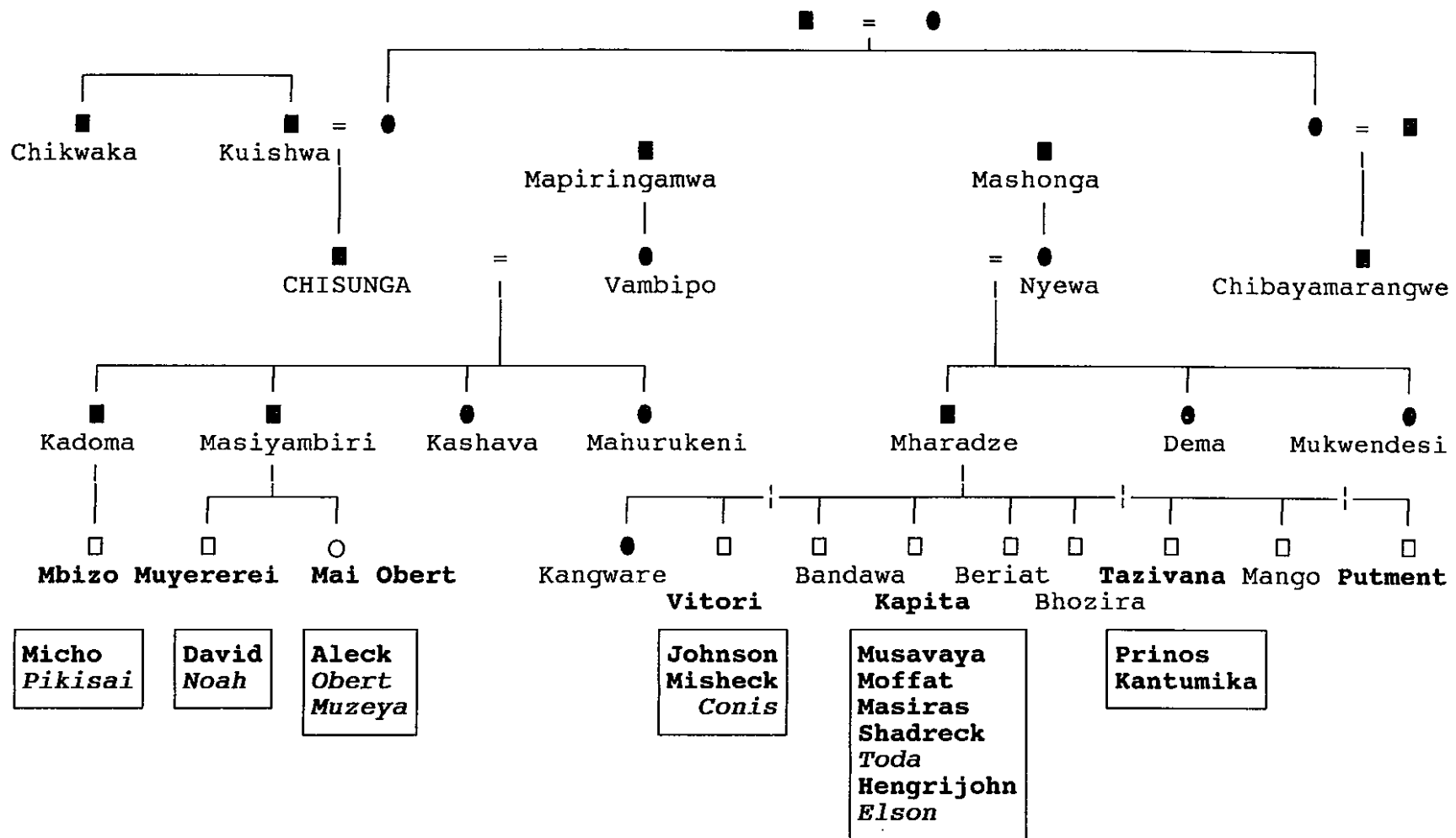


**Figure 10.3. Genealogy of the Descendants of Chisunga.** Those shown constitute the core lineage of Tazivana Village. Current residents of the village are in bold. The genealogy includes only those members of the fifth descending generation who had already been allocated land by 1989 (shown beneath their father or mother in boxes--those who were still unmarried are shown in italics). Only the children of Mai Obert are not members of the Mbano clan.

pools...I cannot remember when I was married. He came from his home..no, I cannot remember who Tazivana married either...He was the first to get married. We paid money for him to marry. If you bought beads, you could go and marry. You would marry with beads, arriving with your beads, that was *tsamba* [bridewealth payment to the father-in-law]. If you had one pound, you could marry.

The social organization of the domestic economy during this early period can only be grasped if we think about it as a process unfolding continuously, if unevenly, over time. If these men became prosperous through hunting elephants and selling ivory, they might eventually have been able to attract less successful men--or other migrants looking for new hunting grounds--to settle in their own households as *vakwasha*. The obligation might last for a period of many years and span the birth of several children--sometimes only to be commuted with the gift of a grandchild, or of the bridewealth earned by a daughter, to the lineage of the father-in-law (*tezvara*). The work performed for the *tezvara* during the period of service would include tasks as diverse as cutting trees to clear new fields and travelling long distances to deliver a message to relatives. When the period of bride-service ended, the *mukwasha* would be allowed to establish his own homestead, and would be allocated his own lands--sufficient in size to provide for his descendants--to clear and cultivate in the near vicinity. Toward the end of his own life cycle he might become a legitimate lineage head in his own right, with the attendant jural responsibilities and authority over kinsmen to whom he had made sub-allocations of land. This is in fact the



basis for the network of villages now extant in eastern Goredema; each village head traces descent from an ancestor who married the daughters of the founder/hunter through bride-service.

Hamadziripi, the person reputed to be the oldest living in eastern Goredema today, recalled the marriage system described by his own elders (presumably toward the end of the nineteenth century) and that of his own generation as follows:

**Interview with Hamadziripi: 12 January 1989**

When you wanted to marry, you would first propose to a girl, then you would give your father and mother-in-law a string of beads the length of the handle of an axe; that was the *tsambo* (first payment to make yourself known) that we would give to our *tezvara*. After paying that you would be allowed to stay with them. Another system would be if you go to a faraway place for your *tezvara*, or if you build a house for them, or if you would go to their land and clear [*kupanda*] the field without their asking, then they would say that you had paid part of your *lobola* [Nguni term for bridewealth], and you could live with them and your wife. There was nothing like today's system of paying two or three hundred dollars. Nowadays if you ask your *mukwasha* to go to Kuwirirana or to work in your field he will say, "No, I have paid my *lobola*." But there was nothing like that then. My father was married this way, but I myself married with money. In my time, you would give 5 bob for *nhumbi* ["love-token"; or *mwadzo*] for engagement to her, and one pound to her parents as *tsambo*. Now people are paying two or four hundred dollars, but not in the time of our fathers. Long ago the sons-in-law would stay with the fathers-in-law, and they would do some tasks or go places for them. That is why there was not much *lobola* to be paid.

We got beads from the *Vazungu* [Portuguese]; they would come and trade them for the tusks of elephants. Then they would return to their own places. The beads were black, red, and white. They were very big, like *mbumburo* [Nguni word for bullets or round shot]. These beads were worn by

men and women. But there were rings or bangles that girls would wear around their ankles so that you could hear them jingle as they walked, going *chaka, chaka, chaka*.

This pattern of uxori-local marriage established a core of lineages living in close proximity to one another; while they identified with diverse totems, they were nevertheless bound to one another socially by overlapping relations of marital alliance or common descent. Success in hunting meant access to ivory and skins as sources of exchangeable wealth. These products could be traded for beads and cloth with the Portuguese, and later with the British; and a string of beads, the length of a hoe handle, would be sufficient bridewealth with which to obtain a wife (but not enough, according to Hamadziripi anyway, to live independently of one's father-in-law).

An iron hoe (*badza*) would serve as bridewealth as well. Elders such as Mugomeri suggested to us that even one hoe could significantly increase the productivity of agricultural labour in the recipient household, and that those who knew both the sources of iron and the method of smelting were easily able to marry and establish their own *musha*:

Some used to be clever; they had been given a special talent to heat stones of iron until they melted. They would pour the liquid ore into bark until it became the shape of a hoe. When they removed it, you would see that it had become a hoe. You would pound it and pound it until it became a hoe. Then you would go cultivate. That is how hoes used to be made.

Not everyone would get them though--there were only a few who would do so that way--so few that you

could count them easily. He would be the one to marry, using that hoe to pay roora. He would be the senior person of that village, like mine. That mukwasha (son-in-law) would come with that hoe to marry my child--he would become the senior man (mukuru) of my village.

If such a man came looking for a wife, he would say, "I am asking for a wife if I can find one here."

And the father would say: "Girls are here!" and he would call the girls to come and say, "which one do you want?"

"I want that one."

And the father would say, "You! This man wants you." These men used to be the greatest at first.

You would take that hoe and cultivate with it. If you did not have a hoe yours would not become a home. The hoe will allow one to cultivate food for my family here at home, the hoe that was paid by that son-in-law. Yes that is what was done at first. That was farming.

We can discern in Mugomeri's narrative the central dynamic through which households took shape and were transformed over time. Senior and powerful men--in this case blacksmiths, but also successful hunters and chiefs--were able to recruit large numbers of wives into their households in the course of their lives. In time, reproductive success meant that daughters could be used to attract the supplementary labour of dependent sons-in-law. Alternatively, daughters could be exchanged for bridewealth in the form of hoes, which their fathers could dispose of in turn to bring wives to

reside patrilocally with their sons.<sup>22</sup>

The village now known as Tazivana, after its present headman, seems to have developed precisely according to a combination of these principles. It was founded by Chisunga, the original immigrant of the Mbano clan. Chisunga originally settled as a dependent *mukwasha* of the Goredema lineage (whose *mutupo* was *Moyo*--the Rozvi totem). Of his three sons by two wives, Mharadze was the most long-lived, and the most successful in terms of marriage and reproduction. Before he died, he had made at least four bridewealth marriages of his own, two of which were with daughters of the reigning Chief Goredema; he had also inherited at least one wife (Madhikiri--the mother of Mai Obert) who was also a daughter of Goredema from his brother Masiyambiri after the latter's death. (See Figure 10.4--which excludes those of Mharadze's wives without known descendants).

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<sup>22</sup>I am unable to say precisely how scarce iron hoes were, and hence to what degree their possession offered a real advantage in agricultural production and accumulation. The best hypothesis may be that soon after the colonial occupation--when iron ore was mined and hoes were manufactured on a larger scale, and when hoes could be purchased in town with wages--their importance in bridewealth transactions, like that of cloth and beads, lay in their function as symbolic tokens of alliance more than as instrumental means of production.

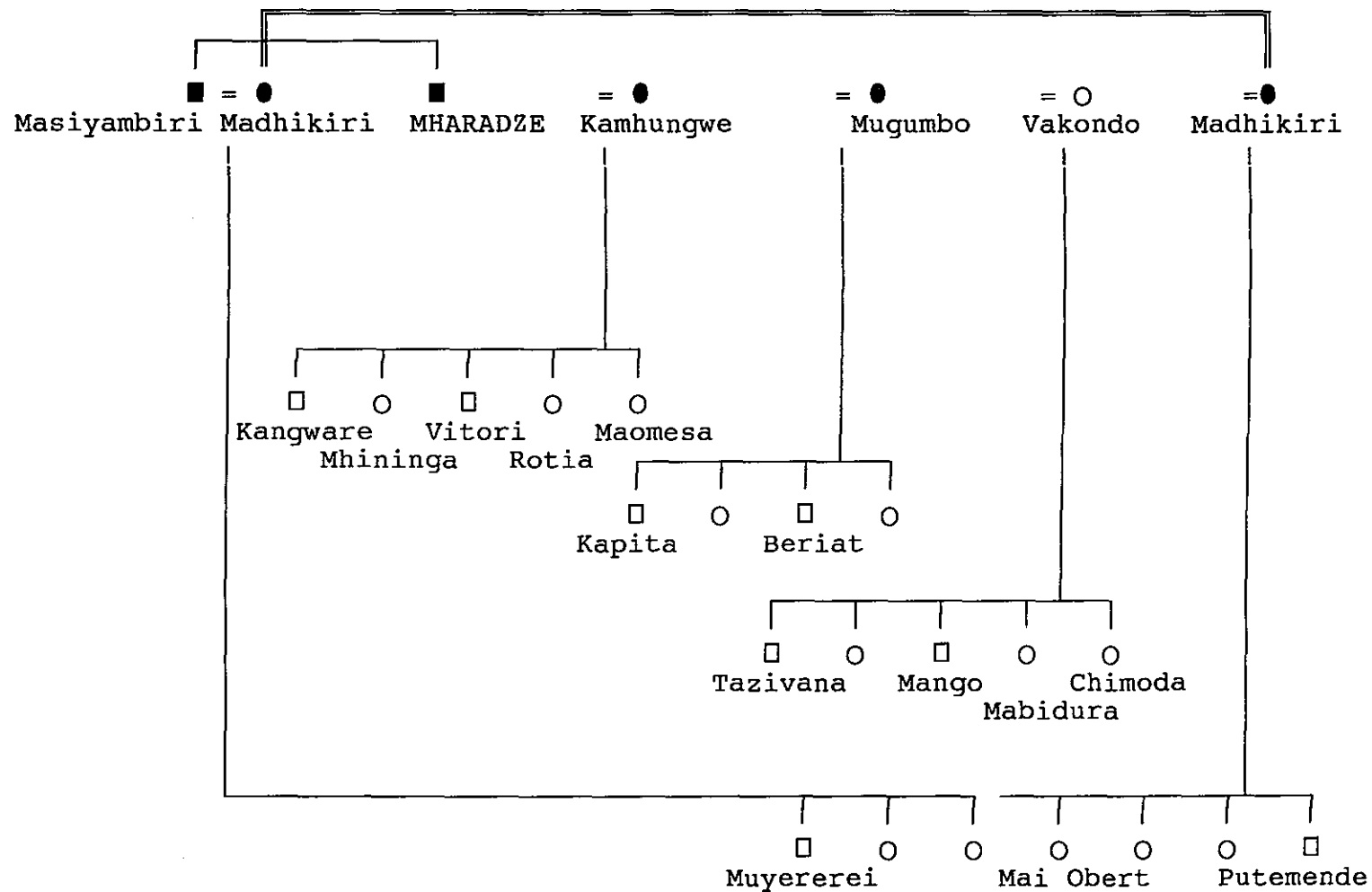


**Figure 10.4. Genealogy of Mharadze's Descendants.** After the death of Musiyambiri, his wife (Madhikiri) was given to Mharadze, with whom she bore four additional children.

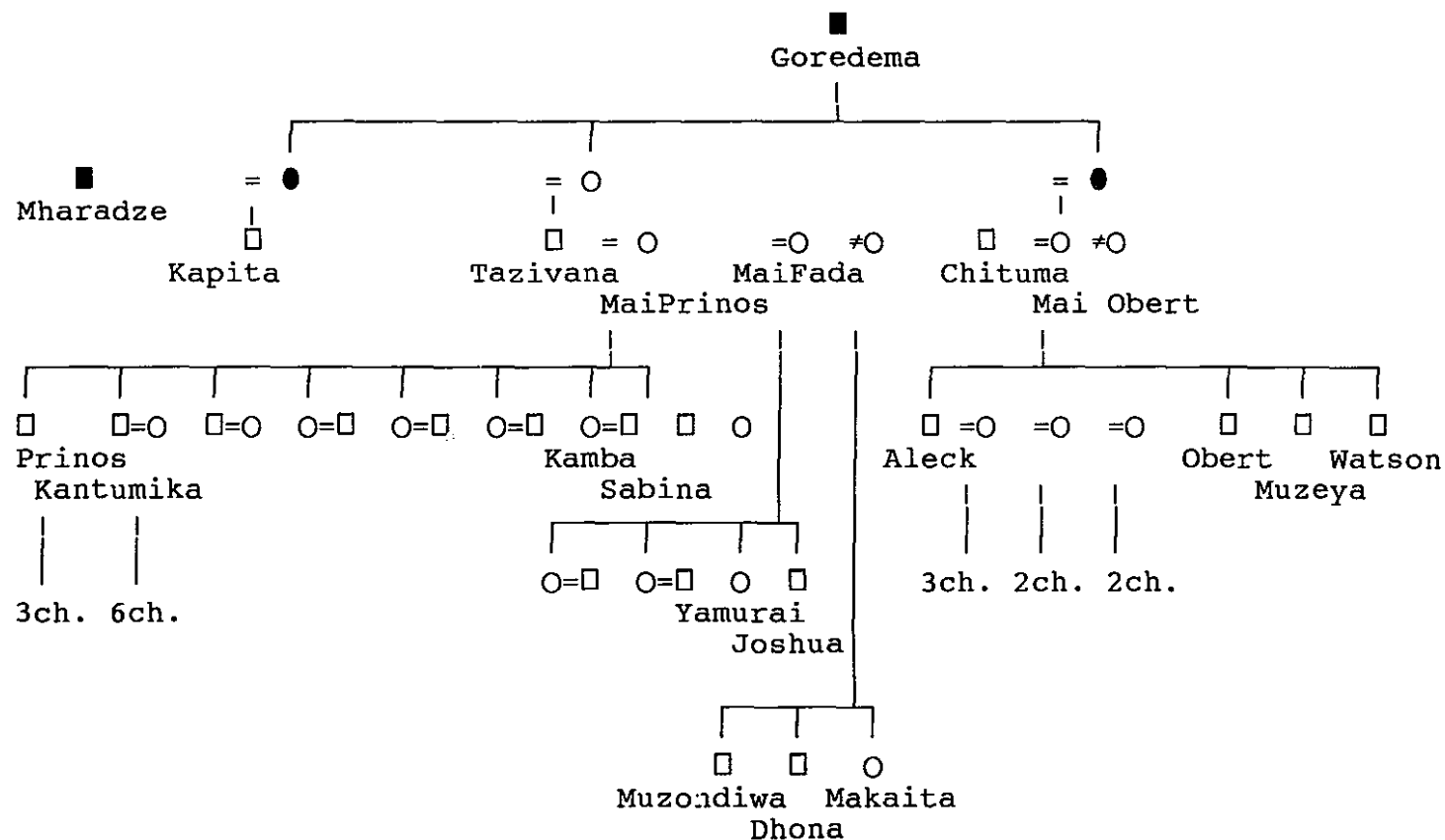


**Figure 10.5. Kinship Ties between Tazivana Village and the Goredema Lineage.** This figure also illustrates the sororal linkage between the mothers of three of Mharadze's children: Kapita, Tazivana, and Chituma's senior wife (Mai Obert). Note also that these sisters were all daughters of the reigning Chief Goredema: i.e., their sons are matrilineal descendants of the royal lineage. Only those living in Tazivana village are named; the youngest generation is simply indicated by number of children (e.g., 3Ch. = three unmarried children).

The sons of Mharadze and those of his brothers are the elders of Tazivana village today, having been allocated land by their fathers and brought their wives to live with them after paying bridewealth. All of the daughters of Mharadze and his brothers were married outside the village with bridewealth with the exception of Obert's mother ("Mai Obert"). Her husband had come from Makonde to the east, contracted an *ugariri* marriage with her father, and settled permanently in Tazivana village--thus replicating the pattern of uxori-local marriage that Chisunga had established two generations earlier. This is what explains the special relationship of Obert and his brothers to the men of Chisunga's lineage. Obert stands in relation to them as sister's son to mother's brother, or *muzukuru* to *sekuru*--a relationship, as I have said, that is characterized by informality and mutual assistance (see Radcliffe-Brown 1950). As a very old man, Mharadze had selected Obert to be the repository of his knowledge of the ways of the ancestors, perhaps in part because of the special opportunity for intimacy given by their formal status as kinsmen. Obert and his brothers, as the only *vazukuru* of their generation who actually reside in the village, enjoy this special status generally.

#### The Allocation of Land

What is now Tazivana village was founded by Mharadze when he moved across the Goche to the northeastern bank of the

Kaongo river. His field there, which some remember to have been cultivated for the first time in the early 1940s, now belongs to Kapita, who extended it continuously into the uplands away from the riverbank.<sup>23</sup> Mharadze only died in 1980, but was by then a very ancient man, who had relinquished all but ceremonial powers to his sons. Although Kapita seems to have been designated the *samusha* for purposes of dealing with intra-village disputes and ritual matters, Tazivana had been serving as the government appointed headman, or *sabhuku* of the village, and attendant at the court of chief Goredema since the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> At that time villages were administered under the *chengeta ivhu* ("protect the soil") programme; each village had a committee charged with the maintenance of contours and the sanction of various violations of soil conservation measures indicated by government. In the 1970s, land allocation itself was apparently placed under the jurisdiction of "Tribal Land Authorities" on which the *sadunhu* or wardhead would sit in consultation with the *sabhukus* and representatives from the Department of Internal Affairs.

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<sup>23</sup>As Mai Obert explained (see above), Mharadze's household was originally located about three kilometres to the north, across the Goche stream--now the northern boundary of Tazivana village. Kangware, Mharadze's eldest son, was given land there by his father, and his descendants now live as members of what has become Mutawa village.

<sup>24</sup>Although Kapita was older, and the son of a more senior wife, Tazivana was better spoken and apparently more literate. They each had an equally powerful, if very different, kind of charisma.



These developments reflected not only the formal bureaucratization of land allocation procedures, but also their association with the payment of various service charges and fines (these are detailed in a document reproduced in Appendix One).

We were told that "Chief" Goredema (the government classified him as a "headman" at the time), was already exacting a fee--perhaps \$10--for land allocations to outsiders in the 1960s. After granting his permission, Goredema would direct the applicant to a *sabhuku* to be allocated a particular tract under that sub-jurisdiction. The *sabhuku* was given a cut from the fee. The oldest *Madheruka* family in the village--the Maposa lineage--was allocated land in this way in 1968.

Those young men who held rights in the land of their fathers were not subject to these procedures, since they could expect to receive portions of their father's land when they reached maturity. But by the time the younger grandsons of Mharadze had come of age--eight men, including Kapita's son Masiras, born roughly within a year of one another in the late 1950s--those expectations could no longer be satisfied: land had become short at the same time that ploughs had made more extensive cultivation possible. The elders apparently formed a village committee to decide which parts of the village common lands should be opened up, but the young men rapidly realized that they were being given only land with the poorest soils and steepest slopes, so they forcibly interposed

themselves into the committee's deliberations in an effective show of generational insubordination. The result seems to have been that those sons were apportioned a larger share of their fathers' lands, as well as lands that some senior men had abandoned when they left the village in search of more fertile soils in Nenyunga and Chireya.<sup>25</sup>

The post-colonial government has taken the bureaucratization of land allocation one step further than the Department of Internal Affairs in the Smith regime. Since 1986, any applicant for land must go through the VIDCO (Village Development Committee)<sup>26</sup>; and if need can be demonstrated, a native of any village in the VIDCO is eligible to be allocated land anywhere within the VIDCO's domain. This has evidently resulted in the pattern of increased distance (up to about 5 km.) between homesteads and their lands that characterizes the households of relatively recently married men.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>The last surviving son of each elder--Kapita's son Toda, for example, or Mbizo's son Pikisai--inherits whatever portion of his father's land remains at the time of the latter's death and so has no claim to make on surplus land within the village domain.

<sup>26</sup>The VIDCO comprises six "traditional" villages. Kangesokwe Vidco includes the following villages: Chibayamarangwe, Chipangura, Tazivana, Murota, Mutawa and Mugomeri. While each VIDCO ideally contains 100 families, in Goredema Ward the norm is 200 families.

<sup>27</sup>Only those grandsons of Mharadze who were acquiring land after 1985 did not have their major fields adjacent to, or within 200 metres of, their own homestead. The only exceptions were cases where someone had relinquished rights to land in the village and then returned some years later.

### Land, Residence and Regimentation: The View into the Future

I want to conclude my discussion of the relationship between the evolution of village form and the process of land allocation by looking more broadly at what has changed since Chisunga and Mharadze were hunting and cultivating the land of southeastern Goredema with hoes. In the time of these recent ancestors, villages took shape on the model of households to which senior men attracted wives and sons-in-laws.<sup>28</sup> Now that model has been superseded as village committees have been converted--not always willingly--into local agents of state control.

In comparison to the heavily regimented villagization schemes carried out elsewhere in Zimbabwe during the middle decades of the century, it is only recently that state structures have directly seized hold of the process of resource allocation in the villages of Goredema and in most parts of Gokwe as a whole. The new VIDCOs charged with allocating land were being staffed by middle-aged, educated men, and it seemed clear that sooner or later this accretion in power by the younger generation would come into open conflict with the old prerogatives of elders. But as we shall see, any solidarity among elders was threatened by the fracturing of identities along religious lines.

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<sup>28</sup>There are many interesting parallels here with patterns of residence among the "Goba" north of the Zambezi, who give equal recognition to the line of descent from both mother and father. See Lancaster (1981).

During our stay in Tazivana village we heard discussions about moving the homesteads of the VIDCO into a line, about fencing off the grazing area from cultivated fields, and even about the extension of the electricity lines from Gokwe before the end of the century. Kangesokwe VIDCO had been selected as the demonstration VIDCO for the drawing up of a comprehensive land use plan by the RAE0, one that would incorporate demographic and economic data collected by the VIDCO itself. Had we stayed longer, we would have lent assistance to this project. But in the meantime, all was in flux. Some middle-aged men, hungry for land in which to expand, were defying the authority of the VIDCO and cutting fields in areas that were designated for grazing only. The younger grandsons of Mharadze--young men such as Obert--were clearing and cultivating their first fields in hilly areas on the escarpment, sometimes nearly an hour's walk from their home.

The dilemma for these young men was a dilemma that arose from the intersection between different dimensions of time, and different systems of power. The dynamics of intergenerational time suggested that eventually, the lands of the fathers would devolve upon their sons.<sup>29</sup> The large cotton harvests that these young men saw being realized on these fields made it tempting for them to raise some cotton on

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<sup>29</sup>Musavaya, the eldest grandson of Mharadze, had managed to accrue some 16 hectares of land, as he demanded new land to provide for his wives and children, and as his aging father Kapita gave over more of his land to his eldest son.

their own peripheral plots, marry, and then wait their turn to receive the more choice areas. But at the same time they also could see the VIDCO building in strength as a regulatory institution--one that would be likely to restrict the opening up of any new lands, and control the use of existing lands in various ways, such as enforcing the restriction on riverbank cultivation. This made an adventurous foray into the northern Gokwe frontier a temptation as well.

In the next chapter I will continue to look at the way in which intergenerational dynamics such as these are implicated in agrarian change. My focus will be on the relationship between the evolution of household form, the annual farming cycle, and the labour process centred around cotton. But my discussion will be set against a more abstract discussion of how these and other processes are intertwined in different kinds of time.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE WORK OF COTTON NEVER ENDS: AGRARIAN LABOUR AS TIME, PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

"Time, time!" Mbano muttered in a tense voice unlike any I had heard issue from him before. He used the English word. We were standing in the open courtyard next to the frame of poles that the empty jute cotton bales would eventually be fitted over for filling. Mbano was preparing to hike up the escarpment to catch the bus into Gokwe town where he had a meeting to attend on the organization of the District Agricultural Show (he chaired the committee in charge). Why had time suddenly become a concern? What kind of time did he mean? (Journal Entry, 11 April 1989).

At this time [the turn of the nineteenth century] the image of history as a uniform process that generates problems is formed, and time becomes experienced as a scarce resource for the mastery of problems that arise--that is, as the pressure of time (Habermas 1987:6).

#### Time, Labour and Modernity

The consciousness of time as a unidimensional, quantifiable resource, and the experience of abstract time as a pressured space within which an individual's life plans must be realized, lies at the heart of the condition of modernity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>As Bender and Wellbery (1991:1) write in their recent introduction to wide-ranging collection of views on the subject, "This temporalization of experience--this notion of time as the framework within which life forms are embedded and carry on their existence--is the defining quality of the modern world."

The reformulation of the relationship between time and labour seems to measure with particular acuity the difference between the modern epoch and all those that have preceded it, just as its continuous refashioning through what Harvey (1989) has called "time-space compression" under post-Fordist forms of capitalist organization seems to undergird the postmodern future all humans are fast coming to inhabit. This is why Mbano's reference to "time" that April afternoon caught my attention: it seemed oddly indicative of a modern situation, one in which the "zealous husbandry of time" (Thompson 1967:89) becomes the governing prescription for the conduct of daily life. Not only was Mbano's language of time in this instance my language, but it seemed to anticipate my own estimation of the temporal crisis besetting his entire agrarian enterprise: the maize was due to be cut and stacked, school fees were long overdue and could only be paid with the early cotton gleanings, and Mbano seemed to be overly committed to numerous "official" duties that had little bearing on the success of this year's harvest. This last set of commitments seemed designed to pay him returns in the long-run by increasing his call on sources of patronage--wealthy men who might offer loans of money or cattle; but for the time being such obligations seemed merely to be making claims on his increasingly scarce apportionment of time. In my judgement, he seemed to have dug himself into something of a hole, one in which Time and Money seemed increasingly

interdependent, the loss of one entailing the loss of the other (buying time and losing it being, in my cultural universe, the converse of one another).

Perhaps Mbano was as cognizant of this predicament as I was. Perhaps the equation between the expenditure of time and the value of labour was a percept that guided him at every step as he made decisions about how to manage his farm in relation to the labour-time required to make it productive. Perhaps, too, this set him and his family apart from some others in the village who had not yet grasped the modern fact that time is money--elders such as his father Kapita, or even contemporaries such as his half-brother Hengrijohn, who would absent himself for days at a time at distant beer-parties while the cotton fields cried out for weeding.

But this would be a narrow reading of the potential ways or dimensions of living through time, and labouring in time, that existed as existential possibilities in and beyond the village. Mbano, I now think, is not fruitfully understood as an awkwardly modern man striving to overcome the constraints of the traditional milieu in which he had been raised; nor is Hengrijohn best seen as an anachronism, a man who imagines he lives in an insular pre-capitalist universe. The accounting of time in terms of uniform, quantifiable values had, after all, been a universal component of the early biography of persons in their parent's generation, women and men who had received money for their time from white employers in



Bulawayo, Kadoma and Chakari. For these elders, the relationship between time conceived as a quantity and labour conceived as the duration of effort was cemented in the very form of the wage contracts they submitted to (such as the infamous ticket system of wage payment)<sup>2</sup> as migrant labourers on the mines and farms in the early decades of the century.

The idea that units of labour-time might be equated with money was thus nothing new in the collective repertoire of village experience. But for some reason it had never been applied as a strategy to the remuneration of agrarian labour in the village itself, even after twenty years of expanding involvement in cotton production. The fact remained that although wage-labour certainly existed within the village, it was never paid in units of time.<sup>3</sup> A kind of selectivity

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<sup>2</sup>Under this system a ticket was issued only after the completion of a complete day's labour, and no payment was issued until thirty tickets had been earned. The system persists, albeit illegally, on some commercial farms in Zimbabwe to this day.

<sup>3</sup>Elsewhere in Gokwe, it was, although rarely. In our survey, only 15 out of the 210 households we interviewed hired permanent labourers on a monthly basis. All of these had regular sources of off-farm income. As Mbano's older brother Musavaya put it, "How can I pay a boy to work for me at a minimum wage of \$105 per month, when I myself only get one check per year?" Of course from another point of view, when labour is rewarded according to the task accomplished ("piece-work"), more value is extracted from the worker per unit time. In the industrialized world, remuneration by unit time represents a victory for the working class since it puts the onus of increasing the productivity of labour on management. In agrarian systems, where variability in the content and timing of tasks is the rule, remuneration by unit time is only feasible under conditions of extreme coercion or when labour is very scarce and must be attracted with guarantees of security.

seemed to be applied at the level of the community as a whole, such that some ways of modelling the relation between time and labour were brought into play as forms for the organization of labour more often than others, and some were not permissible at all even though they were not in any sense "unknown" to the actors involved.

Still, it was clear to me from the start that relations of labour exchange or purchase were not best understood at the level of community "norms," even though these were sometimes invoked in justification of various forms of labour reciprocity (through statements such as, "this is how we do things" or "this is our customary practice" [*nditsika yedu*]). There were two reasons for my doubts on this score. One was that even closely related individuals--Mbano and his half-brother, Hengrijohn, for example--had very different things to say about what was a good or a bad way of working the land and working with others. Their different location in the social landscape of the village implied different (and not always consistent) ways of making statements about their commitments and beliefs through their own practices: refusing to accept an invitation to a work party, for instance, or ignoring injunctions against working on the *chisi* days devoted to the spirits of the ancestors.

Such practices did more than announce a moral position, however; they served, from the point of view of the individuals involved, to continually recreate some social

relationships while attenuating others. This presented me with another analytical and interpretive puzzle, since these individual projects of making and breaking relations were, at another level, aggregating in a variety of social forms of bewildering variety. How could I grasp the way in which dozens of social actors, each differently positioned in an agrarian community, and yet all linked in various ways to one another (indeed, recreating those links all the time), choreograph and contest the dance of power, labour and time?

Because people in Gokwe seem in a *prima facie* way to divide their agricultural labour time between their own fields and the fields of others, it is tempting to portray the movements in this dance in terms of an oscillation between the two poles of a familiar Western folk dichotomy. I have in mind the dichotomy that opposes competitive individualism (in which the rational pursuit of economic rewards are paramount) to cooperative sociality (through which various social goals are held to be met). Thus the ability of individual actors to utilize time so as to optimize the achievement of private goals might be seen as being constrained by collectively imposed obligations--the power over the allocation of individual time held by society as a whole or some privileged sub-sector thereof. Alternatively, the private use of time by individuals might be seen as anathema to the achievement of collective ends.

The contrast made between these two "orientations" or

"guiding principles" of human behaviour has, of course, served as a keynote focusing efforts to morally evaluate, and often to naturalize, capitalist social relations (Polanyi 1944; Thompson 1963). The thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, embodied in the work of Hobbes and Locke, through Adam Smith to the Utilitarians, is still very much with us in this respect: derivative assumptions about universal propensities in human behaviour and their wider social effects underlie many analytical strategies that seek to explicate "decision-making" in terms that oppose "choice" (located in the individual and conceived to be naturally free) to "constraint" (located in collective norms and conceived to be social inventions).

This analytical frame has, at least implicitly, organized a good deal of research concerned with the fate of collective forms of agrarian labour organization under conditions of "commoditization"--i.e., when both the products of agricultural labour and labour itself are increasingly being sold for cash. Thus Barth (1967) argued that festive work parties in Darfur (Sudan) had become covert mechanisms for the pursuit of individual gain. Along the same lines, Uchendu (1970) argued that,

The behaviour of a work group membership may best be approached through a transactional model--a simple and general model to analyse an aggregate of people making choice in an environment of certain constraints and incentives. Our model assumes that work group membership involves a relationship in which there is a flow and counter-flow of prestations (labour and hospitality). This we may

call transaction--the sequences of interactions which are governed by reciprocity. To sustain the relationship, each participant must act or rather assume that the value of prestations gained is greater or equal to the value lost (Uchendu 1970:259-60).

There is no doubt that this is how some people in the village construed things, at least some of the time. Masiras, in particular, had expressed to me on numerous occasions his disaffection with having to share either his time or his assets (especially his cattle) with his parents and uterine brothers. The contrast between selfish and altruistic motives is hardly absent in the cultural discourse of rural Gokweans either, and thus not unique either to "Western thought" or "capitalist ideology," however falsely uniform these are taken to be. As a prominent feature in Shona folklore and in pragmatic discourse (in the everyday socialization of children, for example) it is a theme that should be given due place in any interpretation of indigenous constructions of the relationship between labour and time.

It was Weber (1958) who decisively shifted the focus from such postulated universals to the more contingent relationship between culture and history. In his effort to demonstrate an "elective affinity" between the Protestant ethic of worldly work in the pursuit of personal salvation and the capitalist transformation of Europe and America, Weber opened the door to a cultural account of the accounting methods applied to labour-time under capitalism. Thus Benjamin Franklin's maxim, Time is Money, is adduced by Weber not as the pronouncement of

some universal truth, but as evidence of a historical shift in cultural perspective.

There is a related construction that recurs in modernist discourse, however, that resonates less harmoniously with cultural formulations in Gokwe, and here I have in mind the concept of alienated labour (cf. Strathern 1988:151-9). The conception of labour as an alienable capacity of the individual depends upon the conceptual possibility of possessing time as a property-like resource (see Chapter III, above); as the least tangible, yet most personal form of private property, labour may, in this construction, be safeguarded for use by and for oneself, or yielded up to society in a variety of forms: as a gift intended to generate an obligation; as an exchange or sale that receives recompense either immediately or over time; as a sign of submission or loyalty to authority; or as a means of allaying a social or physical threat.

Is the model of labour as an alienable substance or property the most appropriate way to capture the way our hosts thought about the disposal of their labour in time? The model seemed appropriate enough to the relations established by shop and lorry-owners like Mukomboreri and Chifambi, who hired labour on a monthly salary to operate their enterprises. It seemed reasonable that these rural capitalists would regard time differently, more quantitatively and fetishistically, than the villagers whose cotton they purchased or transported.

Was Mbano starting to think like these capitalist traders? Could that be what his anxious mutterings about "time" really signified? In this chapter and in the next, I want to complicate this question, since it betrays an overly simplistic view of the relationship between time, labour and modernity. As long as these three elements are seen as fitting together in a unique cluster of values and behavioural orientations that in some way "enable" capitalist forms of production and commodity exchange, then we are tempted to see everything else residually, as an obstacle or objection to change. What is missed is the sense in which agrarian practice in Gokwe is constituted out of argued alternatives and signifying performances.

### **Chronotypes: Labouring in Time**

If we think of labour as a dialectic between social practice and nature, then the key mediating factors in this relationship are knowledge and time. Nature, apprehended through cultural representations and appropriated through culturally conceived strategies, provides the parameters for planning through time in all agrarian regimes (not excluding the "artificial" hydroponic production of vegetables that has recently found a place in North American agribusiness). In a place like Gokwe, where rainfall and temperature vary sharply with the seasons (and even then, fluctuating uncertainly within seasons) and where people depend entirely upon the rain to provide moisture for the production of their upland staple

crops, these parameters are both more irregular in time and more autonomous in relation to living human agents. The timing of natural events--the first soaking rain, a mid-January dry spell, a flood in March--impedes some activities and adds a unique urgency to others. Intention and action in agrarian practice are thus always being delayed or forced by the presence or absence of natural conditions. But they are simultaneously moulded by the social forms and relations that, as Durkheim rightly observed a century ago, prefigure the possibilities of a human encounter with nature in the first place. Such forms and relations, as Bourdieu (1977) has argued, are realized as strategies in time-- that is, in the conscious variations on the tempo according to which social transactions are completed, and social relationships constituted. The process of rural class formation or gender inequality, conceived in recent Marxist anthropology in terms of control over the means of production and reproduction, is thus not only realized through power over the distribution of resources, but even more crucially, through the exercise of power over the deployment of time. It is for this reason that I wish to direct my attention in this chapter to social processes in which tempo itself is both an object and a means of contestation.

Such processes might include the following: the order of task completion in a single phase of crop production; the rules invoked and rhythms established by which labour is



divided and redivided in relation to different tasks, and the order in which tasks specific to different crops are interdigitated over the course of a growing season; the pace at which bridewealth obligations are fulfilled or "damages" for elopement or adultery paid; the timing of the devolution of spatial and managerial autonomy to the household of a son.<sup>4</sup>

These disparate arenas in which time and labour are contested might be understood as alternative and overlapping "rhythmic structures" (Guyer 1988) that impinge upon the organization and experience of agrarian labour as a temporally-bound process.

#### Time Between the Generations

While agrarian practice is framed by the annual cycle of seasons (see below), people invest their labour and strategically bring resources to bear on production in view of endowments they feel they have received from their own ancestors and which they anticipate leaving with their children, in relation to whom, they will one day stand as ancestors themselves. The ideals that are shaped by such a transgenerational view of time are of course often unrealized.

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<sup>4</sup>The classic literature on the structure of African domestic groups, conceived of as a series of processes or transformations through time, begins with Evans-Pritchard (1940), Fortes (1970[1949]), and Goody (1958). More recent studies, e.g., by Parkin (1972), Murray (1981), Berry (1985), Guyer (1988) and Heald (1991), examine these processes in terms of their embeddedness in a wider political economy that engages local, regional, and international processes of change.

They are broken by the intrusion of unpredictable events--of which war, famine and premature death are only the most dramatic, and divorce, drought and unresolved debt the more common if less consequential. Moreover, over the past three decades, there have been a proliferation of alternative models which propose different ideals altogether.

Thus in Tazivana village the sons of men who had converted to the Apostolic faith in the 1960s were now looking for eligible young Apostolic women to marry, only to discover that the men in their father's generation had already married all such women, having exchanged daughters with one another as additional wives. While most Apostolic elders thus had accumulated at least five wives, their sons were virtually deprived of the possibility of marriage within the church altogether. Amidst much acrimony, many were leaving the faith, and sometimes even seeking to leave the area.

The following two cases explore some of the dynamics involved. The first involves Chiposhi, the powerful headman of the village to the east of Tazivana, and someone whom Mbano sought out constantly as a patron. We had been told that Chiposhi had been a drunk until his conversion to the Apostolic faith in 1976; at that time, he moved west of the Kaongo river where he wanted to secure land for his sons. He subsequently became an innovative and relatively wealthy farmer, harvesting an average of over 40 bales of cotton in each of the last three seasons. The story of his most recent

efforts to marry additional wives shows not only the trajectory of tension between Apostolic elders and their sons, but also how pan-village institutions are still called upon to mediate disputes over marriage exchanges that involve people from both within and outside of the Apostolic church:

**Journal Entry: 3 December 1988**

We visited Chiposhi yesterday afternoon to return a borrowed spanner (I had borrowed it from the Dubes next door) and found his two youngest wives pounding *upfu* in the *duri*--we mistook them for his daughters since they appeared to be, at best, 14 and probably 12 years old--one having come from Gwebo, the other having been "given freely" by her father in Chireya. The eldest wife--Mai Anthony, apparently has been less than cooperative since her husband went fishing for these young girls, and threatened to take her children and move out if she found some means of supporting herself. A second wife, from Chibayamarangwe, was not present. We managed to embarrass all concerned [not recognizing that hand-pounding maize is one of the first tasks a new wife is required to perform for her agnates]. First, Gul Rukh called out to them, "*Vasikana, ndipewo mvura!*" ["Young girls, please bring me some water!"]. The elder wife burst out laughing sarcastically, then covered up by saying, "*Anogona Chishona!*" ["She can really speak Shona!"] Then I innocently asked what grade the girls were completing in school--prompting Chiposhi to shuffle and stammer that, no, they were not going to school, and left it at that.

We had learned earlier that there had been a three-way contest between Anthony, his father (Chiposhi), and Sinyoro's father (Nzeve) for another girl (a daughter of Putemende). Anthony, having proposed love first it seems, was denied permission to marry her by his father, who had the same intention. Meanwhile, Nzeve had tricked the girl by using an intermediary to give the girl instalments of money that came from him, but which she thought came from his wife, a relative of hers (father's sister?). She refused to marry Nzeve when he made an offer, but he simply said, "I have paid you--you may return the money or else come to live with me." Her parents insisted she go, but Anthony

decided to take Nzeve to court over the issue; he was subsequently given permission to pay off Nzeve himself by the chief's court [and take the girl for his own wife], but was once again denied permission by his father to do so. Meanwhile, the girl went to stay with Nzeve, but refused to "cooperate" with him. He beat her, and she ran back to her home. This time her parents summoned Nzeve to judgement, since Nzeve had approached them directly, without using a *munyai* or go-between, to claim the girl back. Nzeve was required to pay one head of cattle by the village dare. Unfortunately, the girl was by this time already pregnant, and has, for some reason returned to Nzeve's home. Anthony apparently can still claim both mother and child if he gathers his father's consent. But the friction between father and son is obviously great--Anthony is not speaking to him, though we found him building his own hut in his father's compound--pole and *dhaka* with lovely long-grass thatching.

Chiposhi chased out his first son, Mandeko, for having joined the army which is interdicted by the Apostolic faith. These obvious manifestations of gerontocratic authority help account for Anthony's earlier remark that the Apostolic Church is "only interesting for married men." Obert predicts he will either leave the Church altogether or else impregnate a girl, thereby obligating his father to pay compensation ("the case will be taken to the father").

The series of "rules" that are applied in such a case can be bewilderingly complex, as the tactics chosen by each party may choose from several alternative menus of "tradition" to reinforce their claims. The second case involves Samson, the second eldest son of Bvumira:

**Journal Entry, 3 December 1988**

Samson, married two months ago to a girl with three O-levels, and thus considerably better educated than he is himself, managed somehow to circumvent this kind of patriarchal domination, probably because his father has given up on marrying again, having been rejected by his third and last wife. Samson met the girl at a regional meeting of *Vapostori* in Kana--such meetings being one reason

why Vapostori have at least potentially, a wider, more geographically dispersed network of available marriage partners. Her parents, not surprisingly, opposed the marriage, but through the good offices of Hepson who went to pay the amount to "open the mouth" (*kushama muromo*)--\$20--she has been permitted to remain with Samson. The bridewealth in total, however, will amount to \$400-\$500.

Hepson's good offices as *munyai* proved to be less reliable on subsequent occasions. He "ate" the next instalment of bridewealth himself instead of passing it on to Samson's father-in-law. After the latter came storming through the village loudly demanding his due to everyone who would listen, Samson's elderly father, now humiliated, came to me to borrow the money. In this case, it was more important for Samson's father to uphold his dignity by fulfilling bridewealth obligations on his son's behalf, than to spite his son and refuse to help him.

#### Identities in a Lifetime

To speak of time within a generation is to speak at once about the biography or life-course of individuals and at the same time about the relation between a set of siblings or age-mates defined against similar sets that either preceded it in the past (such as parents and grandparents) and those that will succeed it in the future (such as children and grandchildren). In Gokwe, as in other Shona-speaking areas, there are no ritualized ways (such as initiation rites) of marking time-shifts in the lives either of individuals or of categories of age-mates (although, as I have mentioned, a new

generation-based corporation has been introduced by the men of Musavaya's generation). For the most part, a person's life-course is socially unmarked and fluid. Marriage itself unfolds as an open-ended series of transactions that serve to bind affines over time--either through the transfer of labour or the transfer of gifts in the form (today) of clothes, cattle and money. Status shifts for both women and men are marked only by the birth of children, the parents being colloquially referred to in terms of their relation to their first, last or perhaps favourite child (e.g., Mai Dzorai, mother of Dzorai). One's identity in the life-course is established not in terms of physical maturity or social achievements, but relationally, through, for example, practices of reference or deference to others that serve to differentiate speaker and referent as generationally distinct.

Thus relative birth-order among agnates (persons related through the male line) is acknowledged by kin terms<sup>5</sup>: while father, father's brothers and father's male parallel cousins (e.g., father's father's brother's son) are all called *baba*, qualifiers are added that recognize relative birth order, and hence rank, relative to one's actual father. (*Baba mudiki*, "little father," refers to a classificatory father younger than one's own, and *baba mukuru*, "big father," refers to one older than one's own.) Terminology for mother's patrikin, on

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<sup>5</sup>In classic anthropological discourse, the Shona system of kin terminology belongs to a sub-variety of the Omaha type.

the other hand, disregards generational differences entirely. Every male member of the mother's patrilineage is called "grandfather" (*sekuru*) and all females related this way are known as "mother" (*amai*).

Why should male and female matrikin be differently located in generational time? Radcliffe-Brown's (1950:35) classic, if somewhat implausible, discussion of this problem took Shona kin terms as an exemplary case; he suggested that a core model of behavioural norms toward one's mother and father structures all other relationships in the system. The father is to be treated with formality and deference; by extension, all male, and to a lesser extent female, agnates in the father's generation should also be so treated. Alternating generations of agnates, in contrast, may treat one another affectionately and with considerable equality (signified by the reciprocal terms for "grandparent/grandchild": *sekuru/muzukuru*). The mother, and by extension her entire lineage, on the other hand, are expected to be nurturant and sympathetic. Relations toward the mother's siblings group are like that with the mother: the mother's brother to the extent that the mother's brother is a unique ally and source of aid throughout ego's life as are other classificatory *sekurus* to a lesser extent.

This explanation gives priority to the distinctive norms governing parent-child relations over the effects of the kin terms themselves in structuring relations. But speech acts

themselves have potent effects. To call anyone *muzukuru* ("sister's son"/"grandchild"), is to suggest familiarity and mutuality as opposed to social distance and exploitation. In those parts of Gokwe where people hire semi-permanent employees, *muzukuru* is the term commonly used to refer to an unrelated person who has been hired to herd cattle for a monthly salary.<sup>6</sup>

#### Daily Time and Domestic Routine

I recall the pleasure I experienced at learning some of the Shona terms marking the passage of the day: *mashambanzou*, "when elephants wash" (just before dawn); or *zuva runanzwa makomo*, "when the sun licks the hills" (sunset). These expressions I took to be quaint vestiges of a life governed by the movements of nature rather than the stiff mechanical motion of the clock. To my disappointment, I rarely heard such phrases used in the village. In the years immediately preceding our fieldwork, the neighbouring country of Botswana had developed a formidable light manufacturing sector, whose chief product of interest to the mass of Zimbabwean consumers

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<sup>6</sup>Particularly in the context of minimum wage laws introduced after Independence that (in theory) should raise the salaries of such persons by 200-300 percent, the stress laid on kinship and mutual interest implied by framing the relationship in this way serves to exclude the interests of the state in governing its terms. It is even possible, though I think unlikely, that casting wage relations in terms of fictive kinship originated in the experience of migrant labour. Even today, white employers-- for whom informal patronage rather than state-protected contract has served as the most suitable model for relations with their black employees--often call their mature employees *sekuru*.



was the cheap digital watch. Young men often owned such watches and used them to refer to the hour. When I would enquire as to the time at which a given meeting was to occur, Mbanu often would say "Ten O'Clock. That is our special time." Such meetings--whether of the village dare, or court, or of the VIDCO or of an agricultural group--rarely got underway before noon, however. The "special time" in fact comprehended the entire interval of about two or three hours following morning tea.

Time intervals within the day were starkly gendered: few women owned watches or ever attended meetings that might have nominal clock-times attached to them. When asked when an event had or would occur during the course of the day, Mai Dzorai or Mai Wanda typically made a deictic gesture, extending an arm at an angle to the ground and saying, *zuva radai*, "when the sun is like this." Yet in many respects a woman's day was more decisively broken into a relatively fixed sequence of tasks that anchored intervals of time much more firmly than for men. The following tasks punctuated the days of virtually every married woman without significant seasonal variation: sweeping the sleeping hut, kitchen hut, and yard at dawn; gathering firewood and lighting the fire; dressing one's children; going to the well or borehole for water; preparing morning tea; preparing the afternoon *sadza* (maize porridge) and *usavi* (a relish of vegetables or meat); fetching water once again; preparing evening *sadza* and *usavi*; and finally,

washing pots, one's own children, and oneself before going to bed. Additional tasks performed for one's husband (setting out wash water, for example) would obtrude into this schedule with a frequency determined by the number of one's co-wives and the organization of their work rotation.

For some time, I tried to gauge through observation a set of consistent rules that governed the way in which domestic labour was deployed, but this proved to be a futile exercise, since each household seemed to have evolved its own routine. Most of the older generation had known the model under which Mharadze's household had been organized. This is how Mai Obert described it:

We lived at one home. They [the seven wives of my father] pounded meal, cooked *sadza* [stiff porridge], we eating at one place only. Like that, yes, they cooked... Each [wife] had her own hearth: there was a little one there, one there, and so on. But we all ate our *sadza* together in one place. When the *sadza* had been cooked, it would be brought outside into one place where we would eat it. Our mother would take her own food and go join the other wives and eat with them. We children would eat together by ourselves. Each wife would cook her own *usavi* [relish] and she would bring it together with her own *sadza*...When our father killed [an animal], the meat would be put in a clay pot like this [showing its dimensions with her hands]! Then it would be set on the fire until it was cooked. We would go with our plates and be given the meat there and we would return to our place and eat. This is how it was when there was meat; if there was just *muriwo* [vegetables, usually greens] you would cook for yourself.

The organization of domestic labour in the households of Mharadze's children and grandchildren was sometimes a variation on this model, and sometimes a departure from it:

**Journal Entry, 3 December 1988**

Yesterday when we visited Tazivana to complete our interview with him, we were served a special lunch: his elder wife, Mai Prinos, offered *ishwa* (fried, flying termites) as relish. But upon discovering that none of us ate them, Obert included, she substituted a bowl of *derere* [wild greens with a slippery texture]. *Sadza rodzvura* [sadza made from hand-pounded maize-meal] was presented in separate bowls by the younger wife (Mai Fadha) and another by one of Tazivana's son's wives--Kantumika's perhaps? Obert commented that in the house of some polygamists, the man is served *usavi* from the kitchen of every one of the wives in the *dare* [men's area in the courtyard]--where he is joined by even very young boys; and he must eat enthusiastically from the *usavi* and *sadza* given by each--lest one be offended and fail to give him any on a day when the others are absent.

Mugomeri is apparently the only man that maintains this "traditional" system--perhaps because he is an heir to the chieftainship. What is surprising is the variety of organizational forms--both for purposes of production and commensality--that have evolved among polygamous households in Tazivana village alone. Obert's household, for example, presents an unusual case of a senior man (Obert's father) who joined the village as a *mukwasha* [son-in-law] and married only once--through *ugarira* or brideservice, when he was relatively old...his wife--a matrilineal descendent (daughter's daughter) of chief Goredema--resisted the marriage but was eventually compelled by Mharadze (her father) who favoured Obert's father a great deal. They had ten children--six of whom died in childhood or infancy --leaving four boys. The eldest surviving child, Aleck, ran away from school along with Prinos the very first day they attended. He married three times-- perhaps because he was raised under the influence of his grandfather who had at least seven wives.

The eldest wife initially shared a kitchen with her mother-in-law, but when Aleck married the other two, his mother said to the first, "now you are grown up and must have your own kitchen." The mother then appointed the two junior wives as her help-mates, that they would be responsible primarily for feeding her husband and sons (as well as their own children). But when she was absent

Aleck's first wife would act as her stand-in and the younger wives would assist the senior wife in her own kitchen. The eldest wife is always responsible for reserving food for Aleck if he is away at meal-time--in the case of the other unmarried sons, they may choose among themselves who is to be responsible.

We have yet to see Mapitse's home, but there, the eleven wives share a common kitchen ("the pots are very big") and each wife is delegated a sphere of responsibility, or of provisioning. One has salt, another soap and so on. We will learn more about this in time. Vapostori men as a rule seem to organize the work-time of wives rather closely. This is facilitated by the interdictions of the Church itself--for whom cooperation and obedience among wives is unequivocally prescribed; as well as the process of socialization of girls from an early age into the church, the early age of marriage, and the ideal of marrying sisters.

Mapitse, the recently elected WADCO chairman who lived on the western side of Goredema across the *jese*, or highland bush area that formed our VIDCO's eastern border, was a *Mupostori* and had the largest household in the ward. A man of unrivalled charisma, Mapitse's own overwhelming self-confidence was bolstered as much by the modern aviator glasses he wore, as by the tremendous biceps that bulged ominously through the short sleeves of his blindingly white shirts. He had married a twelfth wife by the time we paid him a visit, and professed interest in marrying twenty.

In other households, such as Musavaya's, the six wives rotated cooking duties, so that one wife remained home from the fields the entire day in the kitchen preparing meals for all. There was nothing fixed about the qualitative performance of these tasks, since this could vary enormously

from day to day and required a capacity to improvise continuously--when children were sick, when relatives unexpectedly arrived, when torrential rains inhibited any movement beyond the homestead and so on. Other variations depended upon tasks of equal regularity but somewhat greater intermittency: thus, for a mother with several young children, washing clothes might occupy an entire morning at the borehole once a week; one who has older daughters will be able to transfer some of these duties to them; a grandmother with a resident daughter-in-law will relinquish such tasks altogether.

Technological changes that impinge on the village from without have altered the daily round of women's domestic labour as well. Nothing has changed the structure of daily time for women so much as the local availability of the grinding mill since that has displaced perhaps two hours of pounding grain daily, substituting a single, weekly two-hour round trip (for women from Tazivana village) with a headload of maize. During 1978-79, when the liberation war arrived in Goredema, the entire community secreted itself in the bush on the northern escarpment and these routines acquired an altogether different content. In the terrible drought of 1983-84 (and probably as I write today), women were called upon to disperse for much of the day in search of wild grass seed to pound by hand into meal. The organization of the day is thus itself partially structured by other orders of time--

ranging from the changing shape of the polygynous family over time (what is often known as its "developmental cycle") to the less predictable intrusions of weather and war.

#### **Time of the Seasons: The Qualities of Agrarian Labour**

The most characteristic feature of agrarian life anywhere is its adherence to the annual cycle of the seasons. Ironically, the experience of seasonal time in relation to work in Gokwe was familiar to me, being broadly similar to that experienced by an urban academic in the Northern Hemisphere. Work is required with relentless intensity from the early ploughing before the rains in September until the harvest begins to taper off in June; between late November and early March, the depressing monotony of weeding by hand, hoe, and cultivator is broken by Christmas festivities at the township. These are the hungry months, when granaries run low and the only *usavi* often consists of *derere*--the wild leaves that are boiled into a slippery green stew. But the distribution of time and task over the season has changed dramatically over the longer time frame in which new crops have been adopted. This has been a continuous process, centuries old, and it is one that continually creates new cross-rhythms that overlay the schedule of labour operations on existing crops.

#### Hunting and Hoeing: Labour Processes before 1950

Virtually every man who is indigenous to Goredema recalls

that agriculture was subordinate to hunting in importance, although this may reflect the nostalgia of elder males for the prestige brought by hunting, and thus overemphasize its practical contribution to subsistence. Hunting was organized in male groups under the leadership of a skilled and knowledgeable practitioner. Agricultural tasks were, in contrast, primarily the domain of women, although men would initially cut the trees, pile the dried timber around the stumps and burn it as a prelude to cultivation. The organization of agricultural labour and even the severity with which this ideal sexual division of labour was applied, depended upon the founding conditions of the conjugal couple at the start of their life cycle as a unit of reproduction and production. If they began by residing with the wife's father, their labour would be entirely subordinated to him for a period of several years. This would limit the extent to which the husband could pursue a career of household expansion by contracting multiple marriages. If, on the other hand, the husband's father was able to pay bridewealth, enabling the couple to reside virilocally, their labour would periodically be at the disposal of the father's household.

It should be emphasized here, as it so often was by our informants, that in comparison to today, people relied far less on cultivated cereals for subsistence. While their production took place on a very small scale on patches of riverine land, the intensity of labour was relatively great

and more individualised in nature. As Obert's mother told us,

Long ago we were farming so as to get the food which was fit to our living in small quantities. Only that our work was to look for food only. [kusunza: to barter for food or search for food.] We were not yet farming in the way we are today.

We planted crops like maize [*chibage*], sorghum (*mapfunde*) and bullrush millet [*mhunga*]. This is what we planted. That tall white sorghum known as *donga*, yes we planted that...and maize and millet, too. No! We began to see other kinds of sorghum such as red sorghum. And we also began to see others such as *cheta* and *kakadzidzoka*. Ah! We didn't know these kinds then. Things were different, different because these new kinds we are now buying from the store. But at that time, provided we harvested, we would eat. Every year, that is what we would plant again, every year. Nowadays if we are to plant we must go to buy other seed and then plant it. Long ago we were not doing it that way. It differed from where we take our seed today. Our seed was mixed--the red mixed with the white which has black spots.

Until the 1950s (when some people first began to experiment with handcrafted wooden ploughs drawn either manually or with donkeys) plots were cleared, burned and planted using hoes--a technique still occasionally practiced by some elders and known as *makaa*. The fields were also cultivated with hoes and by pulling weeds by hand (*kudzura*). At harvest, grain heads were left to dry on the stalks while children guarded them against birds and other predators; then they were cut free (in the case of sorghum and millet) or stripped (in the case of maize) and carried in baskets on the heads of women to the homestead or to temporary shelters in the fields for further processing. Obert's mother describes the labour process this way:



We did not see cattle then. We would cut the bush, and when it was cut, we would burn it. When we had cut the trunks and branches we would gather them together and burn them. We used axes; then we chopped the branches and burnt the heaps. Then we would go and dig holes [makaa] and then plant. We did this in the month of October. This is the time when we began to dig the ground. The rain would come and the seeds would germinate. We would weed. We went with the children, leaving only the very little ones at home.

We were farming with our hands, we were digging holes [tichitema makaa]..we were digging and then covering with our legs...you were just bending your back. That is how we farmed, digging holes with a hoe, then we covered the seeds, then we weeded, yes. My mother was the one hoeing, we, the children, would cast the seeds in the holes behind our mother.

In the case of each of these tasks, the work was first collectively carried out by co-wives on the field of their husband and the produce stored in his granary for his own support and for potential distribution to wives whose own production fell short of their requirements. Subsequently the wives were free to work on their own individual fields with their children.

Each wife had her own fireplace and each had her own little field--all the women had their own little fields and father had his as well. They would go to cultivate father's field. They would go and cultivate in his field and then you were given time to cultivate in your own field...The first harvest was in father's field. His wives would then harvest theirs. At first we were to eat our own harvest. Our father then measured out our shares [vachiita zvokutipimirwa zvanababa], yes, we were given shares of father's harvest: this one for her, that one for her...

In this way, the product of the wives' fields was stored in their own small individually owned granaries, each wife

providing in this way for herself and her children:<sup>7</sup>

[Were there granaries?] Yes, each wife had her own little granary [*kakombana*] where she put her share of grain, after being given her share she would pour it into her little granary. No! We were given our share monthly, at the end of the month another share would be measured out. They measured out the share with large harvesting baskets [*matengu*]. There was nothing like tin buckets for measuring then. We had clay pots [*hari*], but no tins. We cooked in clay pots, some of which were very big, reaching as high as this! These are the pots we used to cook *sadza*; for *usavi* we used little pots like this.

Nobody used to know about grinding mills. We were pounding--even sorghum, we would separate the grain and then grind it on the grinding stone. Everyone had to pound her own grain. That is the way we used to do it. Each [of us daughters] would put hers in her mother's home. When we were children, each of us had to put our own in our mother's house.

We can see from Mai Obert's account how success in contracting marriages through paying *roora* meant, for men who were able to do so, the aggregation of partially dependent female labour. Successful reproduction meant that as a man's sons and daughters were married, he would be able to draw in dependent sons-in-law, through *mugariro* marriages, as well as daughters-in-law (*varoorra*) who could be called upon periodically to collectively work in his field, planting, weeding or perhaps carrying the crops home.

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<sup>7</sup>Meat was shared out by the husband, while gathered foods were the responsibility and property of the wife who collected them.

### From Hoes to Hybrids

Before the widespread adoption of maize in this century, the favoured cereal crop was *donga*, a local millet variety which grows in the flood plain to a height of five metres over a six month growing period. Hybrid maize and sorghum varieties have shortened the period for producing the staple grain down to four months or less, leaving the production of *donga* to the garden plots of elderly women who use it in the preparation of beer or for *sadza* on festive occasions. Cotton, on the other hand, has both crowded in on the tasks required of other crops, and extended the season of field labour well into the winter months of July and August, when the last bolls are being picked, baled and transported, and the stalks must be chopped down with a hoe. *Basa redonje haripere*; "the work of cotton never ends."

The care of large stock that has become a widespread concern only since tse-tse clearance in the late 1950s and 1960s in Goredema, essentially is determined by the positioning of the grazing lands relative to the sown fields. In the VIDCO to which Tazivana village belongs, the grazing lands are consolidated in one area; as a result, livestock can be allowed to graze freely there with minimal supervision. In other areas (such as the VIDCO north of the road) the fields and grazing areas are interlaced, and livestock must be supervised much more intensively (with a much higher frequency of dispute).

In the sections that follow, I record my own experience of the labour tasks associated with cotton from my journal. As members of Moffat Mbano's household, we were swiftly incorporated into the net of labour obligations in which the household was embedded. Most often this involved work on Mbano's own fields, but sometimes also those of his brothers, parents, neighbours and friends.<sup>8</sup>

**Knowledge, Practice and Discipline: The Agrarian Labour  
Process as Experience**

Ploughing

In Gokwe, the long cotton cycle comes to rest in late August when the desiccated stalks of the previous year's crop are chopped down with the hoe, gathered into piles, and fired. Soon after we arrived in the village, the lands were everywhere ablaze with the burning and crackling of the dry cotton. Then there is a hiatus in the agricultural year--the months of September and October. Increasingly hot and windy, these are the months of anticipation when the ground is so hard that those who have not yet winter-ploughed must use two span of cattle to break the rock-like surface of the baked clay soil. And with water and grazing scarce, the cattle are parched and weakened:

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<sup>8</sup>The genealogies already presented (see Figures 10.3 and 10.4, above), as well as Figure 11.1, below, will be helpful in recognizing the people to whom I make reference.

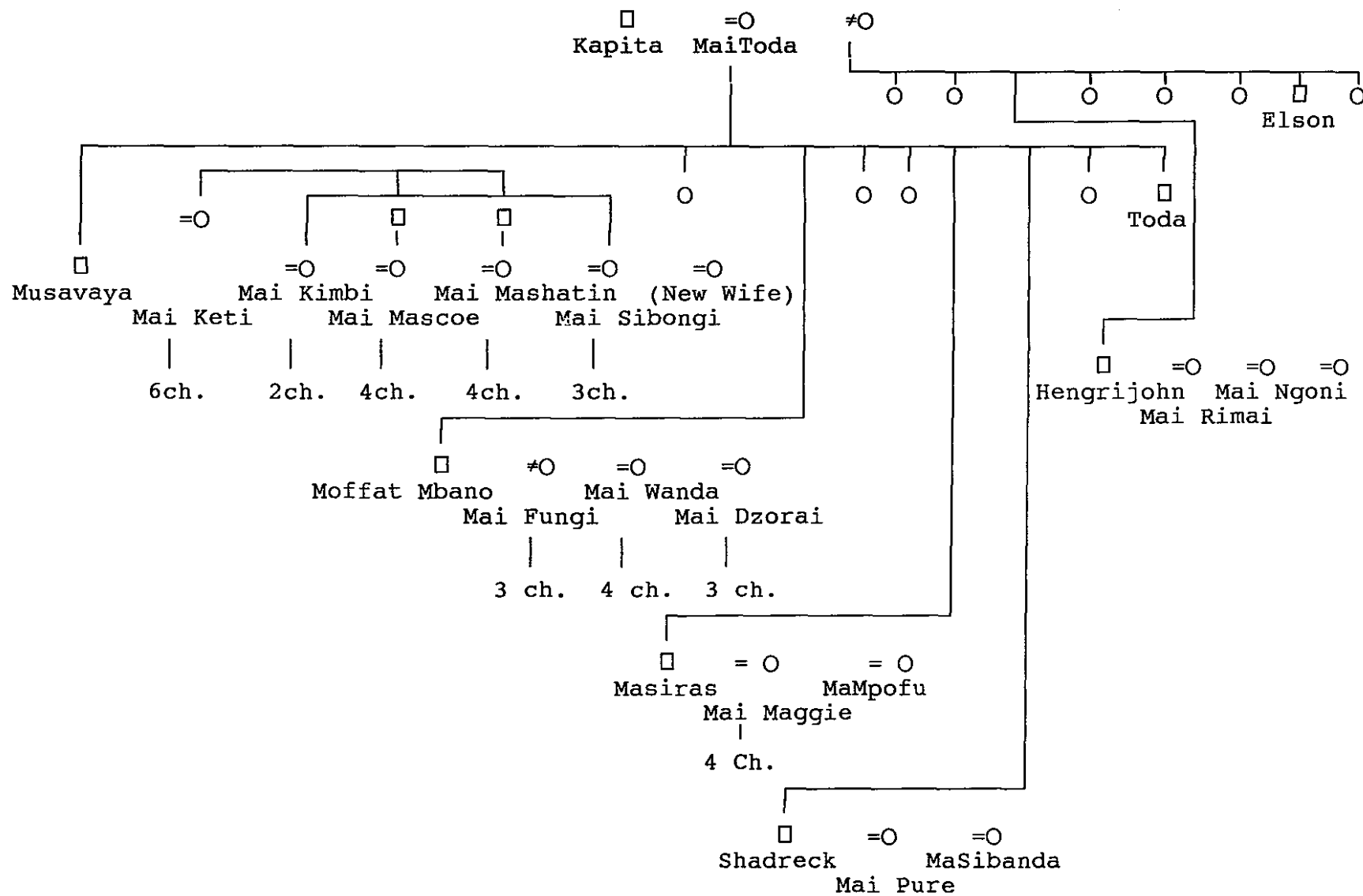


Figure 11.1. Genealogy of Kapita's Family

**Journal Entry, 2 September 1988.**

This morning Mbano and I ploughed what he called a "quarter acre" on the Western ridge. Fungi had already taken the first few furrows and Tawanda was working his way up the rise when I arrived over half an hour before sunrise. The wind was blowing furiously, whipping up storms of dust and ash where the cotton stalks had been burnt the week before. The soil is especially uneven on these slopes, turning from hard-packed or crusty clay into soft pebbles and sand as one is dragged up the incline. The two teams of oxen, led by the ever-worthy Bulawayo--paired with a brown ox named Loam and the errant Champion and Shamgazi behind, struggled from the outset, seeming to be exhausted from the wind, the heat and the desiccation of the grass. We repeatedly hit heavy clods of clay that hung on the ploughshare and brought the oxen grinding to a halt, or jammed up in huge tubers or stalks that seemed to have persisted there in the ground for years. The pace would slacken or increase suddenly with Mbano's sharp whistles and words of almost paternal encouragement to the animals. The oxen lurched downhill, tilting the plough into the old furrow and forcing me to compensate by digging in deep and lifting the handle upright while my right leg was dragged into the deep cleft in the earth; then suddenly we would hit a hard patch, jerking the plough out to skid over the baked clay--then the only chance was to cut in sideways, to lift up clods and turn them over like boulders.

Executing proper turns was most difficult at the top of the ridge where the furrow ends. There was no room to turn without falling down the other side, so the only chance was to dig the share in deep and let the oxen pivot, the chain cutting into the leg of the beast in the inside rear position. At the opposite end, the furrow met the far half of the field, already ploughed, so the oxen seemed always to stop too soon--as soon as their feet entered the already ploughed furrows. There, I would try to lift the plough and pull it taught, letting the tension on the chain drag the plough on its side around and into position for the next furrow, while Mbano shouted in a strange and beautiful singing voice, "Kom Boys!"

Mbano had a special interest in ploughing according to Agritex "standards." For him, the appearance of his field, neatly

contoured and evenly tilled, was a marker of modern agrarian practice, and a visible, aesthetic sign of difference between himself and other farmers. During my apprenticeship with him, he was especially concerned to make this knowledge and this aesthetic known to me, as I recorded after learning to replough lands in the aftermath of the November rains:

**Journal Entry: 25 November 1988**

On the evening of Nov. 21, I helped Mbano to plough along the contour of the maize field just south of the homestead, using Life and Masockisi, two of the largest and better trained oxen around, which belong to Mbizo. Our task was partly to "finish" off the edge of the field properly (it had been ploughed once in April) and to add soil in deep ridges along the contour to hold back the water as it seeks a path down the slope. The technique was to dig the plough in very straight and deep when moving downslope and let the plough in lightly on the upslope (the line of ploughing, needless to say didn't follow the contour of the land fully--this being a strategy to shift steeply sloped soil into depressions at the foot of the slope in order to even out the land. Mbano pointed out that the actual lines drawn would follow the contour much more faithfully and thus contain run-off).

When reploughing land in general the objective is to flatten out the ridges created by the first ploughing (when the blade is allowed to cut in at a sharp angle, breaking clods and cutting through cotton stalks). This is achieved by holding the plough as upright as possible just to the left of the ridge. Turns are made by swinging the plough out into the bush and allowing it to pierce (*bata*) the soil at the very beginning of the new line. The result maximizes the utilization of the land and is more aesthetically pleasing. ("You are there to look behind as you are ploughing and see whether it is nice, if the rows are straight," said Mbano). Mbano favours deep ploughing--he remarked derisively as we passed Gaison's field, that Gaison had failed to set his plough properly and had not trained his boys to plough properly. As a result the depth was only about 4-8 cm.

### Drawing Lines and Planting

When the rains finally come, they do so with a vengeance; but sometimes it is but a tease, a false show of sincerity that tempts farmers to gamble their seed and their labour. This was the case in 1988-89, the year we lived in Tazivana village. Only a few households in the village were able to take advantage of an early rainfall. Everything depended on the quality and diversity of the land one had access to, and to the timing of access one had to animals and labour:

#### **Journal Entry, 27 October 1988**

I am sitting in the bedroom of our new, yet never quite complete house, foot soaking in the *bafu diki* [a small aluminum washtub], the wooden shutter flapping in the merciless sand-wind outside. It is time to take stock. The land was dusted with rain on October 12, then soaked on the 20th, just after we returned from Sai. The formerly obvious roads and footpaths dissolved into rivers of shining mud--the homesteads looking like beautifully preserved ruins, recently excavated and washed by rain. The rains first dampened, then accelerated the intensity of work as the entire village strove to capture the waning energy of the few remaining oxen.

Musavaya was first to draw lines for planting--he claims he always is--and has kept his two eldest sons home from secondary school since July to ensure his preparedness. Then came Kapita's field: lines drawn by Toda [Kapita's youngest son], myself, and Kimbi [Musavaya's son--aged 16] and planted by Kapita's nine daughters-in-law, plus Gul Rukh. Masiras drew lines with his own cattle the previous day (23rd October); then Mbano drew lines with myself, Tawanda (aged 10) and Dzorai (aged six) on Tuesday the 25th. Mbizo and Vitori [two of Kapita's classificatory brothers] apparently have not yet started.

After the first substantial rain--even while it was falling--people avidly discussed the drawing of a few lines



and planting maize in a clear attempt to establish a sort of baseline food security for the household. Maize seed planted in October risks rotting in the ground after 4 days if more rain doesn't come. The furrows are examined carefully to ensure that the moisture has penetrated before planting. The seeds must be covered lest they be eaten by mice and presumably birds; this hastens germination, but also the deterioration of the seed. Cotton, in contrast, can be dry planted, left uncovered and can withstand a longer dry spell before the rains.

The importance of timing in the planting of maize was accentuated by the shortage of draught animals in the village during the year we were there; a large proportion of the total pool of animals died in 1983 and 1987 due to drought and disease (anthrax and red-water).<sup>9</sup> Kapita's cattle kraal, for example, held thirteen animals. Kapita himself owned four cows and two oxen and his wife, Mai Toda, owned one cow; Musavaya owned one ox; Masiras, three oxen and a cow; and Moffat, Shadreck, and Hengrijohn (Kapita's other three married sons) had no animals of their own at all. In 1987/88, four of Kapita's and Mai Toda's animals were put at Hengrijohn's disposal, and three were made available to Musavaya; Masiras used his own animals to plough Shadreck's field, since the

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<sup>9</sup>In the 1986/87 drought people in the village were selling their cattle for between Z\$60 and Z\$135 in to Mukomboreri or to people in Jehana and Njelele up on the plateau where rainfall was better. There, the animals were fattened in April and May and resold for Z\$300-400.

latter was teaching school in Sai. Mbano had grown impatient with having last call on his brother's animals, and decided to engage in a reciprocal labour and property sharing arrangement (known as *machangano*, see Chapter XII) with Mbizo's household in order to gain access to their cattle.<sup>10</sup>

As I have said, the expansion of Musavaya's family through his contraction of additional marriages had accelerated his claim to lands hitherto controlled by his father. But those marriages had themselves been contracted without the need for bridewealth cattle in the Apostolic system. His bricolage of rules from distinct systems thus served to advance his access to land, labour and draught animals all at once. Since Musavaya was able to draw on his father's cattle and owned a moist loamy field on the south bank of the Kaongo, he was always the first to plant a crop of maize in late October, and to harvest it green as early as January--a full six to eight weeks before anyone else in the village. The danger, however, was that a flash flood in January or February would knock down the ripening maize and rot the cobs; monkeys in the trees along the river posed a threat to the crop as well.

Mbano's family, on the other hand, was unable to plough and plant until the second substantial rainfall in late November. This is how I described the processes of wet-

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<sup>10</sup>Mbizvo's household included himself, his wife, his married son Micho and his wife Mai Muda, and his adult, but as yet unmarried son and daughter, Pikisai and Pepekai.

ploughing:

**Journal Entry, 25 November 1988**

Mbano and Mai Dzorai are drawing lines, Tawanda and Wanda leading--held back from school this morning as punishment for losing the cattle the other day in the jesse. It would appear that Mbano has worked Mbizo's cattle now for two weeks without reciprocation--having ploughed the wet lowland, drawn lines and planted cotton there in the space of 3 or 4 days--the cattle having been used for a morning and night one day, and a long morning in another. Now he is drawing lines with one span in the southern maize field, while Mai Dzorai and Fungi are cultivating [with hoes] between cotton rows in the southeastern field by the hill in order to break up the hardened soil surface to prevent run-off when the rain comes; a great problem with these *chidhaka* soils.

These fields--the lowland field and the southern *chibage* [maize] field were apparently ploughed once in April, incorporating maize and sorghum stalks. The task of ploughing itself is thus somewhat less arduous, or demanding of sheer physical strength--partly because the cotton stalks are absent, but more because the clays are not hardened into large clods. Perhaps this is why Mai Dzorai has been incorporated into the work team. Still, especially on the stoney slopes, the plough barely scrapes the surface, losing its hold in the soil and straying wildly from the groove. All one can do is lift up on the handles and force the point of the blade down into the soil.

The moisture of the soil makes ploughing in *chidhaka* after the rains easier in most ways, but more difficult in some:

**Journal Entry: 3 December 1988**

A note on ploughing after the rains: we entered Micho's field in the morning of Dec. 2nd, 24 hours after the heavy rains (Mbano himself had ploughed a few lines a full 14 hours earlier near his home gate--despite the *chisi* prohibition--a fact we didn't discuss). The clay soils of course stick to the tip of the plough share forcing it up to the surface where it will drag ineffectually until the mud is scraped off with a stick--while the plough is in motion if possible (the back end of the whip

stick will do); otherwise by stopping the team, lifting up the plough and cleaning it off. Wet ploughing is undoubtedly less strenuous than dry ploughing.

After lines are drawn with the plough in the moist earth, the maize seeds are dropped in pairs at 30 cm. intervals and then covered with a brush of the foot.

Mbano is explaining why we covered the maize seed in the southern field last week with a hoe instead of the harrow. The idea is to adapt to two possible contingencies. First, if the rain falls lightly and the soil has been levelled by the harrow, the water will simply run off without penetrating. Hoeing over the seeds (*kufutsira nebadza*) conserves the ridges, enabling them to hold the water near the seeds. If the rainfall is very hard the maize will have trouble emerging because the surface will be compacted, and they will pull the harrow over the field to break up the soil surface at that time.

On November 19th, we finished planting maize in the southern field on the hill slope. Fungi, Mai Wanda, and Mai Dzorai were planting. Myself, Gul Rukh, Muchaneta, Tawanda, and Wanda were covering (*kufutsira*). We were able to do 37 lines (each 100-120 metres long).

Children were a crucial source of additional labour for Mbano. The oldest three, Fungi (15), Muchaneta (12) and Tawanda (10) --all from his first wife whom he had divorced--were learning to hold the plough, though only Fungi was able to manage for more than a furrow. Five-year old Action, too young for school, was available full time to assist with the herding of Kapita's and Mbizo's cattle. Meanwhile, Wanda (7) and Dzorai (6) were fully utilized as *vakokeri*, walking in front of the oxen to guide their progress. While this was not an indispensable role, it greatly facilitated ploughing with

unruly or poorly matched animals:

**Journal Entry: 3 December 1988**

Yesterday's work was long and vigorous, beginning at 6:15 AM when I went to join Mbanu and Micho ploughing Micho's field--a flat, rain-drenched piece of land--brown clay--just by the brick pits at the river. Micho doesn't winter plough, so his ploughs weren't properly "cured"--a bit rusty--and the first ten turns or so were cutting unevenly through the soil without turning it over. Then the ploughs were broken in and the work became relatively easy since it became possible to "ride" the plough. Only that Jolekas and Butterfield, a black cow and brown ox of Mbizo's, are still relatively young and unruly, easily distracted when crossing the other team--composed of Life and the formidable Masockisi ("Socks"). The latter team Mbanu was able to manage single handedly, while it took a separate whip-man and a *mukokeri* (six-year old Dzorai) as well as myself to handle the former.

All this merely confirms that the labour requirements for ploughing are entirely relative to the age and experience of the animals as well as the skills of the ploughman--though I have seen even Mbanu struggle in vain to keep untrained oxen in the furrow even when I am holding the plough and Tawanda is leading.<sup>11</sup>

Weeding and Cultivating

By early December, the entire village could be seen in the fields from dawn to dusk, but a staggering of tasks had already taken shape:

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<sup>11</sup>I continued in this entry by recording the rate at which the work was accomplished: "By this morning Mbanu and Pikisai reported having completed 3 1/2 acres in 3 sessions (2 mornings [4 hours] and one evening [1 hour] with Micho and Musa, Micho's eldest son, leading). A total of 9 hours labour--or we can say roughly 3 hours per acre for two span, or 6 hours per acre per span; or 15 hours per hectare per span (5, or at best, 4 days for a single span to complete a hectare)."

**Journal Entry: December 5 1988**

Heavy, billowing clouds formed mid-morning, then melted away. The maize has germinated in many fields, following cotton by one day. Hence 4 days for the latter, 5 days for the former, excepting Shadreck's field, where I heard, the cotton germinated on the 3rd--loam soil once again is the key to easy, reliable germination. Already a heavy crust, as on a good pumpernickel bread, has formed over the chidhaka soils, providing a formidable obstacle to all but the most determined young maize. The entire village was in the fields this morning, presenting a rather romantic, bucolic scene. The elderly Mbizo and Mai Micho, hacking choosily at weeds, in the slow but steady way of old people. Meanwhile Micho and his wife tackled a new ridge by the road with the plough, fiercely and with determination and resolve, mud flying. She [Micho's wife] held the plough. Pepekai planted maize in Micho's new lines drawn in his riverside plot.

Vitori's family--his wives and sons--were busy weeding with hoes in a field to the south--cotton I think. Toda, Mai Maggie and Mai Mpofu were to be seen weeding in Masiras's field by Kapita's home--Toda's land having been prepared by Masiras during his absence at school (he returned on the 2nd of December together with Noah.) We even found Hengrijohn shovelling his *gandiwa* (contour ditch) while his three wives weeded his cotton on the path leading up to Musavaya's.

Shortly after the cotton plants emerge, the weeding begins in earnest. Weeds between rows can be removed, and the soil aerated, by drawing a cultivator (a rake-like instrument grasped and manipulated like a plough) with the cattle. This turned out to require an even more delicate kind of tactile communication between the soil, the animals, and the person holding the cultivator:

**Journal Entry: December 5 1988**

Moffat today deployed Bata and Socks in four plots--one for drawing lines for maize on the North

side of the storm drain, one by the road--drawing lines and planting cotton, one in the narrow isthmus of land south of the *musha*--20 lines of cotton again, and then lastly in the field by the gate where he drew more lines, had Mai Dzorai, Mai Wanda, and Fungi plant, and then cultivated the already germinated lines, using the cultivator to cover the cotton seeds--this last a most awkward procedure, since the *mombes* (cattle) are trained to furrow such that, given a 2 metre yoke, the tool will naturally align itself directly over the furrow in between, not to the side.

Cultivating itself seemed equally impossible for more or less the same reason and I found myself throwing the blades about wildly, trying vainly to avoid cutting off the two little pentagonal leaves of the budding cotton plants and at the same time to rake through the now prolific stands of grass that have sprouted between rows--my instinct was to dig the blades in hard and to lean back. I even tried steering into the turn--wrongly--rather than cutting the blades in. The result was more of an uncontrolled rampage than a finely monitored manicuring of the field as it is intended to be. (Once again Mbano remarked, "you are there to see that you are doing the job nicely--to control your cultivator, to control your *mombes* just so, so, so.") Mbano explained and urged that one must let the *mombes* pull the blades freely while you step smoothly in line with where you want the cultivator to go, allowing the arms to remain flexible, shifting the handles gently to keep them on course. As soon as you panic, so do the *mombes* and all is lost.

At the same time that the cotton plants must be weeded for the first time, gaps in the rows of maize where plants did not germinate are filled in by the same procedure as the *makaa* way of planting before the introduction of the plough:

*Kukavira*, filling in, was done by holding the *badza* in the right hand and the seeds in the left, proceeding rapidly down the row cutting the soil where no seed germinated, dropping in two seeds, then making another cut just after it to cover (*futsira*). The 3 women worked abreast this way.

Surprisingly, weeding between plants with a short-handled hoe

turned out to require considerable dexterity and technique. The skills are acquired early: children are allowed to handle or play with hoes (as well as virtually all other tools, which lie around the courtyard or fields) as soon as they are autonomous of the mother; and a 2-year old hacking away at the soil with a hoe is a common sight. Hoes are fashioned especially for children although their contribution to the work actually done may be slight since they typically lack stamina and perhaps accuracy.

The hoe, if well maintained, is a surprisingly sharp instrument that can easily slice off the young leaves of an emerging maize or cotton plant. The soil is cut on the ridges on either side of the plant (these having been made by the cultivator) with the objective of aerating as well as weeding. The work is back-breaking--the most distasteful and physically demanding agricultural task of all:

**Journal Entry: 15 December 1988**

The weeding which we did yesterday, around the cotton plants, now about 10 cm. and just growing their second pair of leaves, but not yet thinned, was arduous and tricky by everyone's estimate. The correct technique is to cut and scrape soil from the ridges on either side of the planted row, trailing soil over the space between plants and flattening out the surface of the bed (later we will open the weeded area again with the *chikoforo* [cultivator]; "open and close, open and close," said Mbano.) But because the plants aren't thinned yet, the soil, especially the heavy rocky clods in clay soil, tends to roll recklessly over the delicate seedlings. It wasn't clear why they didn't thin [the cotton plants] first, but perhaps it is because, given the rotational work plan, if they used their "turn" to thin, they wouldn't get the field weeded and the young plants would be stunted



as a result.

Men liked to claim that ploughing, categorized as "men's work" but not infrequently carried out by women, was more demanding than weeding. Still, they avoided weeding whenever possible. The distaste men hold for weeding and their avoidance of it also comes I think from its association with junior status or marital failure: a mature man with many wives will rarely be seen weeding. Gul Rukh and I often argued with each other over the extent to which women bore the burden of weeding; in at least one instance, I tried to look for a silver lining in what was fairly obviously an effective expression of male power over the division of labour:

**Journal Entry: 17 December 1988**

Mbano's preference to work individually rather than abreast with others is obviously due to his reluctance to be pressured to compete with women or perhaps even to be compared to them, or to be thought to be doing women's work. Still, it is true that he also tends to each plant more carefully, breaking off the upper leaves of stunted maize plants that have worked back under the surface and aerating the soil thoroughly. This in contrast to, for example, Mai Dzorai who works at easily double the rate but sacrifices quality. One might have guessed the opposite if one were to make facile assumptions about maize being a "women's" subsistence crop. All this raises the question of the "intensity" of cropping in terms of the quality of the labour that is invested in it.

Mbano's extra care might have been worthwhile during December, when the maize and cotton plants were becoming established; but by February the need for speed had overwhelmed concern for quality in the work performed. Throughout the village, maize stocks were running low, cash had run out, and labour was

desperately required to keep the weeds at bay, weeds that would reduce the cotton yield to nothing if not attended to. In Mbano's household, the confluence of the cycles of cash expenditure and labour demand made it difficult enough to meet this crisis. When Fungi injured her leg and was lost to the household workforce, the crisis proved insurmountable:

**Journal Entry: 17 February 1989**

The shortage of money grows more acute daily. Ma Sibanda asked Gul Rukh for \$2 to help her return home where presumably she will offer it to the spirit of her grandfather who had made her ill last month; but Shadreck (her husband, Mbano's younger brother) apparently refused to allow her to go. Micho and Mai Muda are planning to go to Jehana to weed for maize, since theirs has run out--they were too shy to ask Mbano--who commented, "how can one be shy to ask for help when we are working together?" And, he thought, when he himself was looking for people to weed the now heavily overgrown field number #4 in return for maize.

Mbano has no money to pay for Fungi's school fees (having paid the building fund) which means she will get no books. She has now stayed at home for at least a week, since her leg is not healing. Her gogo [grandmother] today made small incisions in her leg with a razor and applied medicine. The vadzimai ["mothers"--i.e., Mai Wanda and Mai Dzorai] have at last accepted her status as ill, allowing her to sleep during the day and relieving her from the obligation to fetch water. With Fungi lost from the workforce, Pikisai and Pepkai at school, or sleeping on weekends, Micho and Mai Muda short of sadza, and our own visitor, John, absorbing at least two full working days...the labour "bottleneck" has reached crisis proportions. Even a 30 plus mm. rainfall such as last night's is insufficient to keep the vadzimai out of the field, even if it means simply to kudzura ne maoko (pull out weeds by hand; done when chidhaka is too wet for hoeing).

Field #1 is now completed, and the portion in the eastern corner has been weeded by them yesterday for the first time. But fields #3, #4 and #5 are

crying for cultivation and/or weeding. Musavaya, Shadreck and Masiras, in contrast, seem to be more in control. Their plants are all forming substantial numbers of bolls, of exceptional length. Bolls are up to 5-8 per branch in Masiras's, Musavaya's, and Kapita's fields.

Dependent on unreliable partners in Mbizo's household, Mbano ended up having ploughed and planted more land than he was able to weed. His only remaining exchangeable asset was maize, left over from the previous year's successful harvest; this he used to pay a man to weed the field in greatest need (which I labelled #4), but it was too little, too late and the field had to be abandoned. Ironically, it was the first field we had winter-ploughed in August.

**Journal Entry: 22 February 1989**

Mbano is now concentrating labour time on his "sure" high-yielding cotton crop, in fields #3 and #1 now that the maize is safely in. He seems to recognize that the returns to labour on the heavily overgrown field #4 and the portion of #3 along the fence where we weeded yesterday are now diminishing, though he still predicts that 2 bales are possible in the latter, where we did kudzvura [pulling weeds] yesterday. Many thorny plants and itching grasses, as well as water-logging, makes hoeing extremely difficult and pulling, potentially dangerous (Mai Dzorai cut a puff adder in two at Mai Toda's field the other day.)

While the women weeded without respite, Mbano and Pikisai applied themselves assiduously to the spraying of the cotton plants during the crucial period prior to the first boll splits. Despite the cash crisis, and the opportunities for selling pesticides for cash that he had obtained on loan from the AFC through Mai Dzorai's grower's card, Mbano had kept the full allotment of pesticides in hand. Only a few farmers were

either unable, or unwilling, to keep their chemicals out of circulation. To exchange pesticide for grain or cash, was to risk sacrificing the entire year's investment in the cotton crop in order to satisfy a short-term need; it was a gamble few were willing to take.

### The Harvest

As the harvesting of maize began amidst the final, frantic efforts to weed and spray the cotton, the intensity and the length of the working day increased to such an extent that I was unable to find the time or summon the energy to write in my field journal about my experiences. In late April I took a day to try and put into words what my body had learned about a single set of tasks--the cutting and stacking of maize; it proved to be difficult, since there is a kind of ineffable knowledge out of which the substance and quality of agrarian practice is made. The following long passage in my journal was the result:

#### **Journal Entry: 17 April 1989**

Once again I have neglected to make a prompt record of the "experience" of the labour process, illustrating aptly the contradiction between the vocation of iron-age farmer and 20th century (or any other century) scholar. So now--recollections of maize slashing and stacking (*kutema chibage/kumisa mastakis*). People reportedly began to do this at the behest of Agritex in the early 1970s. Before that cobs were allowed to dry fully on the stalk and then plucked one by one before being carted to the *ngorani* [maize crib], stripped and cast in. The deficiencies of that system, which is still employed by some--e.g. Kasiche's brothers and mother if the termite situation was too bad--was that many stalks would fall to the

ground by the time the maize was sufficiently dry. If rains came late, the fallen cobs would sprout--if not they would be devoured by termites in a matter of days.

Surprisingly, people recall the plucking-in-standing-maize method to be immensely laborious and time consuming, although it is difficult to imagine how it would exceed the demands of cutting and stacking. The latter, new method begins with the demarcation of sections in the field. Mbano spent a couple of hours one March (16th) morning lopping off the tops of maize plants in two adjacent rows, then leaving ten rows before lopping off two rows again. At that time he anticipated that the cutting would begin at the end of the month, depending on the rains. The women were already eager to begin, feeling, as usual, uncomfortable with the lull in effort that characterized the first weeks of March. There was still a good deal of variation in the extent to which various portions of the maize had dried out: the earliest green maize just past the middle gandiwa [contour ditch] had been eaten as it ripened, so that had something of a levelling effect.

Mbano chose to begin cutting at the far southern end of the field on the morning of March 29th. The procedure is this: each participant is allocated two adjacent rows to cut and all will move through the field abreast cutting their two-row swath in much the same manner as a weeding group--similarly, there might be great variation in the density of plants along the row, their maturity or dryness, which enable one to move faster or slower. The stalk is grasped with the left hand about a foot from the root and drawn down toward the ground at an angle so as to create a bend or break at the bottom where the knife edge of the hoe will be brought to bear.

The hoe is held near the end of the handle and swung from behind the head, allowing the weight of the iron blade to drive it with force through the stalk. The slide of the handles through my grip created huge blisters in the crotch of my thumb and forefinger in no time; as well as on the tip of the thumb and the far side of the tip of my middle finger. Very quickly, I learned which type of stalks could be easily cut through with one decisive blow--those that were mature, but still somewhat turgid and green. If too young, it was

easy to miss the neck's centre, and it would be difficult to break. If too old, and desiccated, the stalk fibres would be stringy and would splay longitudinally like dental floss; the hoe in this case would bounce back into my face and antagonize the blisters fiercely. Having been successfully sliced through, in one motion the left hand can drag the stalk back and drop it in line with a group of others (10-12) arranged lengthwise, heads together and roots together.

It was easiest to move back and forth between the two rows after cutting two or three plants from one side. If cutting on the left the severed stalk would be drawn in front of the body cross-wise. If from the right, it could simply be laid down since the body would be already facing the row's centre. Work proceeded at about the same pace as weeding, (though one might say that double the area was covered since each worker does two rows rather than one)--"pace" here meaning the rate of movement through the field (weeding of course entails two "rows" of weeds astride each row of plants, so perhaps the work is equivalent). In some cases where termites were active and in sandy soil the stalk could be broken off with a flick of the wrist without bringing the hoe into play, or it could be pulled out of the ground altogether in an easy jerk, root and all.

All told, a double row of 150-200 plants each would take about 30 minutes to cut. On the day I helped with the work, Masiras came by to have a word with Mbano, ended up working with him, and the two men characteristically took a *mahewu* break midway through the rows on which they were working--unthinkable for the women who would never consider breaking before completing a line. In general it seems men are keener to stack than to cut--once again the association between women and the hoe is apparent. (At the *humwe* for cutting Kapita's maize for example, Masiras and Elson exclusively made stacks while all of the women both cut and stacked maize). Stacking, having an "organizational" or "planning" component, seems to fall under the aegis of men, who dig the holes for the forked branches that serve as a frame for the stack. They cut and place these branches--which stand about 1 1/2 metres tall out of the ground--and I once saw Mbano tying a nice stripped cob onto a branch before commencing to build the stack--a kind of offering to the *vadzimu* perhaps--but I noticed some

embarrassment when he saw that I had taken notice, and no further cobs were hung.

The gathering of stalks proceeds in a random way. Since stacks are set roughly 20 metres apart, the bundles of stalks that have been left after cutting are gathered--one or two bundles at time--within perhaps a 10-15 metre radius of the forked frame. People pick up the bundles where they please and handle the armloads of stalks as best they can, swinging them over one shoulder or simply carrying them in across the front of the body encircled by both arms. No matter how it is done, the leaves in contact with the skin cause itching and irritation (*chiri kuvava*). Men wear long-sleeve shirts and trousers which protects them more than the women who are inevitably wearing open-necked, sleeveless sundresses. When the sun is strong, the itching effect is increased several-fold, thus the preference for the work to be done early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

I quickly recalled one of Mbano's explanations for the last, late weeding of *derere* out of the maize field: "if we don't, then stacking will be very difficult, even though if we leave it we'll have more manure." Indeed, had we left it, the *derere* would have perhaps rivalled the tallest maize stalks in height and would have made gathering the stalks and transporting them to the stacks nearly impossible. As it was the *derere* had regrown to nearly chest height in some of the more fertile, wetter, heavy clay rows. The problem hardly exists in sandier soils where inter-row weed growth is far less dense or rapid. In previous years, Mbano had followed the "Agritex-standard" practice of clearing the stalks off a 10-metre strip, then ploughing it before establishing stacks on top of the ploughed earth. This was done by Masiras on his own, Shadreck's, Kapita's and Mai Toda's fields because, he said, it's best to conserve moisture and green manure by ploughing it in as early as possible (*masutso*, "autumn ploughing") and putting the stacks on top of ploughed earth reduces the risk of termite attack. Mbano discounted this latter argument as nonsense, saying that ploughing up and softening the earth only abetted the termites in reaching the grain, and the ploughed land increased immeasurably the difficulty the oxen would have pulling the scotchcarts full of cobs out of the field and up to the homestead. Masiras countered by saying that lanes would be left

unploughed over which the carts would be drawn. We shall see when the cobs are collected next month.

Labour itself--the performance of a task in a particular way, or the shunning of other tasks or techniques--was clearly a means by which Mbano announced a gendered identity, and his confidence in his own knowledge. Labouring itself became a way of arguing for particular styles of agrarian practice; it also became a means of announcing an identity measured against one's willingness to conform to either the old ways of the grandmothers or the modern practices promoted by the extension service. Mbano was apparently negotiating his own position on the ground somewhere in between.

#### Cash, Grain, and Time

Cash potentially became available as soon as the first bolls split and could be exchanged in small quantities for cash on the black market. In early April, Musavaya allowed a local trader to set up a weighing and purchasing station at his *musha* in exchange for a small fee and the convenience of having an instantly available buyer for his own cotton. In spite of this temptation, the maize harvest took precedence for most people in the village. In Musavaya's case, the timing of the harvest of the two crops had worked out perfectly:

#### **Journal Entry: 17 April 1989**

Most striking of all about the maize harvesting operation is that it takes absolute and unqualified precedence over cotton at this stage, despite the temptation of instant cash and higher quality that



would eventuate from quickly picking the first boll splits. Musavaya in this sense was doubly lucky since his maize matured early enough to cut and stack just as his early cotton burst in mid-March, and no later rains fell to damage it. The result: 11 bales picked by April 12, 2 of them sold already for cash. Amazingly only 3 were picked in the single *humwe* (work party) of that date, and 9 by the family--a substantial allocation of time. Their first pickings were also quality sorted although the *humwe* cotton they seemed to just pack into bales straight from the grain sacks or scotchcart.

Because of his extraordinary endowment of family labour, Musavaya had little difficulty in arranging to have the first round of cotton bolls picked rapidly; he was able to turn the early harvests into cash, and as we shall see, the cash into work parties. Others had to wait until their maize had been cut and stacked, only to find themselves obligated to attend the work parties of others before they could attend to their own cotton.

With the culmination of the cropping season, the cumulative effects of these various cycles of time on each household were becoming more starkly apparent. In the next chapter, we will look at how the options for overcoming bottlenecks in the demand for labour and cash are dealt with through the deployment of different labour forms. As we shall see, these forms, reworked from their origins in historical past time, are brought into play in various ways in order to contend with the demands of time in the present.

## CHAPTER XII

### GIFTS OF LABOUR, SALES OF THE SELF: FORM, TIME, AND STRATEGY

In this, the last chapter of the thesis, I move away from my own experience of agrarian practice in the village in order to engage in a more general and abstract discussion of the alternative social forms through which labour has been organized, deployed and remunerated over time in Goredema. I will be paying particular attention to the way in which people such as the Mbanos draw on a repertoire of organizational forms and strategies in order to contend with the constraints imposed by time, debt and social obligation. Some of these are modelled directly on practices remembered from the past, while others represent a reworking of pre-existing forms to fit novel contexts and contingencies. My discussion here will therefore provide an opportunity for me to review some of the historical themes I have drawn attention to in previous chapters, while at the same time casting them in a somewhat different theoretical light.

One of the issues I want to raise here--and it is an issue that I have so far scarcely touched upon--concerns the relationship between generational time, household form and social inequality. Are some farmers in the villages of Goredema getting rich at the expense of others? Has the

introduction of cotton proved to be the thin end of the wedge that will eventually destroy the remaining vestiges of inter-household cooperation, and turn peasants like Mbano into proletarians? If so what are the social mechanisms through which these processes are advancing? If not, what social forms stand in the way? Our colleagues in urban Zimbabwe posed these kinds of questions to us all the time. What follows, in a general way, is my attempt to answer them.

### **Commodity Exchange and the Transformation of Labour Forms**

Let me begin by reviewing some of the historical terrain we have already covered. As we saw in Chapter X, before the introduction of cattle, ploughs and hybrid seeds in Gokwe, labour was recruited into the households of senior males through cross-cutting obligations built around descent, affinity and residence. Yet at the same time, the roots of the commodity economy, and the sale of labour, coexisted with these domestic forms for most of this century and perhaps long before. In polygamous families built around the recruitment of wives with bridewealth, the task of provisioning the household with food was complemented by the small-scale, individualized production of tobacco as a commodity crop. Tobacco was channelled from household heads through local headmen to Chief Chireya, who would dispatch it with a delegation to meet his tribute obligations to the Ndebele.

The enforced collection of taxes and the suppression of the tobacco trade was the initial inducement, around the time

of the First World War, for young men from Northern Gokwe to seek work in the mines, and as domestics and garden-boys in town. Still, in parts of Gokwe district, tobacco sales to itinerant European traders provided a means not only for tax payments, but also for the independent acquisition of hoes, cloth and other essential elements of bridewealth until well into this century.

Most of our older male informants, such as Mugomeri and Tazivana, and even middle-aged men such as Musavaya, suggested that they migrated in search of wage-work as a prelude to marriage or shortly thereafter; but long careers of intermittent labour migrancy seem to have been virtually absent in Goredema. The wives of these men sometimes accompanied their husbands to commercial farms in the Chegutu, Chakari, or Kadoma or even to town after marrying, often as a means to obtain the means to purchase clothes, utensils or hoes. There is little evidence, however, that the withdrawal of the labour of young unmarried or just-married adults had much impact on the organization of labour in the domestic groups to which they belonged; this undoubtedly distinguishes Gokwe from other regions of the country during this period.

Less well known are the relations of labour appropriation that transcended the boundaries of the domestic or kin group, and yet remained within the ambit of the agrarian economy of the Reserve. In Gokwe, these relations emerged primarily, though not exclusively, from the uneven impact of drought. As

we have seen, rainfall in Gokwe is distributed erratically over space and time. Adjacent wards such as Goredema and Jehana, or even adjacent villages often have radically different endowments of usable precipitation, and hence productive success, in the course of a single season. The impact of a food shortage is experienced most acutely during the rains following a drought year, when all surplus in the granary has been used up and before any crops can be harvested "green" from the fields. It is therefore hardly surprising that elders such as Mai Obert recalled offering their labour to weed the fields of others in exchange for stored grain.

We would go to buy [grain] with money [also]. They [our mothers] went looking for money when they didn't have any; sometimes they would go and cultivate for it. Sometimes they would go and finish several days cultivating in someone else's field, and would be given a tin of maize to carry home. If someone had money, they would buy grain with it; if they had none, they would have to weed for someone else.

These kinds of labour-for-food exchanges prefigure the kind of casual wage-labour that constitutes an extremely common, though hardly dominant, form of labour recruitment today. Of course, given the very small scale of agricultural production before the 1960s, the extent to which food surpluses could be used to recruit labour, extract surplus value, and expand production was obviously limited. In the 1940s, however, traders appeared in the district offering cash or goods (usually soap or salt) in exchange for grain. By providing a market outlet for surplus grain, this served as an

incentive to expand production. By that time, and perhaps not independently, bridewealth was being paid in cash; the return from grain sales could thus also be converted into additional wives.

### **Calling the Varoora: Collective Labour and Domestic Form**

During normal years the organization of labour took shape according to the obligations imposed by relations of descent and marriage. It is possible to discern the essential elements of this model in the predominant form of labour recruitment used by senior elders such as Kapita and Mai Toda. Kapita often called upon the labour of his married sons and their wives to plough, plant, weed and harvest in his fields; Mai Toda was able to command the labour of her varoora (daughters-in-law) on her own fields in the same way. If its contemporary form may be taken as a guide, this mode of labour recruitment may well be the nearest antecedent to the modern *humwe*, or work-party, which transcends the domestic group. But I will get to this shortly.

What is important to note here is that the amassing of the labour of adult sons and daughters-in-law is a strategy that can only be realized by households at an advanced stage in the life-cycle. When co-wives are old enough to have married sons, they can require their daughters-in-law to fulfil labour obligations on the fields of the senior male in their stead; if they have fields of their own, like Mai Toda, they can call on their varoora to perform tasks as a group

there as well. Kapita's household followed a pattern of maturation and a rule of residential division over time that was apparently typical. The most recently married son remained in residence at his parent's home to manage production activities and to assume, with his wife the burden of daily labour tasks. When the next son married, the older one was allowed to establish his own residence and pass on these responsibilities to his younger brother. While the change in residence would free him from daily obligations to his parents, he and his wives would still be on call should his father or mother request their help. These calls upon the labour of non-resident sons and daughters-in-law had a formal quality, typically taking place in the earliest phases of a particular cropping task such as ploughing or planting.

In fact, the second household to draw lines and plant maize in our village (after Musavaya) was Kapita's. It was on this occasion that I first became aware of the ways in which labour units were made by activating kin ties beyond the coresident members of a single household:

**Journal Entry: 24 October 1988**

Work began at Kapita's riverbank field at roughly 7 AM. We arrived at 8 AM--"we" being myself, Gul Rukh, Mai Dzorai, and Mai Wanda. We carried three hoes with us and left three *gomos* [20 litre tin buckets] at Kapita's home (which was near the borehole, since we would be bringing water home with us on our return). Drawing lines were: Kimbi (the first son of Musavaya's second wife), who held the plough, and the second son of Musavaya's fourth wife, who led the two cattle: Spirit, a black cow, and Bloom, a brown ox with a white spotted face. Paul, the eldest son of Musavaya's first wife,

arrived midway through the job with Mbano's harrow and two more younger brothers.

The women involved were essentially the daughters-in-law of Kapita: the two wives of Mbano, the two wives of Masiras, three (out of five) wives of Musavaya, one wife of Hengrijohn's (out of three) and Mai Pure (the wife of Shadreck)...Tea (without milk) and *chimodo* [unleavened bread made of maize meal, sometimes mixed with purchased wheat flour] were prepared by Mai Pure, the only daughter-in-law resident in Kapita's homestead. Mbano's harrow was brought (from Musavaya's, were it had been "sitting" for an undetermined period of time). In the end, perhaps a hectare was drawn and planted to maize, with the area near the riverbank drawn, but not sown. Roughly 2-4 women dropped seeds from a tin or plate at the rate of one seed per 30cm., while seven others, moving abreast, covered the seeds with hoes (*kufushira*) with one slash of the hoe on one side, then another on the ridge on the other side. When the harrow arrived the intensity of hoeing was reduced and some of the women retired to do some embroidery or to chat, while three or four followed the harrow, covering seeds that were still exposed. I drew lines with Kimbi, driving the *mombes* [cattle] and a son of Musavaya's fourth wife, only six years old, who was later replaced by an older, more capable boy to lead (*mukokeri*).

I was able to diagram the assembled labour force, excluding Gul Rukh and myself, as follows: (a hollow square or circle designates a male or female respectively; filled in squares and circles designate that the person was absent):

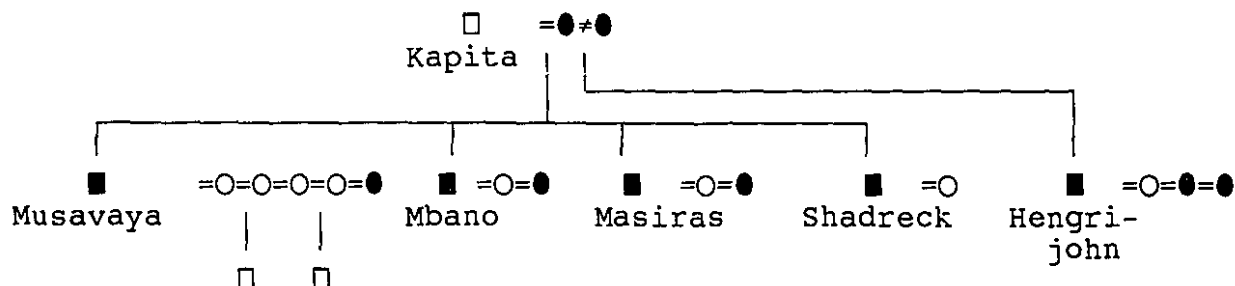


Figure 12.1. Kinship Diagram of Kapita's Work Team for Drawing Lines and Planting.



Kapita had clearly activated a labour form made possible by the marriage of his sons, one which obligated his daughters-in-law to engage collectively in a task on his field for a day. We were to see the same form--the calling of the varoora (daughters-in-law)--resurrected at various points throughout the season: for planting sorghum, for weeding and picking cotton, for shelling maize.

This accorded well with my anthropological understanding of the relationship between bridewealth and wives in a patrilineal society--the model that has been applied continuously to the Shona peoples over the last half century. According to this model, Kapita, representing the interests of his own patrilineage, had surrendered cattle on behalf of his sons in exchange for rights in the labour and progeny of women in other patrilineages. This core model of "cattle for wives," that we had occasion to examine earlier, seemed to be the anchor of social organization across much of southern Africa. But Mai Toda had access to her son's wives on her own fields as well. This form was not, therefore, an expression of patriarchal power so much as an instantiation of rights gained through marital exchange that both of them were able to realize. On this particular occasion, the only wives who were absent from the field were evidently at home looking after children or meals; but none of their husbands--Kapita's sons--were there. The only others present were those grandsons old enough to make a contribution by managing the draught animals.

### **From Beer Party to Tea Party: The Evolution of the *Humwe***

Were there no moments in the childhood years of living elders during which unrelated persons associated through common residence or political affiliation might come together to labour in common? As I said earlier, our informants were emphatic that labour was not performed collectively for the chief on his fields, but that representatives might be sent from each household to cultivate the fields of the local spirit-medium when called upon to do so.

Beyond this, there is little reason to believe that people were recruited for community, as opposed to kin-based work-parties, until after the suppression of hunting, the adoption of the plough, and the introduction of cattle. It was only then that the scale of agricultural production increased to the point where it might be either necessary or useful to assemble large numbers of adult workers on one field at one time.

The first such collective labour forms had no general designation and were named after the specific task for which they were organized. The term *mutemwa* was used for a work party to which people would come with their own axes to clear the land. *Zvipani* (from "spans") would be called in order to assemble several teams of oxen to plough a field. Work parties for weeding or reaping the heads of millet or sorghum had no special designation that people can recall. People were attracted to these work parties by beer, although in the

case of *zvipani* the owners of the span would be given a pot of beer while their children would carry out the work.<sup>1</sup> The rules for the distribution of beer pots by the owner of the work party at different points throughout the work day were highly formalized, with a specific name being used to refer to each such allocation. Obert described what he had seen of such events as a child:

**Journal Entry: 8 May 1989**

In the old system when people arrived they would be given:

1. *Chikuru ramabhachi*: "to take off the coat"--which would be a ladleful (*mukombe*) of beer before they begin.

Then they work up to approximately 10 AM and are given another *hari* [pot] of beer to share.

Then they would work until approximately noon. (When they are doing *mutemwa* [clearing a field]), when they are given *kupedza nyota* ("to finish thirst"), or a *hari* to share to show they are through with the work.

For ploughing, there will be no foreman ("bossboy"); the owner of the field will direct people. They will make *mahewu* for the children and count how many spans are in the field and each owner will be given a *hari* while the children are ploughing in the field. He can carry it to his home or share with others, as they like. The last such *humwe* that Obert remembers was at his home in 1980. Nowadays too many people are churchgoers so they might refuse to attend such a *humwe*.

The old labour units built around co-resident agnates and dependent sons-in-law had broken up as the latter matured and established their own villages; but with the introduction of

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<sup>1</sup>Children would be rewarded with mahewu, a non-alcoholic grain beverage.

cattle, ploughs and cotton, the need for establishing networks along which labour could be accessed beyond the extended family and even the village became apparent. The addition of cotton to the crop repertoire compressed interlocking cycles of production and created bottlenecks in the demand for labour and draught power. The *humwe* was ideally suited to solve the problem, as we learned during late October when families were desperate for extra help within a narrow frame of time:

**Journal Entry: 29 October 1988**

Tomorrow the family will host a *humwe* to plough the old maize field to the West which Mbano says has not been planted for three seasons, and which will therefore provide a good place for cotton. The intensity of work increases--the women look exhausted and are starting to complain of aching arms and chests, and to visibly resist moving on to the next task for the first time since our arrival. Always, the unforeseen problems of *kunaya* [to rain] lend a special urgency to the work. If the seeds are not planted before the *chidhaka* is saturated with rain, the fields will become virtually impenetrable and planting will be impossible. "The weeds grow so fast that, if you look for Wanda and the cattle in the *dondo* (forest) you will see only horns," said Mbano.

The *Vadzimai* have now started to prepare *mahewu* for tomorrow's *humwe*. The thumping of the *duri*, the gentle clanging of the cowbells, chatter of children and of birds seem a distant background to an essentially peaceful day. Tazivana is hosting a *humwe* at his field today, and Mbano explained that the participants will be drawn from his own local, sub-village "group"--his sons, Obert's family, and perhaps David. Mbano then gave an encapsulated picture of how core work groups have fissioned with the maturation of successive generations. Originally, the Chipanguras, Chibayamarangwes and Mbanos and the Mutawas all worked together. Then the latter dropped out, then the three remaining families began to work independently--so presumably Kapita and his brothers--Muyererei, Tazivana, Josiya, Mpembene, and Never all worked

together--When their sons grew up and married, the work groups devolved upon them in lineage clusters--so that now the "Work Group" is comprised of Mbano, Musavaya, Masiras, Hengrijohn, Shadreck and Toda and Mbizo's family plus one other man, a *mukwasha* (son-in-law) named Thomas. At this level the work group seems to be based on a combination of descent and proximity, though perhaps there are other reasons such as a history of faithful reciprocity. In the "old" days--which I think means the mid-1970s, Obert tells us, the *humwes* put on by Chibayamangwe or Musavaya were truly grand affairs. "They were very generous," Obert commented. "There was so much food!"

### The Humwe System: Rules and Consequences

The term *humwe* might be translated as "one-ness".<sup>2</sup> It is used in one sense as a name for any event in which people in the local community are invited to the home or field of an individual to carry out a specified task. But at another level it designates a system of potential obligations that a household acquires when others agree to work collectively for it on a particular occasion. Obligation emerges from the cycle of debts or duties that are incurred or imposed through participation in the *humwe* system. The system is founded upon a simple governing rule: for every participant sent from one household to work at the *humwe* of another, an equivalent number must be sent in reciprocation should the sending household call its own *humwe*. Equivalence is reckoned in units of adult labour, so that sending one adult and one child in reciprocation for two adults would be viewed as a deficient

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<sup>2</sup>The equivalent term used in most other Shona-speaking areas would be *nhimbe*.

return and a violation of the rules of the system.

The most important feature that distinguishes the *humwe* from other forms of supra-household labour recruitment is that initial entry into the system is based upon free-choice: there are no ascribed relationships, kin-based or otherwise, which make participation obligatory, although it would be highly irregular for a family to decline to send representatives to the *humwe* of a close agnate living nearby.

If entry into the *humwe* system is acknowledged to be based upon individual choice, the ideology invoked in support of the system is rooted in an explicit commitment to diffuse solidarity--to "helping one another," or "pulling each other up." Indeed, it is probably these kinds of articulated sentiments that impress well-intentioned social scientists with the *humwe*'s potential as a beneficent, redistributive social institution. In fact, our observations suggested that the *humwe* may serve as a vehicle for the differential ability of households to aggregate community labour over the long-term. The relevant variables are both demographic (involving household size and composition) and economic (involving access to cattle and money-capital). But before exploring these, it is necessary to understand something more about the way the *humwe* system operates through social time.

I have already said that a household can choose<sup>3</sup> which

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<sup>3</sup>I am evading here the important question of how such decisions are made in the household. Where the household head is present and male, it is he who generally decides in the

*humwes* it wishes to send a delegation to, as well as how many members to send. It remains to point out that in this way every participating household can impose, to the degree that it wishes, a potential labour debt upon the *humwe*'s owner. And sooner or later, this debt must be repaid with a reciprocal allocation of labour. The repayment of such debts, however, has uneven implications for households of varying size, and for households at various stages in the life-cycle.

The owners of fields who command many wives and dependents can dispose of a larger absolute number of household members on the *humwe* circuit, thus imposing a greater number of debts on the community of participants which will potentially be redeemed all at once should they call a *humwe* of their own. The result is that a newly married couple with little labour to dispose of on the *humwe* circuit will attract very few persons to their own (perhaps less than 15), whereas a senior polygynous man will attract many (well over 40 in most instances), although the latter may have the labour of sufficient *varoora* at his command so as to make participation in the *humwe* system unnecessary.

The case of ploughing *humwes* suggests a somewhat special case since participation apparently requires the possession of

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last instance who to send to a given *humwe*, although in a polygynous family, he may delegate this (along with most other labour allocation decisions) to a senior wife.

at least one span of cattle and a plough.<sup>4</sup> Just twenty-five years ago in eastern Goredema, the number of households thus equipped could probably have been counted on one hand, and even today most households depend periodically on access to the cattle of neighbours or kin for ploughing. One can imagine that this would severely circumscribe the pool of potential participants. But in fact, we have observed households with no draught animals at all call ploughing *humwes* with some success; assistance is often "earned" in this case by sending sons to help with the labour of ploughing at the *humwes* of stockholders, even if they are able to bring only one ox themselves, or none at all. In fact, kinship solidarities--among married brothers, for example--often lie behind apparent asymmetries in the *humwe* balance of labour obligations.<sup>5</sup>

A necessary pre-requisite for successfully calling a *humwe* which I have so far neglected, is the provision of consumption goods, initially in the form of beer brewed from fermented maize and sorghum. Control of beer brewing is the exclusive province of elder women, or at least they organize and command the labour of their daughters-in-law in the

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<sup>4</sup>In the hard, heavy clay soils of Goredema, and much of the rest of northern and central Gokwe, two span of oxen are often required to draw each plough before the first rains soften the surface; the poor condition of the cattle at the end of the dry season makes this requirement even more likely.

<sup>5</sup>For a description of ploughing work-parties organized among kin in southern Zimbabwe, see Weinrich (1975:91).



process of making it. When beer *humwes* were still predominant, men thus depended upon their wives to make a *humwe* possible in their field, and young married men were virtually incapable of doing so. Undoubtedly, the expectation of quality beer, amply provided, increased the likelihood of good attendance. But the consumption of beer was also largely limited to persons with married children, and this implies that with the exception of ploughing *humwes*, wherein young unmarried men were expected to do the work, the participants were largely elderly people. While they weeded and reaped perhaps with skill and experience, they did so under the debilitating influence of alcohol, and the efficiency of work was probably comparatively low--or so younger people liked to believe. I was only aware of one such beer *humwe* during our stay in Tazivana village, one which we did not attend, but were told about later.

**Journal Entry: 19 May 1989**

Notes on *Humwe ye doro* at Kapita's.

Work started at 8:30 AM; they had already been given a *pfuko* of beer, distributed by sex and age. ("*rakagoverwa kuvarume ne vakadzi nemazero avo*"). Given beer four times while working, twice before *sadza*, twice *kuseri dzera* (after *sadza*). First given beer at home, then work for some hours, then given beer in field, then given *sadza*, then work again, given beer, then work the last time, then return home and given again by age and sex. In the field, given just as they are (i.e. where they are in the field) by a man who dishes beer out in cups.

They finished about 3 PM. Filled 3 empty cotton bales with *rukweza* [finger millet] stamped down to compress it and 3 stacks maize.

Both the people involved, and the crop being harvested is of significance in this instance. Kapita and Mai Toda, we might recall, are the *vanyai* who link the community to the mediums and the ancestors. The *rukweza* they were harvesting is grown virtually exclusively for brewing beer. We saw in Chapter IX how beer itself is a metaphor of the transformations that the ancestors bring about in the world. In many ways it is the food of the ancestors as well, beer mash being thrown on the ground at the beginning of every possession ceremony. There is thus little question that in this case, as in others where a beer *humwe* is held, the elderly participants were asserting a special kind of identification with one another and between themselves and the ancestors through forms of commensality and agrarian praxis.<sup>6</sup>

#### Cotton and Collective Labour

With the adoption of cotton in the late 1960s in Goredema, the significance and function of the *humwe* underwent a marked change in response not only to the increased circulation of cash, but also to the changing requirements in the quality of the labour that needed to be performed. Let us examine these two aspects in turn.

The adoption of cotton into the crop cycle not only increased the demand for agricultural labour overall but also increased the demand for labour of a particularly high quality

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<sup>6</sup>See Karp (1980) for a synthetic exploration of some of these themes in another African social context.

and delivered at critical moments in time. As I suggested in the previous chapter, weeding with a hoe is particularly demanding and important. Failure to weed a crop at least twice during the first eight weeks of growth (when the young plants are most delicate and difficult to weed without destroying) means that virtually no cotton will be harvested. Picking must also be carried out in a timely fashion. Once the cotton bolls burst, the farmer has perhaps a month before the cotton starts to fall to the ground, or at least loses weight and quality. As a consequence, existing forms of group labour were adapted to the requirements of cotton and altered by the commodity quality of the crop.

The first people to take up cotton in Goredema were polygynous men, such as Musavaya, in mid-career; many of them had some experience as wage-workers and most were church-goers, and hence non-beer drinkers. In the mid-1970s these men began to purchase consumable commodities--tea, sugar, and bread--in order to attract sober *humwe* labour and thus make possible an expansion in production without threatening the quality of the crop. It was not long before the beer-party *humwe* became a tea-party, and soon it became a standard expectation that a goat or sheep would be slaughtered on such occasions as well.

This commoditization of the conditions for the recruitment of collective labour occurred in a way that parallels the commoditization of bridewealth. Today, a truly

memorable *humwe* features jam and margarine, canned beans, tomatoes and onions to accompany the bread and tea! The cost of hosting a *humwe* has thus been inflated significantly, and since it is never known in advance how many people will attend (the labour debts are not calculated as a total) the host is obliged to make a fixed outlay to purchase the maximum amount of food that may be required.

The social consequences of the subordination of the *humwe* system to the circulation of manufactured foodstuffs outside of it are of two kinds. On the one hand, such goods are often obtained on credit from shopowners such as Mukomboreri, who sometimes require that the credit be paid in cotton at the depressed black market rate. A trading class thus feeds off of the *humwe* system as an indirect exploiter of the collective labour it makes possible through the advance of consumption items. On the other hand, the socially necessary investment of capital in purchased consumption goods lends advantages to those with either greater liquidity at moments of greatest labour demand, or with access to credit at the shops. In the latter case, it is always large households with a reliably high aggregate output of cotton that are given goods on credit most freely.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>I have elsewhere (Worby 1990) explored the advantages accruing to large polygynous families, particularly those belonging to the Apostolic Church.

### **Machangano: From Kinship to Contract**

Beyond the formal recruitment of labour based on prescribed obligations between kin, and the *humwe* system which operates over the wider space of the community, there are still other ways in which people form bounded sub-networks for the exchange of labour and means of production. These are generally founded upon co-resident lineage branches and it is possible, in Goredema at least, to trace how the boundaries of these networks have been adjusted over time in an ongoing process of fission and reconstitution.

With the maturation of successive generations, the sons of a group of cooperating agnates will hive off and form their own cooperative cluster. After the introduction of cattle, scotchcarts and ploughs--all scarce means of production, unevenly distributed among households--these networks of cooperation constituted the channels along which livestock, tools and labour could be redistributed. When the cotton regimen introduced as necessities a host of new tools and inputs--cultivators, sprayers, and pesticides--these resource pools became still more important. Because they are essentially constituted on the basis of kinship, no formal "accounting" of the contributions each household makes is made. Members of such a network are likely to explain that "we help each other because we are brothers. If I want to borrow his plough, I can help myself. If he wants my son to help lead the oxen, he simply asks and I will send him."

Sometimes the informality of this arrangement is insufficient to guarantee a household what it needs, and this is particularly true with the sophisticated means of production required for successful cotton production. A frequent complaint is that "if my brother wants to borrow my battery for his ULV sprayer, I can't refuse; but he may finish it and then I will not be able to spray my crop this week." The solution to this problem is to formalize a *jangano* contract. This is precisely the kind of labour arrangement that was made between Mbano and Mbizvo (his father's half-brother) in the 1988/1989 season. Such contracts may or may not be among kin, but they are distinguished by the fact that their terms are explicitly defined outside the idiom of kinship, and it may be a useful way for people to withdraw from the more nebulous and capricious demands that dependence on a kin-based network may entail.

The terms *jangano* (sing.) or *machangano* (pl.) widely denote some form of season-long contract between two or more households to work on one another's fields on a rotational basis (cf. Holleman 1951:366), although as Cheater (1984:63-5) points out, the terms *jangano*, *machangano* and *nhimbe* denote labour arrangements which vary widely or even coincide, depending on the area in which they are found. In her study of Msengezi Purchase Area, she found that

*machangano* is obviously and explicitly an attempt to improve upon the inefficiencies of *nhimbe* [i.e. *humwe*] as a form of labour cooperation and to refine and rationalize the traditional form of

*jangano* (in which the reciprocity of labour units was not so finely calculated), in order to ensure the necessary labour for large-scale agriculture (1984:64-5).

And Bratton concludes from his study of group formation in four Communal Areas that "the pooling of labour (*majangano*) is a contemporary adaptation and substitute for the traditional practice of attracting labor with a beer party (*nhimbe*)" (1986:372).

In Gokwe, *machangano* arrangements are most frequently utilized among the post-1960 immigrants to the district and between households in the resettlement areas established since Independence. The prevalent form is characterized by the precise reckoning of labour inputs described by Cheater. Since both older immigrants and new settlers arrived as nuclear or extended family units, this probably stems from their need to establish relations of exchange and cooperation with strangers, with whom it is possible to enforce strict rules of limited reciprocity. Decisions about the work schedule are arrived at jointly by parties to a *jangano* contract. If there is an uneven distribution of tools and draught animals among them, the collective inventory might be drawn upon as a common pool.

When *machangano* participants perform labour at the fields of one member, the women of that household are expected to provide tea and perhaps sadza. While the amount and quality of these items of consumption are not part of the contract, inequality in provisioning the work team may inspire

resentment and dissension. In the *machangano* groups in Goredema, dissension may also be aroused if some members opt out of scheduled work in order to attend beer parties, or excuse themselves too often on account of illness. Still, the participants perceive that these work arrangements perform a critical function in correcting imbalances in livestock, labour-power and even farming skills between households, potentially to the benefit of all (cf. Bratton 1986:376).

### **Maricho: The Forms of Hired Labour**

In a capitalist economy, labour-power is generally sold as a commodity by persons in their private capacity as individuals. This characteristic gives us an important clue as to how the various forms of paying labour in kind and cash differ from the labour forms already under discussion, and provides insights into the origins of the commoditization of labour power in general in Gokwe. As I have already suggested, the people of Gokwe were engaged in a regional commodity trade in tobacco over a century ago, and were migrating, as individuals, to perform labour for wages before the First World War. Between 1930, when the long-distance tobacco trade had been effectively stifled, and 1963, when cotton was introduced into the district, there was a limited trade in maize and regional flows of labour in exchange for surplus grain whenever there was drought with a regionally varied impact. But there is little evidence of any generalized presence of detached labour circulating as individual wage



seekers within the local agrarian economy.

Cotton changed this situation dramatically. By 1966, the Extension Officer responsible for the cotton programme in Gokwe noted that the more successful of his cotton farmers "employ labourers for planting, cultivating, spraying and picking." "What the social implications of this are likely to be is not yet known," he continued, "but implications there will certainly be" (Reid 1966). Because cotton is particularly labour-intensive, its widespread adoption radically increased the demand for agriculture labour and led to a massive redeployment of labour in the region.

As we saw in Chapter VI, the demand for casual labour has risen in direct proportion to the diffusion of cotton production from the small-scale farms and immigrant wards in Gokwe district to the more remote and isolated northern periphery bordering on the Zambezi escarpment. Before 1980, these latter areas--Binga, Nenyunga, Simchembu, Mashame, Chireya and Goredema--supplied labour, largely on a seasonal basis, to the Copper Queen and Chenjiri freehold farms. Once cotton was firmly established in the eastern part of the district, seasonal labour began to be absorbed by the Communal Area wards such as Makore and Nembudzia, where immigrants from the Masvingo area, many holding Master Farmer qualifications, had settled in the 1960s. From the 1970s onwards, however, households in those areas which had formerly been sources of casual labour supply, gradually became cotton growers in their

own right. Thereafter, those who could meet the entry cost of cotton production chose to invest their labour-power in the production of their own cash crop instead of selling it to the immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

It is unlikely that former casual labourers invested wage earnings in cotton production; with a piece rate of 1 cent per kg. paid for picking through most of the 1970s, wages were spent, as they are today, on items of immediate consumption. It was rather credit--advanced first through cooperative societies and then after 1980 by the AFC--that largely created the possibility for entry into petty commodity production by Gokwe's indigenous peasantry (see Selim 1989).

In any case, the result of the mass diffusion of cotton growing capabilities has been that today, casual labour tends to be in short supply. Demand is by far the greatest in the freehold farms whose scale of cotton production usually greatly exceeds that which can be managed by family labour, but whose margins are too small to hire more than one or two

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<sup>8</sup>It is interesting to note that the critical shortage of picking labour was being felt on the white commercial farms on the Plateau as early as the mid-1960s, and has continued into the present. For a remarkable account of early propaganda efforts to recruit pickers from the Reserves, see Appendix Two. More recently, we watched with some amusement as the post-Independence government tried in vain to recruit cotton pickers from among urban unemployed youth for the privately-owned, irrigated Sabi river cotton estates in the southeastern part of Zimbabwe during 1989. Unlike the strategy of the previous regime, the Mugabe government tried to win labour by exhorting youth not to be "slothful" and to apply themselves patriotically to the task of easing the nation's foreign exchange crisis.

resident wage workers. The shortage is of course exacerbated in a year of uniformly good harvests, when Communal Area farmers are fully employed on their own plots.

Casual labour moves largely within local communities or between adjacent localities, particularly where one such locality has had a good harvest and the other has not. Small-scale freehold farmers, and some few Communal Area farmers who own vehicles, often resort to collecting labourers in lorries from distant areas where crops have failed and ferrying them to the farm for weeding or picking. In 1988, the lorries often returned empty. After watching their cotton fall to the ground for lack of picking labour, many Copper Queen freehold farmers declared that they would resort to recruiting labour this year in their "home" areas--generally far to the south of Gokwe in areas such as Masvingo--where the rains had failed. Clearly some had in mind the recruitment of casual labour through the idiom of kinship (cf. Cheater 1984).

Casual labour is known as *maricho*, a term used to refer to labour sold by an individual to be paid according to the quantity of work accomplished, rather than its duration. It is always strictly contractual; the buyer and seller of the labour offered agree beforehand to the rate of payment and the way in which work is to be measured. The problems in negotiating a contract vary according to the nature of the work to be done. The rate for ploughing and drawing lines is fixed per acre, and the rate is higher if the labourer

supplies his own ploughing team. For weeding, both the length of the lines and the density of the weeds are taken into account. Picked cotton may be weighed and paid by the kilogram, or packed into 20-litre tins or fertilizer bags (by the owner of the field) and paid by each unit filled.

In the current context of labour shortage, farmers wishing to attract *maricho* labour must provide not only a competitive rate for the work but other perquisites as well: for example, food of high quality should be offered at regular intervals during the day, and the owner of the field should refrain from supervising the work too closely. This latter factor has wider ramifications, implying that the pace, technique, and quality of the work performed are determined entirely by the worker. This is not an incidental consideration since, for example, careless or half-hearted weeding can easily destroy young cotton plants or reduce yields. Moreover, cotton that is not picked cleanly will receive a lower grade and price from the Cotton Marketing Board.<sup>9</sup> Ties of kinship do not preclude wage relations

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<sup>9</sup>Though not, with occasional exceptions, from private illicit buyers in the black market. Such buyers--including transporters, civil servants, ministers, schoolmasters, extension workers, and anyone else with constant income and hence liquidity (see Chapter VI, above)--reward quality at the lowest common denominator of all cotton sold to them, though they might reject truly "dirty" cotton. Most are unwilling to invest labour-time in sorting and packing the small parcels of cotton sold to them into bales of uniform quality before resale to the CMB. In any case, with gross profit margins after resale on the order of 50-60%, the benefits from turn-over purchases as rapidly as possible are greater than those that would derive from paying for additional labour to sort

between close relatives, although the character of these relations may differ somewhat from labour contracts established between non-kin. We have seen, for example, kin picking in return for a share of the crop (two or three tins per day) which they will sell at a local store on the black market for cash. This is viewed as a gesture of charity, since the value of the in-kind payment is often significantly above the going rate of pay. We have also seen Mbano's sister's daughter (*muzukuru*) from the neighbouring communal land of Sanyati, whose family had experienced crop failure, come to Goredema to pick cotton in the fields of her mother's brothers, where she was allowed to retain and sell the entire product of her labour. But she remained behind to "volunteer" at the *humwes* of several of the uncles she had picked for.

Other relations between kin fall into the gray area between hired labour and cooperation. An unmarried nephew or classificatory brother cultivating his first cotton crop, for example, may put his labour entirely at the disposal of a mature relative during the period of ploughing and cultivating in return for being allowed the use of oxen in his own small field, perhaps every fourth day. At other times kin are simply hired under a straightforward *maricho* contract for wages at the same time that both parties are mutually engaged in the *humwe* system.

One final, but no less essential form of rural wage

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for quality.

labour remains to be mentioned. The extraordinarily rapid diffusion of cotton among the mass of rural producers in the Gokwe region has coincided with the equally dramatic extension of formal education to their children. The attendance of children at school represents a significant drain on the labour of the household. But once again that significance must be measured against the specific demands of each of the crops being produced, and the technological options available to produce them. Although some tasks, such as ploughing, can be delayed until the holidays, others such as weeding or picking cotton ordinarily extend well beyond the corresponding holiday period. At this point, it becomes possible to see how the coincidence of the adoption of cotton and the provision of schooling can be causally linked to the resurgence of existing inter-household forms of labour recruitment and the innovation of new ones.

The school not only draws labour away from the family, however. It serves simultaneously as an institutional conduit through which wage labour is supplied or redistributed to those larger producers who can afford it. The cotton-picking labour-power of primary school children is sold by schoolmasters in order to purchase uniforms or transport to regional competitions. The benefits to the employers of these children are several: first, a mass of organized workers are delivered reliably at one time; second, schoolchildren are generally both docile and disciplined, and in any case

supervised by their teachers; and thirdly, a great deal of urgent work can be accomplished in a single day. On the negative side, the quality of the cotton picked is generally a grade lower than if it had been picked by individual adult maricho labour, and perhaps two grades lower than if it had been picked by family members themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Inevitably, those who hire schoolchildren most often are those whose production exceeds family labour resources and who find themselves isolated from potential networks of neighbours and kin--the small-scale commercial farmers. In years where a bumper harvest is widespread, however, many Communal Area farmers will hire schoolchildren for a day or two as well.

#### **Cotton and the Remaking of Traditional Labour Forms**

Despite the increasing circulation of cash and commodities that the production of cotton has generated, and the use of money as well as grain or salt as means of labour remuneration, non-wage agrarian labour forms in Gokwe are not

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<sup>10</sup>The distribution of value between workers and owners is contested at two points: the control over the quality of the work (since the cleanliness of the cotton largely determines its grade when sold to the Cotton Marketing Board), and the means of measuring the quantity picked. School children pick quickly but less carefully than adults, and quality cannot be ensured when a hundred children are in a field simultaneously. In 1989, the difference between the price paid by the Cotton Marketing Board for grades A and B was on the order of 5.9 per cent; between A and C grades, it was 11.8 per cent. The wage contract for picking is made between schools and employers on a per bale basis; and bale weights vary from 180 to 250 kgs. depending on how tightly they are packed. The actual price paid per kg. picked is thus highly variable unless the owner has access to a scale (this is fairly common in the small-scale freehold areas, but rare in the communal lands).

at present being driven out by labour hired through wage contracts. On the contrary, such forms have, at least in areas such as Goredema, been on the increase. It is tempting to interpret this as a reversal of trends toward increasing proletarianization--trends that are often assumed to be inevitable. After all, entry into cotton production has become nearly a universal option for Gokwe's Communal Area farmers since Independence. The kind of broad petty-commodity base that characterized the tobacco trade a century ago has once again been established, and today, as opportunities for urban jobs grow increasingly scarce, young school-leavers are once again considering a life as rural cotton farmers in the district.

The eradication of the tse-tse fly, the provision of credit, and extension efforts by the colonial state and its successor have made this possible; but at the same time these institutional interventions have increased both the aggregate regional demand for labour and the uniformity of that demand over space. The result is that peasants in the Communal Areas turn to forms of labour organization that satisfy the peculiar requirements of the cotton crop--in particular, the intense application of labour for weeding and picking within a short space of time--and that they do so in a way that enables producers to periodically work for one another.

One of the "collective" advantages of the *humwe* system in the long run, where labour debts should cancel each other out,



is that it allows a large assembly of workers to circulate among fields as they sequentially become "ripe" for a particular task. While it is true in a general sense that the demand for labour in a community peaks all at once (say within one month), it is still the case that a certain amount of staggering takes place due to variation in planting time, soil type, rainfall and the ability to command familial, *machangano* or *maricho* labour. And it is perhaps in the way that this staggering comes about--in other words, in the way that some households are able to call a *humwe* before others--that the differential advantages of the system can be seen to operate, and the seeds of differentiation need to be sought.

Still, there are limits to the possibilities for accumulation through the *humwe* system; and it can safely be said that while it may be one factor enabling some households to accrue the surpluses of grain or cash required to occasionally hire casual labour, it does not by itself enable the hiring of permanent workers. In fact, virtually all those who hire full-time permanent workers have salaried jobs and/or own shops or vehicles used for commercial transport.

The rural proletariat, to the extent that such a class may be said to exist in Gokwe, is employed by those with constant cash incomes, not by full-time peasant farmers. Broadly stated, it is not at the level of agricultural production that significant exploitation is taking place in the Communal Areas, but at the level of circulation. In order

to gain entry as an economic actor at that level, however, one must have accumulated capital either through non-agricultural wage-employment or, more rarely, through a few consecutive years of profitable cotton production. It is in the middle ground of social relations--i.e., those that arise and often mediate between peasants and the state--that the absorption of surplus generated by cotton production takes place.

## CONCLUSION

A revolution is taking place in the rugged, rolling and difficult terrain that encompasses the cotton growing areas of Sebungwe, Munyati, Nemangwe, Goredema, Gandavaroyi, and Masuka--all in the Gokwe District, Midlands. The combatants leading the men in the fighting, are not armed with guns and cudgels. In fact, they are not trained to kill or shed blood. These are the Agritex agricultural extension workers...These are men who have been armed with the knowledge of improved farming methods, who go from village to village, over hills and valleys, advising communal farmers in their day to day chores. They are referred to as "Red Army" because they ride on red Honda motorcycles...  
--Harare Herald, 17 June 1986.

It is nearly three years now since we bade farewell to the people of Goredema. In a feat of organizational skill that we had come to know so well, the village arranged a massive farewell party for us on the model of the Agricultural Field Day. Indeed, as Mai Wanda and Mai Dzorai replastered the huts with a lovely pink *jecha* (sand) mixture, they recalled with delight how hundreds of people had come to the Field Day at their home three years before, when they had won the area competition. They especially liked to remember all of the red motorcycles parked in a line beneath a stand of mopane trees.

On this occasion, awnings were constructed on poles in the low-lying mopane flats just north of the Mbano homestead in the direction of the township. Some six hundred people,

including Chief Goredema, Councillor Mapitse and many other distinguished guests from across the ward attended--seated, as we were, on chairs in the centre of a U-shaped arrangement. We were treated to skits by the schoolchildren and many dances, and then it was time for speeches--Gul Rukh and I had been frantically preparing ours amidst all the packing in our hut. I have saved the text (the longest I ever attempted to write in Shona) which reads, translated back to English (I would be embarrassed to make known the Shona!), as follows:

May I beg your pardon, Chief Goredema, Councillor Mapitse, Officers of Agritex and Government Departments, Village Chairmen, Committee Members, Teachers, Parents, Schoolchildren, and All of Our Friends,

We never thought that we could possibly have as many friends as this in Goredema. You have made us happy today, because now we know that Goredema is our own country. We stayed with you for only one year, but it seems like ten. When we arrived here, we were like small children. We didn't know how to greet others or how to clap our hands in thanks like this [laughter]. I didn't know how to hold a plough and Mai Worby didn't know how to carry water on her head. But you, the people of Goredema have taught us these things. You have taught us how to plant maize and cotton, how to weed with a hoe, and how to pick cotton. Now, we can teach people in Canada the things that we have learned here. We will tell them that the farmers of Gokwe can really farm! They don't have tractors, they don't have good roads, they don't have dams, they don't have transport, they don't have large fields--but still, they can harvest twenty or even forty bales of cotton, and fifteen scotchcarts of maize. Some can achieve yields per acre that exceed even the commercial farms.

But there are some things that are killing the farmers here in Goredema. Drought kills because the cattle don't have water to drink. Pesticides can kill because farmers don't have proper clothing to protect themselves. I myself refused to spray

cotton because there is no mask to cover one's mouth here. I have seen many, many farmers putting their hands into the pesticides without gloves. One day they will die. If you die, the companies that are selling pesticides will say, "It's not our problem."

Loans, too, can kill farmers. The people of the Finance Company are happy to give money, but if the rain fails to fall, they will say, "It's not our problem." The businessmen, they are happy to give you loans if you don't have money to buy seeds or sugar. Many people told us, "The businessmen help us a lot. If we don't have money, we can borrow \$80 and give them a bale of cotton later." But they don't really want to help you. Are they not rich? Are you yourselves rich? They are taking half of your money and they are putting it in their pockets.

Our advice is: Refuse to take loans. It is better to form savings clubs and to keep your money in the bank. The CMB should build cotton depots that are close by and give cash for cotton, not checks. You can form groups for buying things together in bulk: sugar, oil, salt, seeds.

Here is some more advice:

To the parents: Allow your daughters to go to school until they finish Form 4, or even Form 6 and University. Don't force them to be married before they have finished school. The people who refuse to send their daughters to school, they shall be left behind. There can be no development without educated women, because women are needed to sit on all the committees and VIDCOs. If they cannot even read and write, how will they do it?

To the schoolchildren: Don't only think of going to town to find work. You should use the knowledge that you have learned in school to help your elders: to write farm budgets, to organize your farming practices well. You should join the National Farmers Association. You should gather knowledge about your VIDCO so that you can write a good plan together with the Agritex Officers and your Councillor and your VIDCO members. You are planning for your future. If you fail to conserve the soil, protect the grazing lands, and rotate crops, you will be left behind. Don't forget the crops such as sunflower, beans, nyimo, pumpkins,

finger millet and bullrush millet. Don't just plant cotton, cotton, cotton, year after year.

To the teachers: Help the students to do practical things: to write *farm plans*, *farm budgets*, and other such things.

So, I have finished. I do not have words with which to say "Thank-you." We do thank-you very, very much. We will remember you for our whole lives. And one day, we will return.

These were the answers I had found to the "agrarian question" from a point of view I had hardly imagined to exist before that year. When I read these words today, I feel both moved and disturbed. There was no dissimulation in them, of that I am certain--I felt these things passionately. They are the things that everyone had probably expected me to say since I had been saying them on numerous occasions to small groups of students, elders, and extension workers for some time. I had been both made into, and made myself into, a spokesperson for a particularly modern point of view.

The invading "Red Army on Motorcycles" that the Herald writer described in 1986 represents perhaps a fifth wave of conquest to wash over Gokwe. The first was led by Chireya, who tricked the autochthonous inhabitants out of their salt, their wives and their land, but couldn't seize the power to make it fertile. The second was led by the *indunas* of the Ndebele, who accepted tobacco from people they called the *VaShangwe* as a sign of subordination and peace. The colonial conquest that followed not only extracted tribute and labour, but, more profoundly, established a different language of

agrarian discipline and practice and made possible the reimagination of relations of power and identity. It was under the aegis of the colonial state that the fourth "conquest," that of the *Madheruka*, took place. The late colonial and post-colonial regimes took the spatial journey of the *Madheruka* into the land of the *Vashangwe* as an allegory of the journey from the backward past into the progressive present and future. Today, their exploits are already mythologized in the culture of modernity.

Knowing that I too was coming to give voice to the perspective of the modern, Mbano and the other people we lived among in Goredema were only too well prepared. The texts of my speeches reflect the degree to which I had learned as much about how to speak for modernity as I had about holding a plough. More than I would like to admit, either then or now, I had been trained to play the ventriloquist's dummy, a mirror of the *masvikiro* who allowed the voice of tradition to speak through themselves.

The discourse of modernity has no centre that is located in the Western tradition. It is dispersed through the Other, made on the edges of the colonial world, and then used to recolonize the core; it continually recreates the distinctions it sets out to discover, like a virus, infecting subjects with the instructions to reproduce itself ad infinitum in yet other hosts.

Had we been the viral agent or its victim? I am not

sure. In the course of my stay in Gokwe we shifted identities many times, and had spoken as often for the virtues of preserving "tradition" as we had for the necessity of obtaining, say, a Western-style education or the rights of women. The gifts of labour that we had made to Mbano's household and to many others in the village over the course of the year had alone called into question our association with the programme of modernizing agrarian practice borne by the Red Army of Agritex. In return we had received many kinds of knowledge--social, technical, and sacred. It was a knowledge that was contained in bodies as much as in voices, and one that was continually being remade out of a long historical dialogue with emblems and agents of modernity such as ourselves.

Our journey into Gokwe, our search for the solution to the puzzle of commoditization, did not end with our departure. After our return to Montreal, we reformulated the original questions we had carried with us to Gokwe, but this time with a novel depth of understanding: What was becoming of the moral authority of the ancestors over the land now that the formal authority over its distribution had become even more detached from the principles of lineal descent and alliance enshrined in myth? What meaning had the ritual circulation of water and money, seed and salt from the living inhabitants of the land to those who govern its fertility, when "fertility" had become a matter for the extension service to solve with



regimens of crop rotation and fertilizer application, and money was being paid for land that the headman could spend any way he likes?

For several months I struggled with new questions such as these, not knowing whether to answer them in the distanced discourse of an anthropologist or to consider them by thinking back through the experience we had lived through, the journey we had made. Soon this dilemma was to solve itself. In December, we received a letter from a friend in Harare who had met by chance a young man from the village. He told her that a lightning bolt had struck the main hut in the *musha* of Mai Obert as over twenty people huddled inside to protect themselves from a terrible storm. Seven people had been knocked unconscious, he said, but only one had died. It was Obert.

Gul Rukh and I wept off and on for days. Finally, we agreed on what we must do: we took one of the last Zimbabwe ten dollar notes we had saved and wrapped it in a short note of consolation addressed to his parents, put it in an envelope and sent it back along the path of the journey that we had made into the heart of Chireya's land: from Canada, to Zimbabwe, to Gokwe, to Goredema, to Tazivana Village.

Since then, we have continued to send money to the villagers, tying our lives to theirs by sending these tokens of ourselves in the form of a commodity across the oceans that separate our homes. For some time, the money went to pay

Fungi's secondary school fees; she dreamed of journeying to Canada some day, perhaps to help us look after our baby daughter. But this year, in the wake of a devastating drought, Mbano wrote that he had to buy eight bags of maize with the money we sent. With nothing but scorched cotton fields and empty granaries left in the village the young men have all run off to Harare in search of jobs that can't possibly be there.

Had this year been different, I might have proffered the conclusion that the miracle of commoditization in Gokwe was enticing the younger generation to stay on the land and make their living from cotton, combining and remaking new labour forms from old, reshaping their identities as "modern" farmers. Now I will have to think of another story to tell.

## APPENDIX ONE

### TRIBAL LAND AUTHORITY REGULATIONS

Minutes of Tribal Land Authority Meeting Held at Goredema on 14 June 1977. (File Gokwe A4, RAO Gokwe).

item: Tribal Land Authority Rules: The TLA rules as prescribed in 1977 were re-drawn. Copies are to be cyclostyled and distributed to the Kraalheads at the next Kraalhead meeting.

#### Goredema TLA Rules

1. Allocation of Land: Land applicants approach a full TLA meeting together with their Kraalhead and, on payment of a fee of \$1.00 a date is arranged for the TLA member, the K'head and the Extension Assistant to meet at the site where the land is to be allocated and the allocation is then completed. A further \$1.00 is paid to the TLA member concerned at the time of the allocation. The Kraalhead also receives a dollar. When the land is actually pegged a further fee of \$1.50 is paid and split between the pegger, staff boy, TLA member and the Kraalhead.

2. Allocation of Gardens: The applicant pays a fee of \$1.00 to the full TLA for permission to form a garden. The garden is then pegged by the TLA member for no fee.

3. Grazing Areas: The TLA members and the Kraalheads are responsible for the demarcation of grazing area boundaries.

4. Boundaries: The TLA member in consultation with the Kraalhead concerned, demarcates the boundaries between lands and "misha" and between land holders. The TLA members are responsible for the settling of Kraalhead boundary disputes, and, together with the Kraalhead concerned, settle land holder boundary disputes.

5. Business Sites: A business applicant pays \$10.00 to the Headman for his approval and a further \$10.00 to the whole TLA. A date is arranged where the applicant meets together with the TLA member, the Community Advisor and the Health Assistant at the business centre concerned where he may be allocated a stand.

6. Kraalhead Removal: A person changing from one kraal to another pays the Headman \$1.00 and the TLA \$1.00 for approval.

7. Moulding of Bricks: Any person who wishes to mould bricks must have the permission of the TLA. A Businessman pays \$2.00 for this permission if the bricks are required for his business.

8. Water Ways: These are pegged by the TLA member, the pegger and the Ex.A.

9. Cattle Routes: At certain times of the year and in certain circumstances, a person who drives cattle along a road may be fined up to \$5.00, when this may result in the damage [sic] to the road concerned.

10. Offenses: Any person who contravenes the following rules, or is responsible for performing the following without permission, is fined the amount as detailed.

| <u>OFFENCE:</u>                                      | <u>FINE</u>  |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| i)Ploughs land with no permission                    | \$2.00       |
| ii)Ploughs land with no contours                     | 10.00        |
| iii)Ploughs within 35 yard limit                     | 10.00        |
| iv)Drags logs or pulls sleighs                       | 10.00        |
| v)Ploughs over allocated boundaries                  | 5.00         |
| vi)Leaves fire unattended or starts veld fire        | 10.00        |
| vii)Transfers lands for no reason                    | 10.00        |
| viii)Grazes cattle in arable lands in growing season | Warning Only |
| ix)Grazes cattle in arable lands a Second time       | 5.00         |
| x)A Kraalhead who allocates land in grazing area     | 10.00        |
| The person so ploughing must leave immediately       |              |
| xi)Ploughs water way                                 | 10.00        |
| xii)Moulds bricks without permission                 |              |
| Businessmen and Schools only                         | 10.00        |

## II Permission Relating to Trees

No permission is required for the chopping of trees for domestic use.

TLA permission at \$10.00 per annum is required where the person is cutting trees for the purpose of getting timber to make stools, implements, etc. to sell or for his carpentry business. Such a person who cuts trees without the requisite permission is fined \$10.00 and pays a further \$10.00 for the required permission.

Under no circumstances can wild fruit trees, baobab trees and large riverine trees be felled. A person who contravenes this provision is liable to a \$5.00 fine for the first offence. The fine is increased for subsequent offenses.

**APPENDIX TWO**  
**DOCUMENTS ON THE RECRUITMENT AND SUPERVISION OF COTTON**  
**PICKING LABOUR**

**Document I.**

Ref. CRP 2 (D/39/3) From the Director of Conservation and Extension to All Provincial Conservation and Extension Officers. 16 Jan. 1968.

Cotton Picking: The secretary for Agriculture has informed me that the Ministry of Information Immigration and Tourism will be carrying out a campaign in the African Areas adjoining European farms where cotton is being grown with a view to telling Africans what good money can be earned as casual labourers picking cotton. It is hoped by this means to obtain an adequate labour force for seasonal cotton picking.

The Ministry of Information, Immigration and Tourism has prepared a series of slides to be shown by their cinema units and publicity is also being given in the African Times and over the R.B.C. Copies of the commentary which will accompany these slides are attached hereto and I would be grateful if Officers in Tribal areas adjoining European cotton growing areas could spread this information through their Extension Assistants.

[Text for Slide Presentation]:

Cotton Picking:

(1) When we think cotton, it is very seldom that we think about its production, only of what it means to us in the form of shirts, dresses and thread for mending our clothes. The cotton plant, when ready for harvesting, looks like a dry stick with lumps of white cotton wool hanging on it, and these lumps are in fact the pieces of raw cotton before they have been picked and processed at all.

(2) The actual picking of cotton is usually done by hand, because better quality results are achieved than by machine plucking.

(3) The work itself is quite easy and is the sort of thing that can be done equally well by women and older children, as

men. This means that a whole family can be employed on the same job, and work as a family team.

(4) Cotton farmers use different methods to pay their pickers. Some farmers pay the pickers daily, while others pay weekly. Whatever system is used the more cotton you pick the more you will earn. Most farmers pay on the basis of so much for each pound of cotton picked.

A good picker who works hard can earn £4 or £5 per month. So you can see that if a family decides to go cotton picking they could easily earn £50 in the four month cotton picking season.

As each picker fills (5) his or her bag with cotton it is taken to a central point in the farm where it is weighed, and a note made of the weight of each bag handed in by each picker, so that daily wages can be assessed. After the bags have been weighed (6) the cotton is then looked over by another team of workers, again both men and women are quite capable of doing this job, so that small pieces of stalk and other impurities can be removed before the cotton is (7) baled and sent firstly for sale and then properly it is necessary for one of the workers, as can be seen here, to stand inside the bale and push the cotton down hard with the feet. (8) The main reason for anyone working is so that he or she can make some money to buy things that they need and most people who are engaged on cotton picking (9) make sufficient money to be able to save most of it during the picking season, which is about 4 months long and then take the money back to the Tribal Trust Lands, and spend the money that they have earned from there. The wise pickers put their money (10) into a Savings Account as they earn it, and then draw on this when they return home. The different things that people spend money on are as different to [sic] the people themselves. Some like to buy nice new clothes, and this for them is going from the extreme beginning to the extreme end of the same process [i.e. meaning cotton]. The cotton (11), once it has been processed, is made into yarn and cloth and then into clothes, and then the people buy clothes, and then the next year the circle is repeated all over again. Other people will not be very interested in buying themselves clothes, but will be very interested in finding sufficient money (12) to pay for their children's school fees each year, so that their children do not only learn their lessons well, but also learn to play. (13) And this is not only healthy for the child's body, but also for its brain which must have plenty of fresh air to keep alert and therefore learn all that he or she is taught. All these things can be paid for, and many others besides as the result of a season's cotton picking by a family, but the additional benefits to be gained from this occupation are those of the friends made during the season (14) and the good times to be had by all (15-pause for 10 seconds).

Many people living in the Tribal Trust Lands can also benefit very largely (19) from this seasonal employment by

having sufficient money at the end of a season to buy all that they need in the way of seeds, fertilizers and implements, to ensure good quality and high yield crops (20), not only of maize, but also of things like sugar, wheat, seen here, sorghums and other crops. These will not only provide all the food needed for the family during the year, but the farmer will be able to sell his excess produce, and be able to put still more money into his Savings Account. Another type of farming (21) is that of cattle breeding and fattening, and a Tribal Trust Land farmer who buys cattle with the money that he makes during the cotton picking season, can afford to run a small herd of quality cattle that again he can sell to the Cold Storage Commission, at a handsome profit, and again the money will go into his savings. The one thing the farmer can be sure of (22) is that his meat will have a ready market.

One thing is certain (23) and that is that everyone wants to see his family living in comfort and with plenty to eat at all times and by working for a while each year in the cotton lands (24) and then returning home all the needs of the family can be satisfied.

People living in areas bordering cotton lands are lucky to have seasonal employment so close to home, and would be wise to take advantage of it (25).

## **Document 2.**

Ref. CRP 2 (J/A/2) From RHG Howden, Acting Chief Agronomist, Conex, to All Provincial and Group Conservation and Extension Officers. 8 Feb. 1968.

### Cotton Picking Courses: 1967/68.

Group officers to arrange demonstrations in cotton picking to coincide with the opening of the earliest bolls in their areas.

Attached Circular from R.F. Locke, Agronomist: Cotton, Gatooma Research Station.

### 5 Feb. 1968: "Cotton Picking Training":

From work-study observations, it is considered well within the capabilities of men, women, and teenagers, to pick, on an average, 70-80 lbs. of seed cotton in a day. A little more than half this amount is presently being harvested by the majority of pickers.

There was an acute shortage of labour in some areas for reaping the 1967 crop. With the increased acreage, it is probable the labour problem will be even more acute in 1968.

One obvious way to overcome the shortage of pickers, is to increase their efficiency. Where the incentive exists to earn more money, the pickers soon take to improved picking

techniques. Where it doesn't, there is little one can do...."

1. Divide the group into convenient geographical units easily get-at-able by the farmers.

2. Select the most advanced crop in each unit for the demonstration. This is important, as the demonstration must be given before pickers, particularly the new ones, have developed wrong methods of their own."

3. As soon as a few bolls are open, and before the crop is ready for the first reaping, the extension staff concerned, should don a reaping bag, and spend an hour or two reaping. The methods advised in the booklet should have been studied beforehand, and it is very necessary to put this information into practice, before trying to put it across to others. Officers in European Areas, should train field orderlies, or other African staff, so that they can be used for speaking to their own race in the vernacular when the demonstration is given.

4. When the crop is ready for picking, invite the farmers to attend the demonstration. In European areas, the farmer should load his car with his boss boys, or principal pickers, and bring them along. It is at this demonstration that the field orderly, or other trained African Extension Staff, can be used to advantage.

.."Don't try and teach people to pick cotton if you haven't first tried it yourself."

### **Document 3.**

Ref CRP 3/3 (D/39/10/38) 1 July 1966 From J.H.H. Lourens for Director of Conservation and Extension to All Provincial Conservation and Extension Officers.

At a recent RNFV congress, a representative pointed out that cotton was arriving at the ginnery "which had been badly picked, and in some cases, was very dirty and dusty, resulting in degrading [sic] of the cotton with consequent financial loss to the producer. It was suggested that this should be brought to the attention of the Rhodesian Cotton Growers Assoc., and that they should offer assistance to ensure that the necessary assistance and guidance be given to producers to ensure high grades. The point was also made that something should be done to train farmers in the picking of cotton so that they in turn be in a position to train their labourers...please make sure that the necessary steps are taken for Field Staff to advise and train farmers in the correct methods and procedure of picking and reaping cotton.



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