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# A social history of town and country interactions: a study on the changing social life and practices of rural-urban migrants in colonial Harare and Goromonzi (1946-1979)

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**2014-01-24**
http://hdl.handle.net10539/13597

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the changing social life and practices of rural-urban migrants who migrated to colonial Harare (then known as Salisbury) from several rural reserve areas such as Kunzwi, Chinyika, Seke, and Chinamhora in the Goromonzi District in a period spanning over 30 years from 1946 to 1979. The study aims to capture autonomous, plural and contextual transformations in both the rural and urban spaces emanating from, or because of increasing rural-urban interaction. This challenges conventional interpretations of rural-urban migration and examines the role of material culture, associational life and livelihoods in African social transformation and engages with the possibilities of independent agency of Africans and cultural reconstruction. I propose that in much the same way as the colonial state, the African colonised people constructed alternative discourses that shaped their daily realities and identities. This was partly as a form of resistance against the state or other power holders but principally in pursuit of individualising and seizing various contexts in attempts to bring about the cultural elements preferred, and the social relations wished for. I contend that while one of the defining features of twentieth-century Africa was, undoubtedly, the growth of cities and the accompanying transformations in urban life; such change has largely been treated under several other accounts such as the emerging African elite, the rise of nationalism and trade-unionism. This study, however, posits that the unprecedented multiplication of rural-urban linkages in colonial Zimbabwe, more so, in the decades following the end of the Second World War, calls for a separate interrogation of how subaltern classes transformed or reframed their own social environment. The thesis, therefore, contributes to the scholarship on rural-urban interactions by foregrounding the social history analytical framework through exploring how those who traversed between the rural and urban spaces transformed their own socio-spatial environments and livelihoods. By elevating urban-based rural migrants into the investigation and analysis, the study shows that colonialism and "modernisation" were not the only forces shaping the lives of the African colonised people. The aim is to reconstruct the inner workings of an indigenous community for which colonial rule was but one (though important) thread in the fabric of social life. This brings into analytical space the lives, goals and transformations of those who experienced the complex and often-contradictory effects of migration in colonial Zimbabwe daily and restores the inner workings of the socio-cultural systems emanating thereof.