NDEBELE FORCED REMOVALS, MIGRATION, AND HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONS IN COLONIAL BUHERA, ZIMBABWE: 1925 - 1980

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Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus
AMEC	American Methodist Episcopal Church
ANC	African National Congress
ANNC	African Natives National Congress
BSAC	British South Africa Company
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
EFA	European Forum Alpbach
EFS	Emancipatory Futures Studies
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
GNWA	Gwelo Native Welfare Association
LAA	Land Apportionment Act
LMS	London Missionary Society
NAZ	National Archives of Zimbabwe
NC	Native Commissioner
PNC	Provincial Native Commissioner
RSF	Rhodesia Security Forces
SANC	South African National Congress
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association
USA	United States of America
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The world has a long history of migrations as individuals and communities constantly traversed the face of the earth. Africa has been equally shaped by such movements and the Bantu migrations stand out as one major process that played a huge role in shaping the social, cultural, and political order of modern Africa.[1] The colonisation of African territories that intensified in the 1870s saw a notable change in how people were moving around the continent. Relocations became racialised. In colonial southern Africa, the early 1900s came with the mass evictions of African communities from their ancestral territories into new settlements. This was part of the social engineering processes meant to force Africans to join the wage labour economy. In British colonies, this process of social engineering put Africans in hazardous ecological landscapes as well as in spaces where they hardly possessed any form of belonging. A few scholars have studied how movements across different landscapes shaped people's thoughts and interactions with nature.[2] Stories of how African communities particularly in colonial Zimbabwe navigated these environmental and social challenges remain largely unknown.[3] Yet their resilience in various hostile environments has been Africa's greatest contribution to global history.[4] By weaving together social and environmental history, this study re-reads histories of colonialism in Africa through the lens of agro-ecological resilience and agricultural innovation.

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[1] R. Waller. "Ecology, Expansion and Migration in East Africa". *African Affairs*. (1985, 84: 336) 347-380.
[2] These include Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Terence Ranger. *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the "Dark forests" of Matabeleland.* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), JoAnn McGregor *Crossing the Zambezi: The Politics of Landscapes on a Central African Fronteir.* (Oxford: James Currey, 2009), Terence Ranger. *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*. (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), and Sandra Swart. "It Is As Bad To Be a Black Man's Animal As It Is To Be a Black Man' – The Politics of Species in Sol Plaatje's Native Life in South Africa". *Journal of Southern African Studies.* (2014 40:4), 689-705.
[3] Following occupation of the Zimbabwean plateau by Cecil John Rhodes, the area was renamed Rhodesia. In 1901, it was renamed Southern Rhodesia. Zimbabwe and Southern Rhodesia are used interchangeably in this thesis.
[4] John Iliffe. *Africa: The History of a Continent.* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 1.

Writing in 1927, the Native Commissioner (NC) of Charter District in the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) reported that a group of Ndebele immigrants, the Gwebu people, had relocated from Matabeleland and settled in the Makumbe area in the then Sabi Reserve (now Buhera) in Manicaland.[5] In his correspondence, the Native Commissioner revealed that the Gwebu people were "in distress" because they had not been allocated their lands and were living in uncertainty.[6] He feared that the Gwebu people were going to cause environmental damage and practise wasteful agricultural methods in the area where they had settled because they had no sense of responsibility for the land in particular and natural resources in general. An earlier 1927 livestock census of cattle belonging to Ndebele households evicted from Mzingwane to the Sabi Reserve in Buhera revealed that the group that migrated through the Dagamela area of Lower Gwelo had a total of 348 head.[7] This was, according to colonial officials, bound to cause massive soil erosion.[8] In addition, the Native Commissioner revealed that the area that had been identified for settlement by the Gwebu people had settled was prone to droughts and difficult to cultivate. The area had been unoccupied for a long time and was infested with wild game, characterised by thickets. Although the area presented opportunities such as abundant firewood, timber, and untouched fertile soils, it was generally deemed inhabitable by the first-comer Shona-speaking Makumbe.[9]

The remarks made by the Native Commissioner of Charter District reveal three challenges. First, the Gwebu immigrant group settled in an area where they did not have historical legitimacy and were treated as outsiders. This was exacerbated by the fact that the colonial officials did not allocate the immigrants a clearly defined territory with its own boundaries. They were left at the mercy of

[5] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Report of the District Commissioner, Charter, for the year ending 31st December 1927.
[6] Ibid.
[7] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: The District Veterinary Surgeon to the Superintend of Natives, Bulawayo, 20th July 1927.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid. The term first-comer is used contextually to show that the Njanja/Makumbe arrived before the Ndebele in Buhera. It does not necessarily suggest they were the first to arrive in the area. In fact, the Njanja/Makumbe were immigrants themselves who displaced the Hera and the Mutekedza Dynasties. *See* David Beach. *A Zimbabwean Past: Shona Dynastic Histories and Oral Traditions.* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1994).

the first-comer Shona-speaking Makumbe people. It was not guaranteed if they were going to be allocated lands for settlement. Second, the colonial officials expected the Gwebu to leave behind a trail of environmental destruction and practise harmful agricultural methods in the area where they had settled. These projections by the colonial officials were informed by racial prejudices.[10] The Gwebu people were therefore treated with suspicion. Third, the Gwebu people settled in an ecologically hazardous area that the Shona had even neglected. The area is referred to as hazardous due to several reasons. Though the area had fertile uncultivated black clay soils and adequate water sources, it had been neglected by the Makumbe because it was infested with wild animals which were a threat to both humans and livestock, as well as thick forests which could not be easily converted into arable lands.[11] The Sabi Reserve in general was also characterised by perennial droughts owing to poor rains as well as infertile dry lands which put the residents in danger of starvation. The question that arises from these two issues is: how did the evicted Ndebele immigrant society make sense and interact with the environment following their settlement in Buhera around 1927?

The overarching argument presented in this thesis is that the Ndebele immigrant group was able to demonstrate innovative agricultural methods and dynamic conservation practices during the colonial period between the mid-1920s and 1980. This was despite being in an area marred by ecological hazards and socio-political insecurities such as the lack of belonging. Agricultural innovation took different forms throughout the colonial period, but it mainly included appreciating soil material qualities, innovations in livestock production and diversification of crops. This, in turn, contributed to food security. In terms of dynamic conservation practices, the Ndebele immigrants deployed their indigenous knowledge to conserve water resources, forests, and farmlands. I argue that the immigrants exhibited what scholars such as Richard Grove and Toyin Falola have termed resilience:

[10] James McCann. *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa, 1800– 1990.* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999) 216.
[11] Personal Interview with Chafa Chigwende, Garamwera Village, Buhera Ward 3, 9 March 2015.

a form of ingenuity that enabled them to navigate the respective ecological hazards and social illegitimacy.[12] Scholars such as Anderson and Bollig have used the concept of resilience to study long-term adaptation and transformation of communities living in areas with economic, environmental, climatic and social shocks.[13] The ecological adversity in Buhera did not blur their ingenuity. Rather, they saw an opportunity in an area generally viewed as hostile. Iliffe notes that Africa's greatest contribution to global history is the ability of its people to inhabit hostile landscapes.[14] This study contributes to this important conversation by showing how rural agro-ecological resilience and innovation by the Ndebele immigrants shaped broader socio-economic realities.

The history of the Gwebu people

What is now called the Gwebu immigrant society or simply the Ndebele people in Buhera, Zimbabwe, has a history traceable to the Zulu State in present-day South Africa in the 1820s. The Gwebu were originally not a unified group, but a closely knit family belonging to the broader Khumalo under the leadership of King Mzilikazi who was in turn a subordinate of King Tshaka of the Zulu State. The Gwebu family belonged to the elite Zansi socio-political class which was made up of the original Khumalo people most of whom were descendants of King Mzilikazi. Due to the family's proximity to King Mzilikazi, the Gwebu people made up the trusted *Amnyama* regiment in the 1820s. The *Amnyama* was a proto-military group (*amabutho*) made up of young men described as the "black-haired ones" in Zulu military nomenclature.[15] This regiment was formed by Mzilikazi just before his breaking away from Tshaka's control.

[12] Richard Grove and Toyin Falola. "Chiefs, Boundaries, and Sacred Woodlands: Early Nationalism and the Defeat of Colonial Conservationism in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, 1870-1916." *African Economic History*. (1996, 24) 1–23.
[13] David M. Anderson and Michael Bollig. "Resilience and collapse: histories, ecologies, conflicts and identities in the Baringo-Bogoria basin, Kenya". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. (2016, 10:1) 1-20.
[14] John Iliffe. *Africa: The History of a Continent.* 1.
[15] Julian Cobbing. "The Evolution of Ndebele Amabutho". *The Journal of African History*. (1977, 15: 4) 622.

In 1837 after the Khumalo group broke away from the Zulu state at the instigation of Tshaka, the Gwebu family were part of the *Amnyama* regiment that fought against the Boers at the battle of Egabeni in the Great Marcio region of South Africa.[16] Majijili Gwebu was one of the members of the Gwebu family responsible for leading the regiment.[17] According to Khumalo customs and traditions, each regiment was led by a chief (*induna*) who was appointed by King Mzilikazi.[18] The Gwebu family as a social group and as a regiment were, therefore, represented by a chief. Ndhlavana was the Gwebu chief who ruled under both Tshaka and Mzilikazi in Zululand.[19] His son, Ntabeni, gave birth to Tshuwe who was then appointed head of the family by Mzilikazi after settlement in the Zimbabwean plateau.[20] Daniel Fish Gwebu who was appointed as chief of the Gwebu people in 1925 emerged from this lineage.[21]

The Gwebu family was one of the several clans who fled the Zulu State under Mzilikazi of the Khumalo during the Mfecane and crossed the Limpopo River into the then Zimbabwean plateau around 1840.[22] Due to their important place within the Khumalo (hereafter referred to as the Ndebele) regimental system, the Gwebu family were allocated their regimental town in Mzingwane, southwest of the then Zimbabwean plateau. According to historian Julian Cobbing, these regimental towns which had populations of more than a thousand each were colossal strongholds that provided security to the royal capital located at Matopos.[23]

The processes of migration from Zululand to Matabeleland between 1820 and 1840 contributed to the evolution of the Gwebu from a mere family into a larger community. Several Nguni groups which were conquered and incorporated into the Ndebele group found their way into the Gwebu

[16] Julian Cobbing. "The Evolution of Ndebele Amabutho". *The Journal of African History.* (1977, 15: 4) 622.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Burial of Gwebu "Eulogy" Isaiah Fish Gwebu 16 January 2001.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Julian Cobbing. The evolution of Ndebele Amabutho. 607-631.
[23] Ibid.

clan through marriage and social relations. For example, the Pedi were incorporated into the Ndebele in 1820 and found their way into the *Enhla* class.[24] However, due to the porosity of these classes, some Pedi found themselves in the Gwebu *Zansi* clan through marriage.[25] Upon settlement in the Zimbabwean plateau, groups such as the BaTonga were incorporated into Ndebele society through both consent and coercion as part of Mzilikazi's nation-building project.[26]

Another important moment in history that led to the further evolution of the Gwebu from a mere extended clan into a diverse group was the process of colonisation and early colonial rule between 1890 and 1900. The Cecil John Rhodes-led British South African Company (BSAC) which colonised Mashonaland and Matabeleland in the early 1890s brought with it Fengu and Xhosa communities from the Cape Colony in South Africa.[27] Some of these were cattle herders, wagon drivers and general workers who were part of the Pioneer Column - a quasi-mercenary group that took part in the colonisation of Mashonaland and Matabeleland. In the mid-1890s, an additional group of Sotho immigrants came to the newly colonised territory, Rhodesia, as missionaries under many different ecumenical organisations. Most of these missionaries belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the London Missionary Society (LMS).[28] The two organisations had realised the merits of employing African evangelists in spreading Christianity.[29] From the 1890s, the Sotho established communities in areas such as Manama in Gwanda south, Chief Nhlamba's area in Gwanda north, Kezi District, as well as in the Dewure Purchase areas in Gutu district.[30]

[24] Julian Cobbing. The evolution of Ndebele Amabutho. 607-631.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. "Dynamics of Democracy and Human Rights Among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe, 1818-1934." https://ir.uz.ac.zw/bitstream/handle/10646/893/ndlovu%20g.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y Accessed 17 June 2022. 2.

[27] Robin Palmer. *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia*. (California: University of California Press, 1977). 62.
[28] Joseph Mujere. "Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists, And Progressive Farmers: Basotho Struggles for Belonging in Zimbabwe 1930s-2008". (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh: 2012) 46.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Joseph Mujere. "Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists, And Progressive Farmers: Basotho Struggles for Belonging in Zimbabwe 1930s-2008". 40.

Though small in size, Mzingwane hosted a few Fengu households, some of whom immersed themselves among the Gwebu people.

In 1925, the Gwebu people were evicted from their lands in Mzingwane by the colonial government. Some of the Gwebu family members evicted from Esigodini in Mzingwane District migrated to the Shangani Reserve where many other Ndebele-speaking groups had already settled. Others migrated north of the Zambezi River into present-day Zambia.[31] Around 1927, the Gwebu group led by Daniel Fish Gwebu decided to take a completely different route. They migrated to Buhera where they had found alternative lands for settlement. At the same time, neighbouring Ndebele-speaking areas from Fort Rixon, Douglas Dale, Hope Fountain, and Essexvale areas in Matabeleland South were also served with eviction orders after their lands were bought by Willoughby Consolidated.[32] A then young Chief Fish Daniel Gwebu (hereafter referred to as Chief Gwebu) who had just been appointed as an *induna* following the death of his father convinced fellow evicted Ndebele families, most of whom were not of the Gwebu clan, to join him on the migration to Buhera where he had found an alternative place of settlement. One of the reasons why Gwebu mobilised Ndebele-speaking communities outside of his clan was that the group had become too small to warrant an autonomous chieftainship after the other group had migrated to Shangani. This further diversified the once purely *Zansi* family into a diverse group of Ndebele-speaking society.

The migration from Zululand, eviction from Mzingwane and subsequent relocation to Buhera between 1820 and the 1920s make it clear that what is now called the Gwebu immigrant society or the Ndebele of Buhera is a by-product of different socio-political processes. What is now called the Gwebu society evolved from the different historical processes discussed above. These include the migration from Zululand and accompanying conquests of smaller communities, settlement in

[31] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". *African Studies Review*. (2014, 57:3) 84.
[32] Ibid.

Mzingwane and incorporation of other groups to beef up the regiment, and the eviction and migration from Mzingwane to Buhera which encompassed many other diverse ethnic groups.

Environment and agriculture

Throughout the early colonial period (1890-1925) in Southern Rhodesia, the Gwebu managed to establish themselves as successful farmers.[33] Not only were the Gwebu successful tillers of the land, but they were also big livestock owners. Afrikander cattle breeds were fused with the local Mashona type to produce agile disease and drought-resistant crossbreeds which thrived in the Matabeleland region.[34] Their success was even noticed by a white broker working for Willoughby Consolidated who wrote:

> The area is thickly populated by natives who grow all the natural products of the country – mealies, millets, groundnuts, pumpkins, melons, etc- and the mealies grown in this area are second to none in the country.[35]

These claims corroborate Ndebele oral histories which reminisce of stories of agricultural success enjoyed by the Gwebu people before the violent evictions which started around 1926. The success of the Gwebu in Mzingwane was attributed to the availability of the heavy clay black soils (locally referred to by the Gwebu people as *isidhaka*). The soils were not only fertile but would also withhold moisture for prolonged periods. This enabled farmers to attain good harvests even during drought years.[36] Sufficient water sources allowed all year-round crop cultivation. The black clay soils enabled the Gwebu to grow a diverse range of agricultural products such as vegetables, sweet potatoes and wheat.[37] While describing the land and water sources, J. Downie added:

[33] The British South Africa Company to Colonial Office. 21st April 1914.
[34] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu (Headman Gwebu), Gwebu Homestead, Buhera, 7 July 2019.
[35] NAZ Files: S1180/2/2(11) Willoughby Consolidated CO. Ltd, Land Settlement Scheme: Correspondence Between Sir Melville Heyman and Honourable J.W Downie 1925.
[36] *Chronicle.* "How the Ndebele Settled in Buhera" 9 July 2022. https://www.chronicle.co.zw/how-ndebele-community-settled-in-buhera/ Accessed 9 July 2022.
[37] Personal interview with Albert Masaile, Masaile Homestead, Buhera, 8 July 2019.

> The ground is undoubtedly suitable also for tobacco and cotton besides which, cattle, pigs, and poultry, do excellently. Although this area cannot be classed as well-timbered, there is an abundance for fuel purposes and for cattle shelter and the grazing throughout is good. There is good surface water, and well water can be obtained at no great depth throughout the plots if a little discretion is used when sinking.[38]

This admiration of the environment, soils and landscape by a representative of Willoughby Consolidated in 1925 is the answer to why the lands were eventually acquired by the company in that same year. The forced removal of the Ndebele communities was, however, not an isolated process. They were part of a countrywide scheme of social engineering to create enclaves of white settlement while simultaneously depriving Africans of economic opportunities, thereby forcing them to seek employment in the colonial wage labour economy. Their lands were acquired in 1925 by Willoughby Consolidated, a multi-national company with interests in land throughout Southern Africa.[39] In turn, the company would create sub-divisions of the land and sell to white immigrant communities who were interested in farming.[40] The reason the lands were acquired was that they suited very well the interests of the white settlers. The settler community wanted to venture into both crop production and animal husbandry due to the availability of a ready market both locally and in neighbouring South Africa.[41] Mzingwane was strategically located a few days away from Johannesburg where there was a ready market for all sorts of agricultural products due to a thriving mining community.[42] According to Willoughby Consolidated Company's land advertisements dated 1925, Mzingwane was capable of supplying milk to Johannesburg and Cape Town due to its suitable conditions for dairy farming.[43]

[38] NAZ Files: S1180/2/2(11) Willoughby Consolidated CO. Ltd, Land Settlement Scheme: Correspondence Between Sir Melville Heyman and Honourable J.W Downie 1925.
[39] Ibid.
[40]Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] NAZ Files: S1180/2/2(11) Willoughby Consolidated CO. Ltd, Land Settlement Scheme: Correspondence Between Sir Melville Heyman and Honourable J.W Downie 1925.
[43] NAZ Files: S1180/2/2(11) Willoughby Consolidated CO. Ltd, Land Settlement Scheme: Correspondence Between Sir Melville Heyman and Honourable J.W Downie 1925.

Eviction from Matabeleland

Several Ndebele-speaking families were evicted from Matabeleland's Fort Rixon, Hope Fountain and Douglasdale areas in Mzingwane in 1925.[44] Different Ndebele-speaking groups were affected by these evictions at different levels. Most Ndebele-speaking Africans evicted from these areas migrated to the Shangani Reserve where different communities had already settled. Being the first 'Native Reserves' to be created following the colonisation of the Zimbabwean Plateau, the area was diverse in its population, but the Ndebele were the dominant group. Due to this reason, some members of the Gwebu people chose to settle in the Shangani Reserve because some of their descendants had already settled there. While some members of the Gwebu clan relocated to Shangani Reserve in Matabeleland, another group led by Chief Gwebu chose a completely different route.[45]

There are traceable reasons why the group led by Chief Gwebu eventually settled in Buhera located 400 miles (250 kilometres) from their ancestral lands. One account given by historian Musoni argues that Chief Gwebu was advised by his friend named John William Posselt (nick-named Mbizvo) who worked as a Native Commissioner for the colonial government to settle in Buhera.[46] Described by Musoni as Chief Gwebu's "friend", Posselt was the Native Commissioner for Charter District (which included Buhera) between 1911 and 1941.[47] Heavily relying on colonial stereotypes of soil preferences, Posselt convinced Chief Gwebu that there was an unoccupied area with black soils that the Ndebele preferred.[48]

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[44] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". 14.

[45] In Alexander *et al*'s *Hundred Years in the Dark Forests*, there is evidence that some members of the Gwebu clan settled in the Shangani Reserve in the 1930s. Oral histories of the Gwebu in Buhera affirm this and even state that some of them went to live in Bulawayo after evictions. There are still strong ties between the Gwebu families in Buhera and those in Bulawayo.

[46] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". 89.

[47] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". 89. 100.

[48] [48] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". 89. 100.

A competing account given by the Gwebu and Nkomo families nevertheless projects a different view of how the Ndebele finally migrated to Buhera. According to accounts given by Nicodemus Gwebu and Bambatha Nkomo, the Ndebele migrated to Buhera because they had found out on their own that the area had the soil qualities they desired.[49] According to this account, Chief Gwebu sent emissaries on several occasions to different parts of Midlands, Manicaland and Mashonaland to survey the lands and identify an area for possible settlement. After several searches, the party eventually agreed on Buhera.[50] According to this narrative, Posselt only came in to facilitate the subsequent movement of the Ndebele immigrant from Matabeleland to Buhera but the actual searching and identification of the lands was an entirely Ndebele initiative. This account downplays the role of Posselt highlighted by Musoni.

These two narratives are not necessarily contradictory but put emphasis on two different groups. Musoni's narrative emphasises the role of NC Posselt in advising the Ndebele evictees. The narrative given by Gwebu and Nkomo places emphasis on the migration as an entirely Ndebele initiative that emanated from within the group. The role of the colonial government and officials such as Posselt in aiding the migration in both accounts is undeniable. However, it remains evident from the two accounts that the Ndebele were conscious of the kind of environments they desired and made informed rational decisions even at a time when they were confronted by violent evictions.

However, unlike other wholesale evictions in colonial Zimbabwe such as the Madheruka who were evicted to Gokwe, the relocation of the Ndebele to Buhera did not take place at once. Different groups migrated at different times using different routes. The first group arrived in Buhera in 1926 and included the Doba, S'gaxa, Ndinga, Makhutshwa, and Msiza clans.[51] They settled in an area

[49] Personal Interviews with Nicodemus Gwebu and Bambatha Nkomo, Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo, Nkomo Homestead, 6 April 2021.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". 83.

under Chief Makumbe. Due to the numerical superiority of the Doba people, the area was later named after the clan.[52] The second group arrived in 1927 and included Chief Gwebu and the Nkomo families.[53] This group came via the Midlands town of Mvuma and some of the families were transported by trains from Bulawayo.[54] Other Ndebele families such as the Mgazi and Masaile arrived in Buhera as late as 1945.[55] Outside these known groups, smaller communities and families of Ndebele immigrants trickled into Buhera unnoticed at different times and escaped the attention of local colonial administrators.

Following their arrival in Buhera, colonial officials such as Posselt who had facilitated the Ndebele immigrants to settle in the area left the immigrants to negotiate with the Shona communities on their own. The Gwebu immigrants were thus not allocated their lands by the colonial government as was the practice during this era in other parts of Southern Rhodesia where similar removals had been engineered. Although the colonial officials, relying on ethnic prejudices, anticipated conflict to erupt between the immigrants and the Shona first-comer society, the immigrants were accommodated and given lands for temporary settlement.[56]

When the Ndebele immigrants arrived in Buhera, they were not allocated a place of their own with clearly defined boundaries. Instead, the colonial authorities left them to liaise with the Makumbe people at the local level. As historian Musoni argues, this put the Ndebele immigrants and the Shona-speaking Makumbe at crossroads because boundaries were not clearly defined.[57]

[52] Telephone interview with Headman Makabeni, 27 June 2020.
[53] Personal interview with Ellen Nkomo, Nkomo Homestead, 6 April 2021.
[54] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". 83.
[55] Personal Interviews with Victor Mgazi and Masaile.
[56] Personal Interview with Chief Makumbe, 28 August 2020, Harare.
[57] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". 84.

Courtesy of Chief Makumbe's hospitality, the Ndebele were given land for settlement under Headman Garamwera around 1928.[58] Gwebu had asked for permission to settle in an uninhabited land characterised by black heavy soils. The Ndebele immigrants settled in Buherain south-eastern Zimbabwe. This area was dominated by Shona-speaking groups. Although their immediate neighbours were the Makumbe, there were many other Shona-speaking groups within their immediate and farther environs. These included Shona-speaking communities in Charter in the north, Rusape in the east, Gutu district in the west on the Nyazvidzi River, and the Nyashanu area in the south.[59]

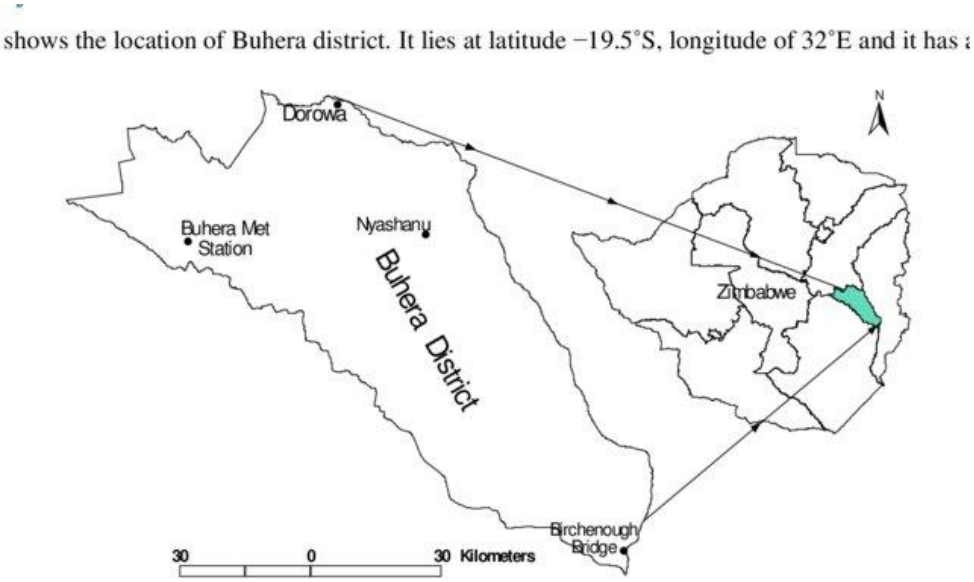

Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing the location of Buhera. Map by David Chikodzi (2016).

Throughout the colonial period in Buhera, the immigrants constantly faced challenges because their legitimacy was contested by the Shona. In addition, unlike other Ndebele immigrants who migrated to Gwai and Shangane, the Gwebu people in Buhera did not have belonging and the Shona used this as a basis to exclude them from natural resource ownership.[60] Considering these challenges, the

[58] NAZ Files: S2929/1/1 Delineation of Communities: General Report on the Buhera District, 1965. "Boundaries of Makumbe chieftainship".
[59] Ibid.
[60] J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger. *Violence and memory: one hundred years in the "dark forests" of Matabeleland*. 47.

immigrants resorted to their own initiatives, environmental creativeness by making use of, for example, black clay soils which had been shunned by the Shona-speaking communities in the area. I use the trajectory of natural resources, particularly agricultural lands and water sources, as an entry point to examine how the displaced Ndebele immigrants used their indigenous knowledge of nature to identify favourable soils that best suited their interests. They were agriculturalists who valued the importance of not only tilling the lands but also conserving the environment around them. They learned how to maximise their use of land others shunned and even thrived. In doing this, the study deploys the African initiatives approach to make sense of how the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera drew upon their indigenous knowledge of environments to make informed choices, for example, between heavy black soils over the sandy light soils. The study defines African initiatives as internally driven initiatives used by Africans to overcome environmental and social challenges.

These people referred to in this study as the Ndebele (or the Gwebu) were not homogenous. The phrase Ndebele society is only used reservedly to appreciate some shared historical experiences that bound the group together. The study uses the term Ndebele immigrants while being conscious of the fact that the group was made up of many other minority groups who were not truly Ndebele. The term Ndebele community is used interchangeably with Ndebele immigrant group, Ndebele speakers, and Gwebu community for the basic reason to appreciate the numerical superiority of the original Khumalo group which also doubled as the ruling class. The community included ethnic minorities such as the Xhosa, Fengu and Swati. The Fengu were, however, numerically superior among all these minorities.

Cecil John Rhodes struck a deal with Fengu chiefs in South Africa in which he promised Fengu immigrants agricultural lands in colonial Zimbabwe for their services in working for the BSAC.[61] The Fengu had immigrated to colonial Zimbabwe in the early 1890s just after colonisation by Cecil

[61] Pius S. Nyambara. "That Place Was Wonderful!' African Tenants on Rhodesdale Estate, Colonial Zimbabwe, c. 1900-1952." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies.* (2005, 38:2) 278.

John Rhodes' BSAC.[62] They came as wagon drivers, butlers, and baggage carriers assisting soldiers and mercenaries in the invasion of Mashonaland and Matabeleland.[63] Other Fengu families came as Christian missionaries under different ecumenical organisations. From 1895, Fengu groups who came to Southern Rhodesia were mainly brought in to suppress some pockets of resistance by the few remaining Ndebele armies after the initial 1890 invasion.[64] This particular group can therefore be described as mercenary colonial sidekicks. By 1900, the number of Fengu immigrants in Southern Rhodesia had reached 7,000.[65] Due to their important role in the establishment of the colony, Fengus were concentrated in Fingo Location in present-day Ntabazinduna near Bulawayo.[66] Besides the Fingo Location, there were smaller Fengu groups scattered in different parts of the country. In addition to the Fengu minority group, there were also Xhosa and Swati families who had also migrated to Southern Rhodesia with the earliest white settlers in the early 1900s.[67] Following settlement in Buhera, these minority groups, though they claimed to be Ndebele, maintained subtle forms of particularism. For example, though they paid allegiance to Chief Gwebu, the Xhosa and Fengu households lived in a village of their own (Charlton Village) located on the north of the main Gwebu territory.[68] The village was named after its Xhosa founder.[69] The broader Ndebele immigrant community in Buhera also included different BaSotho families such as Dobha, S'gaxa, Ndinga, Makhutshwa, and Msiza who belonged to the *Enhla* caste.[70] The agricultural and conservation practices of the Ndebele immigrant community throughout the colonial period in Buhera mirror this ethnic diversity.

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[62] Robin Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination*. 62.
[63] Pius S. Nyambara "That Place Was Wonderful!'. 278.
[64] Robin Palmer. *Land and Racial Domination*. 63.
[65] Pius S. Nyambara. "That Place Was Wonderful!"'. 278.
[66] Elioth P. Makambe. "Africans Protest Movements in Southern Rhodesia Before 1930: An Ideological Appreciation of the Socio-Political Roots of the Protests Movements", https://authors.library.caltech.edu/25709/1/MALN_65-66.pdf accessed 6 June 2023.
[67] Personal Interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[68] Personal Interview with Paul Mbulelo Tshabalala, Charlton Village, Buhera, 8 July 2019.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 83.

Literature review

The Ndebele immigrants in Buhera

Ndebele immigrants in Buhera are surrounded by different Shona-speaking neighbours. Different scholars have historically devoted attention to these neighbouring communities. During the colonial period, Johan F. Holleman conducted an ethnographic study of the VaHera dynasty in 1949. Holleman was preoccupied with understanding patterns of kinship through a collection of essays on various topics such as marriage, power, and inheritance.[71] Although this study was framed in the narrow context of understanding Africans for governance purposes, it reveals the dominance of the VaHera dynasty even beyond the borders of Buhera District. With their centre of power located at Nyashanu south of Buhera, the VaHera dynasty had their Chieftaincy called the Nyashanu, the VaHera people are depicted as the dominant and most autochthonous group in Buhera. Among other things, Holleman argued that the name Buhera was itself a derivation from the Hera clan. It is this kind of scholarship that set the tone for treating Buhera as the land of the VaHera. By doing so, many other minority groups are treated as perpetual outsiders.

Starting in the early 2000s, scholars focusing on Buhera began to produce works that were more grounded in the activities of ordinary people and marginalised groups, thus marking an intellectual departure from the earlier dynastic approaches. In 2001, social anthropologist Jens A. Andersson conducted a study showing ordinary people's dynamism in creating nods of transactional relationships through rural-urban migration.[72] This study marked an intellectual departure from the previous works focusing on Buhera by showing how ordinary people were involved in processes of transmitting and producing knowledge that shaped broader processes of life.

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[71] *See* Johan F. Holleman. *Pattern of Hera Kinship*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1949).

[72] *See* Jens A. Andersson works, "Re-interpreting the rural-urban connection: migration practices and socio-cultural dispositions of Buhera workers in Buhera" and "Mobile workers, urban employment and 'rural' identities: Rural-urban networks of Buhera migrants, Zimbabwe". 2001.

Historians such as Chitotombe and Musoni have also touched on the historical significance of Buhera: often viewing land as a window to understand localised politics of exclusion and inclusion in which local actors played a key role.[73] Historian Terence Mashingaidze used the case study of Buhera to explore the dynamics of Zimbabwe's liberation war between the 1960s and 1980 by showing the contributions of civilians in the armed struggle for independence.[74] In all these studies, the Ndebele immigrant community is barely mentioned and attention has largely been given to well-known first-comer societies such as the Nyashanu and the Makumbe.[75]

Two separate studies by historian Francis Musoni have however gone a long way in reconstructing the history of the Ndebele immigrant community in Buhera. In his unpublished master's dissertation, Musoni traces the history of Ndebele immigrants from 1927 to the 1960s.[76] In 2014, Musoni published an article focusing on the dynamics around the Ndebele ethnic identity in Buhera.[77] Empirically speaking, Musoni's works make an important historical contribution by arguing that the Ndebele immigrant community was not homogenous. Using the Ndebele caste system, Musoni argues that the immigrant group included ruling families such as the Gwebu as well as members of the *Enhla* caste. Musoni identifies families such as the Gwibila, Sigudhumezi, Malombo, Sikwabayile, Mahodho, Nkamanda, Makhwakhwa, Ndonjelana, Mathonganyana, and Nkomo as belonging to the *Enhla* caste.[78]

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[73] J.W Chitotombe. "Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Governance of Natural Resources: The Case of Buhera Communal areas, Zimbabwe". *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance.* 2012, 3:4). *See* also J. A. Andersson, *Going places, staying home: rural-urban connections and the significance of land in Buhera district, Zimbabwe*. (Wageningen: Wageningen University, 2002).

[74] Terence M. Mashingaidze. "Dynamics of Zimbabwe's Struggle for Liberation: The Case of Buhera District from 1950-1990". (Unpublished M.A Dissertation, University of Zimbabwe, 2001).

[75] Tavonga Zhanje. "Chiefs and Contestations Over Power and Territory: The Case of Njanja of Buhera District, 1950s - 2016". (Unpublished Hons Dissertation, Midlands State University, 2017) 16.

[76] Francis Musoni. "Forced Removals in Colonial Zimbabwe: The case of the Ndebele in Buhera District: 1927 to the late 1960s". 2001.

[77] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 84.

[78] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 84.

Musoni's works concentrated on the historical causes of enmity and tensions between the Shona-speaking Njanja and the Ndebele-speaking Gwebu. He singles out competition for productive lands, and not ethnicity, as one major cause of historical conflicts between the Gwebu and their neighbours, the Njanja.[79] One of the most important contributions of Musoni's works to the historiography of Zimbabwe is the use of an underutilised archive made up of a collection of colonial and post-colonial records preserved at the Buhera District Administration offices. This study relies on these same sources and empirical findings but takes a different direction by focusing on human-nature relations - an area that is clearly not covered in Musoni's works. Despite the lack of attention on human-nature relations which is the core of this study, these works on Buhera offer an important starting point to understand the histories of different societies in Buhera.

Colonial evictions and African initiatives in Zimbabwe

Starting in the 1990s, there was an important turn in the historiography of Zimbabwe as scholars began to express an interest in the experiences of African communities forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands as part of land expropriation programs that started in the 1920s. This was part of a budding revisionist scholarship that sought to re-read the histories of Africans under colonial rule. Evicted African communities that received considerable coverage since 1995 include communities of Mazvihwa in Zvishavane District, the Rengwe of Hurungwe, the Madheruka of Gokwe, the Basotho of Gutu, the Ndebele of Shangani Reserve, the Shangane of Gonarezhou area, and the Tonga of Kariba.[80]

The literature gives a fair geographical coverage of colonial Zimbabwe and highlights the varying degrees of violence that accompanied colonial evictions. It was, however, the Ndebele of Shangani

[79] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 84.
[80] *See* Thembani Dube. "Shifting Identities and the Transformation of the Kalanga People of Bulilimamangwe District, Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe C. 1946-2005". (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg, 2015).

Reserve who suffered the worst violence leading McGregor, Alexander, and Ranger to describe the forced removal of the Ndebele from their ancestral homes to the Shangani Reserve as "extremely harsh" – an act which resulted in the reserve becoming a "zone of violence".[81] Using vivid words such as *Gusu* (dark forests), sandy wastes, jungles, and lands of baboons, Alexander *et al* demonstrate that Africans were evicted to areas that were hazardous for both humans and animals.[82] The title of the book, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the Dark Forests,* re-affirms the eminence of the ferocious nature of colonial rule in general and colonial evictions in particular. This book relates empirically with this study by capturing the colonial perceptions of the 1920s that evicted Africans were going to inflict harm both to the environment and people in the Reserves. Evicted Africans were described as witches, thieves, and disease-carrying.[83] The empirical connection between this book and this study is that the local colonial administrators used alarming caricatures to depict evicted Africans as potentially harmful to both humans and the environment.

One of the key contributions to the historiography of colonial evictions and African environmental initiatives is a 1995 article by environmental historian K.B. Wilson on the environmental history of the Mazvihwa community in Zvishavane, south-central Zimbabwe.[84] The article delves into the realm of African knowledge systems by giving primacy to indigenous explanations of soil erosion and degradation in Zvishavane. Following their evictions in the 1920s to pave the way for white settler ranchers, the Mazvihwa community settled in an area with red and dry soils which were difficult to manage.[85] An important contribution of this study is that it brings into the conversation African initiatives that were deployed by locals in dealing with soil degradation at the local level. Wilson's work shares a conceptual similarity with this study in that there is a mutual appreciation

[81] J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger. *Violence and memory: one hundred years in the "dark forests" of Matabeleland*. 47.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid 55.
[84] K.B Wilson. "Water Used to be Scattered in the Landscape': Local Understandings of Soil Erosion and Land Use Planning in Southern Zimbabwe". *Environment and History*. (1995, 1:3) 282.
[85] K.B Wilson. "Water Used to be Scattered in the Landscape': Local Understandings of Soil Erosion and Land Use Planning in Southern Zimbabwe". 282.

of African initiatives among evicted communities and their ingenuity. The connection is also temporal as Wilson's study focuses on the same timeframe as this study. There is however a divergence in terms of how the agency of African women in local conservation projects is conceptualised in this study. Wilson's study is patronised by predominantly male informants such as Magwidi who project a patriarchal conservation scheme that simply viewed women as wives and outsiders.[86] It, therefore, offers an important opportunity to draw comparisons on the nature of African environmental initiatives in Buhera and Zvishavane during the colonial period.

The experiences of African communities evicted from Rhodesdale Crown Lands in the 1950s and settled in Gokwe, northwestern Zimbabwe have also .been used to understand the nature of colonial migrations.[87] Historian Pius Nyambara makes an important contribution by capturing how the processes of naming and counter-naming between the immigrants and the first-comer community, the Shangwe, revolved around the concept of modernity.[88] Equally important is that Nyambara captures the importance of the interactions between the immigrant Madheruka and first-comer Shangwe in the making of ethnic identities. Just like the immigrant Ndebele in the Shangani Reserve in the 1920s and the Basotho in the 1930s Gutu, the Madheruka viewed themselves as "modernised" immigrants because they had encountered forces of "civilisation" such as centralised farming earlier in the 1920s whilst they were still at Rhodesdale Estate.[89] Among other things, the Madheruka immigrants had brought with them "modern" farming technology and some of them were Master Farmers donned with badges and certificates as symbols of their "modernisation".[90] They grew cash crops such as cotton and this resulted in them being viewed as modernised. The most important contribution made by Nyambara is how colonial evictions

[86] K.B Wilson. "Water Used to be Scattered in the Landscape': Local Understandings of Soil Erosion and Land Use Planning in Southern Zimbabwe". 282. 283.
[87] Pius S. Nyambara. "Madheruka and Shangwe: Ethnic Identities and the Culture of Modernity in Gokwe, Northwestern Zimbabwe, 1963-79". 287.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid. 287.
[90] Pius S. Nyambara. "Colonial Policy and Peasant Cotton Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia, 1904-1953". *The International Journal of African Historical Studies.* (2000, 33:1). 96-97.

resulted in new forms of social relations that emerged in the Reserves.[91] This research relates to Nyambara's work in the sense that the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera were also viewed by both the colonial officials and their neighbours in high regard as "modernised". Colonial stereotyping magnified these perceptions by viewing Chief Gwebu, for example, as the most modernised chief in the entire Buhera District.[92]

Historian Terence M. Mashingaidze discusses coerced evictions in the context of the indigenous Tonga community who were evicted from the Zambezi Valley area in 1953 to pave the way for the construction of the Kariba Dam.[93] It is argued here that following their eviction, the Tonga were excluded from the emergent hydro-livelihood activities such as game hunting and fishing that accompanied the construction of the dam.[94] Mashingaidze argues that the suffering of the Tonga was caused by the colonial government's failure to conduct environmental assessments to evaluate the habitability of the areas where the evicted families were resettled.[95] Like many other Africans who were evicted by the colonial government during the 1920s, the Tonga were re-settled in marginal, tsetse-fly infested, waterless and infertile areas.[96] Even colonial officials were unsure if Africans would survive the hazards.[97] This explains why some colonial officials equated eviction to the Shangani Reserve to "depopulation".[98] Mashingaidze's works share an important empirical

[91] Pius S. Nyambara. "Madheruka and Shangwe: Ethnic Identities and the Culture of Modernity in Gokwe, Northwestern Zimbabwe, 1963-79". 287.
[92] NAZ Files: 4/32//48/3 NC Buhera to PNC Gwelo 29 Dec 1948.
[93] NAZ Files: 4/32/48/5 Office of the Native Commissioner Buhera District, 28 June 1950.
[94] Terence M. Mashingaidze "The Kariba Dam: Discursive Displacements and the Politics of Appropriating a Waterscape in Zimbabwe, 1950s-2017". *Limina*. (2019, 25:1). 9.
[95] Terence M. Mashingaidze. "Beyond the Kariba Dam Induced Displacements: The Zimbabwean Tonga's Struggles for Restitution, 1990s–2000s". *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*. (2013, 20). 382.
[96] Ibid.
[97] In Shangani, colonial officials used terms such as 'depopulation' to refer to the removal of Africans into the Reserves. The colonial officials had found out at a later stage that the place where Africans had been settled was not conducive for human settlement. Missionaries even pleaded against the government's eviction of Africans to Shangani on humanitarian grounds. See Alexander et al *Violence and Memory*. 45-57.
[98] Ibid 46.

relationship with this study in that both the Tonga of Kariba and the Ndebele of Buhera were resettled to areas that can be described as inhabitable.[99]

Socio-environmental historian Ivan Marowa brought to our attention the experiences of the Rengwe community evicted from the Zambezi Valley region to the Rengwe Communal Lands in north-western Zimbabwe between 1957 and 1958.[100] Marowa's important contribution to historiography is his articulation of the nexus between landscape, memory and the processes of migration. Collective and individual memories of the ancestral homes and migration are depicted as embedded in the landscapes such as rivers. By weaving together social memories, landscape, ethnic identities, and environment, Marowa reconstructs the histories of the group not only during the evictions and migrations but also before these processes. Marowa demonstrates "that stories and memories of forced removal tell us not only about relocation itself but also about events before and after it."[101]

This study relates to Marowa's work in two ways. First, there is conceptual relation in the deployment of the "history from below" approach that Marowa derives from cleric and anthropologist Michael Tremmel.[102] This study, therefore, joins Tremmel and Marowa in giving agency to the marginalised groups such as women and ethnic minorities in navigating uncertainties and insecurities brought about by forced evictions. The second connection is methodological. This study relates very well to Marowa's work in its use of landscape to make sense of people's memories. This study however goes beyond Marowa's conceptualisation of memory by viewing landscape as text that embodies consciously created discourses.

[99] The two areas had different climatic features, however. What makes them similar is that they were both Native Reserves- areas set aside for Africans.
[100] Ivan Marowa. "Forced Removal and Social Memories in North-Western Zimbabwe c. 1900-2000". (Unpublished PhD Thesis, BIGSAS and the University of Bayreuth, 2015) 1.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid. 8.

Baxter Tavuyanago's PhD thesis contributes to the scholarship on forced evictions from the perspective of African responses. In his study, Tavuyanago propounds that the eviction of the indigenous Shangane community from the Gonarezhou National Park to the fringes of the newly established game sanctuary in 1934 resulted in Africans engaging in "defiant poaching" while some crossed the border into South Africa to join nationalist politics.[103] Tavuyanago's work joins the likes of Nyambara and Alexander *et al* in finding connections between colonial evictions of the 1920s-30s and the nationalist consciousness of the 1960s. Such scholarship maintains the argument that colonial evictions had a boomerang effect as forcibly evicted Africans later came back to revolt against the government in the 1960s. Tavuyanago's study is important in showing that evicted Africans were brutalised but responded through defiant poaching and nationalism. The experiences of the Shangani communities are important for comparative purposes. However, Tavuyango only limits the agency of evicted Africans to the social and political acts of defiant poaching and nationalism. This study goes beyond these to interrogate African initiatives in environmental conservation and agriculture in hostile areas. Tavuyanago's work is therefore important in comparing and contrasting lived experiences of Africans in the economic and political fringes of the colonial state.

As much as the literature reviewed above has made significant strides in the historiography of colonial evictions in Zimbabwe, this study exposes two important gaps that need scholarly attention. The first knowledge gap comes in the form of what I conceptualise as a temporal silence. Not much has been written about the experiences of Africans during the period between eviction and settlement. What we know is that Africans were evicted and then migrated to different Native Reserves where they started new lives. Very little is known about how Africans acted during the episode between eviction and relocation. These temporalities are worth exploring because they

[103] Baxter Tavuyanago. "Living on the Fringes of a Protected Area: Gonarezhou National Park (GNP) and the Indigenous Communities of South-East Zimbabwe, 1934-2008". (PhD Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2016). 162-163.

were not devoid of agency. For some Ndebele immigrant families, the temporal phase between eviction and subsequent settlement in Buhera lasted more than a decade as they deployed different delaying strategies while negotiating and resisting eviction. Yet these specific moments in the historiography of colonial evictions are missing. This temporal silence is an evident lacuna that should be explored to understand the fears, actions, experiences and resilience of Africans in precarious colonial times.

Second, the reviewed literature on the historiography of colonial evictions in Zimbabwe shows an important intellectual gap. Historians such as Tavuyanago confined African post-eviction agency to political and economic actions such as joining nationalist politics and economic endeavours, for example, "poaching" wild game for meat.[104] In some instances, there is no mention at all of how Africans made sense of the environments around them following settlement in new areas. For a socio-environmental historian, this approach is problematic because it gives the assumption that Africans were only involved in harmful activities such as clearing lands for agriculture and killing wildlife for food. Yet there is evidence from areas such as the Sabi Reserve where Ndebele immigrants were engaged in innovative agriculture and sustainable conservation activities that saw them attain food security and preserve their agricultural lands, soils, and water resources.

These gaps feed into one broad historiographical lacuna: that of the silence on how Africans interacted with the environment in areas that were characterised by different hazards following violent evictions. This gap is worth filling because it helps us to re-read histories of colonialism at the national level through the lens of the environment while in global history it helps to appreciate how Africans thrived in hostile environments.[105]

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[104] [104] Baxter Tavuyanago. "Living on the Fringes of a Protected Area: Gonarezhou National Park (GNP) and the Indigenous Communities of South-East Zimbabwe, 1934-2008"162-63.
[105] J. Iliffe. *Africans, the History of a Continent*. 1. *See* also William Beinart. "African History and Environmental History". *African Affairs*. (2000, 99: 395) 285.

The environment and natural resources in colonial Zimbabwe

There currently exists a significant number of writings on Zimbabwe's environmental history. This section is not exhaustive but only engages with literature that directly relates to this study. Anthropologist Donald Moore's 1998 publication introduces aspects of material and symbolic struggles over natural resources in Zimbabwean historiography.[106] Using a case study of the Kaerezi River Protected Area in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands, Moore engages with notions of memory, chieftainship, tradition, political boundaries, resource rights and landscape: and how these became contours of conflict between the state and the local communities.[107] Again in 2005, Moore revisited his earlier argument using the same case study of the Kaerezi. He reveals the ambiguities of a tripartite relationship between the state, community, and household and how these three maintain divergent views of the environment. He argues that the post-colonial resource conflicts in Zimbabwe are a product of how people labour upon and suffer for a territory.[108] Moore's contribution to the historiography of natural resource governance is his nuanced analysis of subaltern resilience in fighting state and institutional forces which were engaged in wholesale dispossessions and evictions of African communities. His work is important in providing the different aspects of localised conflicts over land between the state, traditional leadership, and rural households. Actions of rural communities in areas such as the Kaerezi can be interpreted as versions of rural resilience against a land-expropriating government and imposition of natural resource management by the state.

In the same vein, the works of Kwashirai on woodland exploitation in Matabeleland from 1890 to 1980 offer one of the most extensive studies on the dialectical relations between the conservationist interests and exploitative approaches of the private timber extraction companies

[106] *See* Donald S. Moore. "Clear Waters and Muddied Histories: Environmental History and The Politics of Community in Zimbabwe's Eastern highlands". *Journal of Southern Africa Studies.* (1998, 24: 2) 377-403.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

in Southern Rhodesia. Kwashirai pays special attention to conflicts, collusions, and compromises between the colonial state's conservationist advocates and exploitationist capitalist companies.[109] His study resonates with many others that focus on the centrality of the colonial state in natural resource distribution and conservation. It follows Richard Grove's 'green imperialism' discourse which fits into the high modern state trajectory. This trajectory often views the state as omnipresent.[110] The discussion is closely related to the seminal Beinart and Phimister debate in which the former argues that conservationism was first implemented in relation to settler farming while the latter suggests that it was concerning peasant farming.[111] This approach is important in revealing the activities and thinking of the colonial institutions about African environmental and agricultural issues. The methodological weakness of such state-centric narratives is that they cannot be useful in cases such as Buhera where the colonial state was weak. Though sharing a common interest with these studies in terms of the period of focus, they do not allow social history and environmental history "to meet each other" as Jacobs puts it.[112] This puts a clear theoretical distinction between this form of environmental history and the socio-environmental history approach that this study pursues.

Zimbabwean historiography on the environment has focussed on the conflicts and struggles over the natural environment and resources from different perspectives. Environmental historian Muchaparara Musemwa explores the real and imagined fears over water scarcity in Colonial Zimbabwe in the 1960s. Africans in urban areas such as Bulawayo lobbied the government to establish a national water administration authority: a "hydraulic bureaucracy".[113] This study intends

[109] Vimbayi C. Kwashirai. *Green Colonialism in Zimbabwe: 1890-1980*. 1-29.
[110] R. Grove. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 560.
[111] W Beinart, "Soil erosion, conservationism and ideas about development: a Southern African exploration, 1900-1960". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (1984, 11: 82), Ian Phimister "Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context: Conservationism and Ideas about Development in Southern Rhodesia 1930-1950". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (1986. 12:2) 263-270.
[112] Nancy Jacobs. *Environment, Power and Justice*. 16.
[113] Muchaparara Musemwa. "Narratives of Scarcity: Colonial State Responses to Water Scarcity in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1965". in C. J de Melo, E. Vaz, L.M.C Pinto (eds.) *Environmental History in the Making*. Springer. (2017) 263-265.

to establish a link between these narratives of scarcity at the national level and the localised land scarcity experiences in Buhera during the same period. A study by historian Thembani Dube illustrates how the settler government used the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 to marginalise the Kalanga community in Bulilimamangwe.[114] In the same vein, Mujere uses the case study of the Basotho community in the Dewure Purchase Areas to show how the colonial government, through the Christian missionaries, allowed this group to acquire land on more relaxed terms than other communities.[115] These studies clearly situate the colonial state at the centre of the distribution of natural resources (water and agricultural lands). These debates are important in the historiography of Zimbabwe because they show the lengths and depths that the colonial government was prepared to reach to control Africans' use of natural resources such as agricultural lands and water.

Although this is true for different case studies, the Ndebele immigrant community had a different historical experience in which the colonial state was not a key agent in the distribution of peoples' use of natural resources. By intersecting two types of histories from below (social history and environmental history), this study takes the debate further by revealing how, in the absence of state interventionism, African environmental initiatives became the centrepiece of people's use of natural resources. Conflicts over the distribution and use of natural resources such as agricultural lands and water can therefore be understood from a localised perspective. Often marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, women and peasants were at the centre of these processes. By virtue of these historical realities, this study is foregrounded in subaltern agency- the thinking and actions of ordinary and often marginalised rural communities.

See also Muchaparara Musemwa. "Politics of Water in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1980-2007". Seminar paper presented at the African Studies Centre, University of Leiden, The Netherlands, 19th June 2008. 4.

[114] Thembani. Dube. "Shifting Identities and the Transformation of the Kalanga People of Bulilimamangwe District, Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe C. 1946-2005". 78.

[115] Joseph Mujere. "Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists, and Progressive Farmers: Basotho Struggles for Belonging in Zimbabwe 1930s-2008". (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012) 77-79.

These works form the theoretical and empirical basis which continues to inform and invigorate contemporary debates on Zimbabwean environmental and social histories. The literature review has purposefully revealed that scholarship on Zimbabwean environmental history has predominantly touched mainly on state-centric narratives. Focus has largely been projected towards the role of the colonial government in land expropriation and eventual allocation of agricultural lands to the evicted communities. The literature also focuses on how the colonial government's role enabled evicted communities to use agricultural land to ascertain their belonging in the reserves, thereby attaining some form of security and certainty. Another layer of state-centric scholarship pays attention to post-eviction social relationships in different parts of Zimbabwe. It has also emerged that debates on ethnic relations and identity have been central to producing knowledge about the histories of evicted communities in Zimbabwe. Not much is known about how, after eviction from different zones, the local communities initially contended with, but eventually mastered, different hostile landscapes. Questions on how communities such as Gwebu used their indigenous ways of knowing to choose soils and conserve water resources and forests have hardly been posed in Zimbabwean historiography. Little is known about the power relations that governed gender and water resources.[116] This study intends to fill this knowledge gap by using a combination of "two histories from below": socio-environmental history - an approach that critically appraises Africans' environmental initiatives.[117] The emphasis on resilience and the agency of indigenous environmental creativity ultimately reconstructs a story of how the Gwebu community inhabited and made sense of hostile landscapes. By exploring African communities' agency, the study finds some resonance with Iliffe's idea that Africans have contributed to global history through their ability to inhabit hostile landscapes.[118]

[116] F. Cleaver. "Water as a Weapon: The History of Water Supply Development in Nkayi District of Zimbabwe". *Environment and History 1*. (1995, 3:1) 313-33.
[117] Nancy J. Jacobs *Environment and Justice*. 16.
[118] John Iliffe. *Africans, the History of a Continent*. 1.

Socio-environmental history: regional and global perspectives

Socio-environmental history emerged following the realisation that there was a need for what historian Ted Steinberg described as "ecologically minded and socially sensitive approaches".[119] Socially sensitive approaches included concepts that included other aspects of the biosphere in historical accounts. Features such as trees, soils, and waterscapes have recently been regarded by anthropologists such as Daniel Miller as carrying some agency and thus qualify them as social actors.[120] As opposed to the traditional environmental history approach where the human is at the centre, this study is ecologically and socially sensitive in embracing the agency of soils in shaping social processes in the Ndebele immigrant community in the Sabi Reserve.

Debates in global environmental history from the 2000s were more theoretical than empirical. Researchers sought to find common ground between environmental history and social history and the debate intensified in 1999 when environmental historians James McCann,[121] and later in 2002, Stephen Mosley argued for the need for cross-field communication between environmental history and social history.[122] Since the late 2000s, there has been growing collaboration in ways which demonstrate that social and environmental history are compatible, complementary, and intertwined in reconstructing different histories. Socio-environmental history thus emerges as a discipline that appreciates both social relationships (fissured by race, class and gender), and the natural environment, which is the basis of all human life.

This literature review, however, only engages with the most relevant works related to this study. Environmental history was first deployed by historians from the Annales School, Anna

[119] Ted Steinberg. "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and Power in History". *American Historical Review*. (2002, 107) 798-820.
[120] Daniel Miller. *Stuff*. (London: Wiley, 2009) 2.
[121] James McCann. *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa, 1800– 1990*. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999) 216.
[122] Stephen Mosley. "Common Ground: Integrating Social and Environmental History". *Journal of Social History*. (2006, 39:3) 916.

Bramwell,[123] Donald Worster,[124] and Peter Burke[125] to explain how long-term developments alter human history. These scholars' principal objective was to show how human civilisations altered the environment. By so doing, the crop of historians challenged the environmental determinism approach that had thrived from the 19th century through the works of geographer Ellsworth Huntington.[126] The environmental determinism approach subscribed to the belief that the environment and its physical factors determined the patterns of life for human communities.[127] With the emergence of world histories in the 1960s, scholars began to write about environmental histories at global and continental levels using interdisciplinary approaches. Although environmental history had earlier been founded in the 1960s, it was not until 1972 when environmental historian Rodrick Nash coined the term "environmental history" in his study of human societies and the natural environment.[128]

Having been influenced by the Annales School, Phillip Curtin became the first Africanist historian to describe the dialectical relationship between human actions and Africa's natural environments in 1968.[129] His work was one of the first in African environmental historiographies to counter colonial depictions of African landscapes and environments as static and rigid. Colonial historians of the environment pushed the narrative of "saving Africa from Africans"[130] while others landscaped Africa by Europeanising local environments.[131] In recent years, historians have re-

[123] *See* Anna Bramwell. *Ecology in the 20th Century, a History*. (New Haven: Yale University, 1989) 1-34.
[124] D. Worster. *The Ends of the Earth, Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[125] Peter Burke. *The French Historical Revolution, the Annales School*. 1929-89. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
[126] Amanda Briney, "What is Environmental Determinism" https://www.thoughtco.com/environmental-determinism-and-geography1434499#:~:text=Environmental%20Determinism%20and%20Modern%20Geography,central%20theory%20in%20the%20discipline, Accessed 18 June 2022.
[127] Ibid.
[128] *See* K. J. Oosthoek. "What is Environmental History?" *https://www.eh-resources.org/what-is-environmental-history/, accessed 13 February 2017*. See R. Nash *Wilderness and the American Mind*. See also R. Nush. "American Environmental History: A New Teaching Frontier". *Pacific Historical Review*. (1972, 41:3) 362-372.
[129] *See* Phillip D. Curtin. *Epidemiology of the Slave Trade.* (Academy of Political Science. 1968). *See* also William Beinart and JoAnn McGregor (eds.). *Social History and African Environments*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).
[130] Robert H. Nelson. "Environmental Colonialism: 'Saving' Africa from Africans." *The Independent Review* 8. (2003, 8: 1) 65.
[131] Jevgeniy Bluwstein. "Colonising landscapes/landscaping colonies: from a global history of landscapism to the contemporary landscape approach in nature conservation". *Journal of Political Ecology*. July 2021. No page numbers.

considered environmental histories from social and cultural perspectives. This is aptly captured in a volume co-edited by historians William Beinart and JoAnn McGregor titled *Social History and African Environments.*[132] An important contribution from Beinart and McGregor's book is the argument that environmental history is a new way of rethinking the larger social history project instead of merely being a separate sub-field.[133] Because of this, Beinart and McGregor, reconcile social history and environmental history by showing how the two seek to achieve similar ends in reconstructing histories from below. They contribute to the conversation by arguing that environmental history opens a new window in reading the impact of colonialism on Africa.[134] This study empirically relates with Beinart and McGregor's argument in that this study concludes that an environmental approach to the colonial history of Zimbabwe allows us to appreciate creative African environmental initiatives as opposed to seeing them as entirely helpless victims at the mercy of harsh colonial legislative regimes.

Several scholars focus on indigenous methods of environmental control. These include Anderson and Grove,[135] John Clarke (who uses Zimbabwe as a case study)[136] and James McCann who discusses the uniqueness of African environments and dismisses modern scientific interpretations.[137] It is important to note that the greatest criticism levelled against these Africanist works has been the fascination with Africa's pre-colonial past as well as an inherent anti-science bias.[138] These scholars in African environmental historiography were followed by revisionist writers in the making of historians Jan Vansina, David Schoenbrun, James Fairhead and Melissa

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[132] William Beinart and JoAnn McGregor (eds). *Social History and African Environments.* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003).
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] David Anderson and Richard Grove. 'The Scramble for Eden: Past, Present and Future in African Conservation', D. Anderson and R. Grove (eds.). *Conservation in Africa People, Policies and Practice.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 388.
[136] John Clarke. *Building on Indigenous Natural Resource Management, Forestry Practices in Zimbabwe's communal Land.* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1999) 189.
[137] James McCann. *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa, 1800– 1990.* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999) 216.
[138] *See* Vimbayi C. Kwashirai. "World Environmental History". *Environmental History of Africa, Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems.* (EOLSS).

Leach.[139] These scholars, while admitting that there was environmental degradation even in pre-colonial Africa, advocated for indigenous environmental management policies linked to the appreciation of the landscape.[140] The above-cited scholars highlighted the dichotomies between science and indigenous perceptions of the environment in Africa.

In 2006, environmental history Gregory Maddox demonstrated that Africa's environmental histories can be useful in understanding contemporary challenges that the continent is facing, such as HIV/AIDS, overpopulation, Sahelian droughts, desertification, and climate change.[141] This shift was important in African environmental historiography because it demonstrated the relationships between environments and other processes of life such as migration. Literature on comparative environments is used to inform the study on how communities elsewhere have interacted with their environments over time. Such studies include Sutter's comparative study of the USA and South Africa's environmental conservation strategies.[142] Environmental historian Donald Worster deploys the same comparative approach to compare the environmental histories of Canada and the US.[143] One important argument that emerges from these works is that of diversity in cultural interpretations attached to nature in different communities. This thinking is further expounded by William Beinart and Peter Coates who suggest that "concepts of nature are always cultural statements".[144]

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[139] James Fairhead and Melissa Leach. *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest- Savanna Mosaic.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 348. J. Vansina. *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) 448. David Schoenbrun. *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian, Gender and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century.* (Heinemann: Portsmouth, 1998) 315.
[140] Vimbayi C. Kwashirai. "World Environmental History". 5.
[141] *See* Gregory H. Maddox. *Sub-Saharan Africa, An Environmental History.* (Santa Barbra: ABC-CLIO, 2006).
[142] P. Sutter. "Reflections: What Can U.S. Environmental Historians Learn from Non-U.S. Environmental Historiography?" *Environmental History.* (2011, 8:1) 1-20.
[143] Donald Worster. 'Wild, Tame, and Free: Comparing Canadian and American Views of Nature,' Kenneth S. Coates and John Findlay (eds.) *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies.* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).
[144] William Beinart and Peter Coates. *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in USA and South Africa*. (New York, Routledge, 1995) 3.

In 2016, the centrality of agriculture in African environmental histories was challenged by historian Kathryn M. de Luna.[145] The work of de Luna is particularly important because it directly challenges the validity of Schoenbrun's interpretation that puts agrarian change at the centre of African environmental histories. Using the case study of pre-colonial south-central Africa, De Luna argues that political innovation was in fact contingent on developments in hunting, fishing, and foraging. Relying on a combination of new and extant evidence, De Luna deploys archaeology, linguistic evidence, and historical landscapes to argue that it was food collection that was central to the people's conception of the environment. This work is important in that it challenges the earlier interpretations which had put farming at the centre of environmental historiography. Although De Luna's work immensely contributes to this growing debate, it remains evident that any study that seeks to understand human-nature relations should not lose sight of the particularities of place. De Luna's study has some methodological similarities with this research which takes the history from below approach by focussing on the agency of rural communities.[146] For Jacobs, rural communities have been historically marginalised and their histories have been "suppressed, their voices ignored and their agency unrecognised".[147] My study of the socio-environmental history of the Gwebu community maintains this methodological trajectory by exploring how the centrality of African environmental initiatives amid ecological hazards and uncertainty caused by lack of belonging.

Nancy Jacobs' 2003 book reveals how rural African communities in Kuruman, Northern Cape, navigated environmental hazards such as soil infertility and semi-arid harsh conditions.[148] She contends that for a long time, historians of South Africa have ignored the importance of the environment in understanding changing social and political relationships. This proposal resonates with Jacobs' work. First, Jacobs' case study of Kuruman in South Africa has some topographic

[145] Kathryn D. De Luna. *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa*. (Yale: Yale University Press, 2016).
[146] Ibid.
[147] Nancy J. Jacobs. *Environment, Power and Justice*. 16
[148] Ibid. 16.

and climatic conditions that are almost like those of Buhera in Zimbabwe. These include high temperatures and semi-arid conditions. Second, Jacobs' book contributes to the global socio-environmental history debate by arguing that both social and environmental history "must be brought together for the benefit of both parties".[149] Certainly, a socio-environmental history of the Gwebu demonstrates that the interconnectedness of social and environmental histories benefits both parties by enabling an interplay of different frameworks such as gender and power relations. Hence, this study finds a place in these ongoing debates by essentially demonstrating the possibility of using gender, subaltern agency, power relations and ethnicity to reconstruct a coherent socio-environmental history.

Methodological reflections

Socio-environmental history transcends disciplinary boundaries by making use of diverse fields of study for data, methods, and conceptual tools. Unlike other sub-disciplines of mainstream history, socio-environmental history pays attention to interactions between humans and non-human subjects. Thus, by its very nature, this field is privileged with the dynamism of drawing upon disciplines such as ecology and geography. Such an approach to human-nature relations seeks to demonstrate how socio-environmental history implicates other theoretical modalities such as ethnicity, class, gender, and power relations. This study follows the socio-environmental history trajectory by encompassing specific components of the natural environment, that is, agricultural lands, water sources, landscapes, and soils. The study treats the Gwebu area of Buhera as a complex web of inextricable interactions between the natural surroundings and different social groups. Therefore, the study acknowledges that human-nature relations are not only a scientific issue but also a social one, embedded in the day-to-day lives of the rural communities in Southern Africa.

[149] Nancy J. Jacobs. *Environment, Power and Justice*. 16.

This explains why the research, by and large, prioritises qualitative sources that carry voices of the ordinary people and subaltern actors to give the study a truly socio-environmental outlook.

Doing research during the COVID-19 pandemic

On 5 March 2020**,** the first case of the COVID-19 pandemic was reported in South Africa where I was studying. Two weeks later, the country went into lockdown. On 20 March, several COVID-19 cases were also confirmed in Zimbabwe whilst I was in the middle of conducting follow-up interviews on issues that had been raised during the first round earlier in 2019. This affected the research in ways that I had never imagined. University libraries were closed indefinitely as part of containing the virus, casting a cloud of uncertainty on this project which relied significantly on published secondary material such as books and journal articles. This was partly remedied by Wits University's availing of digital library material remotely as part of the remote teaching and learning that had been adopted by the university in the wake of the pandemic. Despite these efforts, the little available digital material was not helpful for this research.

The National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) also closed its doors for a cumulative period of five months from April 2020, making it impossible to follow up on questions that needed answers solely from the archives. Unlike the universities which were quick to embrace remote teaching and learning, none of the material from the NAZ was digitalised. The closure of the archives cast a cloud of uncertainty on my research.

Whilst the university community and postgraduate students were encouraged to continue with their work virtually embracing technologies such as telephone calls, WhatsApp communication, Zoom and Microsoft Teams in their research as part of the "new normal", these were not very helpful and presented new limitations. Unlike in other disciplines which involve the collection of quantitative data and "yes" and "no" answers, this study was designed to rely on qualitative data. My reliance on WhatsApp communication and phone calls to conduct interviews during the

pandemic as part of the "new normal" did not produce the desired quality of data needed to answer the qualitative questions set out for this research. This justifies why, out of 23 interviews conducted via phone and through WhatsApp, only a few were used for this research. What explains this phenomenon is that WhatsApp conversations and phone interviews lacked the interactive human experience. The written texts and voice notes as responses gathered during this period were often straightforward, devoid of any nuance, and often sounded rehearsed, and choreographed. Unlike face-to-face oral interviews which are comparatively characterised by favourably long winding answers and extensive responses, WhatsApp and telephone interviews proved futile. They neither challenged my assumptions nor pushed me to think critically about issues of forced colonial evictions and human nature interactions.

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down my research, I began to re-imagine the whole idea of the field. Whilst stuck in Johannesburg and later Harare, several avenues kept me in sync with Buhera. Having previously lived in Buhera before, I woke up every day with imaginations of what was happening in the villages. Towards summer, I envisioned how villagers were preparing their fields for planting while others would be servicing their ploughs in preparation for the work ahead. During winter, I imagined how peasants were engaged in vegetable gardening along riverbanks where a few remaining water sources were found. A combination of imaginations and personal reminiscences allowed me to spend a lot of time in Buhera without physically going there. From the comfort of my home, I was able to conceptualise the geography, environment, climate, and the physical architecture of Buhera. I was already doing fieldwork.

In addition, I was kept abreast of everyday developments in Buhera through various social media platforms. The most important of all was a WhatsApp group made of Gwebu Villagers. Although the group was mainly designed to give updates on the Mandaza Bus schedules and timetables, members often posted funeral notices and political meeting announcements. Besides these updates, group members also posted jokes and memes that depicted everyday contemporary

environmental realities in Buhera. For example, memes about the weather were posted during the rainy season and one could easily deduce the quantity of rain. On a hot day, corresponding memes about the weather were also shared. Others went to the extent of sharing photos of their crops and videos of their livestock, and these populated my gallery becoming a small archive that kept me immersed in everyday happenings back in Buhera. For me, part of my fieldwork was a cognitive experience.

In August 2020 travel restrictions were partially lifted, allowing me to go back to Buhera for another round of oral interviews. Villagers often light-heartedly requested COVID-19 negative tests before agreeing to speak to me. This was understandable because the Gwebu community lost some villagers to the pandemic, some of whom were key participants in this research. During this period, the villagers were beginning to live their lives without physical contact and people were sceptical about any form of interaction that would put their lives in danger. The pandemic affected the research by not only claiming the lives of some key informants but also impacted on the rapport between the researcher and the community.

Oral sources

Most of the oral interviews for this research were carried out in informal settings through informal methods. Settings such as beer parties were used to solicit collective views about certain issues while simultaneously allowing local power dynamics to play out. Beer parties often resulted in lengthy conversations that were characterised by divergences from the imbibers who had different narratives about their histories. Many a time the conversations often deviated from the main subject of the environment to touch on aspects of religion, taboos, sacred places, and superstition. This was important in showing how the subject of the environment crosscut different faculties of life. Such conversations enabled the research to appreciate how societies related to the environment not just as a scientific aspect but a social and even religious one.

Some of the most important conversations with community members in Buhera took place while walking about the fields and vegetable gardens. These spaces allowed individuals to recollect different memories associated with places. Farmlands and vegetable gardens triggered nostalgic memories of a glorious past when Ndebele immigrants in Buhera enjoyed agricultural success, food sovereignty and economic prosperity through selling surplus produce. In addition, farmlands and vegetable gardens were particularly important in allowing marginalised members of the communities such as women to freely tell their stories and relate their individual experiences to broader agricultural and environmental processes.

Despite the diverse settings in which oral interviews were conducted, the research consistently deployed the life history approach. The advantage of this approach is that it allowed the research to appreciate the agency of individuals in shaping broader processes of life. The life history approach was particularly rewarding in challenging my initial assumptions that conservation efforts would only bear fruit if introduced from the level of power. My assumption was informed by contemporary environmental studies in Africa where transformative conservation has been led by those in power. Individual reminiscences collected in Buhera challenged these assumptions by demonstrating that marginalised community members such as immigrants and women were at the centre of innovative agriculture and sustainable local conservation.

Ironically, about 95 years after the settlement of Chief Gwebu of the Ndebele and his people in Buhera in a predominantly Shona-speaking area, the Ndebele language is still dominant and is the first language in most households. This study used these linguistic dynamics within the context of orality to weave a nuanced historical narrative that has never been done by preceding historians who have studied this community. For example, the use of Ndebele words to name places, animals, and built environments such as schools is used to map contestations over territory between the Ndebele and Shona communities during the colonial period. Other aspects of orality such as Ndebele songs are used to reconstruct the history of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera. The study

made use of Gwebu oral narratives, linguistics, and other forms of orality with the caution that they are not beyond intellectual reproach. In fact, different forms of orality associated with Ndebele immigrants are treated as discourses of belonging and legitimacy that are not neutral but designed to justify and legitimise the presence of Ndebele communities in Buhera.

Ndebele narratives of eviction and migration tend to romanticise the role of their founding leader, Chief Gwebu, who administered over the community for 52 years in Buhera (1927-1979). The narratives exhibit notions of particularism in which they underplay the agency of the neighbouring Shona-speaking communities. These biases are dealt with by bringing together different competing oral narratives as opposed to relying on a single version of the past.

Having lived and researched in this area before, my positionality in the Gwebu area was an important entry point that allowed me to access narratives relevant to the research question. Besides living in the community and experiencing everyday life with fellow villagers, I had the privilege of engaging community leaders such as Chief Richman Gwebu, Headman Nicodemus Gwebu, and Chief Makumbe who treated me as one of their own. My relationships with these local authorities allowed me to get access to 'official' accounts of the Ndebele immigrants' history in Buhera which, however, clearly differed in many respects.

Throughout the research, I was fully cognisant of the different challenges and prejudices that come with researching in one's home area. One of the dilemmas was negotiating the thin line between 'home' and 'field'.[150] The other challenge was that of being othered based on social class. I overcame these challenges of positionality by maintaining common ground on language, shared community experiences, and taking part in local social gatherings to blend in.

[150] F. Saltana. "Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research". *An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*. (6:3) 377.

Instead of having structured 'interviews' with 'informants', this study took the approach of having conversations with participants. The deviation from the traditional interview format was informed by the belief that 'interviews' by their very nature involve an asymmetrical power relationship which portrays the researcher as superior and the participant as inferior in terms of knowledge. The participants were therefore treated as conscious knowledge producers. As decolonial scholars suggest, decolonising fieldwork in Africa involves a departure from viewing communities as problems in need of enlightenment through western-centric research towards an appreciation of their indigenous forms of knowledge.[151]

Written sources

When I started fieldwork for this research, I was initially confronted with the challenge of a lack of sufficient documentary evidence. At the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) in Harare, I came across delineation reports which were not useful for a study on socio-environmental history. This is because delineation reports were interested in politics, chieftaincy, and succession.[152] The files had very little information on environmental issues and the social lives of the Ndebele immigrant community in Buhera. In addition to the content, the style of reporting made it difficult to reconstruct the environmental past of the Ndebele in Buhera. The style was monotonous, and the authors often repeated the same topics year after year. As noted by historian Gerald Mazarire, the authors of these reports lacked sufficient data resulting in them replicating the same accounts year after year.[153] In addition, the authors were interested only in specific communities while neglecting others. For example, communities such as the Nyashanu, Makumbe, Chingombe and Chapwanya received considerably more attention than others. The Nyashanu community received

[151]A. Nhemachena, N. Mlambo and M. Kaundjua. "The Notion of the "Field" and the Practices of Researching and Writing Africa: Towards Decolonial Praxis". *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*. (2016, 9:7) 19.

[152] For a more detailed critique of the colonial archive in Zimbabwe and delineation reports in particular. *See* Gerald C. Mazarire. "A Social and Political History of Chishanga, South Central Zimbabwe, c. 1750-2000". (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2009) 27-28.

[153] Gerald C. Mazarire. "A Social and Political History of Chishanga, South Central Zimbabwe, c. 1750-2000". 27-28.

more attention from colonial officials, and this is manifested in the records. This is understandably so because of the widespread belief that the Nyashanu people were the original inhabitants of the land.[154] I therefore prematurely concluded that the history of the Ndebele immigrant community had been overlooked because of the colonial tendency to focus on the presumed importance of major dynasties.[155]

After my initial failure to access adequate documentary evidence, I travelled to Buhera District offices to seek permission from the local authorities to interview some members of the Gwebu community. Upon my arrival, the District Administrator, Mr Rolland Madondo, expressed his interest in my research and decided to avail what he referred to as some 'archaic papers' stashed in one of the cupboards consigned right at the back of his office as if to keep them out of sight. The pile of papers, which, indeed, visibly looked 'archaic', was labelled in fainting ink *CHK5 Gwebu Volume 1*.[156] Hand-written letters, police reports, court reports, maps, obituaries, ministerial speeches, written complaints, and notices were some of the files that I found, dating as far back as 1927. The archive contains voices of important classes of society such as ordinary villagers, farmers, teachers, community health workers, Christian church representatives, community leaders such as village heads and rural entrepreneurs such as shop owners. The most important attribute of these documents to this study is that they contain accounts of ordinary members of the Gwebu community, a trait that was missing in the documents preserved at NAZ.

The CHK Gwebu Archive, as I term it, is different from the delineation reports preserved at the National Archives of Zimbabwe, both in terms of content and style. It is important to note that files from the CHK archive have an important local appeal. In addition to containing different

[154] This notion was reproduced by later anthropologists such as J. F Holleman in his seminal book *Pattern of Hera Kingship*. (London: Oxford University Press 1949).
[155] Gerald C. Mazarire. "Reflections on Pre-colonial Zimbabwe, c. 850 -1800s". in Brian Raftopoulos and Alois S. Mlambo, (eds.) *Becoming Zimbabwe, History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*. (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009) 20.
[156] Personal conversation with Madondo, Buhera District Office.

documents written by locals, there are also documents written by local colonial officials who had direct encounters with the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera.

Colonial officials working in Buhera District reported based on their eyewitness encounters as well as their experiences. Most of their reports carry vivid and historically worthwhile accounts of several important events. One such event that was captured from the perspective of an eyewitness was the ceremony conducted by Chief Makumbe and his community to welcome Chief Gwebu's Ndebele immigrant community, the Gwebu in 1927.[157] The journalistic style of writing as well as vivid eye-witness accounts by the colonial officials make it easier to capture the prevailing mood of that time. More importantly, the accounts were so clear on their appreciation of geography; they refer to specific places by their local names making it easier to reconstruct, for example, settlement patterns in the 1920s.

Besides the file containing important accounts of local colonial actors, there are also different forms of correspondence that playback African voices and mirror African perspectives across different times. These documents include letters, written complaints, meeting notes, power disputes and memoranda. The letters, for example, vary in style and content. In terms of authorship, several of them were written by locals from the Gwebu area; ordinary villagers, village heads, teachers, and Chief Gwebu whose personal correspondence with the native commissioners is quite striking. The CHK archive is different from the colonial archives elsewhere in Zimbabwe which were predominantly a two-way affair between colonial administrators and African traditional leaders. The archive is a collage of documents that were authored by different actors of society such as ethnic minorities. The content in this archive goes beyond issues of taxation, demography, and tribal politics - aspects that fascinated the Native Commissioners. Letters that were written by villagers to the Native Commissioners are vivid and detailed marking a departure from the structured reporting style of colonial officials. Themes such as ethnic violence, boundary disputes,

[157] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1. Welcoming of the Ndebele People.

crop cultivation, livelihoods, soil conservation, livestock production, rain-making ceremonies, forestry, succession, and chieftainship are dominant in this archive and made it possible to reconstruct a socio-environmental history of the Ndebele immigrant community in Buhera[158]

Ironically, the Gwebu CHK Archive contains significant historical records yet the colonial state in Buhera was weak. This ambiguity can be explained by specific historical factors. One of the reasons is that the Ndebele immigrant community was diverse in terms of history and ethnicity. Some community members had acquired western education before their eviction. They had mastered the basics of letter writing and used this to communicate with the local colonial officials. Some of the community members were AmaFengu and Xhosa lay preachers.[159] In addition, Chief Gwebu himself was educated at Robben Island in South Africa around the 1920s.[160] He also resided and worked at Queens Hotel in Cape Town, South Africa, before returning to Colonial Zimbabwe to lead the Gwebu people after the death of his father in 1925.[161] After his return, he founded the African Natives National Congress (ANNC), one of the earliest proto-nationalist movements in Southern Rhodesia affiliated with the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa.[162] It was his political consciousness which enabled him to be in constant touch with the Native Commissioners. Hence, some of the correspondence between the Gwebu community and the Native Commissioner's office was in the form of documents personally authored by chief Gwebu himself. One of the challenges is that the original letters handwritten by Chief Gwebu in the *isiNdebele* language are not easily readable because of the cursive handwriting.[163] The translated and typed versions of the letters however make it better to make sense of the contents.

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[158] NAZ: 4/32/48/5 Chief Daniel Fish Gwebu to Native Commissioner of Buhera, 1950.
[159] These include Paul Mbulelo Tshabalala's father of Charlton Village.
[160] *Chronicle*. "How the Ndebele Settled in Buhera" 9 July 2022. https://www.chronicle.co.zw/how-ndebele-community-settled-in-buhera/ Accessed 9 July 2022.
[161] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Burial of Gwebu "Eulogy" Isaiah Fish Gwebu 16 January 2001.
[162] NAZ File: S138/22 1923-1926, Daniel F. Gwebosi to Chief Native Commissioner, 12 January 1925. *See* M.O West, *African Middle Class*. p. 141. See also NAZ S138/22 Daniel Fish Gwebu to Superintendent of Native Affairs Bulawayo, January 1925, R.A Hill, (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: Africa for the Africans, 1923-1945*. Vol. 10. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) 285-286.
[163] Most of the communication between the Native Administrators and Chief Gwebu was about the welfare of his people, need for schools, hospitals, ethnic violence, livestock theft among other things. These documents are in most

These notable differences between the NAZ records and the CHK documents allow this study to explore socio-environmental issues from a different perspective. This 'new' documentary evidence is disruptive. It brings in new voices of indigenous communities which are in most cases deliberately silenced in the process of rendering inaudible their critical pronouncements which characterised British colonial traditions in many parts of Africa including Southern Rhodesia.[164] I use the rural people's voices in this Gwebu archive as a counter-archive to the mainstream colonial archive which is dominated by structured, quantitative, and biased colonial reports. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, documentary evidence from the NAZ remained relevant throughout the research and went a long way in giving pointers to major turning points in the history of the Ndebele immigrant community. As far as the chronology of events, chieftainship, and ethnic relations the NAZ offered a good documentary foundation.

Despite its reliance on documentary evidence, the study remained consistently conscious of the conviction that the colonial officials were responsible for the creation of the so-called ethnic identities in Africa. The colonial archive became an organising tool in the creation of knowledge about ethnic identities. As theorist Ann Laura Stoler suggests, the study handled written sources with great caution, bearing in mind that the colonial archive has been a part of broader society and should be read against the grain, that is, in the context in which it was produced.[165]

In addition, the local archive in Buhera reinforced the use of maps in confining Africans to specific geographical zones. The study was fully aware of the reality that the colonial administrators sowed the seeds of what anthropologist Eric Worby aptly terms ethnocartography; the use of maps to restrict Africans to specific geographic zones while simultaneously giving "…administrators a

cases handwritten letters with the signature ending style inscribed "Chief Daniel Fish Gwebu". See for example CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Chief Gwebu, Chief Fish to NC Buhera, Appreciation of Service, April 1972.

[164] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Minutes of Meeting Held between the Gwebu Family and District Officials: 25 October 1967.

[165] Ane N. Stoler. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010) 17.

sense of authority over their subjects in clearly defined spaces".[166] To overcome these challenges, the research was conscious of the fact that these records were created in a specific historical context and designed for specific audiences.

Justifying a socio-environmental history of the Gwebu people

The beginning of the 20th century in southern Africa came with widespread internal (forced and voluntary) migrations as individuals, families, and communities relocated from their ancestral lands for reasons ranging from ecological to economic imperatives. The histories of these migrations have often revolved around the role of the state in evicting people and re-distributing lands. This study intends to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by redirecting focus to the agency of rural communities and how they used their indigenous cosmologies in the distribution and sustainable use of natural resources particularly land and water sources. As Judith Carney and Rangan Haripriya note, African agency in colonial state records is primarily presented through the prisms of slavery and tribal subjugation.[167] Colonial records on Africans are characterised by declensionist narratives which often blamed Africans for debasing nature.[168] By taking a detour from the state-centric narratives, the study contributes to the growing field of socio-environmental history by bringing out the intersection between forced evictions and natural resource use and allocation among indigenous communities of southern Africa. Drawing upon a previously untapped body of documentary evidence, the study uses the case study of Buhera to de-centre the mainstream narratives which put the colonial state at the centre of evicted communities' use of natural resources.

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166 Eric Worby. "Maps, Names and Ethnic Games: The Epistemology and Colonial Iconography of Colonial Power in North Western Zimbabwe". *Journal of Southern African Studies.* (1994, 20:3) 371-372.
167 J. Carney and H. Rangan. "Situating African Agency in Environmental History". *Environment and History*. 21 (2015, 21: 1) 5.
168 *See* Muchaparara Musemwa's review of Diana K. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa*. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007). Environment and History. (2009, 15: 1) 79-107.

In many instances where Africans in Southern Rhodesia were evicted from their ancestral lands into Native Reserves, the colonial government took the initiative of allocating them lands. By doing so, this created the precedent that the same was going to happen in Buhera. This was not the case for Ndebele communities evicted from Mzingwane who were not allocated alternative lands for settlement. The community, therefore, makes an ideal case study because of their unique experiences. Secondly, the Ndebele community settled in an area that had been rejected by the first comer Makumbe. How the immigrants settled and interacted with this rejected landscape remains unknown. It is therefore important to recover this unknown past to understand the broader history of colonialism in Southern Rhodesia.

This study focuses on the period between 1927 and 1980. Firstly, the year 1927 is historically important because it saw the final eviction of the Gwebu people from Matabeleland as well as their subsequent settlement in Buhera. The year 1980 is the cut-off date because the study is interested only in understanding colonial dynamics. Another important phase for this study is the period between the 1920s and 1950s. During this period, the focus of the study is on how land distribution revolved around the availability of red and black soils which the Gwebu favoured as opposed to the sandy light soils. The period between the 1960s and 1970s is equally important due to land-related conflicts loosely referred to as *dzviti ngarirobwe*.

The study has an important global and regional appeal. Except in less pluralistic countries such as Lesotho, Swaziland and Somalia, most African countries have been affected by natural resource-related conflicts and violence.[169] With Zimbabwe being in an era of redistribution of natural resources and corrective action, current discussions in both academia and policymaking are shifting towards addressing structural inequalities. In both social and biological sciences, conversations are

[169] *See* P.L. van den Berghe. "Class, Race and Ethnicity in Africa". *Ethnic and Racial Studies Journal.* (1982: 6: 2).

also shifting from Euro-centric discourses to African ways of knowing. The failure of colonial environmentalism and early modern science in Africa triggered the need to rethink the place of indigenous epistemologies of nature. This study is important in that it adds knowledge to the debate by historicising natural resource distribution, rural agro-ecological resilience, and local environmental conservation practices by incorporating the role of indigenous epistemologies.

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis has six chapters that address different themes. **Chapter one** introduces the research by outlining the history of the Gwebu people by capturing different events and processes between the 1820s to the 1920s. It traces the journey from Zululand to Matabeleland, in present-day Zimbabwe. Using secondary literature, the chapter reveals that what is now called the Gwebu immigrant group in Buhera only started as an extended family that was made up of the *Umnyama* regiment. The chapter identifies colonisation, immigration, evangelisation, and eviction as some of the processes that contributed to the ethnic diversity of the Ndebele immigrant society. The ethnic diversity of the Gwebu immigrant group contributed to a variety of agricultural and conservation practices which became the group's key defining characteristic. Literature focussing on colonial evictions in Southern Rhodesia, Buhera and the environment is discussed using a thematic approach. The chapter discusses the sources used in conducting the research, their limitations as well opportunities they provided.

Chapter two examines how the forced eviction of the Gwebu people from Matabeleland created uncertainty. The uncertainty emanated from the fact that the Gwebu were unsure if the new environments would guarantee their survival. For several families, the migration process was therefore characterised by episodes of waiting and negotiation in a bid to ensure that they found lands that suited their interests. Instead of viewing them only as victims at the mercy of the colonial

government, the chapter appreciates how the evicted Ndebele people had a clear understanding of the kinds of environments that they needed for settlement. In addition, contrary to fears exhibited by colonial administrators, the Ndebele immigrants were conscious of the need to conserve the environment even in places where they had historical attachment.

Chapter three discusses how, following settlement in Buhera in 1927, the Gwebu utilised the heavy black clays that the first-comer Shona-speaking Makumbe people had rejected. The chapter appreciates the agency of the minority Ndebele immigrant group in thriving in an area that was characterised by different hazards. **Chapter four** argues that the agricultural success of the Gwebu people and environmental practices carried out between the 1930s and 1950s were not entirely a result of the "gospel of the plough" preached by the colonial government. Instead, the success emanated from the society which embraced diverse agricultural and conservation practices. This diversity ultimately resulted in locally crafted innovative indigenous agricultural practices and conservation schemes.

Chapter five focuses on the violent clashes and struggle for belonging in Buhera between the 1960s and 1980. In these struggles between the immigrant Ndebele group and the Shona-speaking first-comer society, the natural and man-made landscapes became reference points through which both parties claimed legitimacy and belonging. The chapter closely examines how both the natural and man-made landscapes were deployed by either side to ascertain belonging. Chapter six provides an overarching conclusion that ties together different arguments made in the respective chapters. It brings out the importance of indigenous environmental and agricultural practices of minority and often vulnerable communities in the broader conversations on sustainable natural resource management in Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER TWO:

SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL UNCERTAINTIES AND NDEBELE AGENCY IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE: 1925-1945

Introduction

The period between 1925 and 1945 for the Gwebu people was a phase of eviction, relocation, and settlement. While some families migrated and settled in Buhera only two years after their eviction from Mzingwane, others took as long as 20 years to subsequently arrive and settle in Buhera. Despite the variations in the times they settled, it remains clear that the relocation of the Gwebu people in Buhera was neither immediate nor a simplistic process. Despite this silence surrounding their experiences in this era, their experiences during these temporalities between eviction, relocation, and settlement in Buhera remain largely unknown. Filling this gap is important because it highlights the agency of Africans in hostile landscapes in an area characterised by racialised natural resource expropriation.

This chapter plugs this important gap by reconstructing the experiences and agency of Africans during this period. This is done in two ways. First, the chapter argues that the phase between eviction and settlement was characterised by existential socio-environmental uncertainties as the evicted Ndebele people were uncertain if they were going to be allocated an area for settlement that possessed the desired environmental qualities such as fertile soils for crop cultivation and pastures for their livestock. Second, the chapter argues that uncertainties stemmed from the Ndebele fears of relocating to alien territories where they would be dominated by other ethnic groups because of their lack of belonging. In addition to identifying uncertainty and its different manifestations, the chapter goes on to argue that the Ndebele evictees were not only victims of colonial evictions. Despite their brutalisation, they influenced the processes of relocation in various creative ways which included the strategy of buying time. By recalibrating focus to these ignored

temporalities and deviating from the narratives of victimology which characterise histories of colonial evictions in Southern Rhodesia, this chapter takes scholarship forward by appreciating conscious and rational decisions and innovative strategies used by the Ndebele during a period tainted by systemic colonial violence and natural resource expropriation.

Forced removals in colonial Zimbabwe

Colonial evictions in colonial Zimbabwe have been read through the lens of suffering and victimology.[170] The problem with this approach is that it clouds different forms of agency deployed by Africans in the face of forced relocations. In these studies, the suffering of African communities is traced back to the earliest forms of land and natural resource expropriation. In 1898, the Southern Rhodesian colonial government enacted the Native Reserves Order in Council which legalised the creation of "native homelands" in different parts of the country.[171] In 1925, the Prime Minister appointed a commission led by lawmaker Morris Carter to counsel the government on the land issue. The Carter Commission, as it became known, recommended racial division of the colony's land. Africans' rights to own land in the colony were withdrawn.[172] These recommendations became the core of the Land Apportionment Act (LAA) of 1930.[173] The Act laid bare the principle of racial segregation which became the core of colonial rule in Southern Rhodesia up to 1980 when the country attained its independence.

The racial division of land between the white minority and the black majority resulted in the country's land distribution becoming more linear and rigid. A few white settlers disproportionately owned the larger portion of the country's productive lands and the means of production in general.

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[170] *See* for example, Donald S. Moore. *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place and Power in Zimbabwe.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
[171] Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Terence Ranger. *Violence and memory: one hundred years in the "dark forests" of Matabeleland.* 96.
[172] Barry N. Floyd. "Land Apportionment in Southern Rhodesia". *Geographical Review.* (Oct.1962, 52:4) 577.
[173] Eric Worby. "A Redivided land? New Agrarian Conflicts and Questions in Zimbabwe". *Journal of Agrarian Change.* (2001, 4:1) 481.

By 1952, the minority Europeans owned 49% of the total land while the majority of Africans owned 21.5%.[174] The smaller proportion owned by Africans was characterised by infertile and semi-arid parched lands which were susceptible to perennial droughts. Only a small population of Africans who aspired to own productive lands without necessarily challenging white settler privilege were accommodated in what were called African Purchase Areas.[175] The vast majority of Africans were evicted into the native reserves.

These developments resulted in the period between the 1920s and 1950s in Southern Rhodesia being an era of mass evictions and forced relocations. Just like the colonial encounter in Africa or the Black Experience under the British Empire which varied over time and space, Africans in Southern Rhodesia experienced colonialism differently. Among all the communities that suffered evictions, it was Ndebele who had the most violent experiences in the Shangani Reserve between the 1920s and 1950s. The forced removals of the Ndebele from areas around Bulawayo involved brutality at the hands of the military and the police. Families and communities were dumped in forests in the Shangani Reserve.[176] Using Ndebele linguistic ethnography, Alexander *et al* describe the Shangani Reserve's Gusu area as "dark forests" due to its adversities:

> The people of the Shangani explain that the Gusu forests are 'thickets to be afraid of', they are 'dark and fearful, full of lions, spirits and other scary things', 'places of tall, crowded trees and no people'; in the past, they were places of outcasts 'where witches were thrown to live'. The image of the Gusu forests as dark and threatening is a powerful and evocative one, central to the way people narrate their lives in the Shangani.[177]

For decoloniality theorist Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, the Gwayi and Shangani Reserves were "wild forests" and "disease-ridden"- connoting an area full of health and ecological hazards.[178] The experiences of the Ndebele in these reserves demonstrate the extent to which Africans suffered at

[174] Barry N. Floyd. "Land Apportionment in Southern Rhodesia". 580.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor and Terrence Ranger. *Violence and memory: one hundred years in the "dark forests" of Matabeleland*. 16.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Sabelo. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. "Re-Thinking the Colonial Encounter in Zimbabwe in the Early Twentieth Century". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (March 2007, 33:1) 138.

the hands of the colonial state in Southern Rhodesia. The trauma associated with this violence continued to cast its shadow as late as the post-colonial period in the 1980s-demonstrating the far-reaching consequences of the colonial encounter on the psychological well-being of the postcolonial state.[179]

Similarly, the Shangwe people were evicted from Rhodesdale Estate to Gokwe in the 1950s. Nyambara describes native reserves inhabited by Africans in Gokwe following their eviction from Rhodesdale as a malarial, inhabitable, and inhospitable region.[180] During the same period in the 1950s, the Rengwe were evicted from their ancestral lands in the Zambezi Valley in north-western Southern Rhodesia. The Rengwe basin was viewed by the Rengwe evictees as a diseased and hunger-prone landscape that evoked memories of death, hunger, and suffering.[181] Using the case study of the Hlengwe in the south-eastern region of Southern Rhodesia, Tavuyanago argues that the people had, for generations, cultivated sustainable relationships with the flora and fauna before evictions.[182] This allowed them to strike a delicate balance between consumption and sustainable management of natural resources.[183] Evictions naturally disrupted the flow of everyday life and peoples' relations with nature. Native reserves generated a lot of anxiety not only because of their harshness but also because people were hastily and forcibly evicted to new environments which they were not familiar with. They had no prior organised knowledge of the new environments: their soils, climates, rainfall patterns, pastures, terrain and ecologies. The people were not prepared to move to new environments.[184] Forced relocations instituted by the state in Southern Rhodesia have been described in the literature discussed above using overtones of suffering.

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[179] Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnne McGregor and Terrence Ranger. *Violence and memory: one hundred years in the "dark forests" of Matabeleland*. 56.
[180] Pius S. Nyambara. "That Place was Wonderful!" African Tenants on Rhodesdale Estate, Colonial Zimbabwe, c. 1900-1952". *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*. (2005: 38, 2) 267.
[181] Ivan Marowa. "Forced Removal and Social Memories in North-western Zimbabwe, c. 1900-2000". Unpublished PhD Thesis. (University of Bayreuth, 2015) 186.
[182] Baxter Tavuyanago. "Living in the Fringes of a Protected Area: Gonarezhou National Park (GNP) and the Indigenous Communities of south-eastern Zimbabwe, 1934-2008". 364.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid. 1.

The above literature has painted Natives Reserves as landscapes of protracted suffering because they were characterised by hazards such as droughts, diseases, and poor soils. This is explained by the fact that most reserves in Southern Rhodesia fell in the same ecological and environmental category as regions four and five. They were categorised as areas that "are unfit for agricultural settlement because of broken terrain, poor soils, lack of water, and tsetse infestation".[185] Natural regions four and five were characterised by erratic rains, perennial droughts, and poor soils.[186] Comparatively, white-owned commercial farms were established in ecological enclaves that were often well-watered and characterised by fertile soils. These included natural regions one, two and three.[187] Maximum temperatures in these regions were in the ideal range of between 19 ºC and 26 ºC.[188]

The literature cited above further demonstrates that colonialism in Southern Rhodesia came with asymmetrical flows of human populations. On one hand, Africans were forcibly evicted from their traditional lands which they had inhabited for generations and settled in new areas. On the other hand, white settlers moved into areas endowed with fertile soils and vast water resources to take up commercial farming. For example, fertile lands around Bulawayo were taken as early as the 1890s and the "poorly watered, infertile and Tsetse-infested" Gwai and Shangane Reserves were created to accommodate evicted Ndebele people.[189] The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 further partitioned 96 million acres of the country's total land by giving Europeans 49 million acres and Africans 29 million acres.[190] Environmental historians, Musemwa and Jacobs, concur that

[185] Barry N. Floyd "Land Apportionment in Southern Rhodesia". *Geographical Review*, (Oct. 1962, 52:4) 567.
[186] *See* R. Mugandani, M. Wuta, A. Makarau and B. Chipindu. "Re-Classification of Agro-Ecological Regions of Zimbabwe in Conformity with Climate Variability and Change". *African Crop Science Journal.* (2012, 20:2), 365.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid. 367.
[189] Godfrey Hove. "The State, Farmers and Dairy Farming in Colonial Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), c. 1890-1951". Unpublished PhD Thesis (Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch University: 2015). 57.
[190] Victor E.M Mashingaidze. "Agrarian Change from above: The Southern Rhodesia Native Land Husbandry Act and African Response". *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1991, 24:3). 558.

colonialism resulted in lands endowed with natural resources being expropriated from Africans to European settlers.[191] This trend of forced relocations continued and as late as 1955, 4 000 Africans were evicted from their ancestral lands to highly populated native reserves.[192] The disproportionate distribution of agricultural land shows the relationship between race and natural resource ownership. These dynamics reveal that the unequal ownership of land was a direct result of colonial forced removals.

Nevertheless, the above-cited literature on colonial evictions in Southern Rhodesia often treats forced removals and relocations as linear processes involving eviction, migration, and settlement - with no major processes between these developments. The cited works ignore the different events and processes that unfolded from the moment Africans were evicted until they settled in their newly allocated areas. For example, environmental factors such as pastures and soil preferences which significantly influenced choices of settlement have been overlooked. As argued by archaeologist Ian Holder, "there is more to history than linear accounts of events".[193] Stated differently, there has not been adequate attention given to the agency of evicted communities in determining choices of settlement. By ignoring the lived experiences and agency of Africans between the eviction, relocation, and settlement temporalities, we take away agency from the evicted communities and portray them only as victims at the mercy of the colonial state. Yet, as this chapter demonstrates, eviction and migration were not straightforward but characterised by multiple events and processes- just as the post-colony is conceptualised by theorist Achille Mbembe as an enclosure of multiple *durées.*[194]

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[191] Muchaparara Musemwa. "Flows of Water/Flows of Power/Flows of History: Current Trends and Transdisciplinary Insights and Future Directions". *South African Historical Journal.* (2019, 71:2) 146. See also Nancy J. Jacobs. *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 148.
[192] Floyd. "Land Apportionment in Southern Rhodesia". 577.
[193] Ian Hodder. *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012) 100.
[194] Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony.* (California: University of California Press, 2001) 14.

Approaching eviction, relocation and settlement as straightforward processes poses the risk of seeing temporalities in between them as epochs of passive inactivity. Yet there is documentary and oral evidence to suggest that these moments enshrined specific environmental factors such as the Ndebele's desire to get fertile lands and sufficient pastures for their cattle. The temporalities were certainly not void but characterised by contingency and agency despite the uncertainties of forced relocations. Exploring these aspects allows one to think of the period between eviction and resettlement as a complex multi-temporal historical process and not as a rapidly unfolding event.

Ndebele forced relocations and socio-environmental uncertainties.

For the Ndebele evictees, the period between eviction and subsequent settlement was characterised by social and environmental uncertainties. Uncertainty in this chapter is defined as a precarity caused by the unpredictability of a future.[195] Considering this working definition, the Ndebele evictees found themselves in a precarious state because they were unsure if their specific and clearly established desire to settle in an area with black clay soils and sufficient pastures was going to be achieved. Furthermore, they were doubtful if they were going to settle in an area that would allow them to maintain their agricultural prowess in terms of crop cultivation of livestock. This precarity occupied an important space in their everyday lives during the period between eviction, relocation, and subsequent settlement in Buhera between 1925 and 1945.

This uncertainty among Ndebele evictees was generated by specific historical factors. One of the major causes of uncertainty was environmental violence that unfolded in 1925 after the first group of white settlers arrived in Mzingwane with the help of Willoughby Consolidated. Environmental violence came in many forms with destocking being the most pronounced. The Ndebele evictees

[195] Susan R. Whyte and Godfrey E. Siu. "Contingencies: Interpersonal and Historical Dependencies in HIV Care" in Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten (eds). *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa.* (New York: Pelgrave and Macmillan, 2015) (no page numbers).

under the leadership of Chief Gwebu were forced to reduce the number of their livestock because they were now categorised as either tenants or squatters and they no longer possessed absolute rights to land use.[196] Other families who migrated via Gwelo lost all their herds because of restrictions that forbade the movement of cattle from one district to another.[197] This policy was enacted to avoid the spreading of diseases such as East Coast Fever which had re-emerged in 1912.[198] The Ndebele were forced to sell their livestock in haste as was the case in many other areas in Southern Rhodesia which were affected by forced relocations.[199] The newly settled white farmers capitalised on the unfolding situation and bought the livestock which they then resold at higher prices in Bulawayo.[200] Destocking resulted in the mass slaughter of cattle especially indigenous Mashona breeds which were deemed poor quality by white agronomists.[201] The colonial environmentalists and agriculturalists justified these actions by arguing that large herds owned by the Ndebele people posed a threat to biodiversity.[202] Destocking was a direct attack on the socio-economic well-being of the Ndebele people than an attack on herds themselves. By its own admission, the colonial government admitted that Africans' ownership of livestock was one of the factors (among many) that militated against tenants' provision of labour:

> Within the last few years, however, it has gradually come to be realized by many farmers that they have not been getting a reasonable return for their encouragement of native tenants. Even where the tenants entered into agreements to supply their landlords with labour, they have often been tempted away by the more attractive conditions of work at the mines and in towns, and any convenience enjoyed by the landowners has, in many cases, been more than outweighed by certain disadvantages mainly connected with the rapid increase, under favourable conditions, of native cattle and small stock.[203]

[196] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[197] Godfrey Hove. "The State, Farmers and Dairy Farming in Colonial Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), c. 1890-1951" 103.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Godfrey Hove. "The State, Farmers and Dairy Farming in Colonial Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), c.1890-1951", 103
[202] Native Reserves Interim Report, 1915.
[203]The British South Africa Company to Colonial Office. 21st April 1914. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ien.35556012341038&view=1up&format=plaintext&seq=14. 9 October 2022, 14:40.

Historians of colonialism in Southern Rhodesia such as Luke Malaba have interpreted these localised schisms as colonial ploys meant to push Africans into the wage labour economy.[204] These interpretations are plausible considering the reality that the newly settled white farmers in areas around Mzingwane were in serious need of labour.

In addition, from as early as the 1890s, individuals such as Max Eugen Eggert imported ox-drawn ploughs and wagons from Cape Town which were used to clear large tracts of lands for farming in Matabeleland and other parts of Southern Rhodesia.[205] When white farmers were allocated land that previously belonged to the Gwebu people in Mzingwane, this equipment was already at their disposal, hence ecological changes took place immediately whilst the evictees were still in the area. This was done through the clearing of large tracts of land which were previously uncultivated. While in theory, the white settlers seemed to have been immersed in conservationist beliefs, their actions caused a lot of environmental damage.[206] For example, the white farmers cleared previously well-kept forests to establish farmlands while in theory preaching conservation. This extended to areas such as indigenous forests.[207] While the colonial rhetoric was largely couched in conservationist discourse, Willoughby Consolidated which sold land to white farmers portrayed Mzingwane as a landscape ready for environmental exploitation:

> The ground is undoubtedly suitable also for tobacco and cotton besides which, cattle, pigs, and poultry, do excellently. Well-timbered this area cannot be classified as well-timbered, there is an abundance for fuel purposes and for cattle shelter and the grazing throughout is good. There is good surface water, and well water can be obtained at no great depth throughout the plots if a little discretion is used when sinking.[208]

[204] Luke Malaba. "Supply, Control and Organization of African Labour in Rhodesia." *Review of African Political Economy*. (1980 , 18) 7-18.
[205] Duncan Smith, "Memoirs of Max Eugen Eggert" September 8, 2022 at 8:36 AM, https://www.facebook.com/groups/766517063548268/permalink/2089830351216926
[206] Muchaparara Musemwa. "Contestation over Resources: The Farmer-Miner Dispute in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1903-1939". *Environment and History*. (2009, 15:1) 79-107.
[207] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[208] NAZ Files: S1180/2/2(11) Willoughby Consolidated CO. Ltd, Land Settlement Scheme: Correspondence Between Sir Melville Heyman and Honourable J.W Downie 1925.

In addition, the same period saw an increased human population caused by white settlers' immigration as about 50 white farmers settled in Mzingwane in 1925 alone.[209] The immigration of white farmers resulted in ecological changes. According to Ndebele oral histories, ox-drawn wagons were the main mode of transport used to ferry goods and people. Drawn by 16 oxen, these wagons created new trails in places that were previously covered by vegetation.[210] With no definite and clearly established wagon roads, these wagons contributed to increased gullies, and this resulted in a long-lasting ecological footprint.

Furthermore, individual white settlers such as Robinson who founded Spitzkop Farm in the Mlungwe Valley in Essexvale replaced indigenous trees with exotic trees such as citrus fruits, paw-paws, peaches, apples, and apricots.[211] At the same time, indigenous hardwood trees such as Mopani were harvested at a commercial scale as the timber was needed to construct houses for the white farmers.[212] In addition, local tree varieties were harvested to produce wood for fuel. On the contrary, well-kept orchards and exotic tree plantations in the vicinity of all European establishments such as schools replaced indigenous forests. While Robert H. Nelson and Alfred Crosby term this "environmental colonialism", this study conceptualises this harvesting of trees as systemic environmental violence against indigenous flora which followed the same pathways as the violence against Africans.[213] They had not only colonised the peoples but also nature. Ultimately, the arrival and settlement of white commercial farmers in areas around Mzingwane undoubtedly resulted in significant ecological changes.

[209] NAZ Files: S1180/2/2(11) Willoughby Consolidated CO. Ltd, Land Settlement Scheme: Correspondence Between Sir Melville Heyman and Honourable J.W Downie 1925.
[210] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[211] NAZ Files: S1180/2/2(11) Willoughby Consolidated CO. Ltd, Land Settlement Scheme: Correspondence Between Sir Melville Heyman and Honourable J.W Downie 1925.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Robert H. Nelson "Environmental Colonialism: "Saving" Africa from Africans". *The Independent Review*, Summer 2003, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Summer 2003). 65. Alfred Crosby. *Ecological imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

After the Gwebu had cultivated utilitarian and sustainable relations with the black heavy soils, the pastures, and the perennial water resources in Mzingwane, the ecological changes that came with white settlement ultimately generated uncertainty as the people were no longer certain if they were going to get an alternative territory that had similar material qualities. Before their eviction in Mzingwane, the socio-economic well-being of the Gwebu people depended heavily on their utilitarian relations with the natural environment. The clay black heavy soils that characterised the environment had over time allowed them to become successful farmers through diversified all-year-round cropping. By 1925 on the verge of their eviction, the Ndebele were growing a wide variety of crops including mealies, millets, groundnuts, pumpkins, and melons.[214] Writing in 1925, Sir Melville of Willoughby Consolidated commented that "the mealies grown in this area are second to none in the country".[215] These products easily found their way to the booming Bulawayo city which was 35 kilometres (22 miles) away.[216] Cattle and poultry production also thrived in this area owing to an ideal natural environment. These contributed to the well-being of the Gwebu people. Their sudden eviction thus disrupted their lives in many ways.

Another cause of uncertainty was social. It was the lack of belonging and the possibility of being dominated by other ethnic groups such as the Shona-speaking Makumbe. In the history of colonial migrations in Southern Rhodesia, the eviction of the Ndebele-speaking Gwebu people from their traditional lands in Matabeleland stands out. This is because the Gwebu crossed the geographical divide from Ndebele-dominated Matabeleland into the Manicaland region controlled by different Shona-speaking groups. This stands out as a unique experience because most of the evicted communities in Southern Rhodesia remained within their regions of origin where they retained some level of legitimacy and belonging. For example, the Shangwe and Madheruka were evicted

[214] NAZ Files: S1180/2/2(11) Willoughby Consolidated CO. Ltd, Land Settlement Scheme: Correspondence Between Sir Melville Heyman and Honourable J.W Downie 1925.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.

from Mafungautsi State Forests and Rhodesdale, respectively, and settled in the Gokwe area.[217] These two communities remained in the same region though they were moved from their ancestral lands. Another example is that of the Ndebele aristocratic family of Nyamanda who was evicted from areas around Bulawayo and settled in the Gwayi and Shangani Reserves.[218] The place was distant from Bulawayo, but the Ndebele aristocratic families found themselves in a place where their Ndebele language was widely spoken. They retained some level of legitimacy because they now lived side-by-side with other Ndebele-speaking communities with whom they had historical connections. The Rengwe were evicted from the Zambezi basin area but remained in the same north-western region of Southern Rhodesia without necessarily migrating to a new region altogether.[219] Another example is that of the Shangane who were evicted from Gonarezhou and settled just on the peripheries of the newly established game park.[220] Using Mazarire's concept of "home range", it can be argued that the Shangane people remained within their "maximum exploitable area" despite evictions.[221] Stated differently, the Shangane people remained within an area that was part of their territory and they continued to interact with their ancestral lands through hunting after evictions.

These experiences of the Rengwe, the Shangwe, Madheruka, Hlengwe and Ndebele communities demonstrate that some African communities were evicted but remained within their regions of origin where they retained some level of belonging based on, for example, language. This is by no means an attempt to downplay the impact of violent colonial evictions on the lived experiences of African communities. Rather, it is an attempt to appreciate the intricacies of the violent colonial evictions as opposed to the intrinsic generalisations which view these processes in simplistic linear

[217] Simeon Maravanyika. "Local Responses to Colonial Evictions, Conservation and Commodity Policies among Shangwe Communities in Gokwe, Northwestern Zimbabwe, 1963-1980". *African Nebula*. (2012: 5) 1-5
[218]Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni. "Re-Thinking the Colonial Encounter in Zimbabwe in the Early Twentieth Century". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (March 2007, 33: 1) 138.
[219] *See* Ivan Marowa. "Forced Removal and Social Memories in North-western Zimbabwe, c1900-2000". 1-10.
[220] Baxter Tavuyanago. "Living in the Fringes of a Protected Area: Gonarezhou National Park (GNP) and the Indigenous Communities of south-eastern Zimbabwe, 1934-2008". 1.
[221] Gerald C. Mazarire, "A Social and Political History of Chishanga: South-Central Zimbabwe c. 1750-2000". 37.

terms. This is also an attempt to take scholarship forward by deviating from generalised accounts of eviction and migration in Southern Rhodesia and appreciate these processes as multiple temporalities that allow us to appreciate the fears, challenges, innovations, and historical agency of African communities and changes over time and place. The processes of eviction, relocation, and settlement generated lived experiences and these encounters engendered social creativity such as a return to indigenous environmental knowledge systems. As Catherine Brun argues, "without seeking to romanticise displacement, it may also be said to involve innovation; it is a process of transformation and new possibilities".[222]

One way in which this uncertainty was revealed was in everyday conversations which were littered with metaphors of precarity. In 1925, a consultative meeting was conducted between Ndebele evictees and colonial officials to discuss the possibility of relocating to Buhera in Manicaland. Some traditional leaders such as Chief Ntola were sceptical about the idea:

> ... if a leopard and a dog were shut up in a cave together, the dog will soon perish. Formerly the Matabele were the leopard and the Maswina, the dog, but today if we move to the Sabi the position would be reversed.[223]

The dog and leopard metaphor used by Chief Ntola demonstrates that moving to Sabi Reserve posed risks such as socio-political domination by the surrounding Shona-speaking groups. This was a cause for concern considering the histories of ethnic violence between the Shona and Ndebele which were further exacerbated by colonial divisive propaganda.[224] Buhera was imagined as a space of potential subjugation while, on the other hand, Mzingwane was treated as the home

[222] Catherine Brun. "Active waiting and changing hopes: Toward a time perspective on protracted displacement", 3.
[223] NAZ S1561/10/8. See also F. Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 82.
[224] Sabelo J. Ndlovu Gatsheni. "Who Ruled by the Spear? Rethinking the Form of Governance in the Ndebele State". *African Studies Quarterly*. (2008, 10: 2&3) 75-78.

range that provided the group with some comforts.[225] They were, therefore, doubtful about what would become of their influence and status in Buhera.

Chief Ntola's fears of relocating to an area outside their region were shared by many traditional leaders throughout Southern Rhodesia. In 1966 when Chief Tangwena of Kairezi in Honde Valley was served with eviction orders, he deployed a strikingly similar dog metaphor to show his fears and scepticism of relocating to a place where their security in terms of land ownership was not guaranteed:

> I was offered land at Gokwe for my people alternatively and that Government would endeavour to let us join the remainder of our tribe in P.E.A. I declined this…to go to a place where I would be called a dog by another Chief—the Chief I would find there…. I was told that I could go with all my people there and be chief—I didn't go and see the land at Gokwe…[226]

The use of the dog metaphor by Chiefs Ntola and Tangwena, both of whom had been subjected to violent colonial evictions, demonstrates their deep-seated uncertainties about their social futures. In the 1920s when the Ndebele were being evicted, one Chief Maledanisa who was part of the evicted communities informed a Colonial Native Commissioner that he did not like to relocate to Buhera "arguing that his people did not like to live among people who are their enemies as they would practice witchcraft and exterminate them".[227] Again, witchcraft and extermination in this case were deployed as metaphors of uncertainty to refer to cultural domination which would eventually result in the loss of their Ndebele identity. These metaphors indicate the fears among the Ndebele of relocating to Shona-dominated areas were not only realistic but also prevalent. The

[225] The term home zone is borrowed by Mazarire to refer to a territory that includes home and maximum exploitable area for a particular group. See G.C Mazarire "A Social and Political History of Chishanga: South-Central Zimbabwe c.1750-2000". 37.
[226] NAZ Files: MS 335/10/6 Guy Clutton-Brock, G. Nyafaru: 1962-1971, 1967. Cited in Nicholas Nyachega, forthcoming/Unpublished "I want bread, not stones…I will not leave this land": Of Racialized Dispossessions and Boundary Contestations in colonial Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands, the 1950s-1970s." 9.
[227] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)making Ndebele Identities in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 83, citing NAZ: S1561/10/9).

Makumbe of Buhera harboured equally mythical stories about the Ndebele. One oral account described an example of such myths in greater detail:

> We grew up hearing a lot of stories about the Ndebele people. One story that we heard from our elders was that the Ndebele were superstitious. We were told that their Chiefs made their drums using human skin from their enemies. Such stories made us treat our Ndebele colleagues at school with suspicion.[228]

Although revisionist scholars such as Gatsheni-Ndlovu, have dismissed colonial stereotypes which saw the Shona-Ndebele relations as perpetually hostile, there is evidence both among the Makumbe and the Gwebu that such tensions were real.[229] Both Makumbe and Gwebu oral histories affirm the existence of tensions between Ndebele and Shona-speaking households from the time of settlement of the former in the late 1920s.

Some of the actions taken by the evicted Ndebele people, especially from 1925 reveal the deep-seated uncertainty. According to Nicodemus Gwebu,

> After our forefathers had been served with eviction orders, our grandfather who was the Chief instructed his community not to burn down houses, cattle kraals and grain silos as had been instructed by colonial officials. Instead, they continued to maintain their homes. The reason why they did this, we are told, is because they did not know if they were going to be welcomed in any other place. They were afraid of being continuously moved from place to place without being allocated lands suitable for their diverse crop varieties and livestock.[230]

The reason why the Gwebu people maintained their homes was not only a way of holding on to their productive lands. It was also because they had not yet identified alternative lands that would match the environmental qualities of Mzingwane which they deemed fertile and ideal for livestock production. At this stage in 1925, the Ndebele evictees found it worth staying put as squatters and tenants than relocating to new places where they were not guaranteed desired environmental

[228] Personal interview with Gil Masango, Gwebu Homestead, Ward 4, Buhera.
[229] Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. "Who Ruled by the Spear? Rethinking the Form of Governance in the Ndebele State". *African Studies Quarterly*. (Fall 2008, 10: 2 and 3). 74.
[230] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.

qualities such as fertile soils and water sources.[231] The continued stay of some remaining Ndebele families worked in favour of the newly settled white commercial farmers who were in urgent need of labour force. Throughout the colony, newly settled white commercial farmers "desperately needed labour" from tenants.[232] Economic historian of Zimbabwe Erik Lund argues that tenants made up 35% of all farm workers between the 1920s and 1960s.[233]

Moreover, the Ndebele migration patterns from Matabeleland to Buhera further reveal ingrained uncertainties. While eviction orders were served to all Ndebele communities around Mzingwane, Fort Rixon and Douglasdale areas, the communities that migrated to the Buhera did so at different times using different routes. The first group did so in 1926 and included the Dobha, S'gaxa, Ndinga, Makhutshwa, and Msiza families.[234] They trekked via Gwelo and settled near Mavangwe Hills in Chief Makumbe's territory.[235] The second group arrived in Buhera in 1928 and included Chief Gwebu and the ruling Gwebu family.[236] Other families that were part of this second group include the Gwibila, Sigudhumezi, Malombo, Sikwabayile, Mahodho, Nkamanda, Makhwakhwa, Ndonjelana, Mathonganyana, and Nkomo.[237] All these families had come from Mzingwane.[238] They left Bulawayo via Mvuma by train using tickets provided by the colonial authorities. From Mvuma, they trekked for 100 kilometres to Charter where they encamped at the District Offices located at the Range. From there, they then trekked for another 40 kilometres to Buhera where they settled in Chief Makumbe's territory. After 1928, smaller groups of evictees comprising

[231] J. Rennie. "White Farmers, Black Tenants, and Landlord Legislation: Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1930". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (1978, 5:1). 90.
[232] *See* Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. "Re-thinking the Colonial Encounter in Zimbabwe in the Early Twentieth Century". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (2007, 33:1). 183.
[233] Erik Green. "The Development of Settler Agriculture in British Africa Revisited: Estimating the Role of Tenant Labour in Southern Rhodesia, c. 1920-1960" *African Economic History Working Paper Series*. (2016, 4). 4.
[234] F. Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 83.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[237] F. Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 84.
[238] Ibid.

individuals and families continued to trickle into Buhera. As late as 1945, the last significant group of Ndebele immigrants arrived in Buhera. This group included the Masaile and Mgazi families who had spent years in Gwelo where some of their members were employed as farm workers while at the same time looking for alternative lands for settlement.

The uncertainty encountered by the Ndebele evictees is an important historical experience that helps us to understand the thinking, fears, and resilience of the group following forced relocations. This uncertainty is enclosed within a historical era that has been ignored by historians of colonial evictions who have often depicted migration processes as rapidly unfolding events characterised by suffering. As argued in this section, ignoring the experiences of Africans during these moments is tantamount to overlooking their agency.

The uncertainty generated by violent forced evictions of the 1920s was not entirely destructive for the Ndebele people. In fact, uncertainty as a lived experience was to a greater extent productive for the evictees. Uncertainty provoked the people to think creatively about different ways to create an alternative future - a future that could not be dictated by the colonial government. That future involved looking for an alternative area for settlement specifically equipped with fertile lands and sufficient water sources. This would in turn guarantee the minority Ndebele people's survival and avoid being dominated by both the colonial government and rival ethnic groups. Uncertainty, therefore, became a currency through which new survival pathways were created in the face of violent colonial evictions and existential insecurities brought by forced relocations to new hostile landscapes. Theorists Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten lamented that uncertainty has often been viewed negatively as a limitation inhibiting communities to do certain things.[239] Instead of viewing uncertainty as a problem, Cooper and Pratten argue that uncertainty is in fact an important

[239] Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten. (eds). *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa.* (New York: Pelgrave and Macmillan, 2015) 2.

social resource that can be used to navigate insecurities.[240] For the Ndebele evictees, uncertainty became the source of innovation through which the process of searching for alternative lands was carried out.

Ndebele relocation and the strategy of waiting

Following their eviction from Mzingwane in 1925, the Ndebele migrants did not immediately relocate. Instead, they adopted a strategy of waiting. Waiting in this study is defined as a delaying tactic used by the Ndebele evictees to buy time and delay their departure while negotiating and carefully planning their future. It was a way of buying time to carefully decide where to go after the eviction: an alternative future. The kind of waiting deployed by the Ndebele evictees is defined as active waiting by theorists Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten.[241] Active waiting is whereby individuals or communities engage in side activities while waiting for bigger transformative opportunities to arrive.[242] Using the case study of the informal settlements in North West province of South Africa, historian Joseph Mujere argues that following the downsizing of major mining conglomerates which were the biggest employers, local communities were involved in activities such as volunteering for local municipal work while waiting for opportunities and services such as jobs, electricity supply, water supply, healthcare and policing services to be availed.[243] By volunteering, people were buying time while waiting for better employment opportunities. Closely related to this, theorist Catherine Brun defines active waiting as "the anticipation and some confidence in the fact that a certain event will occur and is thus closely connected to hope."[244]

[240] Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten. (eds). *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa*. 2.
[241] Ibid. 11.
[242]Cathrine Brun. "Active Waiting and Changing Hopes: Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement." *Social Analysis*. (2015, 15:1) 19–37.
[243] Joseph Mujere. "Unemployment, service delivery and practices of waiting in South Africa's informal settlements". *Critical African Studies*. (2020 12:1) 1-14.
[244] Catherine Brun. "Active Waiting and Changing Hopes". 6.

Beyond southern Africa, the concept of waiting has been used by scholars to study communities in contemporary West Africa. In post-war Liberia, the city of Monrovia became a space of insecurity and uncertainty due to economic collapse.[245] To navigate the uncertainties caused by joblessness and organised crime, youths resorted to "hustling" as a form of associational life while waiting for long-term stable economic opportunities.[246] By taking part in informal economic activities such as running motorbike businesses, people participated in a process of challenging and contesting uncertain futures while simultaneously looking elsewhere for transformative and stable economic opportunities such as jobs in the government.[247] Besides being informal, these economic activities lack stability and permanence. Writing broadly on contemporary Africa, theorist M. Stasik *et al* argue that youths in contemporary Africa live with uncertainty due to a lack of opportunities and inequality and they use waiting as a strategy.

> It is true that youth wait, but as they wait, they talk, play, plan, scheme, hustle and work. In the process of waiting, African youth build relationships that provide a foundation for transforming their lives.[248]

Similarly, the Ndebele evictees resorted to active waiting. This active waiting took place during a specific temporal moment of eviction and relocation which lasted from 1925 to 1945. During this waiting period, the immigrants were looking for alternative lands where they could go and settle and start new lives. While there is a narrative that discredits the Ndebele's waiting strategy in favour of the account that the government continuously followed and evicted them, there is no evidence to support this.[249] In the case of Ndebele forced removals, the colonial government demonstrated a lack of capacity to strictly monitor the relocation process. As argued by James C. Scott, the

[245] Andrea Kauffmann, "Crafting a Better Future in Liberia". *Journal of the Swiss Anthropological Association*. (2017: 22) 37.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Michael Stasik, Valerie Hänsch & Daniel Mains. "Temporalities of waiting in Africa". *Critical African Studies*. (2020, 12:1) 2.
[249] *Chronicle*. "How the Ndebele Settled in Buhera" 9 July 2022. https://www.chronicle.co.zw/how-ndebele-community-settled-in-buhera/ Accessed 9 July 2022.

colonial state was not always equipped to police the colonised.[250] The Ndebele evictees temporarily encamped in three distinct parts of Matabeleland, Midlands and Manicaland Provinces following their eviction. In addition, the Ndebele evictees did not relocate at once as one group. Different groups migrated at distinct times, through separate routes and using various modes. The first known group arrived in Buhera in 1926 while the last one arrived in 1945.

The first stage of waiting took place in their ancestral lands in Mzingwane between 1923 and 1925. Although the eviction orders were only served in 1925, the Ndebele had already been informed of their imminent eviction. This explains why as early as 1923 the Gwebu people dispatched two scouts to the Sabi Reserve to go and search for lands in preparation for the future.[251] This suggests that even before formal eviction, the Ndebele had already started the deploy the strategy of waiting. After their eviction, the Ndebele people did not immediately vacate their ancestral lands. They negotiated with the white farmers who had possessed the lands. These negotiations took place in two different forms. First, the Ndebele evictees became wage labourers working as livestock herders, wagon drivers, domestic workers, and general workers. Examples of such families include the Tshabalala family of Xhosa origin.[252] The Tshabalalas had a long history of working as wagon drivers following the footsteps of their predecessors who had migrated to Southern Rhodesia from South Africa under the BSAC, LMS, and later the Pioneer Column from as early as the 1880s.[253] Second, the Ndebele evictees remained on the lands as tenants paying cash rents to white farm owners.[254] Although the introduction of cash rents forced many families to relocate, the few who stayed did so because they wanted to buy time to carefully decide on alternative places for

[250] James C. Scott. *Seeing Like a State.*
[251] *Chronicle.* "How the Ndebele Settled in Buhera" 9 July 2022. https://www.chronicle.co.zw/how-ndebele-community-settled-in-buhera/ Accessed 9 July 2022.
[252] Personal interview with Paul Mbulelo Tshabalala.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)making Ndebele Identities in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 83.

settlement.[255] Others remained there without necessarily paying cash rents and they were categorised as squatters.[256]

In 1926, after leaving Mzingwane and before subsequently settling in Buhera, Ndebele families which included the Gwebu temporarily encamped at Makhandeni in Fort Rixon and Mbembesi north-east of Bulawayo.[257] From Mbembesi, they briefly settled in Lower Gwelo in the Midlands Province. The groups that briefly settled in Gwelo include the Mgazi and Masaile families.[258] They then migrated eastwards to Lalapanzi where they briefly settled again.[259]

In 1927, a group of Ndebele evictees from Mzingwane and Esigodini comprising Chief Gwebu's clan temporarily settled in the Dagamela area of the Shangani Reserve as part of their strategy of buying time whilst looking for suitable areas for settlement.[260] Native Commissioners reported that the Gwebu refused to permanently settle in the north-western regions of Gwelo because there were no dipping facilities for their livestock. Instead, they opted to temporarily move with their cattle to Dagamela's area in the Shangani Reserve area.

> Chief Gwebu, of Hope Fountain, has brought in a list of people moving cattle from Hope Fountain and Douglasdale. These people intend to move to the north-western corner of Gwelo district, but cannot settle there until dipping facilities are provided. They now wish to move the cattle to the Shangani Reserve, Dagamela's area, where there are dipping facilities. [261]

This refusal to settle in the north-western parts of Gwelo because there were no dipping facilities underscores the argument that the Gwebu had specific agro-ecological interests and consciously made decisions that shaped their futures.

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[255] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)making Ndebele Identities in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 83.
[256] J. Rennie. "White Farmers, Black Tenants, and Landlord Legislation: Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1930". 90.
[257] Personal Interview with Chief Makumbe, Personal Interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[258] Personal Interview with Victor Mgazi, Personal Interview with Albert Masaile.
[259]Personal Interview with Chief Makumbe.
[260] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: "Native Superintendent to the District Veterinary Surgeon", Bulawayo, 1927.
[261] Ibid.

Place of Origin	Livestock Owner	Number of Cattle (head)
Douglas Dale	Ndaba (Sixpence)	12
Douglas Dale	Ndugu	46
Douglas Dale	Mnyayi	56
Hope Fountain	Mnyayi	3
Hope Fountain	Mabuti	5
Hope Fountain	Mathenjana	22
Hope Fountain	Maumo	14
Hope Fountain	Mjumi	17
Hope Fountain	Mlumbi	9
Hope Fountain	Sinamu	15
Hope Fountain	Malabula	6
Hope Fountain	Sijoli	24
Hope Fountain	Siboho	7
Hope Fountain	Mgazimbi	58
Hope Fountain	Titshimani	15
Hope Fountain	Mpeyakhaya	31
Hope Fountain	Mtombe	5
Hope Fountain	Nqantsi	3
Total head		**348**

Figure 2: Table showing the number of cattle owned by different Ndebele households evicted from Hope Fountain and Douglas Dale areas of Mzingwane District.[262]

Livestock was an important part of their means of production, and this explains why they were interested in settling in an area that would allow their herds to thrive. For them, an area which did not accommodate their herds was synonymous with uncertainty. Their stay in Shangani was however brief as the group led by Chief Gwebu subsequently migrated to Buhera in the same year. The colonial government set aside £5 for the transportation of the Mlumbi and Matshina families from Bulawayo to Gwelo and from Gwelo to Mvuma. The Tshonapi family were also provided

[262] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: The District Veterinary Surgeon to the Superintend of Natives, Bulawayo, 20th July 1927.

with transport from Bulawayo to Mvuma.[263] However, before settling in Chief Makumbe's area, Chief Gwebu and his people briefly encamped at Range District offices in Charter where Posselt was stationed as a District Commissioner. The evictees comprised 20 indunas and 20 followers.[264] Again, their temporary settlement at the Range was to carefully negotiate their arrival in the area that they had identified for settlement.

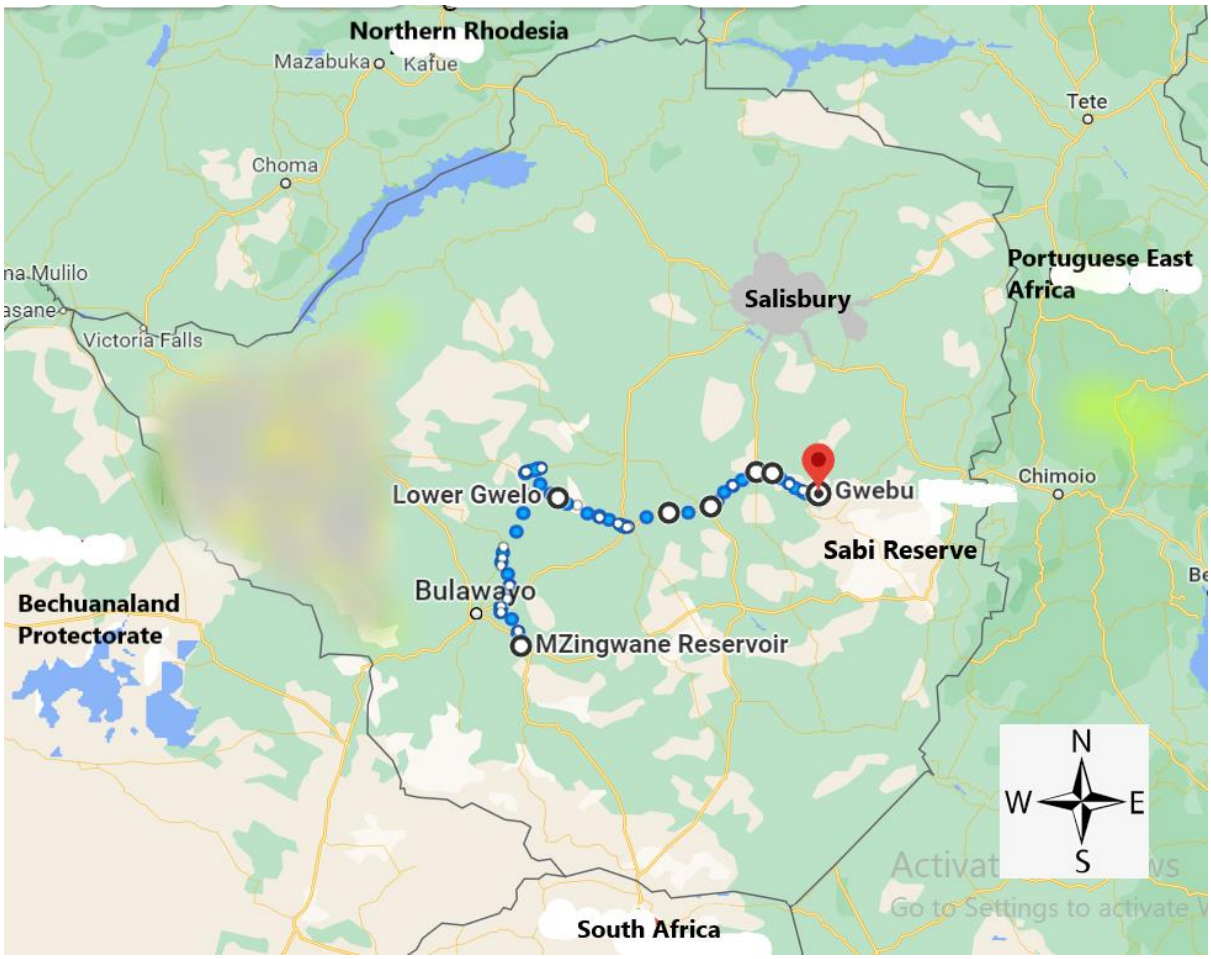

Figure 3: The recreated map showing the route taken by the Gwebu people during their migration from Mzingwane District to the Sabi Reserve.

During this time, Posselt (Fish Gwebu's friend) was stationed at Range. It was at this point that he assisted Gwebu's passage into Buhera which fell under his jurisdiction.[265] However, both Posselt and the local colonial authority in Buhera did not influence the Gwebu's choice of settlement.

[263] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Superintendent of Natives Bulawayo to Chief Native Commissioner Salisbury, "Natives Moving to Sabi Reserve". 3 December 1927.
[264] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Report of The Native Commissioner of Mzingwane for the Year Ended 31 December 1927.
[265] Ibid.

What they only did was endorse an already ongoing relocation exercise. The choices of settlement by the Ndebele were entirely internally driven considering their specific and clearly laid out agricultural and environmental needs. Colonial officials at Charter District further expressed fears that the migration of Ndebele evictees endangered the environment, and this required "careful handling" from the respective administrators.[266] This assumption was based on the realisation that the evictees had no entitlement to the area and their settlement was uncertain.[267]

Furthermore, the subsequent settlement of the Gwebu family and other Ndebele families in Buhera around 1927 is described in both Gwebu and Makumbe oral histories as a part of the waiting strategy. According to Chief Makumbe, the Makumbe people were presented with the assumption that the Ndebele only wanted to rest for a while before proceeding with their journey:

> My grandfather who was chief of the Makumbe people welcomed Chief Gwebu and his people arrived in this area in 1927. Chief Gwebu and his people arrived and settled in an area with black soil. The Makumbe people shunned the lands because they were uncultivable. It was this area that Gwebu chose and asked to rest for a while (*kuzorora*) whilst looking for a place of their own.[268]

The Makumbe were hospitable to the immigrants and offered them a place of temporary abode. When it became clear that the Ndebele immigrants were not going to leave, the Makumbe began to feel betrayed. They felt the Ndebele immigrants had tricked them by hiding their plans to settle permanently in the area they had been given to rest. Considering this, Musoni argues that over time, the settlement of the Ndebele under the guise of resting became a source of animosity between the two groups. According to Musoni, "… the Makumbe felt that the Ndebele cheated them into believing that they were only taking a rest when they intended to settle permanently".[269]

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[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Personal Interview with Chief Makumbe (Shepherd Chengeta).
[269] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)making Ndebele Identities in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 90.

However, although Musoni argues that the settlement of the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera was a result of dishonesty and treachery, this study further explains this using specific historical reasons. In 1930, there was the passing of the Land Apportionment Act (LAA) which codified the movement of Africans to regions deemed unproductive by the white settlers.[270] This Act sealed the fate of Africans as it buttressed the dispossession of land which had been legalised by the 1898 Southern Rhodesia Native Reserves Order in Council.[271] The 1930 LAA was much more impactful in that it was enacted at a moment when some of the Ndebele households were still in the process of relocating from Matabeleland to Manicaland. Colonial laws made no provision for Africans to appeal against land expropriation. Thus, the Ndebele could not claim the lands as theirs, as ownership had been made binding. These realities sealed the immigrants' hope of ever returning to their original lands. They had to abandon their strategy of waiting owing to the changed circumstances that now required creative and robust responses.

Closely related, the Ndebele people's specific environmental needs had been met after their settlement in Buhera. This prompted them to consider settling permanently. The fertile lands characterised by black heavy clays had bolstered their agriculture. In 1948, local colonial officials in Buhera wrote to the Department of Agriculture requesting for a larger grain storage centre to be constructed at Gwebu Business Centre to accommodate increased supplies of maize.[272] In addition, their livestock had by this time adapted well to the environments and their herds were increasing exponentially. These developments suggest that the Gwebu had managed to make use of the environment to excel in agricultural production. There was no longer a need to continue searching for other places for settlement.

[270] Muchaparara Musemwa. "Contestation over Resources: The Farmer-Miner Dispute in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1903-1939". *Environment and History*. (February 2009: 15, 1) 84.
[271] Ibid.
[272] CHK5: Letter by District Commissioner Buhera to Provincial Agriculture Officer, October 1948.

Owing to their success in agriculture, the colonial government only began to cement the Ndebele's settlement in Buhera in the late 1940s. This was after years of notable agricultural success when the local colonial officials mooted the idea of enacting permanent boundaries to protect them from their Makumbe neighbours. In 1946, the Native Commissioner of Buhera proposed that:

> It would be possible to allocate arable area No. 4 to him. This area is 4 312 acres and if area numbers were added it would make a total of 4 876 acres of arable area. If this suggestion is adopted, it would be advisable to remove from this area all those natives of Chief Makumbe who have settled in this area since Chief Gwebu's arrival there.[273]

What this suggests is that even the colonial government in the earlier years had treated the settlement of the Ndebele as only temporary. Even the demographic factor gave the impression that the group was only settling temporarily. The Ndebele immigrant group was numerically too small to warrant an autonomous chieftaincy with definite geographical boundaries. Posselt, who was the District Administrator for Sabi Reserve, and the rest of the local officials were reluctant to grant Gwebu autonomous power before 1948. They argued that the group was too small, and boundaries could only be enacted "when the number of the chief's followers warranted it."[274] At this stage in the late 1940s, the strategy of waiting had been abandoned and the people were now leaning towards permanent settlement. If agricultural success, food sovereignty and political influence throughout Buhera in the 1940s are to be considered, the strategy of waiting used by the Ndebele immigrants yielded positive results for them.

The productive power of waiting and Ndebele agency

Whilst waiting in their ancestral lands, the Ndebele evictees used the time productively. The waiting time was used, for example, to work as wage labourers on white-owned farms, acquiring knowledge from white commercial farmers, as well as selling their cattle to acquire mechanised farming

[273] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: "The Native Commissioner, Buhera", July 16, 1946.
[274] Ibid. See also F. Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)making Ndebele Identities in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 89.

equipment such as ox-drawn ploughs. It was easy for the evictees to secure work on the newly established white-owned farms because of a pre-existing labour shortage. Clearing of lands, cultivation, construction of roads and buildings, and cattle herding were some of the readily available jobs that the evictees easily acquired.[275] Bambatha Nkomo, one of the few surviving Ndebele elders stated that his father was one of the Ndebele evictees who worked as a general labourer for one of the new white farmers in Mzingwane in the mid-1920s.[276] According to Nkomo, it was during this period when his father acquired knowledge of dam construction using semi-mechanised makeshift equipment such as scooping dishes (locally referred to as *skurupati* by the Gwebu).[277] Besides knowledge exchange, the Ndebele were also able to get access to agricultural equipment through their interactions with white commercial farmers. According to Nkomo, his father, Duba-Duba Nkomo did not only acquire knowledge but also equipment such as scooping dishes which he brought to Buhera around 1928.[278]

In addition to these activities, the Ndebele immigrants also used this waiting time to look for alternative lands for settlement following their eviction. It was during this temporal moment when Chief Gwebu dispatched two different teams of representatives to scout the lands. The first group comprised of two scouts went to Buhera to survey the area and find out if the land had the specified material qualities.[279] The second group was dispatched in 1925 and comprised the *Izinyosi* regiment which was one of the most trusted by the chief. The emissaries brought a positive report that confirmed that the area "had clay soils and there were a lot of water bodies".[280] According to Nicodemus Gwebu, the scouts who were dispatched to Buhera were mainly interested in finding

[275] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu. See also *Chronicle*. "How the Ndebele Settled in Buhera" 9 July 2022. https://www.chronicle.co.zw/how-ndebele-community-settled-in-buhera/ Accessed 9 July 2022.
[280] *Chronicle*. "How the Ndebele Settled in Buhera" 9 July 2022. https://www.chronicle.co.zw/how-ndebele-community-settled-in-buhera/ Accessed 9 July 2022.

out if Buhera which had been identified as an alternative area for settlement had fertile soils and pastures for their cattle.[281]

Another important development that took place during the waiting period among the Ndebele evictees was a series of collective consultative meetings between colonial officials and Ndebele leaders to discuss possible areas of settlement. One such meeting that took place on 2 December 1925 shows how colonial officials persuaded the Ndebele immigrants to relocate to the Gwayi and Shangani Reserves.[282] Despite a few households agreeing and relocating to the Shangani Reserve, the group aligned to Chief Gwebu rejected the idea arguing that the area did not have the desired environment to accommodate their herds.[283] Although the colonial officials who were present persuaded the Ndebele to relocate to Buhera, the subsequent relocation was a product of local initiatives and knowledge of the environment. Chief Gwebu and his people conducted their surveys which included sending scouts to Buhera not just to look at the soils but the entire environment and its qualities.[284] These developments provide an opportunity to appreciate that the Ndebele evictees were conscious of the environments that they desired and were in complete control of the process of relocation.

By deploying waiting as a strategy to buy time to make informed decisions, the Ndebele evictees were in what anthropologists have conceptualised as a liminal space.[285] Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep was the first to deploy the concept of liminality in 1909 in his study of rites of passage.[286] He defines liminality as a state of in-betweenness where one has left a certain phase but has not

[281] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[282] Musoni. 82 citing NAZ S1561/10/8. Native Commissioner Mzingwane Report on Meeting held with Matabele Chiefs and Headmen on 2 December 1925.
[283] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)making Ndebele Identities in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 82.
[284] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 82. Personal with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[285] Rebecca Sutton, Darshan Vigneswaran and Harry Wels. "Waiting in liminal space: Migrants' queuing for Home Affairs in South Africa". *Anthropology Southern Africa*. (2011, 34:1&2) 30-31.
[286] Bjørn Thomassen. *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between*. (London: Routledge, 2016) 3

yet been incorporated into the new category.[287] In light of this definition, Ndebele evictees during this period can be conceptualised as being in a liminal space. This is because they had been served with eviction orders and had left their lands, but at the same time, they had not yet settled permanently. They were in a state between eviction and settlement. Yet in this space of in-betweenness, they remained consistent on the kinds of environments that they wanted and deployed an effective strategy of waiting which gave them enough time to make well-thought-out decisions.

All areas temporarily inhabited by the Ndebele evictees during this liminal temporal phase have important environmental similarities which are worth exploring. These areas which include Mzingwane, Lalapansi, Gwelo, and Charter were part of the country's natural regions three and four. With minimum temperatures averaging between 11ºC and 26ºC, the areas were characterised by naturally rich black heavy clays as well as nutritious natural pasture varieties for livestock.[288] This means that the subsequent settlement of the Gwebu in Chief Makumbe's area was not a coincidence, but a conscious and carefully calculated decision informed by their specific agricultural interests. Besides being crop cultivators who produced a variety of crops, the Ndebele evictees were big livestock farmers. The Nkomo and Gwebu families had a combined herd of more than a hundred cattle before their eviction in 1925.[289] These claims are supported by colonial correspondence which cites an example of 6 chiefs around Matopos who owned a combined herdof more than 10 000 cattle in the early 1900s.[290] A study by agronomist Tavirimirwa *et al* shows that the *Mashona* breeds had high calving rates in marginalised areas such as Matabeleland because of their resistance to tropical diseases and ticks.[291]

[287] Bjørn Thomassen. *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between.* (London: Routledge, 2016) 3.
[288] F. Mtambanengwe. "Climate change and variability: smallholder farming communities in Zimbabwe portray a varied understanding". *African Crop Science Journal.* (2012, 20:2) 367.
[289] Personal Interview with Nicodemus Gwebu. Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[290] The British South Africa Company to Colonial Office. 21st April 1914.
[291] B. Tavirimirwa, *et al.* "Communal cattle production in Zimbabwe: A review". *Livestock Research for Rural Development.* (2012, 12:217).

The Ndebele evictees stand out among other evicted African communities in colonial Southern Rhodesia for their agency in influencing processes of relocation. This is because in many African communities in Southern Rhodesia, the colonial government dictated the process of eviction without giving Africans any room to decide their post-eviction futures. For example, the Madheruka people evicted from Rhodesdale Estate in the 1960s were "forcibly loaded into waiting government lorries and dumbed in Gokwe and neighbouring Sanyati Reserves".[292] The Madheruka were given no time to decide where they wanted to settle after eviction. The mode of transportation and routes were imposed on them by the state. The process of eviction and migration was therefore initiated without their input. What made the situation worse is that the communities were dumped in the middle of forests without drinking water and exposed to dangerous wild animals.[293] In a related scenario, the eviction of the Tangwena people in the Kairezi area resulted in the colonial government imposing Gokwe as the alternative area for settlement.[294] This was done without prior consultation to find out if the Tangwena people were in favour of relocating to Gokwe. Similarly, the Hlengwe who lived in the Gonarezhou area in the 1930s were evicted and given a clearly defined area in the peripheries of the newly established game reserve.[295] One of the reasons for settling the people close to the game reserve was to have access to cheap labour from Africans. It is sufficient to say that the evicted Hlengwe did not influence how and where they were going to settle after eviction because a clearly defined territory outside the game park had been carved out for them ahead of time.

[292] Pius Nyambara. "Madheruka and Shangwe: ethnic identities and the culture of modernity in Gokwe, Northwestern Zimbabwe, 1963-79". *Journal of African History*. (2002, 43:2) 293.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Nicholas Nyachega "I want bread, not stones…I will not leave this land": Of Racialized Dispossessions and Boundary Contestations in colonial Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands, the 1950s-1970s." Unpublished paper. 8
[295] B. Tavuyanago "Our fathers and grandfathers were born here…" Shangaan eviction experiences from the Gonarezhou National Park, 1957-1968". 63.

Comparatively, the Ndebele immigrants, following the eviction, took their time and made the necessary consultations before making an informed and conscious decision to relocate to Buhera. According to accounts given by Nicodemus Gwebu, Bambatha Nkomo, and Ellen Nkomo, the main reason for settling in Chief Makumbe's area was the availability of fertile black clays for crop cultivation and sufficient water sources for livestock. There are two reasons which explain why the Ndebele evictees were able to influence their futures following eviction. First, the colonial state had its operational limitations which saw the local officials failing to locate and set aside land for the Ndebele evictees. This supports the notion put forward by scholars such as James C. Scott who argues that the colonial state was neither omnipresent nor omnipotent.[296] This was a blessing in disguise for the evictees as they seized the opportunity to look for lands that suited their agricultural interests. The second reason is that the Ndebele immigrants were conscious of the need to acquire productive lands right from the onset. Having established themselves as successful farmers and cattle producers before eviction, the Gwebu knew that their success depended on access to suitable environments which included fertile soils and water sources for livestock.

But what is the significance of the Ndebele evictees' subversion of the processes of eviction and relocation? By being in full control of relocation, the Gwebu people subverted long-term ploys by the colonial state to retain labour "close to their doors":

> It has already been mentioned that the first tendency of the European landowners was to retain the natives on their farms as tenants, in the expectation that they would provide a constant supply of agricultural labourers conveniently close to their doors.[297]

By its admission, the colonial government always wanted the evicted communities to remain close to them to have access to cheap labour especially between 1910 and 1945 because of labour and viability challenges. Conditions changed after the Second World War when white commercial

[296] James C. Scott. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999) 49.
[297] The British South Africa Company to Colonial Office. 21st April 1914.

farmers wanted Africans to leave the farms and this resulted in mass forced removals. This is true for the Shangane evicted from Gonarezhou and settled right on the peripheries of the game park. This was close enough to retain them as labourers in the park. The relocation of the Gwebu to Buhera was thus a clear subversion of the colonial labour interests and social engineering. The actions of the Gwebu people allow us to challenge a key problem in colonial records in which the state is seen "…as always triumphing over Africans in all aspects of life".[298] The actions of the minority Ndebele-speaking society made up of about a hundred people show that the colonial state's social engineering processes were vulnerable to subversion.

Conclusion

The chapter has identified an important historiographical gap in which scholarship on colonial evictions in Southern Rhodesia has lost sight and remained silent on fundamental issues such as African strategy in dealing with forced removals. In filling this gap, the chapter argues that temporalities of eviction and relocation were characterised not only by uncertainty but also agency. Uncertainty was caused by a combination of social and environmental factors. In the social sphere, there was precarity over the possible domination of the Ndebele evictees by the Shona-speaking Makumbe people in Buhera. Environmentally speaking, the Ndebele were unsure if they were going to secure an alternative territory that had desired environmental qualities such as fertile soils for crop cultivation and adequate pastures for their livestock. Having established themselves as successful farmers in Mzingwane, specific environmental qualities were central to their socio-economic well-being. To carefully navigate this uncertainty, the evictees deployed the strategy of waiting in which they deliberately and creatively avoided permanent settlement. It was a strategy of buying time in order to make informed choices on places of possible settlement. The agency of Ndebele evictees in influencing the processes of relocation disrupts the existing notions of African

[298] J. Carney and H. Rangan, "Situating African Agency in Environmental History". *Environment and History* 21 (2015, 1:11) 5.

passiveness and victimology in the historiography of Southern Rhodesian colonial evictions. The experiences of the Ndebele evictees during the period between 1925 and 1945 demonstrate that this minority group relied on their knowledge of environments, for example, to determine where they were going to settle. By so doing, they subverted the power to resettle and relocate communities from the hands of the government.

The significance of the arguments raised in this chapter in the historiography of colonial evictions in Southern Rhodesia is that it locates the agency of Africans in a temporal phase that has been ignored in the history of colonial evictions. By ignoring these phases in history, historiography is implicated in the process of silencing and ignoring the voices and agency of Africans during colonialism. At the same time, this gives the impression that the processes of eviction and migration were linear, straightforward, and simplistic.

CHAPTER THREE:

HUMAN-NATURE CONNEXIONS AND NDEBELE CONSTRUCTIONS OF SOIL FERTILITY IN BUHERA: 1927 - 1980

Introduction

Social history and environmental history share a common desire to bring the once relegated histories of downtrodden social groups to the fore. While social history is interested in writing back the histories of previously marginalised groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and the colonised; environmental history is premised on understanding the interactions between the social and the natural in ways that challenge the old views of society and nature as separate domains. Environmental history treats humans and nature as entangled.[299] This chapter takes a socio-environmental history approach to make sense of human-nature interconnectedness in the colonial Sabi Reserve between the late 1920s and 1980. The chapter does this by examining the diverse ways in which different social groups, particularly the Makumbe and the Gwebu, interacted with the respective natural environments around them. Going beyond human-nature interactions, the chapter adds to the existing debate on human-nature relations in the historiography of Southern Rhodesia by arguing that the sandy and heavy soil ecologies in Buhera were not two separate domains but were connected mainly through agriculture. By so doing, the chapter takes a leap forward and goes beyond the simplistic binaries which confined the Ndebele immigrant group and the Shona-speaking Makumbe to specific ecologies. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates how different social groups and different ecologies were all interconnected through a complex web of relationships. They were not confined to specific ecologies or social spheres. Mainly relying on oral accounts from both the Makumbe and the Ndebele immigrants, the chapter identifies specific

[299] Paul Warde, "Social and Environmental History in the Anthropocene", in John H. Arnold, Matthew Hilton, and Jan Rüger (eds), *History after Hobsbawm: Writing the Past for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, 2017; online edn, Oxford Academic, 23 Nov. 2017).

moments in history in which the two groups as well as the respective environments they occupied were all interconnected.

The discourse of soil preferences in colonial Zimbabwe: origins and development

Before the arrival of the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera in the late 1920s, the Shona-speaking Makumbe people occupied areas characterised by sandy light soils in different parts of their territory. They deliberately avoided settling in areas with black heavy soils which were found in some parts of their territory. This was because the heavy soils were difficult to cultivate especially during rainy seasons. The largest tract of land with black heavy soils was found in the area administered by headman Garamwera, a traditional leader under Chief Makumbe. This left virtually all tracts of land with black soils unoccupied for the better part of the pre-colonial and early colonial period. When the Ndebele immigrants subsequently started to relocate to Buhera in the 1920s, they settled on these unoccupied lands with black heavy soils. This resulted in a clear distinction between the first comer and immigrant group due to divergent settlement patterns. The history of the Ndebele immigrants, the Makumbe group, and their environments have therefore been told by scholars such as Musoni through the lens of the sandy light soils (locally referred to by the Makumbe as *senya*) and heavy black soil (*isidhaka*) dichotomies.[300] This approach is problematic in two ways. From an environmental perspective, it assumes that the sandy soil and black heavy soil ecologies were detached from each other. From a social perspective, the stories assume that the Ndebele and Makumbe as social groups were confined to their respective ecologies and there was no form of interaction between the two.

The problem of tying social groups to specific environments and ecologies is quite prevalent in the historiography of Southern Rhodesia. It has its roots in early pre-colonial travellers, magnified

[300] F. Musoni, "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 89.

by colonial administrators, and later reproduced by scholars such as Mason, McKenzie and Palmer and McGregor, Alexander and Ranger.[301] These narratives were birthed in the 1880s when European travellers such as Walter Montagu Kerr passing through Mashonaland and Matabeleland seized the opportunity to feed the prevailing curiosity among Europeans who wanted to understand African ways of life throughout the entire region of southern Africa.[302] During this period, Europeans in neighbouring South Africa and beyond were fascinated by the little they read about indigenous Shona-speaking people and their Ndebele counterparts in the Zimbabwean plateau to the extent that they believed anything they heard and read.[303] Stories of nature and the environment fascinated them even more.[304] In trying to feed this inquisitiveness, one of the trending narratives that emerged was that the Shona people who occupied the greater Mashonaland region preferred granitic types of soils which were loose and sandy in texture.[305] The soils were brown, easy to cultivate, and often ideal for drought-resistant crops such as finger millet.[306] They made up the greater part of the central Zimbabwean plateau.[307] In comparison, the Ndebele-speaking communities who occupied the greater Matabeleland region on the south-western parts of the Zimbabwean plateau were believed to have historically preferred the heavy red and black soils.[308] Christian missionaries who travelled to Gwai and Shangani Reserves in the 1890s are implicated in the amplification of this dualistic narrative.[309] Judging from settlement patterns, they argued that the Ndebele preferred to settle and farm on patches of heavy black soils tucked in the remote parts of the Gwai and Shangani Reserves.[310]

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[301] Philip Mason. *The Birth of a Dilemma, Conquest and Settlement of Rhodesia*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1959). See also J.M McKenzie. "Red Soils of Mashonaland, A Re-Assessment: Notes, Documents, and Revisions". *Rhodesian History.* (1974: 5.) 83. Robin H. Palmer, Palmer, Robin H. "Red Soils of Mashonaland." *African Social Research.* 10 (Dec 1970). Alexander, McGregor and Ranger. *Violence and memory: one hundred years in the "dark forests" of Matabeleland.*
[302] Walter Montagu Kerr. *The Far Interior.* (London; 1886) 45.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid.
[307] R. Burt. et al, "Properties and effects of management on selected granitic soils in Zimbabwe". *Geoderma.* (2001, 101: 3–4).
[308] Walter Montagu Kerr. *The Far Interior.* 45.
[309] Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor and Terence Ranger. *Violence and memory: one hundred years in the "dark forests" of Matabeleland.* (2000, Oxford: James Currey) 13.
[310] Ibid.

After the colonisation of Mashonaland and Matabeleland in the 1890s, the BSAC and its subsequent successor governments retained this thinking and heavily relied on such binaries in crafting governance policies. The philosophy that the Ndebele were confined to heavy soil ecologies while the group they identified as the Shona were confined to sandy soil ecologies became the bedrock of understanding what they termed "native life".[311] In 1899, Harvey W. Brown, a Southern Rhodesian politician who later became the mayor of Salisbury in 1910, augmented this myth by adding that the Shona's preference for the granitic sandy and light soils was a sign of laziness.[312] According to Brown, the Shona's soil preferences were based on cultivability, and not on the fertility of the lands.[313] The explanation, albeit devoid of any nuance, given by Brown was that the Shona lacked the zeal to venture into more demanding ecologies such as those with fertile black heavy soils.[314] In separate studies which show inherent contradictions, Kerr labelled Ndebele societies in pre-colonial Zimbabwe "lazy" because of the widespread belief among early white settlers that the group primarily relied on raiding neighbouring Shona groups who were predominantly agriculturalists.[315] In light of these writings, the dichotomy that the Ndebele-speaking groups and the Shona-speaking people of the Zimbabwean plateau had different soil preferences was popularised.

The idea of binary soil preferences was further perpetuated by the Southern Rhodesia government during the colonial period. For example, the 1914 Native Reserves Commission Interim Report claimed that:

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311 *Papers relating to the Southern Rhodesia Natives* "Reserves Commission, Interim Report, 1914". (London: H.M.S.O. 1917). 19.
312 William Harvey Brown. *On the South African Frontier*. 190.
313 Ibid.
314 Ibid.
315 F. Montagu Kerr. *The Far Interior*. 101. *See* also D.N Beach attempts to trace the intellectual and political origins of several myths surrounding Shona-Ndebele relations in the Zimbabwean plateau in "The Shona and Ndebele Power". Henderson Seminar 26. Unpublished, Department of History, University of Rhodesia, Salisbury.

> Most of the settlers in Matabeleland selected their allotments on the gold belt- on land which is locally known as "formation". This type of country contains the heavy red and black clays (*sibovu*) which were favoured by the Matabele proper, as distinguished from the indigenous Makalanga tribes, who preferred the granite country and "sand veld" (*tshebetshebe*) for purposes of cultivation.[316]

Although their findings were only limited to selected parts of greater Mashonaland and a few areas of Matabeleland, this commission concluded that the perceived divergent soil preferences were a "national tendency".[317] Because of these beliefs, throughout the colonial period, the government evicted the Shona-speaking groups to sandy veldts which were often parched, dry, and infertile. The evictions were justified by the crude assumption that the Shona-speaking Africans preferred only sandy light soils.

Yet, as historian Mazarire argues, the group that early precolonial travellers and colonial officials identified as the Shona did not even exist.[318] Records compiled by early Portuguese merchants who visited and lived in the Zimbabwean plateau during the precolonial period do not make any reference to the Shona people.[319] Instead, they make mention of several groups, large and small, scattered across the plateau with diverse ecological preferences.[320] Some lived in the eastern highlands.[321] Others such as the vaGova lived in the southern lowveld areas.[322] The VaNyai inhabited plateau environments.[323] This suggests that the assumption of the Shona preference for sandy soils was unfounded because the group did not exist at all. Rather, the term Shona was imprecisely deployed by early Europeans and settlers as an umbrella term to refer to different Bantu-speaking groups that occupied the Mashonaland region.[324] The whole Zimbabwean plateau

316 *Papers relating to the Southern Rhodesia Natives.* 5.
317 Ibid. 17.
318 Gerald C. Mazarire. "Reflections on pre-Colonial Zimbabwe, c. 850- 1880", in: Brian Raftopoulos and Alois S. Mlambo (eds.). *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*. (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009)1-3.
319 David N. Beach. *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900-1850.* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1980).
320 Ibid.
321 Ibid.
322 Ibid.
323 Gerald C. Mazarire. "Reflections on pre-Colonial Zimbabwe, c. 850- 1880". 3.
324 Ibid.

was an assortment of different groups occupying different landscapes in different seasons. Even marginalised social groups such as vaNyai who were allocated lands on the outskirts of vast territories were not entirely confined to periphery environments.[325] There was no one-size-fits-all approach to soil preferences in the pre-colonial and early colonial Zimbabwean plateau. Different groups preferred different environments, but such preferences were not always cast in stone.

Delineation Reports which were used by the colonial state to inform policy throughout the Southern Rhodesian colony continued to counsel the government based on the dualistic soil preferences of the Ndebele and Shona. The 1914 Interim Native Reserves Report epitomises this tendency to view soil preferences in dichotomous ways.

> The Commission found out that the tendency of the two main branches of the native population, the Matabele and the MaShona, to prefer certain types of soil for cultivation was very marked. The former has as a rule preferred the darker and heavier soils, a preference which they probably brought with them in their comparatively recent pilgrimage from their non-granitic countries of origin...In the same way the Mashona have always preferred the light-coloured and easily worked soil of which so much of their country consists. There are few indications as yet of any desire to cultivate those areas of red or black soils which do occur in their reserves. We recognise this national tendency...[326]

By arguing that the Shona preferred sandy and light soils, the commissioners propagated the claim that there was no direct conflict between the white settlers and the Shona because the two communities had different preferences. They gave the impression that the occupation of Mashonaland and Matabeleland as well as the subsequent arrival of white settler farmers did not interfere with local land ownership. They claimed that "…the indigenous native tribes scattered throughout the country were not exposed to any pressure or inconvenience from the presence of European settlers".[327] This discourse lays bare the intention of colonial officials to portray certain

[325] Admire Mseba. "Narratives, Rituals and Political Imaginations: The Social and Political World of the Vashona of North-Eastern Zimbabwe from the 16th to the 19th Centuries". *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (2020, 46:3) 439. *See* also Mazarire. "Reflections on pre-Colonial Zimbabwe, c. 850- 1880" 1-34.
[326] *Papers relating to the Southern Rhodesia Natives.* 17.
[327] Ibid. 5.

parts of the country as empty, unoccupied, and unclaimed frontiers. These arguments show that soil preferences of the Shona and Ndebele were oversimplified to sanitise the violent land dispossessions of the 1890s and early 1900s. Such stereotypes, argues historian Alois Mlambo, which confined the African communities to specific soil typologies were born out of deep racist ideologies which treated white Europeans' expropriation of African land as justified.[328] Thus, both the treatment of African communities' soil preferences as rigid as well as their subsequent dispossession were informed by racist thinking.

Later, scholars in the 20th century relied on some aspects of these rudimentary generalisations of Africans' interactions with nature. For example, economic historians Robin Palmer and John McKenzie maintained the philosophy that the Shona preferred sandy granitic soils over heavy clays.[329] Palmer makes the differences between the Shona and the Ndebele cast in stone by seeing their main means of production as rigid. He argues that "the Shona-speaking peoples were agriculturalists practising a version of the shifting cultivation method typical of many African societies south of the Sahara".[330] Historian Philip Mason supports this claim by suggesting that the Shona preferred sandy light soils because they grew rapoko or finger millet which was suitable in these areas.[331] On the contrary, the Ndebele were described as largely pastoralists.[332]

Other scholars used the discourse of agricultural technology to magnify the idea of divergent soil preferences. Mason avers that the Shona were not equipped with adequate agricultural technology and tools to enable them to till the red and black heavy soils.[333] Using a similar argument of

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328 Alois S. Mlambo. "This is Our land' The Racialization of Land in the Context of the Current Zimbabwe Crisis". *Journal of Developing Societies.* (2010, 26:1) 47.
329 See Robin H. Palmer. "Red Soils of Mashonaland". *African Social Research.* (Dec 1970: 10). See also J.M McKenzie. "Red Soils of Mashonaland, A Re-Assessment: Notes, Documents, and Revisions". *Rhodesian History.* (1974: 5.). 83.
330 Robin H. Palmer. "Red Soils of Mashonaland". *African Social Research.* 748.
331 Philip Mason. *The Birth of a Dilemma, Conquest and Settlement of Rhodesia*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1959). Also cited in Robin H. Palmer. "Red Soils of Mashonaland". 749.
332 Ibid.
333 Philip Mason. *The Birth of a Dilemma.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). 257, Cited in W. Roder. "Division of Land Resources in Southern Rhodesia". 41.

agricultural technology, Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger argue that the Tonga in the Gwai Reserve grew bulrush millet on sandy light soils on the edges of the Gusu forests because they did not have draught power to plough the black heavy soils.[334] Such a claim loses sight of the diversity of crops grown by the Tonga. Besides bulrush millet, which was their staple food, the Tonga had several other agricultural products grown outside the sandy zones. The Tonga had comparatively small tracts of land called *jelele* and *kuti* gardens.[335] *Jelele* gardens were located mainly along riverbeds and were used for dry-season vegetable gardening.[336] *Kuti* gardens were made on flat and alluvial floodplains just above the riverbanks.[337] These gardens could be ploughed twice a year and provided the Tonga with alternative and supplementary food sources. Although they grew their staple food on sandy light soils, their everyday lived experiences show that they closely interacted with other ecologies in various ways in different seasons of the year. Hence, by confining the agricultural activities of the Tonga to sandy light soils, scholars are liable for denying such marginalised groups dynamism to make use of exceptional ecologies such as riverbeds.

Scholarship on the history of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera has followed a similar problematic trajectory. According to Musoni, the Makumbe people did not use the heavy red and black soils in their area because they did not have adequate material such as two-furrow ploughs.[338] In addition to technology, Musoni affirms that the black soils were too heavy and difficult for the Shona-speaking Makumbe.[339] Musoni makes this argument based on oral accounts from both the Makumbe and Ndebele immigrants. Yet these oral accounts were not impartial. They silenced certain aspects while at the same time magnifying other issues. In this case, the oral accounts

[334] Alexander, McGregor and Ranger. *Violence and memory: one hundred years in the "dark forests" of Matabeleland.*
[335]"Valley Gwembe Tonga Synopsis on Resource: Common Pool and Public Good" https://seslibrary.asu.edu/sites/default/files/seslibrary/cases/153/Valley_Gwembe_Tonga.pdf Accessed 16 November 2022.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Tafadzwa Chevo. "Agricultural Change and the Tonga". Cliggett, Lisa, and Virginia Bond. *Tonga Timeline: Appraising Sixty Years of Multidisciplinary Research in Zambia and Zimbabwe.* The Lembani Trust, 2013.
[338] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 89.
[339] Ibid. 90.

portrayed each group as unique and different from the other. Such oral accounts can be equated to discourses of power which can be disingenuous if taken uncritically.

Oral accounts from the Makumbe and the Ndebele show this bias by treating their respective ecologies as unique and different from the other. The Makumbe oral histories demonstrate how the Shona-speaking first-comer group treated their sandy ecologies as unique and separate from the areas with black soils. In their Shona dialect, they locally referred to the sandy ecologies as *senya* while the areas with black soils were locally known as *isidhaka.* In their oral accounts, the Ndebele immigrants portrayed their black *isidhaka* soils as fertile and more productive.[340] On the contrary, there was an inherent trend in Makumbe oral histories of treating the heavy clay soils as inhabitable, agriculturally unproductive, "filthy", and "dirty":

> It was generally viewed as an unattractive place. The Makumbe used to say that *isidhaka* soils were dirty and filthy and were difficult to cultivate. They often saw their sandy soils as better and more cultivable than the black soils.[341]

Makumbe oral histories further delegated unpleasantness to the black heavy *isidhaka* soils. They did this by associating the black soils with *tsvina* (which refers to dirt in Shona language).[342] *Tsvina* in Shona language covers a wide spectrum of vile things ranging from mere dirt to excretion (human or otherwise). The deployment of the term *tsvina* has a symbolic as opposed to a literary meaning.[343] The Makumbe used the term as a descriptive idiom to show that the soils were difficult to cultivate, and they would constantly stick on hoes and ploughs. To effectively work the fields, one needed to constantly clean the soil from hoes and ploughs like dirt. Thus the black soils were

[340] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[341] Personal interview with Albert Masaile.
[342] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.
[343] In one Shona *ngano* (folktale) called *Ndambakuudzwa*, tsvina is personified and an individual interacting with tsvina is banished from his homestead on the belief that he/she was cursed. Tsvina is thus associated with a curse in some circles of Shona ethnography. A similar version of this ngano is retold, albeit differently, by Davie E. Mutasa, Shumirai Nyota and Jacob Mapara. "Ngano: Teaching Environmental Education Using the Shona Folktale." *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. (2008, 2:3) 49-52.

viewed as dirt which needed to be constantly cleaned from agricultural tools.[344] The process of constantly cleaning made farming more arduous.

Furthermore, Makumbe oral histories described the *senya* ecologies using overtones of home while at the same time describing *isidhaka* as outside their immediate environment. I qualify this as a form of ascribing different use values to environments by the Makumbe. Furthermore, the use of the term *Chibhande* by the Makumbe to describe an area with black soil in Buhera further proves an attempt by the locals to portray the area as distinct from the rest of the region.[345] The term *Chibhande* refers to a geographical belt in Shona.[346] It was used to refer to a geographical area cutting across the Makumbe territory forming a unique black soil belt-like shape surrounded by a sea of sandy veldt. For generations, even before the migration of the Ndebele from Matabeleland in the 1920s, this unoccupied patch of lands with black soils was known as *Chibhande* because of its different environmental characteristics.[347] The term is saturated with overtones of distinctiveness and this demonstrates how dominant perceptions of areas with black soils were, by and large, products of society's cultural and social belief systems. In addition to the local descriptions of black soils and sandy soils, colonial administrators distinguished them using their natural physical characteristics. Colonial officials referred to the area inhabited by the Gwebu as an "enclave" occupied by an "industrious" people.[348] The use of the term enclave was deliberate and was meant to augment the ecological distinctiveness of place. Although the Makumbe treated the *Chibhande* area as a demanding and labour-intensive landscape, this does not mean the area was unclaimed and of no use outside the realms of crop cultivation for them. By the same token, the Ndebele

[344] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Ibid.
[348] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Letter to the secretary of Home Affairs, 26 March 1980, "Chief Gwebu Fish's People: Buhera District". R.L.C Cunliffe. See also District Administrator, Buhera," Boundary Descriptions: Chief Gwebu of Buhera" 22 February 2006. See also Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 80.

contrastingly viewed the sandy soils as less productive, but this does not also mean such areas were entirely useless in their everyday interactions with nature.

Musoni argues that the fact that there was no human occupation in the areas with black soils before Ndebele arrival does not necessarily mean they were unclaimed.[349] Using oral histories of the Shona-speaking Makumbe, Musoni avers that the surrounding groups used the "unclaimed" areas for other purposes such as hunting wild game and gathering fruits and vegetables.[350] Closely related to this is the Mazvihwa example in Zvishavane District in south-central Zimbabwe. The area is also characterised by red clay soils and was not cultivated during the 19th century. Yet it was used for other purposes such as hunting.[351] The *Chibhande* area was therefore not *terra nullius* (empty land),[352] neither was it a geographical *tabula rasa* (blank slate or an unclaimed space) in John Locke's expression.[353] Despite an attempt to complicate the Makumbe's interactions with *isidhaka* ecologies, Musoni confined these relationships to hunting and gathering.[354] These assumptions ignore many other dynamic ways in which the Makumbe interacted with the surrounding environments beyond hunting and gathering.

[349] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)making Ndebele Identities in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 90.
[350] Ibid.
[351] K.B Wilson. "Water Used to be Scattered in the Landscape': Local Understandings of Soil Erosion and Land Use Planning in Southern Zimbabwe". *Environment and History*. (October 1995, 1:3) 282.
[352] The term *terra nullius* historically originates from the British colonisation of Australia. The British justified their colonisation of Australia by arguing that the area was *terra nullius*, meaning it was unoccupied and therefore belonged to no one, an unowned land. See Stuart Banner. "Why Terra Nullius? Anthropology and Property Law in Early Australia". *Law and History Review*. (Spring 2005, 23:1) 118.
[353] "Human Cognition: Are We Really Blank Slates?" https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/evpsych/chapter/human-cognition-are-we-really-blank-slates/ Accessed 10 December 2020.
[354] F. Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 90.

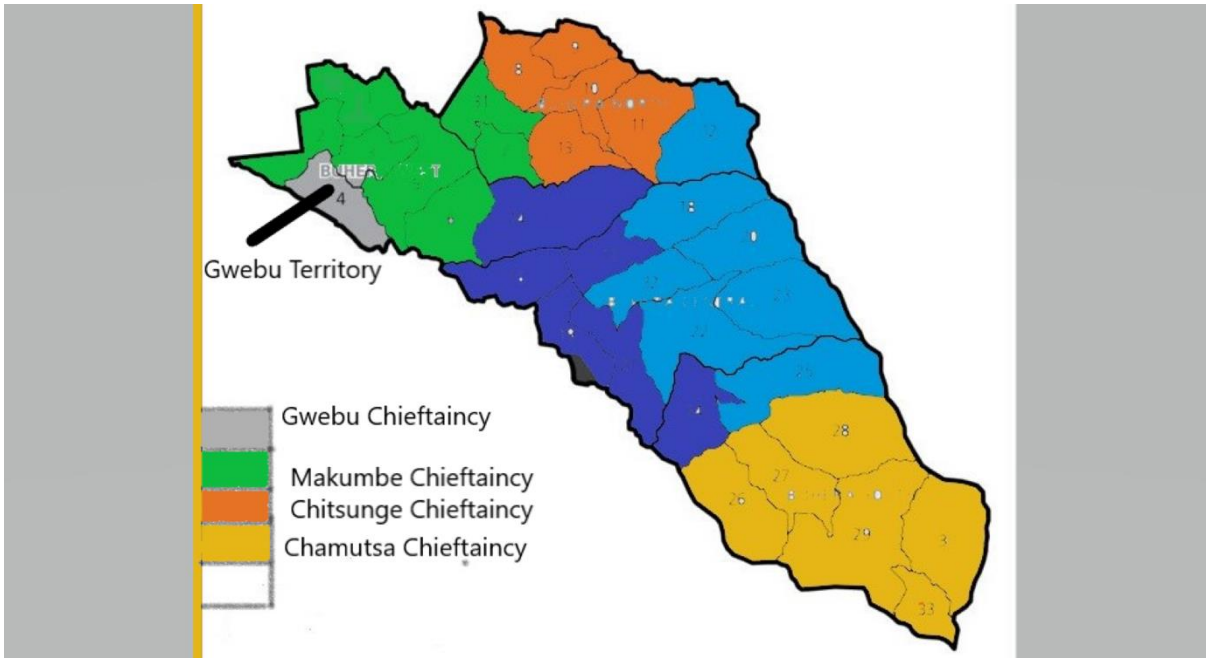

Figure 4: *The map of Buhera District showing the area occupied by the Ndebele surrounded by their Shona-speaking neighbours.*

In comparison, the Ndebele immigrants also perpetuated a narrative of difference in which they claimed that the *isidhaka* ecologies in Buhera were not only unoccupied but also detached from the rest of Buhera. The Ndebele narratives gave the impression that the Gwebu people's interactions with nature were only confined to *senya* ecologies. The Ndebele perceived the two landscapes as not only different but also detached from each other. Thus, both Ndebele and Makumbe oral accounts are littered with narratives of difference in which they both portray themselves as different from the other. Going beyond these overly simplistic accounts, a historical reconstruction of everyday human-nature lived experiences of the two groups gives a completely different picture of people and their interactions with nature.

Interconnected ecologies and human-nature relations in colonial Buhera: 1925-1980

Although the *senya* and *isidhaka* ecologies indeed contained different material qualities, it does not mean they were completely isolated from each other as suggested by early travellers, colonial officials, local oral histories, and recent scholars. The two ecologies were connected to each other in complex ways - entangled. The linear and dichotomous accounts which view *senya* and *isidhaka*

ecologies as completely detached from each other were deployed to serve specific socio-political functions such as in asserting belonging and justifying colonisation and did not mirror the everyday human-nature relations. Thus, both the Ndebele immigrants and their Makumbe neighbours were implicated in a process of silencing the complex interactions of human societies and environments alike.

One of the ways in which the *senya* and *isidhaka* ecologies were connected was through geographical proximity. The areas with black soils and those with sandy soils were in one place and there were no major physical barriers such as large water bodies that separated them. There were no rivers or mountains that separated the areas occupied by the Ndebele immigrants from those occupied by the Shona-speaking Makumbe. This paradox of lack of physical demarcation even boggled colonial officials whose government was so keen to ride on existing boundaries to effectively govern Africans. Colonial officials in Buhera acknowledged that the areas governed by Gwebu and Makumbe were only separated by cattle tracks, vegetable gardens, schools, farmlands, homes, and graves from the Makumbe territory.[355] They could not understand how the two Chiefs governed their areas without physical boundaries. It was only in 1965 that the colonial officials erected a concrete beacon which they used as a demarcation to separate the Gwebu and Makumbe territories.[356] Despite the erection of the concrete beacon, the distinctions between *isidhaka* and *senya* landscapes existed only in theory as the two territories were spatially interwoven. Oral accounts by different Ndebele traditional leaders such as Albert Masaile affirm this spatial interconnectedness.

> If you look at the area that we occupy as Ndebele people, it is very small and surrounded by lands with *senya* soils. If you walk to the edge of our village, you will realise that you are already in an area with senya soils. The soil is different, you can even feel it when your feet

[355] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Boundary Description: Chief Gwebu: Buhera.
[356] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 91.

> trample the ground. Even if you are walking in the dark, you will feel the sound of sandy grains of soil.[357]

This interconnectedness made it impossible for the two neighbouring communities to live separate social lives. The settlement patterns in which the Ndebele immigrants and Makumbe had their homes located in different ecologies do not necessarily mean they were detached from each other. The respective Ndebele and Shona-speaking communities who inhabited different landscapes were socially entangled. The different features (farmlands, schools, graves, vegetable gardens) perceived by the colonial administrators as demarcations that set apart the two groups were in practice conduits of social interaction. For example, graves which are depicted as boundaries were spaces that brought together all people on events such as funerals and memorial services.[358] The Gwebu School was a space of interaction as it brought together learners from both Ndebele-speaking and Shona-speaking households. The vegetable gardens allowed individuals particularly women to buy, sell, and exchange vegetables and seeds. These forms of interactions took place in spaces that colonial officials perceived as boundaries that set apart the two communities.

What made the social interactions between the Ndebele and Shona-speaking households was that the former was a relatively small group made up of only four villages (Malombo, Mutava, Gwibila, and Gwebu) covering 1000 acres of land.[359] The group only made up one local council ward as compared to the neighbouring Makumbe which had 7 council wards.[360] The adult population of the Gwebu was slightly above 1100 in 1977.[361] The relatively small Ndebele community was surrounded and outnumbered by the Makumbe.[362] This means that the two communities inevitably depended on each other.

[357] Personal interview with Albert Masaile.

[359] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Chief Gwebu Fish: Historical Background 1960.
[360] Personal interview with Chief Makumbe.
[361] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Ministry of Home Affairs to PNC Buhera R.L.C Cunliffe, 26 March 1980.
[362] Ibid.

Another lived experience that challenges the simplistic notion of binary ecologies is the system of *nhimbe* (referred to as *ilima* in Ndebele language by the Gwebu) practised in Buhera by both Ndebele immigrants and Shona-speaking Makumbe. *Nhimbes* were work parties organised at the community level involving different families coming together to offer their labour on a specific task such as ploughing, cultivating, weeding, harvesting, or processing grains. The *nhimbe* concept dates to the pre-colonial times and was not limited to communities in the then Zimbabwean plateau. It was like the system of Harambee in Kenya, Chilimba in Zambia, and Latsema in South Africa.[363]

Both the Makumbe and the Gwebu hosted work parties which attracted neighbours despite ethnic differences. The hosts often provided the labourers with libations of traditional beer, fermented *mahewu* beverages, food, and grains as tokens of appreciation.[364] Such parties were mainly hosted during the planting, weeding, and harvesting seasons when additional labour was needed the most. Due to intermarriages and other forms of social interactions, the participation of the Makumbe in work parties hosted by the Gwebu was quite common. Even though they had professed the filthiness of the black heavier soils, the reality on the ground revealed that the Makumbe implicitly worked the black heavy soils through the system of *nhimbe*. Although Victor Mgazi acknowledged that the Makumbe did not necessarily bring their cattle and ploughs to the *nhimbes* held by the Ndebele, the former would participate in different tasks without any difficulties.[365] Besides being served with libations of locally produced fermented sorghum beer, the Makumbe would also get grain and other agricultural products by the Ndebele. Even though *nhimbe* served as a social measure to organise collective labour, it also served as a livelihood activity. These realities which

[363] Pindai M. Sithole. "*Nhimbe* practice in Zimbabwe revisited: Not only a method of socio-economic assistance but also a communal mechanism for conflict prevention and peacebuilding". *African Journal on Conflict Resolution.* (2020, 20:2) 115.
[364] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.
[365] Personal interview with Victor Mgazi.

unfolded within the local labour mobilisation system challenge dominant Makumbe narratives which claim that they did not cultivate black heavy soils because they were filthy. The Makumbe's diverse livelihoods which were complemented by their evident participation in *nhimbes* organised by their Ndebele neighbours reveal that they equally relied on the black heavy soils for survival. These realities reveal that the two societies were environmentally entangled despite their oral histories suggesting otherwise.

Furthermore, Ndebele reliance on Makumbe labour force (*marikicho*/*maricho*) further challenges the bifurcated narrative that the two groups were confined to specific ecologies. The black heavy soils farmed by the Ndebele were demanded extensive labour force. Ploughing using cattle required spans with as many as 16 oxen as opposed to the Makumbe who used 2 oxen or even hand hoes to plough the sandy soils.[366] In addition, the Ndebele had large herds of livestock. In 1980, the Gwebu had a total of 2340 livestock herd which included cattle, sheep, goats, and donkeys.[367] According to Nicodemus Gwebu, some Ndebele families ended up employing more than 2 cattle herders because their herds had significantly increased.[368] In light of the labour intensive agricultural organisation of the Ndebele immigrants, alternative labour force was sourced from the neighbouring Makumbe households.[369] Closely related, increased crop cultivation which resulted in significant surplus harvests by the Ndebele immigrant group further resulted in neighbouring Shona-speaking households engaging in temporary relocation to the Gwebu area in search of lucrative work opportunities.[370] According to Richman Gwebu, albeit with strong overtones of historical nostalgia, one Ndebele family would attract numerous seasonal workers from the neighbouring Shona-speaking villagers who were paid in grain especially maize.[371]

[366] Personal interview with Victor Mgazi.
[367] R.I.C. Cunliffe Provincial Native Commissioner Buhera to Secretary of Internal Affairs, 26 March 1980.
[368] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Personal interview with Richman Gwebu.

As the Ndebele group increased both the acreage of their farmlands and livestock production, the need for an additional labour force from the neighbouring Shona-speaking groups increased correspondingly. Some labourers came from as far as Nyashanu areas farther south. Nyashanu was more susceptible to droughts, hence more people seeking temporary work came in order to supplement their grain stocks.[372] Groups that came from these areas were often remunerated in grain and provided labour for several days or weeks after which they would return to their homes.[373] These interactions in agriculture suggest that the more the Ndebele immigrants worked the black soils, the more they needed additional labour from the Makumbe. Stated differently, the increase in agricultural productivity by the Ndebele immigrants resulted in the corresponding increase of Makumbe wage labourers coming into the Ndebele territory to fill the labour gap. Thus, the Makumbe interacted with the black soils as wage labourers. This again debunks Makumbe oral histories which suggest that the Shona-speaking group was confined to the sandy soil ecologies. Human nature relations were thus far more complex than previously portrayed in oral histories.

These localised developments in Buhera were similar to what was unfolding in neighbouring Apartheid South Africa at the national level during the same period. According to a social and economic historian of Apartheid C. W de Kiewiet, the process of acquiring land by white farmers in South Africa resulted in increased dependency on black South Africans for labour.[374] Blacks began to depend even more on white farmers for wage labour and economic opportunities. As dispossession occurred, the more the whites and blacks depended on each other. Contrary to earlier assumptions which viewed Apartheid agricultural organisation as a construct of whites, it

[372] Personal interview with Albert Masaile.
[373] Personal interview with Richman Gwebu.
[374] C. W de Kiewiet *A history of South Africa: Social and Economic.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941).*See* also Sarah Nuttall. *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid.* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009) 17-32.

was a product of different racial groups who were entangled in complex transactional labour relations.[375]

Furthermore, in another illustration that challenges the dichotomous approach to human-nature relations in Buhera, there were specific moments in history when the Ndebele immigrants were forced by circumstances to shift their agriculture from the black heavy soils to sandy soils. Although the black soils were fertile and ideal for all-year cropping, they sometimes posed a danger to livestock such as cattle at the height of the rainy seasons when the grazing lands were waterlogged. The clay nature of the soils often resulted in cattle being stuck in the muddy trenches and gullies resulting in injuries and deaths.[376] This mainly affected families such as the Siphalas whose homes and pastures were surrounded by seasonal vleis east of Gwebu village.[377] It was precisely for this reason that residents such as Dulumba Siphala opted to relocate their cattle to the neighbouring sandy soil-dominated Munangati area in the 1960s.[378] According to his grandson, Jafta:

> Growing up, I never experienced any livestock epidemic. The only epidemic that I saw with my own eyes as a young boy was that of our cattle dying from being stuck in the mud in the vleis. Those that were lucky came out with dislocated limbs and we would slaughter them. Big bulls and cows were mainly victims. It was more painful to lose cattle in muddy areas than through diseases.[379]

To remedy this problem, the Siphala family joined Makumbe households in the Garamwera community who had established a rotational cattle herding system in which different households brought their herds together and each would take a turn to take the cattle to safer pastures.[380] The system of rotational livestock stewardship was known as *madzoro/majanha* and was common among

[375] Sarah Nuttall. *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*. 17-32.
[376] Personal interview with Jafta Siphala.
[377] Ibid.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid

different African groups in Southern Rhodesia.[381] The Siphala family were not rigidly confined to black heavy soils, but often interacted with the sandy *senya* ecologies for survival. More importantly, these experiences further reveal the different ways in which livelihoods were entangled in complex ways.

Although Gwebu oral histories give a triumphant celebratory account of their forefathers transforming a once pristine territory into an agricultural breadbasket, such accounts were incomplete without including the role of their Shona-speaking neighbours. In March 1980, the Native Commissioner for Buhera R. Cunliffe noted a significant increase in population in the area ruled by Gwebu. Earlier in 1977, the Gwebu population stood at 526 adults above 16 years.[382] In 1980, the population had grown to an estimated 2500 to 3000 adults.[383] Cunliffe speculated that the increase was because of intermarriages between the Makumbe and the Ndebele owing to the fact the latter had been in the area for more than 50 years.[384] This is corroborated by oral histories. According to Richman Gwebu, one of their nieces (*muzukuru/umzukulu*) was married to a member of the neighbouring Makumbe family.[385] Based on Ndebele kinship hierarchies, the Makumbe were all regarded as *vazukuru/abazukulu*.[386] In addition, several Shona-speaking households from the Makumbe area permanently settled in Gwebu's area after realising that the land was fertile. These groups closely interacted and incorporated themselves well into the local Ndebele agricultural organisation. Others came from as far as Nyashanu areas south of Buhera.

All these Shona-speaking individuals, groups and families who settled in the Gwebu altered the agricultural organisation of the Ndebele immigrants. One such way in which they did this was

[381] Rangani Chidembo. *et a*l. "Contribution of Heifer International Programme to Smallholder Households' Livelihoods in Mberengwa District, Zimbabwe". *African Journal of Development Studies.* (formerly AFFRIKA Journal of Politics, Economics and Society). (2022, 12: 1). 30.
[382] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Ministry of Home Affairs to PNC Buhera R.L.C Cunliffe, 26 March 1980.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Personal interview with Richman Gwebu.
[386] Ibid.

through the introduction of new seed varieties into the Ndebele agricultural system. Coming from drier and drought-prone regions, the Shona-speaking groups brought an early maturity and drought-resistant sorghum (*amabele*) seed variety which was only known by its descriptive moniker *kamambo kekwaSave* (the dwarf Chief of Sabi).[387] This sorghum seed type was nicknamed after an unnamed chief from the Save River of Buhera who was a dwarf.[388] The nickname was deployed to describe the sorghum variety which was significantly shorter as compared to other types. The shorter variety had mutated in line with the semi-arid conditions in southern regions of Buhera.[389] By introducing new seed varieties, the Shona-speaking groups actively shaped Ndebele agriculture.

Furthermore, oral interviews in Buhera revealed that Shona-speaking seasonal workers who flocked to Ndebele villages during weeding and harvesting seasons for work (*marikicho*/*maricho*) brought new types of agricultural tools. One such tool was the short-handled weeding hoe with a wooden handle which was shorter than the long-handled type used by the Ndebele.[390] Oral accounts by Bambatha Nkomo and Ellen Nkomo revealed that the short-handled hoe brought by the Makumbe to work in the black soil Ndebele farm shaped their everyday farming activities. The hoe was primarily used in weeding and its signature short handle allowed users to effectively pluck out weeds at close range without the need to constantly bend over. In addition, users had much more hand control of the hoe and the weeding process because it was easy to operate.[391] It gave its users an urge against the persistent and strong-rooted *tsangadzi* (couch grass) weeds which thrived in the black soils.[392] In addition, the short-handled hoes had a comparatively small iron spade which did not easily get stuck in the clay black soils.[393] This was a clear advantage as compared to ox-drawn ploughs which would easily get stuck. By their admission, the Nkomo

[387] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Personal interviews with Bambatha Nkomo and Ellen Nkomo.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Ibid
[393] Ibid.

family admitted that their success in attaining good harvests owed much to the short-handled hoe brought by their Shona-speaking neighbours, agricultural success, by and large, depended on the seasonal labourers from immediate neighbouring areas and those from far away areas such as Nyashanu. It is therefore clear that the Shona-speaking labourers as well as their tools such as the short-handled hoes played an important role in working the black soils and ultimately contributed to the agricultural prosperity of the Ndebele community. Viewing the black soil ecologies in Buhera as entirely constructs of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera ignores the complex interactions unfolding in the agricultural sphere. Just like colonial institutions which are described by Carolyn Hamilton as not wholesale constructions of whites, similarly, the Ndebele agricultural organisation was not entirely a product of the Gwebu people. [394]

Even before the subsequent settlement of the Ndebele immigrants in the 1920s, interactions between *senya* and *isidhaka* ecologies were always there. Mediated by human actors, the two ecologies were connected through agriculture. According to Chafa Chigwende a resident of Gwebu, Makumbe elders often used *isidhaka* ecologies to plant nurseries (*misimirwa*) of finger millet (*rukweza*) just before the rainy seasons. The nurseries would then be transplanted to the *senya* farmlands after germination just in time before the rainy seasons when the *isidhaka* lands would become waterlogged.[395] This gave their sorghum seedlings the advantage of a head start and resultantly allowed their products to mature early.

In addition, there were also seasonal vegetable gardens established on tracts of black soils in Makumbe before the arrival of the Ndebele immigrants in the 1920s.[396] The reason why the Makumbe shifted to *isidhaka* areas was that their shallow wells in the *senya* areas would quickly dry up. In addition, the sandy soils would rapidly leach resulting in them quickly losing moisture. They

[394] *See* Carolyn Hamilton. 1998
[395] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.
[396] Ibid.

were therefore difficult to manage during dry seasons between April and October. As an alternative agricultural pathway, the Makumbe turned to the *isidhaka* seasonal gardens which had not only fertile soils but also withheld moisture for longer periods. In addition, the shallow wells in *isidhaka* areas had sufficient water for gardening. The Makumbe found *isidhaka* only usable for their farming during these specific months of the year before summer rains went into full throttle.

Without a deeper appreciation of the Makumbe's historical interactions with *isidhaka* ecologies, both the Ndebele immigrants and colonial officials referred to these seasonal shifts to black soils as an invasion into the Gwebu territory. In 1948, after receiving reports from Chief Gwebu to the effect that the Makumbe had erected vegetable gardens in what he termed his territory, colonial officials termed this "encroaching".[397] What they termed encroachment was a failure by the colonial government to appreciate the history of human-nature relations as well as the fluid nature of Makumbe agricultural practices in which they made convenient use of both black soil and sandy soil ecologies in different seasons.

From a conservationist perspective, this version of shifting cultivation was part of indigenous African initiatives to make sustainable use of natural resources. Temporarily shifting to *isidhaka* areas for vegetable gardening was a way of conserving the scarce water sources in the *senya* areas which were comparatively drier. The seasonal shift allowed the shallow wells used for gardening to refill, thus carefully maintaining a good balance between consumption and conservation. In addition to conserving water, the seasonal shift to *isidhaka* gardens was a way of avoiding continuous tillage which would in turn accelerate soil erosion. The belief of giving soils reprieve was part of the complex African conservationist beliefs practised by many groups in pre-colonial southern Africa. In the pre-colonial Zimbabwean plateau, African elders instituted laws in which

[397] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Office of the Native Commissioner, Range, Enkeldoorn, to PNC Gwelo 25th October 1948.

specific days of the week, month, or season were declared sacred. On such days, agricultural activities such as ploughing, tilling, cultivating, weeding, or harvesting were prohibited.[398] Traditional authorities were convinced that the earth should be given a break and recover from constant engagement with humans through farming. Among the Shona-speaking groups in the Zimbabwean plateau, sacred days were known in the Shona dialect as *chisi.*[399] It was practised differently by different societies.[400] During the colonial period among the Rengwe people in north-western Southern Rhodesia, *chisi* was observed monthly on the first Friday after the appearance of the moon in the sky.[401]

The interaction of the Makumbe with black soil ecologies challenges existing reductionist assumptions that the group did not have adequate technologies to plough the lands in the precolonial period. The assumption which portrays the Makumbe as technologically ill-equipped was made by colonial officials such as Native Commissioner Posselt, amplified by the Ndebele immigrants to justify their settlement in the area, and later reproduced by recent historians such as Musoni.[402] Although the Ndebele immigrants brought with them two furrow ploughs while the Makumbe had the traditional single furrow ploughs, this does not necessarily mean the Makumbe were technologically inferior. In fact, the Makumbe had superior iron technology during the pre-colonial period. Before colonisation, the most sophisticated iron smelting industry in the Zimbabwean plateau was the Njanja iron smelting economy which covered parts of Buhera.[403]

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[398] Tinashe Takuva. "Rains Come from the Gods!': Anthropocene and the History of Rainmaking Rituals in Zimbabwe with Reference to Mberengwa district, *c.* 1890–2000". *South African Historical Journal.* (2021, 73:1) 155.
[399] Francisca Chimhanda. "The liberation potential of the Shona culture and the Gospel: A post-feminist perspective". *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae. 40* (Suppl. 1). Retrieved November 14, 2022, from http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1017-04992014000200018&lng=en&tlng=en. 313-315.
[400] Ivan Marowa. "Forced Removal and Social Memories in Northwestern Zimbabwe, c1900-2000". 135.
[401] Ibid.
[402] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Office of the Native Commissioner, Range, Enkeldoorn, to PNC Gwelo 25th October 1948 See also. Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 89.
[403] Shadreck Chirikure. "New Light on Njanja Iron Working: Towards a Systematic Encounter between Ethnohistory and Archaeometallurgy". *The South African Archaeological Bulletin.* (December 2006, 61:184) 142.

Early Christian missionaries who had a close encounter with the Njanja iron smelting economy likened it to the British Wolverhampton Iron and Steel industry.[404] The Njanja, according to historian John McKenzie, were at the centre of this economy.

> In what are now the Wedza and Charter districts of Rhodesia there developed during the 150 years before the establishment of Company rule an extraordinary case of a pre-colonial iron industry, an industry which established a network of relationships among various peoples, and created trade over a 100-mile radius and beyond. It was an industry which had a number of different sectors - mining, smelting, forging, trading, and repairing; an industry which was highly labour intensive, an industry which was conducted on such a scale by one people, the Njanja, that it is difficult to see it as being merely peripheral to the subsistence economy.[405]

Among other items produced in this economy, the high-quality Njanja short-handle hoe was supreme.[406] The Njanja hoe was exported to many other areas in the Mashonaland region and to as far as the east African coast through barter exchange.[407] Archaeological evidence suggests that it was used on different terrains and was effective for digging, weeding, and tilling.[408] There is no way the Makumbe would have failed to make use of the black heavy soils with such innovative technologies. With this evidence coupled with new models such as the human-nature approach, the argument that the Makumbe could not farm in areas with black heavy soils can be challenged. How the Makumbe interacted with the black soil ecologies should be understood from the perspective of their everyday interactions with nature as opposed to wholesale generalisations. Such an approach reveals the intricate overlaps in how they generally preferred to farm sandy soils but simultaneously relied on black soils in specific moments such as during dry seasons.

Therefore, the environmental history of the *senya* ecologies in Buhera is incomplete without including the history of *isidhaka*. The two were entangled. In environmental history, argues

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[404] Ibid.
[405] John McKenzie. "The Njanja Iron Industry: The Decline of Pre-Colonial Enterprise". University of Rhodesia Political Economy Research Seminar. 1974 Paper No. 4. 2.
[406] Ibid. 6.
[407] Ibid.
[408] Ibid.

environmental historian Finn Jorgensen *et al*, we cannot talk of one geographical area without talking of the other.[409] Different environments are connected through human interactions.[410] In this age of the Anthropocene, human activity has shaped environments even in the remotest areas, there are no untouched spaces left.[411] Environmental history has done well in revealing how human activity has shaped environments in both obvious and more subtle ways.[412] The socio-environmental history approach allows one to view the *senya* and *isidhaka* ecologies in Buhera not as rigid bifurcated dichotomies, but as entangled in complex ways and moderated by human activities mainly farming.

Whilst the Ndebele immigrant group was not limited to any specific ecology or areas, the way they made sense of the black soils is worthy discussing separately. Such a discussion helps to unpack the local African ways of knowing the environment. This helps to appreciate the thinking which informed the specific set of actions taken by the Ndebele immigrant group between the 1920s and 1980.

***"Isidhaka siyanikeza"*: Ndebele constructions of soil fertility in Buhera**

Even though the black soil and sandy soil ecologies were intricately interwoven, it remains clear that the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera had a unique understanding of the former. It is therefore important to delve into their ways of knowing and understand Ndebele constructions of soil fertility. As argued by environmental historian K. B. Wilson, Africans had sophisticated constructions of the environment which should be studied separately if we are to fully comprehend

[409] Jørgensen, Finn. *et al. Entangled Environments: Historians and Nature in the Nordic Countries. Historisk Tidsskrift.* (2013, 92) 32.
[410] *See* Yue Zhuang, Andrea Riemenschnitter. (eds.) *Entangled Landscapes: Early Modern China and Europe.* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2017).
[411] Ibid.
[412] Ibid.

their interactions with nature.[413] The Ndebele appreciated the black soil ecologies they inhabited in complex ways that disrupt conventional approaches. The agency of soils was an important aspect of the Ndebele's constructions of soil fertility.

Oral accounts from Ndebele-speaking residents in Buhera such as Victor Mgazi, and Nicodemus Gwebu reveal an overarching emphasis on the immigrants' ingenuity in identifying, occupying, and acting upon the black soils to eventually become successful farmers. It is a story that puts the Ndebele people's creativity at the centre of the narrative, delegating all the agency to nothing else but themselves alone. However, a subtle yet recurring statement that appeared in many interviews changed how I had conceptualised the Ndebele's constructions of soil fertility. Victor Mgazi was describing the heightened agricultural productivity that came with farming in the black soil ecologies when he remarked that: "*isidhaka siyanikeza*".[414] Loosely translated, this Ndebele phrase means the black soils are generous because they give out good yields. This sentiment was also echoed in my interviews with Bambatha and Ellen Nkomo.[415]

From these and many other similar accounts, it emerged that for the Ndebele, soil fertility was equated to generosity. Fertile soils were regarded as generous ecologies because of their capacity to give out good yields to farmers who worked them. The statement *isidhaka siyanikeza* accorded significant levels of agency to the soils themselves because it implies that black soils had food-producing capabilities. This was an important component of the Ndebele immigrants' conceptualisation of black soils. The Ndebele's conceptualisation of their agriculture and fertility differed immensely from that of the local colonial officials in Buhera. Writing in 1980, the Native Commissioner of Buhera, R.L.C Cunliffe, attributed agricultural success to the Gwebu people

[413] K.B. Wilson. "Water Used to be Scattered in the Landscape': Local Understandings of Soil Erosion and Land Use Planning in Southern Zimbabwe." *Environment and History* (1995, Zimbabwe Special Issue) 281.
[414] Personal interview with Mgazi.

whom he described as "industrious and very good farmers".[416] Unlike the Gwebu who included the qualities of soils in their stories of agricultural success, the colonial officials saw it as entirely a product of human actors. It is therefore clear that the environmental worldview of the Gwebu immigrants in Buhera was holistic while that of the colonial officials was human-centred. It considered the agency of soils in its attempt to explain the agricultural success that characterised the colonial period. This suggests that the Ndebele relocation and preference to settle but not entirely rely on black soils was informed by rational thinking in which the immigrants appreciated the agency of black soils in shaping agriculture.

The argument that the Ndebele immigrants appreciated the unique material qualities of black soils is by no means a regression into environmental determinism. While environmental determinism suggests that the environment shapes human actions, this study suggests that the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera philosophically appreciated the potency of soils to give out good yields. The difference between the two is that environmental determinism views the environment as determining the course of human life while the notion of *isidhaka siyanikeza* was only a philosophy, a worldview, or a belief system.

The argument that "*isidhaka siyanikeza*" has a revolutionary effect in historical writing because it accords subtle yet undeniable agency to non-human actors. Although situating Gwebu agency in inhabiting these hostile landscapes is worthwhile, scholarship can be taken forward by arguing that such a narrative on its own is not enough because it silences non-human elements within the Ndebele constructions of soil fertility. This Ndebele environmental philosophy relates well with an ongoing intellectual school of thought that focuses on agency of material objects. Anthropologist Bruno Latour terms non-human actors the more than human masses because they

[416] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Gwebu Ministry of Home Affairs to PNC Buhera R.L.C Cunliffe, 26 March 1980.

are part of human societies' constructions of the environment.[417] Human communities have historically made sense of the environments around them by incorporating non-human actors.[418] For some societies, the world is incomplete if only human agency is considered.[419] The world is not a wholesale construct of human actors alone.[420] If the Ndebele philosophy of soil fertility is taken into account, Buhera was a geographical space that was occupied by both human and non-human agents. Such a holistic approach, if incorporated into the writing of history, treats human-centred narratives as not only incomplete but guilty of erasing non-human masses from the past. Presenting a history that ignores non-humans is problematic because it smacks of the same exclusivism as that of elitist histories which largely focused on the experiences of kings, chiefs, and other elite social groups.

The settlement of the Ndebele in this part of Buhera was therefore an appreciation of the agency and material qualities of the black heavy soils. Oral histories support this argument. Victor Mgazi whose homestead is located near Gwebu Business Centre testified that his father identified the family's piece of land by looking for an area that had fig trees (*miwonde*).[421] Remnants of the original fig trees can still be seen surrounding Mgazi's homestead. Mgazi believed that fig trees were environmental signposts that pointed towards places with abundant underground water sources. They also associated a certain type of grass locally referred to as *madungambeva* with fertile soils.[422] This testifies to a long-standing tradition of vegetation being used as a compass for the ecological worth of an area. In Ndebele environmental philosophy, lands with these features were deemed "generous" enough to provide them with good harvests and water for drinking and their livestock.

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417 Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 346, Specifically a book chapter titled "Where are the missing masses?". http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/50-MISSING-MASSES-GB.pdf accessed 10 August 2020. See also Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins. "Introducing Objects". in F. Candlin and R. Guins. *Object Reader*. (New York: CRC Press, 2009) 11.
418 Ibid.
419 Ibid.
420 Ibid.
421 Personal interview with Victor Mgazi.
422 Personal Interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.

These accounts by Ndebele immigrants in the Sabi Reserve resonate well with a social history school of thought that is dedicated towards the agency of things/objects in historical writing.[423] In his study of water politics in post-colonial southern Zimbabwe, Mazarire reveals that local traditional leaders resisted the construction of the Tokwe Murkosi Dam without due consultation with the *mavhu* (soils).[424] The leaders predicted doom for the dam construction project if the soils were not consulted.[425] Soils were viewed as being entangled with ancestors and possessing some form of power over activities happening in their surroundings. Without necessarily admitting the agency of soils, Mazarire's work reveals that these communities strongly believed in the agency of ancestors manifesting themselves through soils in preventing a massive dam construction project. By the same token, the Gwebu indigenous ways of making sense of the environment appreciated the agency of soils in guaranteeing them enough food for survival. This allows us to position the Gwebu as a community that had a deeper appreciation of the agency of soils in human-nature relations and for this reason, the community assumes an important position in discussions of agro-ecological resilience and indigenous ways of knowing.

In his study of whiteness and race in Zimbabwe, historian Yuka Suzuki chronicles how white identities (British and Afrikaner settlers) in post-colonial Zimbabwe differed depending on how they made sense of the non-human actors around them.[426] Using an example of dogs, Mseba and Suzuki reveal that British settlers and Afrikaner settlers often perceived themselves as different by how they treated their dogs. By allowing their dogs to sleep inside houses, British settlers perceived themselves as more civilised than their Afrikaner counterparts who left their dogs outside.[427] These

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[423] *See* Trevor Pinch. "Affordances and Theories of Materiality in STS" Hansen Hsu. STS 632 Inside Technology, Spring 2008.
[424] Gerald C Mazarire. "The Chishanga Waters Have Their Owners': Water Politics and Development in Southern Zimbabwe." *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (2008, 34:4) 758.
[425] Ibid.
[426]Admire Mseba. "Nonhumans, Narratives, and Proximities: The Power of Things and the Cultural Politics of Race, Land and Water in Zimbabwe". *African Studies Quarterly.* (September 2018, 18:1) 68.
Yuka Suzuki. *The Nature of Whiteness: Race, Animals, and Nation in Zimbabwe.* (London: University of Washington Press, 2017).
[427] Mseba. "Nonhumans, Narratives, and Proximities". 68.

two settler communities thus differently made sense of dogs as domestic animals because they interacted differently with the non-human actors- dogs. It is interesting to note that non-human actors are slowly beginning to take an important place as active agents involved in making societies in the historiography of Zimbabwe. There is thus a good justification to privilege soils. The invisibility of soils in social sciences "speaks not only to the literal invisibility of their subterranean elements but also to their taken-for-granted effectiveness as the material infrastructure of human life".[428] Due to their nature, soils offer an important multidisciplinary approach to the writing of history because they can be studied differently in different fields. A turn towards human and non-human relations in this era of the Anthropocene allows one to understand how marginalised societies are making sense and creatively interacting with environments rendered inhabitable and hostile because of climate change.

Ecologically grounded solidarity and contesting power through the environment

The need to understand the interface between the environment and power has for long been a key tenet of environmental history. Environmental historian Nancy J. Jacobs promulgates that "people both gain power from and use the biophysical world as an instrument of power over others".[429] The environmental footprint of power can be seen at different levels of African history in which different groups derived power from access to certain resources. For example, the 20th century Bophuthatswana government in South Africa interrupted black people's relations with the environment which ultimately affected the latter livelihoods, thus prompting them to join the wage labour economy for survival.[430] Muchaparara Musemwa has conceptualised the relationship between access to water and power.[431] Like water which flows boundlessly across geospatial

[428] Anna Krzywoszynska, and Greta Marchesi. "Toward a relational materiality of soils: Introduction". *Environmental Humanities* (2020, 12:1) 191.
[429] Nancy J. Jacobs. *Environment, Power and Justice: A South African History.* 219.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Muchaparara Musemwa. "Flows of Water/Flows of Power/Flows of History: Current Trends and Transdisciplinary Insights and Future Directions". *South African Historical Journal.* (2019, 71:2) 139-149.

boundaries, access to water comes with access to a certain measure of power.[432] The environmental footprint of power articulated by Jacobs and Musemwa above manifested differently in Buhera. In the case of the Ndebele immigrants throughout the colonial period in Buhera, black soil ecologies served two purposes. First, they were used to contest the power of the first-comer Shona-speaking Makumbe. Second, they were used to organise an alternative political organisation that countered that of the Makumbe.

Furthermore, oral histories suggest that the Ndebele immigrants treated the black heavy soils not just as a means of production, but also as a currency to counter social and political domination by the neighbouring Shona-speaking Makumbe community. All Ndebele families settled in areas with black *isidhaka* soils. Such areas included Mkandeni (under chief Nyashanu), Gombe, Msiza, Chizhou, Sizi, Dhlamini, Dhobha, Sojini, and Charlton.[433] Even though their chief, Gwebu, had built his capital near Gwebu Secondary School, other households decided to settle in surrounding areas ruled by Shona-speaking chiefs. Some settled in areas under neighbouring Shona-speaking Makumbe and Nyashanu areas.

Unlike in other areas in colonial Southern Rhodesia such as Kairezi where evicted Africans lived following a linear pattern (*maline/maraini*) or in clusters (*maguta*), the Ndebele immigrants settled in a different pattern.[434] Instead of settling in a single geographical area, the Ndebele immigrants scattered themselves throughout northern parts of Buhera in areas ruled by different Shona-speaking chiefs. They did not occupy a single block of land as was expected by both the Makumbe and the colonial officials.

Following a specific ecological trend, the Ndebele immigrants occupied only areas with black soils avoiding those with sandy soils. This resulted in Ndebele households being dotted across the

[432] Ibid. 139.
[433] Personal Interview with Victor N. Mgazi. See also CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Chief Fish Gwebu. Historical Background, 1960.
[434] Donald S. Moore. *Suffering for Territory*: *Race, Place and Power in Zimbabwe*). 1.

region in areas such as Dhobha, Sojini and Msiza which were characterised by black soils. They avoided areas such as Garamwera, Chatindo, Chapwanya and Chigavakava areas which comprised of *senya* soils.[435] The concentration of Ndebele households in areas with *isidhaka* soils in a haphazard yet deliberate pattern was against general existing patterns of rural settlement in which groups under a particular traditional authority lived together in one place for administration purposes.

The coming of Ndebele immigrants into the area disrupted existing spatial patterns of settlement because they were only interested in settling on tracts of black clay soils which were dotted around the whole Makumbe area. Although about 20 families settled in an area administered by Chief Gwebu, several households went as far as Mkandeni in Chief Makumbe's area in the south of Buhera.[436] Traditionally and customarily, these Ndebele immigrants who settled in the Nyashanu area were supposed to pay allegiance to the political administration of Nyashanu of the Hera dynasty. Those under Makumbe were supposed to correspondingly fall under Makumbe of the vaNjanja group. Instead of paying their allegiances to these respective first-comer Shona-speaking chiefs in the respective areas they lived, Ndebele immigrants disregarded this and offered their loyalty to Chief Gwebu.

This act of choosing to remain under Gwebu traditional authority despite falling under Makumbe and Nyashanu territories irked the first-comer leaders who felt that traditional protocols of paying allegiance had been violated. In 1960, colonial administrators captured this discrepancy noting that "…certain kraals are not contiguous with the main block but owe allegiance to Chief Gwebu".[437] These included a Ndebele village head, Ndawa, who had been allocated land by Mugweni, a Makumbe *sadunhu* (kraal head).[438] Other Ndebele kraals living outside Chief Gwebu's main block

[435] Personal Interview with Mgazi.
[436] Ibid.
[437] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Chief Fish Gwebu: Historical Background, 1960.
[438] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: "Minutes of the Meeting Held to Discuss the Problem of Ndebele Kraals Living Outside Chief Fish's Area", April 25, 1967.

included Mtava, Sizi and Charlton.[439] The Makumbe community leaders such as Garamwera complained about several Ndebele immigrants from their areas who were going to Chief Gwebu for counsel on all social and political matters instead of coming to them.[440]

Ndebeles under chief Makumbe defied the traditional custom of paying their allegiances to traditional leaders whom they geographically fell under. Instead, they paid their allegiances to chief Gwebu who, like many of them, had also settled in an area with black soils. Thus, in addition to disrupting traditional settlement patterns in Buhera, the Ndebele immigrants also disrupted local regimes of power by systematically planning and coordinating an alternative system of solidarity by occupying common ecologies. This inevitably created conflict between Gwebu and his immediate neighbour, Makumbe. Makumbe complained that Ndebele households who had settled in his area yet paying allegiance to Gwebu were supposed to be moved from his territory since they were not loyal to him.[441] Makumbe's argument was historically justifiable because it was one of his headmen, Garamwera, who had allocated Ndebele families' lands for settlement when the latter first arrived in the area in the 1920s. This was done with the anticipation that the immigrants would in turn, as per custom, offer their loyalty to Garamwera of the Makumbe group.[442] In opposition to this claim, Gwebu argued that it was "not fair" since the Ndebele were part of the Gwebu Chieftaincy before relocation to Buhera.[443]

The Ndebele's planned and coordinated settlement in areas with black soils was a form of building a common ecologically grounded solidarity through black soil ecologies and staking a claim on one of the productive sections of the area. This solidarity was historically grounded in the deeper appreciation of the material qualities of the black soils and their potential in giving good yields.

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439 439 CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: "Minutes of the Meeting Held to Discuss the Problem of Ndebele Kraals Living Outside Chief Fish's Area".
440 CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Office of the Native Commissioner, Range, to PNC, Gwelo, 25 October 1948.
441 CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: "Meeting to discuss the problem of kraals living outside Chief Fish's area", meeting held on Tuesday 25 April 1967.
442 Ibid.
443 Ibid.

This solidarity achieved two things. First, it assisted the Gwebu in navigating the uncertainties of lack of belonging in an area dominated by the Makumbe group. Second, it helped the Ndebele to create an alternative form of local governance that enabled them to organise power differently and ultimately counter possible Makumbe domination.

The Ndebele used their common occupation of black soils to establish an autonomous traditional court system of their own presided over by their chief, Fish Gwebu. This was formed in the 1930s.[444] The court was one of the many rural courts administered by traditional authorities and known as "native courts" in colonial administrative nomenclature.[445] By 1942, the Gwebu traditional court was already being recognised by the government through resident native commissioners.[446] At this stage, the Gwebu people succeeded in establishing an autonomous court system that allowed them to dictate their customary laws without the influence of the Makumbe. In addition, an independent local traditional court system of their own allowed them to enact environmental laws that promoted sustainable management of natural resources. An example of such a law prohibited the wanton use of axes.

> Chief Gwebu enacted a law prohibiting villagers from moving around with axes in his area. People needed to get permission to cut down trees. If permission to cut down a tree was granted, one would be shown a specific tree to chop. Such permission was granted for purposes of construction of houses or for getting firewood. Deforestation was made illegal. Village heads were tasked to enforce these laws.[447]

This move by Chief Gwebu speaks volumes about the community's attempts to sustainably use the environment. The act of prohibiting people from moving around with axes was meant to curb unsanctioned deforestation in the area. Chief Gwebu went even further to the extent of limiting the number of blacksmiths in his community.[448] He feared that excessive production of axes in the

[444] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Native Commissioner Buhera to Chief Native Commissioner Salisbury, 18 March 1942.
[445] Ibid.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Personal Interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[448] Ibid.

communities would speed up the destruction of forests.[449] This is evidence to suggest that Chief Gwebu and his community had a strong conservationist philosophy that guided their everyday interactions with nature.

Chief Gwebu and his entire founding leadership have largely been remembered by the Ndebele community as champions of localised environmental conservation initiatives. The collective memories of the Ndebele largely attributed their agricultural success to Chief Gwebu's ability to identify and transform an unoccupied area into a breadbasket of their entire Buhera district.[450] Other leaders such as Kufa Mgazi were remembered as innovative conservationists who encouraged biodiversity through the creation of orchards. Mgazi is also remembered among the Ndebele immigrants as the "Chief of the lands" because of his role in educating his Ndebele community on the need to preserve soils.[451] Duba-Duba Nkomo who was one of the founding leaders who immigrated to Buhera with Chief Gwebu has been remembered for being the leading livestock producer who had one of the largest herds.[452] Their respective contributions among minority Ndebele immigrants provide an opportunity to look at these traditional leaders as subaltern actors championing environmental conservation during a time when the colonial government strongly discouraged African initiatives in favour of western scientific models.

The Ndebele immigrants' experiences are noteworthy because the people resorted to African environmental initiatives at a time when many African communities were drowned in the flawed Alvordian methods popularised by colonial agricultural demonstrators since the 1920s.[453] They avoided possible domination by the Makumbe by establishing their own fluid and environmental laws perfectly crafted to suit their individual and collective existential needs. Having an

[449] Personal Interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[450] The term "breadbasket of Buhera" was often used by colonial officials to describe the Gwebu area.
[451] Personal interview with Victor Mgazi.
[452] Personal interview with Albert Masaile.
[453] *Rhodesia Herald*. "Agriculture and the Native Demonstrators' Work, Way to Comfort and Useful Citizenship" 2 January 1931.

autonomous court system allowed the Gwebu to institute their ways of knowing into their local governance system and environmental conservation became an important aspect of community well-being. The Gwebu would not have succeeded in instituting their own localised environmental laws had they paid allegiance to Makumbe. The story would have turned out differently.

Moreover, the Ndebele immigrants systematically organised power differently by establishing an exclusive chieftaincy that was made up of households that farmed on black soils. Although Chief Gwebu was surrounded by four Ndebele villages, a significant number of people under his authority were Ndebele-speaking households who had settled in Makumbe's territory. It was a unique political organisation in this regard. Documentary evidence affirms that the Ndebele immigrant polities, despite being spatially scattered in different parts of chief Makumbe's country, avoided paying allegiance to their host chief.[454] This is further amplified by historian Musoni who promulgates that Ndebele households gave insignificant loyalty to chief Makumbe.[455]

This means that the Ndebele did not entirely organise power based on ethnicity as suggested by historian Musoni.[456] It is important to note that this group called the Ndebele was made up of different ethnic groups with different histories. It was comprised of Xhosa, Fengu, Swati and different classes (*Zansi, Enhla, and Hole*) of the Ndebele. With this diversity, it was difficult to deploy ethnicity as a tool to build solidarity and social solidarity. Instead, the group was organised based on their common occupation and use of black soil ecologies. Ndebele ethnicity was only used to cement an already established ecologically grounded solidarity. In addition, the immigrants expanded their influence by winning the loyalty of Ndebele-speaking households outside their geographical area of jurisdiction. By winning the loyalty of villages such as Sizi and Dobha which were in Makumbe's territory, the Gwebu group disrupted the political power of the Shona-

[454] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: "Minutes of the Meeting Held to Discuss the problem of Ndebele Kraals Living Outside Chief Fish's Area", April 25, 1967.
[455] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 92.
[456] Ibid. 87.

speaking traditional leadership which was organised based on the geographical location of their subjects. By introducing a new political entity that defied spatial borders, the Ndebele immigrants countered possible numerical domination from their first comer Makumbe neighbours.

It is important to note that the settlement of the Ndebele communities on tracts of black soils transcended ethnic identities. As demonstrated in Chapter One, the Gwebu people were not a homogenous group. There existed several internal fissures along the lines of caste, gender, historical origins, and economic class. For example, the Dlomo family is believed to have originally come from an area called Chipunga near Beira, in present-day Mozambique.[457] The Tshabalala (of Fengu origin) family who settled in Charlton village under chief Gwebu originally came from Natal in South Africa.[458] The Masaile and Mgazi families were initially displaced from Ntabazinduna, then briefly settled at Hogo in the Midlands province before subsequently moving to Buhera in the mid-1940s.[459] In addition to these differences, these groups also migrated to Buhera from Matabeleland using different routes and at different times. Considering these internal differences, the Ndebele immigrant was too diverse to establish some form of ethnic cohesion. Consequently, they could not build any solidarity entirely based on their Ndebele ethnic identity. Hence, the use of black soil ecologies became an alternative modality of building solidarity and countering Makumbe hegemony- thus creatively dealing with uncertainties of lack of belonging brought about by forced relocation.

Conclusion

The chapter has used the human-nature relations approach to put across two fundamental arguments. The first argument that has been raised is that contrary to assumptions by early European travellers later reproduced by colonial administrators and recent scholars, soil

[457] Personal interview with Masitulela Dema Dema.
[458] Ibid.
[459] Personal Interviews with Victor Mgazi and Albert Masaile

preferences between the Ndebele immigrants and their Shona-speaking counterparts in the Sabi Reserve were not rigid. Rather, the two communities were flexible enough to interact with diverse ecologies at different times for their survival. Soil preferences were always flexible. The second argument that has been raised is that the *isidhaka* and *senya* ecologies were connected through different processes such as agriculture. It has been demonstrated that it is impossible to talk about the *senya* ecologies without talking about *isidhaka* and vice versa. Considering these human and ecological interactions, livestock, human societies, and ecologies were caught up in a complex web of relationships. Relationships between humans and nature were not simplistic binaries. The second part of the chapter delves into the Ndebele constructions of soil fertility and deduces that the immigrant community conceptualised fertility as a form of agency. Therefore, the Ndebele worldview of fertile soils equated them to non-human actors, a philosophy that intersects with the intellectual discourse of materiality. Ultimately, the Ndebele immigrants' creative and dynamic interactions with *isidhaka* ecologies in colonial Buhera allowed them to challenge and counter possible social and political domination. They did this by organising an alternative form of solidarity that was based not on ethnicity but on common occupation of areas with black heavy soils- an ecologically grounded form of social cohesion.

CHAPTER FOUR:

COLONIAL TRIUMPHALISM AND AFRICAN INITIATIVES IN AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION IN BUHERA: 1940 - 1980

Introduction

Like many rural areas in Southern Rhodesia, agriculture and conservation of natural resources in Buhera were shaped by a set of new agricultural policies which were instituted starting in the 1920s. Dubbed the "gospel of the plough", the new policies drew heavily from western science and Christianity and were instituted with the hope of getting rid of African indigenous farming and conservation practices which were regarded by colonists as backward.[460] To that effect, all notable successes among Africans starting in the 1940s in rural areas were credited to the success of the gospel of the plough and its so-called modernisation of agriculture and conservation. Couched with celebratory accounts of colonial modernity's triumph over African indigenous practices in agriculture and conservation, this discourse thrived in Buhera starting in the 1940s when the Ndebele immigrants registered an agricultural boom and conservation successes.

By using a socio-environmental history approach, this chapter re-reads the Ndebele immigrants' success and interactions with nature from a localised everyday relations perspective as opposed to a colonial state's triumphalist viewpoint. By so doing, the discourse of colonial triumph which originated from colonial officials is challenged. The human-nature relations approach to histories of agriculture and conservation in the Sabi Reserve brings to light how a significant proportion of success was linked to the agency and innovations of individuals, families, and historically marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities and women. Without necessarily ignoring the work of the colonial government's new policies and practices, the chapter argues for a holistic approach to human-nature relations- an approach that appreciates the contributions of innovative

[460] Emory D. Alvord. "The Gospel of the Plough and Superstition". *Harvester.* (8 September 1948). 3.

individuals, families, immigrant Ndebele-speaking women, and ethnic minorities such as Xhosa and Fengu immigrants.

Colonial perceptions of Ndebele agriculture and conservation in Buhera

Whilst the Gwebu were in the process of relocating following forced removals from Matabeleland in 1925, major transformations immediately started to take place in the agriculture and conservation sectors at the national level. On 26 May 1926, the Southern Rhodesia government appointed American-born missionary and agriculturalist Emory Delmont Alvord as Director for Native Agriculture.[461] The appointment of Alvord saw the emergence of a new discourse which vilified and discouraged the use of indigenous knowledge systems in agriculture and conservation. Due to the centrality of the plough in this "modernisation" scheme, the project was referred to by both its proponents and critics as the 'gospel of the plough'.[462] Indeed, it was regarded as gospel not only because its leading proponent was an American Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) missionary but also because of what Beinart refers to as a "crusading zeal" that it came with.[463] Under Alvord, several modernisation programs were implemented. These included the construction of contour ridges, mixed cropping, deployment of native agricultural demonstrators, creation of demonstration plots, and cash cropping. There was also a strong emphasis on the use of the plough to increase production. The other strand of the gospel of the plough included the conservation of natural resources such as soils and forests using modern scientific methods. There was an overarching emphasis on the adoption of scientific agricultural and conservation practices and the discouragement of African indigenous knowledge.

[461] NAZ Files: Secretary of Treasury to the Secretary in the Department of Agriculture.
[462] Emory D. Alvord. "The Gospel of the Plough and Superstition". *Harvester.* (8 September 1948) 3.
[463] William Beinart. "Soil Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas about Development: A Southern African Exploration, 1900-1960." *Journal of Southern African Studies.* (1984, 11:1) 52–83.

The desire to transform African peasant farming and conservation in rural areas was motivated by specific historical factors. Earlier reports from the Native Reserves Commission of 1915 had concluded that African peasant farming in the reserves was "primitive and wasteful".[464] African farming practices that were regarded as primitive include shifting cultivation in which rural Africans would rotate their fields to maintain soil fertility.[465] African farming methods were regarded as primitive because peasants in rural areas largely depended on the hoe as their primary agricultural tool.[466] In addition, colonial administrators saw African indigenous farming as "wasteful use of land" because the amount of grain harvested per acre was smaller than what they desired.[467] Throughout Africa, colonial governments believed that the entire fabric of social life in Africa needed to be transformed from "voodoo to modern agricultural methods".[468] Alvord himself concluded that superstition, taboos and witchcraft were some of the elements among Africans in Southern Rhodesia that were affecting the development of agriculture in the colony.[469] Invoking some Christian religious nomenclature, Alvord went on to claim that African farming practices were "backward, destructive and in need of revelation".[470] On livestock production, the government's policies were informed by the claims that Africans were practising "in-breeding, careless breeding and using unsuitable bulls".[471] This kind of thinking among early white colonial administrators became the foundation on which the mission to "civilise" and bring about "progressive farming methods" was laid.[472]

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464 "Southern Rhodesia Native Reserves Commission Papers: 1915". https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ien.35556012341038&view=1up&seq=7. 12.

465 Eira Punt. "The Development of African Agriculture with Particular Reference to the Interwar Years". (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Natal, 1979) 58.

466 Ibid.

467 Ibid.

468 Ibid.

469 Gilbert Tarugarira. "An Appraisal of Alvord's 'Gospel of the Plough' on the Transformation of the Peasant Communities of the Gutu District of Zimbabwe: 1926-1960". *The Dyke.* (2015, 9:2). 17.

470 Frederic Baudron. *Et al.* "Failing to Yield? Ploughs, Conservation Agriculture and the Problem of Agricultural Intensification: An Example from the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe". *Journal of Development Studies.* (2011) 2.

471 Ibid.

472 "Southern Rhodesia Native Reserves Commission Papers", 1915, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ien.35556012341038&view=1up&seq=7. 12.

When Alvord was appointed and the gospel of the plough began to spread, the Ndebele evictees evicted to Buhera were still in a transient state, temporarily encamping at different places with no place of fixed aboard. Because of this, they were categorised as a threat to the environment. By 1927 when the evictees were encamped at Charter, the colonial administrators were alarmed that the Ndebele who comprised 20 *indunas* and 40 followers had a lot of cattle and their impact on the environment was detrimental.[473] In addition, the officials further alluded that the group needed "careful handling" in order to avert an environmental disaster.[474] Right from the time of eviction until the 1940s, the Ndebele immigrant group was in the eyes of colonial officials a threat to the environment.

However, by the 1940s, a few years after the settlement of the Ndebele in Buhera, colonial officials had already started to observe the successes of the immigrants in the areas of agriculture and the conservation of natural resources. Local colonial administrators coined the term "the breadbasket of Buhera" to refer to the area inhabited by Ndebele immigrants.[475] The phrase was used to show the importance of the Gwebu area in producing much of the grain that is consumed in Buhera. Both Ndebele and Shona-speaking households in Buhera used the term "*dziva reGMB"* (Grain Marketing Board) to refer to the area inhabited by the Ndebele evictees.[476] The term *dziva reGMB* was derived from a Shona word which means a pool.[477] The area inhabited by the Ndebele was likened to a perennial pool as far as grain supply was concerned. Trucks from the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) Buhera depot made their way to the Ndebele homesteads each harvesting season to collect grain because the ox-drawn wagons and carts could not cope.[478] The success of the Ndebele immigrants was not only limited to agriculture but also extended to the conservation of natural

[473] NAZ Files: Report of the native commissioner of Mzingwane for the year ended 31 December 1927.
[474] Ibid.
[475] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Boundary Description: Chief Gwebu: Buhera.
[476] Personal interviews with Mrs Ellen Nkomo and Goli Mgazi.
[477] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[478] Ibid.

resources. The available water resources, soils, and forests were all conserved through local initiatives.

The successes of the Ndebele immigrant group in agriculture and conservation came as a surprise to colonial officials who had earlier pessimistically predicted that Ndebele immigrants were going to cause environmental damage through wanton destruction of forests, clearing of lands for agriculture and livestock foraging.[479] The projections of the colonial officials were not based on any evidence, but mere racist thinking which assumed that Africans could not conserve their environments.[480] Unforeseen by white colonial officials in Manicaland, the Ndebele immigrants creatively interacted with the black heavy soils, converting the once unoccupied tracts of land into productive farmlands. Along perennial rivers, small makeshift dams were constructed using improvised equipment such as ploughs and scooping dishes, referred to by the Ndebele as *skurupati*. Forests were conserved through a system of indigenous environmental laws enacted by Chief Gwebu's council. Grazing lands were sustainably managed through a set of pasture management system which included, for example, a sophisticated cattle penning practice and pasture rotation. Livestock production thrived due to crossbreeding using bulls and heifers acquired from the neighbouring Bechuanaland Protectorate, now Botswana.

Confronted by a sudden and unimagined Ndebele agricultural boom and innovative environmental conservation schemes in the dry and drought-prone Sabi Reserve, the colonial government was proven wrong. In order to redeem themselves, colonial officials deployed a systematic narrative in which they explained the successes of the Ndebele immigrant group as a product of the colonial government and its agro-conservationist schemes known broadly as the gospel of the plough. Stated differently, the colonial officials re-interpreted the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera not as

[479] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Gwebu Report of the Native Commissioner of Mzingwane for the Year Ended 31 December 1927.
[480] Ibid.

destructive, but as progressives who had embraced colonial agro-conservation teachings brought to the countryside by native agricultural demonstrators, veterinary officials, missionaries and colonial officials.

Between the 1940s and 1950s, colonial officials in Buhera began to deploy the discourse of modernity to explain Ndebele agricultural and conservation successes. In December 1948, local colonial administrators went as far as describing Chief Gwebu of the Ndebele as "the only progressive chief in the district" because he had accommodated the work of native demonstrators in his area.[481] In 1962, Gwebu was appointed into the Provincial Council of Chiefs for Manicaland province.[482] This explains why Chief Gwebu was one of the few African traditional leaders invited to Buckingham Palace in 1964.[483] The Ndebele immigrant group was equally described as the "most progressive" in Buhera.[484] The 1956 District Commissioner's report further described Chief Gwebu as "the most attractive of the African administration in the [Sabi] Reserve".[485]

It is important to discuss the context in which the terms "progress" and "modernity" were deployed by colonial officials. Terms such as "progressive", "modern", and "civilised" were largely used in different parts of the British Empire such as Africa, and India to describe indigenous groups and classes who had embraced the western civilisation.[486] These terms had nothing to do with indigenous innovations but everything to do with spreading western values and othering. Those that had accepted western values such as Christianity, language, dressing, culture, commerce, and governance institutions were simplistically branded progressives. On the contrary, those that had remained conservative were given different descriptions ranging from backward to

[481] NAZ Files: 4/32/48/3 NC Buhera to PNC Gwelo 29 Dec 1948.
[482] PER/5/Fish/67 Office of the Provinvial Commissioner, Umtali, 1967.
[483] *Chronicle.* "How the Ndebele Settled in Buhera" 9 July 2022. https://www.chronicle.co.zw/how-ndebele-community-settled-in-buhera/ Accessed 9 July 2022.
[484] Ibid.
[485] NAZ Files: Report of the Native Commissioner for the District of Buhera for the Year Ended 31 December 1956.
[486] Jeyaraj Joseph. "Modernity and Empire: A Modest Analysis of Early Colonial Writing Practices." *College Composition and Communication.* (2009, 60:3) 468–92.

savages. In Southern Rhodesia, African groups such as the Madheruka in north-western parts of the country who grew cash crops such as cotton were regarded as modern as opposed to their neighbours, the Madheruka, who had shunned the crop.[487] In colonial Gutu, BaSotho immigrants most of whom were missionaries and evangelists belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church were regarded as more progressive because of religion.[488]

For the Ndebele immigrants in the Sabi Reserve, there is a combination of factors that resulted in them being regarded as progressive and modern. Most of these reasons revolve around their interactions with the environment and farming methods. One of the reasons is that the Ndebele domesticated cattle breeds that were deemed ideal by the colonial government.[489] Earlier in the 1930s, the Ndebele had been subjected to a violent destocking exercise in which saw the so-called "undesired breeds" and "poor breeds" were forcibly sold at low prices.[490] Referred to as *nhimuramuswe* (the cutting of tails), cattle culling involved the cutting of tails of all cattle that were regarded as undesirable.[491] Jane Lungile Ngwenya who was born under Chief Gwebu in 1935 narrated that her family's entire herd was culled and some cattle were forcibly taken away in the 1940s.[492] Her parents were at one point arrested for resisting destocking.[493] According to geographer JoAnn McGregor, the legitimation of this type of violence by the state came out of its conservationist alarm.[494] Colonial officials believed that large cattle herds would catalyse soil erosion, thus leading to environmental damage.

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[487] Pius Nyambara. "Madheruka and Shangwe: ethnic identities and the culture of modernity in Gokwe, Northwestern Zimbabwe, 1963-79". *Journal of African History*. (2002, 43:2) 293.
[488] Joseph Mujere. "Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists, and Progressive Farmers: Basotho Struggles for Belonging in Zimbabwe 1930s-2008". (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012) 77-79.
[489] Wesley Mwatwara. "'Better Breeds?' The Colonial State, Africans and the Cattle Quality Clause in Southern Rhodesia". 333-50.
[490] Personal interview with Jane Lungile Ngwenya.
[491] Ibid.
[492] Ibid.
[493] Ibid.
[494] JoAnn McGregor. "Conservation, Control and Ecological Change: The Politics and Ecology of Colonial Conservation in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe.". 257.

In addition to cattle breeds, the Ndebele immigrant group began to be referred to as modern and progressive farmers because they had accommodated native agricultural demonstrators in the area. In 1948, the District Commissioner for Buhera reported that the Ndebele immigrants were practising "...good methods of agriculture and good work has been done in conjunction with community demonstrators."[495] Different possible reasons explain why the Ndebele immigrants accommodated the work of community demonstrators. First, some of the colonial conservation policies were only embraced to avoid direct conflict with the state. The colonial government could use coercion. The second reason why the Ndebele immigrants accepted some aspects of colonial environmental conservation policies was that it was part of the group's negotiation strategy. The embracing of the work of native agricultural demonstrators was therefore not done wholeheartedly but as a way of avoiding confrontation with the government. The way the government enacted conservationist policies and how they were received tells us about the nature of colonial rule in Southern Rhodesia.[496] Colonial policies were not always openly resisted but were sometimes adopted deceitfully by Africans to avoid the use of coercion. As McGregor argues, the adoption of colonial conservationist policies by Africans did not necessarily mean endorsement.[497] This perfectly explains why Ndebele immigrants seemingly embraced the work of native agricultural demonstrators.

There is documentary evidence to suggest that this strategy of deceptively accepting colonial conservationist practice was rampant during this time throughout Southern Rhodesia. At a meeting held between colonial officials and traditional leaders in Victoria in 1934, Chief Serima spoke highly of the work of native agricultural demonstrators in his area much to the amusement of local colonial government representatives. One of the officials who attended the meeting wrote:

[495] Ibid.
[496] Ibid.
[497] Ibid.

> Young chief Serima addressed the meeting on the results he had obtained from his demonstration plot and said he had learned a lesson and never wanted to return to native methods of agriculture again.[498]

By their admission, colonial officials acknowledged that Chief Serima had often returned to the African agricultural practices even after initially giving the impression that they had adopted the so-called modern farming. This suggests that Serima's seemingly positive attitude towards colonial conservationist policies was not sincere. Similarly, in 1927, the Native Commissioner of Mrewa reported a related trend in which Africans secretly returned to their "native methods" after seemingly showing interest in western agricultural practices such as the use of contour ridges. He reported that:

> There are a few natives who have tried to improve their methods and some have been fairly successful, but I notice a tendency, after a few good years, for some of them to drop back to the native method even after they had seen the advantages of the other so far as yield is concerned.[499]

In the same year, the NC for Hwedza reported a similar development. Africans initially embraced the use of fertilisers but became solidly opposed to the idea after a few years.[500] This was despite the anticipated positive results on yield. These examples of how Africans in Southern Rhodesia only embraced the so-called modern methods in theory while in practice they remained they managed to return to indigenous practices when it was convenient for them. Stated differently, Africans managed to maintain a creative balance of both modern and indigenous farming practices during the colonial period.

Besides colonial officials and colonial records using the discourse of modernity to explain Africans' successes in agriculture and conservation, similar arguments have also been captured differently in different historical writings focusing on colonial Southern Rhodesia. According to Nyambara,

[498] NAZ Files: S1542/A4/Vol 1 Agriculturalist in the Native Affairs Department's Report on Agriculture in Serima Reserve 13th April: 1933-1934.
[499] NAZ Files: S235/505 District Annual Reports: Report of the Native Commissioner of Mrewa for the year 1927.
[500] NAZ Files: S235/505 District Annual Reports: Report of the Native Commissioner of Hwedza for the year 1927.

Madheruka immigrants in Gokwe in the 1960s were viewed as more modern than their Shangwe first-comer neighbours because they "had been exposed to forces of modernisation".[501] These forces of modernisation, as Nyambara clearly states, included the production of cotton which was a trendy cash crop in the 1960s, exposure to Christian missionary activities, and renting properties owned by large-scale white commercial farmers.[502] The Shangwe, on the contrary, had not been exposed to these western establishments. Nyambara aptly argues that the latter were therefore not exposed to the forces of modernisation. The category of modernity in colonial Gokwe was therefore given only to those that had been, in one way or the other, exposed to systems of the colonial government. In the same vein, historian Joseph Mujere in his study of colonial Gutu reveals that colonists tended to view immigrant BaSotho group as more modernised than their Karanga counterparts due to their ownership of farms, the practice of monogamy, ownership of local schools, associations with Dutch Christian missionaries, and access to advanced western education. Mujere argues that the BaSotho were an emerging community that "valued progress".[503] Using case studies of Buhera and Shangani respectively, Musoni and Alexander make a similar argument by stating that the colonial government gave preferential treatment to immigrant communities and side-lined the firstcomers. They did this by categorising evicted communities as modern. Besides colonial administrators ascribing the status of a modernised community to the immigrants, Alexander and McGregor posit that the Ndebele internalised these colonial categorisations and began to identify themselves as Europeanised.[504]

Modernity is therefore seen through the lens of Africans' association with different colonial institutions (schools, farms, cash crops and Christianity). Oral accounts from the Gwebu

[501] NAZ Files: S235/505 District Annual Reports: Report of the Native Commissioner of Hwedza for the year 1927.
[502] Ibid.
[503] Joseph Mujere. "Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists, and Progressive Farmers: Basotho Struggles for Belonging in Zimbabwe 1930s-2008". 84.
[504] Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor. "Modernity and ethnicity in a frontier society: understanding difference in Northwestern Zimbabwe". 188.

immigrants affirm this bias. Different generations of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera often portray themselves as better and more innovative farmers than their first-comer neighbours, the Makumbe. One such account was given by Victor Mgazi who stated that northern parts of Buhera only became food secure after the settlement of the Ndebele immigrants.[505] He supported his claim by stating that grain storage facilities belonging to GMB were only constructed after the settlement of the Ndebele. For Mgazi, this was evidence of enough grain supply for the area.[506] Nicodemus Gwebu delicately fronted the same narrative by highlighting that the Ndebele immigrants did not take part in traditional rainmaking ceremonies because they were Christians who belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church.[507] Bambatha Nkomo argued that the Ndebele immigrants brought modern education to the area when they facilitated the establishment of Gwebu Primary School in 1935 after their eviction to Buhera.[508] By so doing, the Ndebele are implicated in propagating the narrative that they were more modernised than their Shona-speaking neighbour.

The intellectual problem with this discourse of modernity is that it gives not only an incomplete picture but also a problematic assumption that the successes of African evictees originated from their interactions with the state and its respective institutions. Although the dynamic agricultural practices and sustainable environmental conservation methods of the Ndebele immigrants borrowed partially from the gospel of the plough, some other factors and agents shaped everyday life. By only focusing on the role of the colonial government and its respective officials and institutions, the agency of Africans in interacting creatively with natural resources and innovative agriculture is ignored. The discourse of modernity, therefore, tells only a one-sided story that ignores the different ways in which Africans particularly rural communities shaped agriculture and conservation during the colonial period.

[505] Personal interview with Victor Mgazi.
[506] Ibid.
[507] Ibid.
[508] Personal interview Bambatha Nkomo.

Furthermore, the modernity discourse does not see African innovations outside the state and its respective western practices. This state-centric approach to evicted communities and their histories ignores the intricacies of their sustainable interactions with nature. This discourse of modernity further gives the assumption that Africans only thrived in places where western forms of agriculture and conservation were adopted. Yet in areas such as Gwebu, there is evidence of a largely indigenous system that was steered by subaltern actors (individuals and historically marginalised groups) who used indigenous knowledge to make significant strides in conserving the environment, attaining food security, seed sovereignty and ultimately achieve some form of social cohesion.

African initiatives and multiple actors in agriculture and conservation

A socio-environmental approach to the history of agriculture and natural resource conservation in Buhera gives a much more holistic picture. Instead of viewing agriculture and conservation from a state-centric approach, the socio-environmental history approach locates many other actors and processes that influenced an agricultural boom and innovative conservation practices in the Gwebu area of Buhera. The different processes include the close connections between town and countryside which allowed the flow of information, technologies and ideas. There was close interaction between Gwebu villagers and urban centres to the extent that the divide between urban and rural was almost blurred. Various historically marginalised groups such as Ndebele-speaking immigrant women, Xhosa and Fengu minorities who were part of the Ndebele immigrant group in Buhera also brought about unique innovative contributions which shaped agriculture and conservation throughout the colonial period. The role of the colonial state's gospel of the plough should be acknowledged but was only minimal.

Contributions by individuals and families

The name Kufa Mgazi dominates oral accounts of local agricultural development and conservation in the Gwebu area of Buhera. Born in the early 1900s in Mzingwane, Kufa Mgazi, a Ndebele immigrant abounded by Xhosa and Fengu households in Charlton Village, was one of the people who benefited from extensive knowledge of the Fengu. Between the late 1940s and 1960s, armed with extensive knowledge of blacksmithing, Mgazi modified the traditional single furrow plough to create a new type which was locally referred to as *indlovu* (elephant).[509] It was nicknamed *indlovu* because of its hump-shaped beam which looked like the back of an elephant. The modified elephant ploughs also came with an altered ploughshare which allowed farmers to till the black soils without having to worry about the adhesive nature of the soils. It thus helped to deal once and for all with the perennial challenge of adhesive soils which neither the Native Agricultural Demonstrators nor the Native Commissioners could address. As of 2021, the disused elephant ploughs could still be seen in Goli Mgazi's field. Accounts by his surviving sons Victor and Goli were littered with how, in his individual capacity, Kufa Mgazi made possible and productive the tilling of the heavy black soils by modifying the elephant plough.

In addition, Kufa Mgazi is credited for having popularised the idea of pre-season ploughing in Buhera. This was whereby farmlands were ploughed just after harvesting between April and August to retain moisture. Before the fields were ploughed, they were cleaned of all stalks from the previous season. Maize and groundnut stalks were taken to the cattle pens and used as food supplements. The Ndebele also believed that by taking away stalks of the previous harvests from the fields, they were cleaning the farms of pests and diseases that would affect the next crop. Mgazi's extensive knowledge of farming drew heavily from Xhosa and Fengu indigenous knowledge.

[509] Personal interview with Goli Mgazi and Bambatha Nkomo.

Stone walled-cattle pens that he constructed at several homes in the Gwebu village are in themselves archives of individual agency in reducing deforestation. Remnants of abandoned wagons were used by the group at large to demonstrate as reference points to show how Ndebele individuals such as Mgazi used available technologies to attain food security in precarious colonial times and in a place where they did not have belonging. Due to his prominent role in local development, colonial administrators for Buhera mistook Kufa for the Chief of the Ndebele immigrants. Kufa is said to have corrected them saying "I am a chief of lands, not a chief for the people".[510] He began to be referred to by fellow villagers as such. Following his death in 1958, Kufa Mgazi was buried at the centre of one of the stone-walled cattle pens he had constructed to immortalise his contributions to local agriculture and the conservation of the environment.

As the ruling families among the Ndebele immigrant group in Buhera, the Gwebu, Mgazi, and Nkomo families are equally remembered through the lens of agriculture and conservation. The Gwebu and Nkomo families were the first among the original Khumalo (*Zansi*) class to acquire the double-furrow ploughs whilst they were still in Mzingwane in the early 1920s.[511] During the five years he spent in Cape Town, Chief Gwebu was able to acquire double-furrow ploughs and ox-drawn wagons which he brought to Buhera in 1927.[512] In addition to these new technologies, Gwebu acquired Xhosa indigenous farming knowledge through interactions with his colleagues whilst working at Cape Town Hotel in South Africa between 1920 and 1925.[513] He also went to school with locals from Afrikaner families most of whom were farmers in the Cape Province. His grandson, Nicodemus, affirms that it was these interactions that partly shaped his knowledge of farming.

[510] Personal interview with Goli Mgazi and Bambatha Nkomo.
[511] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[512] Personal interviews with Bambatha Nkomo and Nicodemus Gwebu.
[513] Michael O. West. "The Seeds Are Sown: The Impact of Garveyism in Zimbabwe in the Interwar Years.: 335–62 348. Interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.

> Our grandfather had friends everywhere. When he was a young man, he was educated and worked in South Africa where he became friends with people from other ethnic groups such as the Xhosa in which he learnt their farming practices. He also became friends with a lot of South Africans of Dutch origin. From these relations, he was able to learn different dialects of the Afrikaans language. In addition, he was fluent in the English language and could therefore interact with individuals from different parts of the region.[514]

Using the lived experiences of Gwebu, it can be argued that a great deal of individual agency as opposed to state interventions played a role in the group's acquisition of agricultural technologies. Both oral histories and written records confirm that Gwebu was able to establish links with key individuals and institutions which allowed him to access new knowledge and material possessions. Nicodemus Gwebu's account suggests that there were a lot of means outside the state that Gwebu could have acquired these technologies.

The individual efforts by Chief Gwebu in establishing networks outside the realms of the state are well documented. In the mid-1920s while working in Cape Town, South Africa, Gwebu made efforts to establish a Southern Rhodesia branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), a pro-black movement led by American activist Marcus Garvey.[515] While in Cape Town, Gwebu recruited more than 200 Africans from Rhodesia to join the Southern Rhodesian branch of the South African National Congress (SANC).[516] After his return to Southern Rhodesia, Gwebu formed the Gwelo Native Welfare Association (GNWA) around 1926.[517] In June 1956, Gwebu was part of a team of African traditional leaders from Southern Rhodesia who attended the Capricorn African Convention in Nyasaland.[518] These interactions and networks facilitated the exchange of knowledge as Gwebu met with different people from different places at a time when most Africans were confined to their villages and townships through statutory instruments such

[514] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[515] M. O. West. "The Seeds Are Sown: The Impact of Garveyism in Zimbabwe in the Interwar Years". 349.
[516] Ibid, 349.
[517] Ibid.
[518] NAZ Files: Report of the Native Commissioner for the District of Buhera for the Year Ended 31 December 1956.

as pass laws. Like the Mgazis and Gwebus, other individuals and families contributed by bringing in machinery and technologies from cities and towns.

Town and country interactions

Some of the agricultural and conservation ideas that were implemented in the Gwebu area during the colonial period emanated from urban areas such as Salisbury and Bulawayo. The bringing of new knowledge, innovations and technologies was made possible by different Ndebele immigrants who worked in the respective towns and cities in Southern Rhodesia. The Masaile family which migrated to Buhera in 1945 benefitted immensely from their father who had earlier worked at white-owned commercial farms in the south-eastern parts of Gwelo between the 1930s and 1940s.[519] Masaile had worked as a general hand at Penny Farm where they cultivated maize on red and black soils.[520] It was at Penny Farm where Masaile acquired knowledge of large-scale production of maize on the black heavy soils.

Upon relocation to Buhera in 1945, Masaile briefly continued to offer labour services to Penny Farm. These connections enabled him to acquire agricultural equipment such as the novel double furrow ox-drawn ploughs which were still very rare in areas like Buhera.[521] The ploughs became important in working the tracts of uncultivated black heavy soils which he had been allocated on the peripheries of the Gwebu village. The area that Masaile had been allocated contained patches of swampy areas and the double furrow plough was the ideal machinery needed in doing the work. In addition to agricultural equipment, Masaile also acquired knowledge of maize production from his employer where the crop was being produced at a commercial scale. According to his son, Albert, upon his settlement in Buhera, Masaile quickly became one of the biggest maize producers

[519] Personal interview with Albert Masaile.
[520] Ibid.
[521] Ibid.

in the area and this resulted in him being envied by neighbouring Shona-speaking Makumbe who had settled in the area much earlier.[522]

Besides having connections with white commercial farmers, members of the relatively small Ndebele immigrant group had constant contact with Christian missionaries. These relations shaped agriculture and conservation back home in Buhera. One of the families that had close relations with the Christian missionary community was the Dema-Dema family from Charlton Village under Chief Gwebu. James Dema-Dema who was one of the first group of Ndebele immigrants who migrated to Buhera from Nkayi worked as an evangelist for the Anglican Church in the 1930s.[523] He worked at various Anglican Church outposts in Matabeleland and was transferred to St Georges in the Chizhou area of Buhera following his relocation.[524] After serving for a while, James was then transferred to Munyaradzi School which was closer to the Gwebu area where he had built his home.[525] He later transferred to Tsholotsho before his subsequent retirement.

Born in 1944 in Buhera, Masitulela Dema-Dema followed his father, James Dema-Dema, 's footsteps in maintaining close contact with the missionaries in particular and the town in general. Whilst his family lived in Charlton Village in Buhera, Masitulela worked in Salisbury and Bulawayo between the 1950s and 1960s.[526] He spent much of his adult life working for Anglican Church missionary Barbra Tredgold. Barbra, sister to the former Attorney General of Rhodesia, Sir Robert Tredgold, had earlier founded Runyararo Hostel in 1949.[527] Located in the then Harari Township in Salisbury, Runyararo Hostel was a philanthropic project providing working African women with

[522] Personal interview with Albert Masaile.
[523] Personal interview with Masitulela Demadema.
[524] Ibid.
[525] Ibid.
[526] Ibid.
[527] "Runyararo" https://www.rhodesianstudycircle.org.uk/runyararo/ Accessed 4 January 2023.

accommodation.[528] In addition, Barbra extended her work beyond providing shelter to promoting self-help agricultural projects for rural women in villages surrounding Salisbury.[529] Working closely as a general hand for Barbra Tredgold, Masitulela benefitted from the agricultural emancipatory projects that encouraged women to produce agricultural commodities for their sustenance.

Reflecting on the experiences of working closely with Barbra Tredgold, Masitulela revealed that his perception of women and agriculture was altered. As a result, he borrowed some of the ideas and introduced them back at home in Buhera. Dema-Dema's lived experiences share some similarities with those of his neighbour from Charlton Village, Charlton Nobula. While doing farming in Buhera in the 1930s, Nobula worked as a wagon driver at Daramombe Mission north of Buhera.[530] As a wagon driver, Nobula used his interactions with white commercial farmers and missionaries to acquire agricultural equipment such as ploughs for use back at home in Buhera. The link between Christian missionaries and agriculture is not surprising in the history of Southern Rhodesia. Emory Alvord who in 1926 was appointed Director of Native Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia was himself a missionary belonging to the American Methodist Episcopal Church. With his missionary background, Alvord became the face of agricultural transformation in colonial Southern Rhodesia. In other parts of Africa, missionaries belonging to different organisations incorporated agriculture in their curriculum as part of the broad evangelisation project. Historian Todd Leedy used the term agricultural evangelism to describe missionaries' interests in agriculture and conservation in colonial Africa.[531]

Individuals that connected the Gwebu group with the outside world even extended beyond the national boundaries. Before installation as chief of the Gwebu, Fish Gwebu had earlier worked at

[528] Runyararo" https://www.rhodesianstudycircle.org.uk/runyararo/ Accessed 4 January 2023.
[529] Personal interview with Masitulela Dema-Dema.
[530] Personal interview with Paul Mbulelo Tshabalala.
[531] Todd H. Leedy. "The World the Students Made: Agriculture and Education at American Missions in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1930-1960". 447.

Cape Town Hotel in South Africa before his subsequent return around 1925. His grandchildren including Nicodemus believe Gwebu acquired knowledge of cultivating black heavy clays from his Xhosa colleagues and Afrikaans farmers in the Cape Province.[532] He also brought six-wheeler ox-drawn wagons when he returned from South Africa in 1925 which were instrumental in agriculture following the subsequent relocation to Buhera.[533] In addition, one of Chief Gwebu's sons, Isaiah, was one of the few Africans from Southern Rhodesia who fought for the Allied powers during the Second World War between 1939 and 1945.[534] Isaiah fought in Ethiopia, South Africa, and Botswana under the Southern Rhodesian Army.[535] Following demobilisation in 1945, Isaiah worked for Fox and Bookless as a driver in Bulawayo.[536] Working as a driver gave Isaiah even a better opportunity to establish contact with many people and many parts of Rhodesia. Such interactions resulted in new ideas and innovations being borrowed for implementation back in Buhera.

As argued by sociologist Jens A. Andersson, Buhera has historically been connected to urban centres such as Harare because of what he terms chain migrations.[537] Andersson argues that close ties between town and country were largely enabled by labour migrations which made it possible for the establishment of everyday connections moderated by a vibrant public transport system.[538] With most villagers from the Gwebu immigrant group having acquired basic education and having been previously exposed to Christianity and the colonial economy, the divide between town and country was only in theory. The coming of modern agricultural equipment such as ploughs, wagons, and shelling machines was thus made possible. This partly explains why the agricultural

[532] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[533] Ibid.
[534] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Burial of Gwebu "Eulogy" Isaiah Fish Gwebu 16 January 2001.
[535] Ibid.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Jens A. Andersson. "Reinterpreting the Rural–Urban Connection: Migration Practices and Socio-Cultural Dispositions of Buhera Workers in Harare". 82–112.
[538] Ibid.

and conservation ideas practised by the Gwebu contained a delicate balance of both modern and traditional norms and this ultimately gave it a complex character.

The role of Fengu and Xhosa minorities in agricultural development

As discussed in Chapter One, the Ndebele immigrant group was historically diverse. It included not only closely-knit Khumalo families but also smaller units of Xhosa, Swati and Fengu families that had immigrated to Rhodesia between the 1880s and early 1900s. Upon settlement in Rhodesia, Fengu and Xhosa were allocated a place of settlement in Mbembesi near Bulawayo. Later, these groups joined Ndebele-speaking communities due to shared linguistic and historical connections. In 1925, the groups were collectively served with eviction orders resulting in them having a shared experience of relocating to Buhera. These shared historical connections somewhat blurred the internal differences, resulting in the diverse groups being generalised as the Ndebele. A socio-environmental approach allows one to delineate the specific contributions of these smaller groups and families to the entire agricultural organisation of the Ndebele immigrant group in Buhera during the colonial period.

Most of the products, livestock and technologies that enabled the Ndebele immigrants to succeed in the areas of conservation and agriculture were acquired by minority families. For example, the Gwebu people owned mules which were brought from Matabeleland mainly by the Fengu families who had in turn brought them from South Africa. Mules were a hybrid of horses and donkeys and most of these were domesticated in South Africa.[539] They were particularly important as a source of draught power and were used to transport grains from the farmlands to houses for storage. In some instances, they were used as draught power in farming because of their endurance compared to cattle.[540] The different breeds of livestock brought by the Xhosa and Fengu perfectly met the

[539] Nancy J. Jacobs. *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History.* 103.
[540] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.

agricultural needs of the group which included the transportation of grains from one place to another.

Besides introducing new livestock breeds such as mules which shaped everyday agriculture, the Fengu had exceptional knowledge of using and modifying agricultural equipment such as ploughs. Historically, the Fengu were one of the first African communities to adopt the use of the plough in Southern Africa.[541] By virtue of their access and familiarisation with the plough, the Fengu became innovative farmers and white commercial farm owners could not help but depend on their expertise in agriculture.[542] When some white farmers decided to migrate to Southern Rhodesia between the 1880s and early 1900s, they brought with them Fengu families. In turn, the Fengu households brought with them ploughs which they had been using in South Africa for use in farming. They also brought livestock which included cattle, sheep, goats, and mules. A descendant of the Fengu, Shadreck Nxusani, reminisces that in 1890, the group even attracted the attention of Cecil John Rhodes who had just been granted a charter by the British government to colonise the Zimbabwean plateau.

> He (Rhodes) realised that the amaFengu could be brought to Zimbabwe, they would show the Ndebele western culture- education, Christianity, agriculture, how to span oxen: all sorts of things. The amaFengu introduced the spanning of cattle. Earlier, the amaFengu had come to this country as Pioneers- driving ox-wagons.[543]

This leads to the realisation that the Fengu immigrants from South Africa comprised a group of agricultural experts that accompanied the Pioneer Column, Christian missionaries and white settlers. It is however misleading to treat the Fengu as pawns that only came to Southern Rhodesia with western knowledge of farming. Much of their knowledge of farming and the conservation of natural resources emanated from their indigenous knowledge.

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[541] Manduleli Bikitsha. "AmamFengu: Re-thinking Fingoism/Fingoness: Contextualizing Hintsa's approach" no page numbers.
[542] Ibid.
[543] Ibid.

As the Fengu moved and relocated from one place to another in colonial Southern Rhodesia, they carried with them different material technologies and expertise. This explains how Fengu families who had settled among Ndebele families in Mbembesi carried their ploughs, wagons and knowledge of farming to Buhera where they settled under Chief Gwebu in the 1920s. Notable was their expertise in the use, maintenance, and modification of agricultural machinery. Over the years of using ploughs, the Fengu were even making their double furrow ploughs and modifying new models to suit the new heavy soil environments.

In addition to the double furrow plough, the Fengu and other Ndebele-speaking communities adopted mechanised ox-drawn planters and hand-operated maize shellers. The mechanised planters were manufactured by an American-based company, Deere and Mansur Company.[544] According to the company records, the double-row planter models were manufactured between 1877 and 1910 in Illinois.[545] The remaining planters found in the Gwebu area in Buhera are labelled 'Deere and Mansur Company' and were manufactured during this period.

[544] "The Plowshare: News for John Deere Collectors". Issue 23, https://myjohndeere.deere.com/en_US/docs/Corporate/fans_visitors/publications/plowshare_issue23.pdf, accessed 16 August 2021.
[545] Ibid.

Figure 5: *Mr Goli Mgazi demonstrating how he used the Pollard Series mechanised planter which was acquired by his father in the 1940s. Photo taken by the researcher at the Mgazi home in Buhera.*

The ox-drawn planter contained two compartments which systematically dropped the seed and this gave the process some level of precision in as much as planting was concerned. It also came with a control seat where the operator would seat and direct the machine to give additional accuracy. One aspect that was common on these two double furrow ploughs and planters is that they demanded a considerably high amount of draught power. This explains why the Gwebu consistently maintained agile crossbreeds of cattle. Like the double-furrow plough, planters and shellers came to Buhera through Fengu families.[546] Maize shellers were hand-operated and used to shell large quantities of maize within a short space of time. The Ndebele in Buhera adopted the Pollard Series model which came into Southern Rhodesia via South Africa.[547]

[546] Personal interview with Paul Mbulelo Tshabalala.
[547] Personal interviews with Bambatha Nkomo and Nicodemus Gwebu.

Figure 6: *A disused maize shelling machine photographed by the researcher at the late Kufa Mgazi's homestead.*

Besides expertise in modifying and maintaining ploughs, the Fengu had also mastered the art of spanning cattle and wagon driving. This is explained by the fact that a significant number of Fengu immigrants came as wagon drivers working with the white settlers since the 1890s. Different generations of Fengu immigrants worked as wagon drivers one after the other. Paul Mbulelo Tshabalala who was born to a Fengu family in Mbembesi in 1936 avers that his father worked as

a wagon driver (*mutyairi wengoro*) at Daramombe Mission between 1946 and 1958.[548] He argues that it was the Fengu people who were the first African wagon drivers in Southern Rhodesia.[549] Cattle spanners worked on white settler farms and were particularly influential in establishing white commercial farmlands in the country. With all this experience amassed over several decades and handed down from one generation to another, the Fengu immigrants played a pivotal role in introducing ploughs to Buhera during the colonial period. Albeit with some nostalgic elements, the Fengu claim that they "enlightened" many places such as Umtali and Salisbury due to their skills.[550]

Figure 7: *The picture shows the frame of a two-furrow plough found at Bambatha Nkomo's homestead. In the picture, Goli Mgazi (left) and Bambatha Nkomo (right) demonstrating to the researcher how the plough was used. Picture taken by the researcher.*

[548] Personal interview with Paul Mbulelo Tshabalala.
[549] Ibid.
[550] NAZ Files: AOH/110 Interview with Shadreck Nxusani (born 1886), at Fingo Location, Mbembesi, 5 November 1981, interviewed by Mark Ncube.

Based on oral histories gathered in the Gwebu area, double furrow ploughs were not known in the area until the Ndebele-speaking immigrant group that included the Fengu and Xhosa minorities arrived in the 1920s.[551] In his 1927 end-of-year report, the NC for Charter District acknowledged the "large scale" influx of ploughs which were coming from other provinces.[552] Although the administrators were able to document the influx, they could not exactly trace the impact of the equipment in terms of agricultural production.

Furthermore, the arrival of Xhosa immigrants who settled in the Charlton area under Chief Gwebu saw the introduction of multiple cattle spanning. Before their arrival, the use of spans of 12 to 16 cattle was uncommon because the Shona-speaking Makumbe farmed sandy soils which did not require much draught power.[553] The Makumbe traditionally used spans of two oxen because they used single furrow ploughs and hand hoes. The system of multiple spanning in agriculture correspondingly resulted in the need to maintain comparatively larger herds. To effectively fulfil the ploughing and transportation tasks, especially during the farming seasons, the Ndebele needed comparatively agile and drought-resistant breeds. The numerical superiority and the hybrid quality of Ndebele herds in Buhera is therefore explained by their need to meet their specific agricultural demands.

It was the multiple cattle spanning system used by the Ndebele-speaking immigrants in Buhera that allowed them to farm the black soil farmlands within a short space of time. The heavy texture and adhesive character of the soil needed the farmers to rely on more than the traditional two-span system used by the neighbours who had comparatively light soils. The use of multiple spans

[551] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[552] NAZ Files: S235/505 District Annual Reports, Report of the Native Commissioner of Charter for the year 1927.
[553] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo. Information gathered from the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition also shows that four-wheeler wagons required 12-16 oxen or 4 horses.

was easy to introduce in Buhera for the Ndebele because they had used the system previously whilst still in Matabeleland where they farmed similar types of soils.

Closely related, access and ability to drive the four-wheeler wagons by the Fengu also allowed them to contribute to food security in Buhera. For example, when the Mgazi family relocated to Buhera in 1945, there was a grain shortage owing to droughts. With the aid of four-wheeler wagons and expertise in spanning cattle, Kufa Mgazi started a grain-supplying business which saw them regularly travelling to Gwelo to purchase grains for resale in Buhera.[554] He was given the moniker *Sengejira*, a Shona phrase meaning "carry a blanket", which was a metaphorical reference to abundant food in his household - visitors were welcome to spend nights eating food varieties of their choice.[555] Kufa Mgazi's grain-supplying business was particularly helpful in 1947 when Southern Rhodesia as a whole suffered a national drought.[556] Most villagers from the neighbouring Makumbe were affected by this drought owing to poor harvests. Kufa Mgazi provided timely assistance by sourcing grains from Gwelo and selling them to his neighbours. The transportation of large quantities of grains was made possible by the availability of his four-wheeler wagon which carried comparatively huge amounts as compared to the traditional two-wheeler scotch carts.[557]

Community-led conservation initiatives

At a time when the colonial government assumed that Africans were involved in the wanton destruction of forests, Ndebele immigrants in Buhera resorted to sustainable use of natural resources by constructing stone-walled cattle pens. Using only stones, peasants such as Kufa Mgazi were able to construct cattle pens large enough to accommodate as many as a hundred cattle at their homesteads. At the time of conducting research between 2020 and 2021, these stone pens

[554] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[555] Ibid.
[556] Personal interview with Goli Mgazi.
[557] Ibid.

some of which were constructed in the 1950s were still in use and standing firm. Similar structures were also found at the Nkomo, Gwebu and Ndlovu homesteads.

Figure 8: *The image shows part of the wall of a cattle pen constructed by Kufa Mgazi at his home in 1958. Above the wall is the traditional wooden yoke used for yoking cattle. The Gwebu School appears in the distance.* Photo taken by the researcher.

The Ndebele immigrants made a deliberate and conscious move to use stones for construction to save the surrounding indigenous forests.[558] This collective decision was based on the Ndebele environmental philosophy that the construction of wooden pens would encourage rapid deforestation. It is indeed true that had the Ndebele opted for indigenous timber, forests would have been easily decimated because several families owned cattle and needed to construct kraals for their livestock. The cattle pens were not only introduced to reduce deforestation, but they were also durable.[559] Besides the need to conserve the indigenous forests, Ndebele immigrants resorted

[558] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[559] Personal interview with Goli Mgazi.

to stone cattle pens as a security measure against predators such as hyenas. According to Bambatha Nkomo, when the Ndebele arrived in the 1920s, the area was infested with wild animals and hyenas were the biggest threat to cattle and goats.[560] Stone pens were comparatively secure because they did not leave any gaps, unlike wooden pens.

The stone livestock kraals were designed to be spacious for a reason. They were part of a complex indigenous grazing system. Under the Ndebele indigenous grazing scheme, villagers fed their cattle from the pens without necessarily taking them out to the pastures. This was done during specific seasons of the year especially just after harvesting from around April. Maize and groundnut stalks were seasoned with salt to provide the much-needed nutrients for the cattle. During this period when the cattle would be confined to the pens, Ndebele villagers would take the time to closely monitor the health of the herds and even nurse the wounds that would have been inflicted on them during the farming season.[561] Those that were ill were put on special feeding schemes and treated with indigenous remedies such as liquefied concoctions of cow dung mixed with herbs, soot, ashes and salt.[562] While cattle owners used this season which lasted about three months to closely monitor their herds, it was also a period when large amounts of organic manure from cattle droppings were produced in preparation for another farming season.

Another form of indigenous pasture management practised by the Ndebele in Buhera involved a periodic rotation of grazing lands. Under this system, livestock herds were often rotated from one pastureland to another to allow the grass to regenerate. According to Bambatha Nkomo, the phrase that was used by Ndebele elders was "*mafuro anofanira kuzorora*"- there was a need to give the pastures some rest.[563] This practice was a livestock equivalent of shifting cultivation practised by

[560] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[561] Ibid.
[562] Ibid.
[563] Ibid.

the Bemba of Zambia in which fields were left to regenerate for some time.[564] Regarding shifting cultivation, environmental historian Vimbai C. Kwashirai argues that shifting cultivation was successful in sparsely populated areas and helped in the conservation of forests and lands.[565] By the same token, it can be argued that the indigenous grazing management scheme which allowed pastures to regenerate ensured sustainable conservation while at the same time reducing the risk of overgrazing. This practice was implemented in the 1940s and was abandoned in the 1980s following the death of Chief Gwebu.[566] The 1980s saw a significant population rise and increased occupation of lands. Some pastures were turned into farmlands and homes resulting in the subsequent decline of the scheme.

The Ndebele immigrants' indigenous grazing system was so established that Chief Gwebu wanted to spread it to neighbouring groups. In 1970, before his death, Chief Gwebu wrote to local colonial administrators expressing his desire to expand Ndebele indigenous grazing management scheme to his neighbouring Shona-speaking Garamwera under chief Makumbe.[567] According to oral accounts, conflicts over pastures had been a bone of contention with Chief Gwebu blaming his Shona-speaking neighbours for overgrazing the communal pastures.[568] The Ndebele immigrants had proposed a holistic grazing management scheme in which all herds from all chieftaincies such as Gwebu and Makumbe would be centrally managed by foraging only in allocated grazing areas.[569] This would in turn allow the little available pastures to be conserved. Characteristic of most colonial officials, Latham, the District Commissioner, expressed his scepticism on the feasibility of the scheme citing technical reasons such as the need for "tight planning".[570] Although the

[564] H. Moore, and M. Vaughan. *Cutting Down Trees, Gender, Nutrition, Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990.* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994). 57.
[565] Vimbayi C. Kwashirai. "Dilemmas in Conservationism in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1930.". 543.
[566] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[567] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: "Office of the District Commissioner, Buhera to Provincial Commissioner, Manicaland, 14 April 1970. "Grazing Scheme, Chief Fish's Community".
[568] Personal interview with Masitulela Dema-Dema.
[569] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Office of the District Commissioner, Buhera to Provincial Commissioner, Manicaland, 14 April 1970. "Grazing Scheme, Chief Fish's Community".
[570] Ibid.

request by the Ndebele immigrants was not implemented, these records show the Ndebele agency in attempting to spread their indigenous pasture management practices to their Shona-speaking neighbours.

This indigenous cattle management scheme demonstrates that Ndebele immigrants had an all-inclusive approach towards sustainable use of resources in which livestock production, crop cultivation, soil preservation and conservation of forests were all done holistically. This demonstrates that the Ndebele immigrant group was not only environmentally conscious but also debunks the myth that evicted African communities in Southern Rhodesia were involved in the wanton destruction of forests because they did not have historical entitlement to places they settled in.[571] Ndebele immigrants in Buhera had a sound conservation scheme that was holistically managed from the cattle pens and extended beyond. It was so well established that it was part of their being. This explains why Kufa Mgazi was buried right at the centre of his stone-walled cattle pen, and this is evidence to show the enduring legacy of Ndebele conservationist practices.[572]

Women and indigenous seed management

After settling in Buhera, Ndebele women played an immense role in sustainable agriculture through the preservation of various seed varieties. Women were particularly influential in establishing communal and individual seed banks. Nicodemus Gwebu described how his grandmother (Chief Gwebu's wife, MaKhumalo) and other women in the area took care of seeds.

> My grandmother and other local Ndebele-speaking women used to prepare seed to be used in the next season just after we had harvested. Seed was very important for them because the best grade of grains, for example, maize, were preserved and not consumed. In fact, the identification of seed was the first process that took place just after harvesting. When

[571] Muchaparara Musemwa. "From Wanton Destruction of Timber Forests to Environmentalism: The Rise of Colonial Environmental and 'Sustainability' Practices in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1938-1961". *Environment and History*. (November 2016, 22:10) 521-559.
[572] Personal interview with Goli Mgazi.

> seed had been selected, then normal harvesting and processing would then take place. They spent a lot of time selecting and preserving seed.[573]

The agency of Ndebele women in seed preservation can be traced back to the eviction, migration and settlement processes in the late 1920s. Narrating how the migration process unfolded in 1928, Bambatha Nkomo revealed that the four-wheeler ox-drawn wagons came to Buhera loaded with bags of different sorts of grains.[574] Among an assortment of these grains brought by the Gwebu from Matabeleland were selected seed varieties such as groundnuts, cowpeas, brown rice (also referred to as *ingqoloyi*), maize, and sweet potatoes.[575]

The Ndebele immigrant group, like most indigenous communities, was characterised by a division of labour in agriculture. The agricultural history of Africa shows that rural women had specialised knowledge of certain agricultural products resulting in some form of monopolies. In colonial Sudan, for example, women and men had different responsibilities in the production of sorghum. Towards harvesting, men and boys would ensure the fields were secure from birds and other preying animals while women and girls interacted closely with the crops through weeding and gathering of edible plants.[576] Women and girls' close relations and lengthy interactions with the plants allowed them to acquire extensive knowledge of the best sorghum varieties available in their respective communities.[577] It is for this reason that women became responsible for the processes of seed selection and preservation, thereby occupying a position of power in the household and community food ecosystem.

It can be argued that women's roles in sustainable agriculture significantly reduced the subordination of women that came with the use of the plough and other mechanised technologies.

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[573] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[574] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[575] Ibid.
[576] V. Lewis and P. M. Mulvany. *A Typology of Community Seed Banks*. (Chatham: University of Greenwich, 1997). 5.
[577] Ibid.

The plough by its very nature was physically engineered to be used by men because of its masculine properties. Different oral accounts by male informants such as Bambatha Nkomo indicated that ploughing using mechanised equipment gave them dignity and prestige over their female counterparts.[578] Using the plough was generally associated with masculinity. This feeds into existing arguments by historians such as Elizabeth Schmidt who argue that colonialism in general and its accompanying civilisations were by and large patriarchal in southern Africa.[579]

At Penhalonga in the Manicaland Province of Southern Rhodesia, Abraham Kawadza was one of the first Africans to adopt a plough in the area in 1908.[580] Christian Missionary Reverend Roberts' description of Kawadza's first use of the plough clearly shows how the adoption of the new technology reinforced patriarchy. Roberts described how Kawadza ploughed the first furrow while his wives looked on in awe.[581] Their previously held power in influencing farming was reduced. Before the acquisition of the plough, Kawadza's three wives equally played a part in tilling the lands using short-handle hoes.[582] The adoption of the plough, according to Roberts, subsequently led to Kawadza divorcing his other two wives and only remaining with one.[583] Roberts's account is important in revealing how the plough altered household labour relations in Southern Rhodesia. It can be argued that indeed the plough was introduced as a masculine technology just like many other mechanised innovations of the colonial times which meant to keep women in the domestic spaces. Besides the plough, grain storage methods among the Ndebele were designed to favour men as opposed to women. Grains were stored in underground silos. These were spacious pits with a depth ranging between 3 and 5 metres where grains were stored. By their physical nature,

[578] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[579] Elizabeth Schmidt. "Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe." *Signs*. (1991, 16:4) 732–56.
[580] Todd H. Leedy. "The Soil of Salvation: African Agriculture and American Methodism in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1939-1962". (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Florida, 2000) 53.
[581] Ibid.
[582] Ibid.
[583] Ibid.

these facilities were masculine spaces because they demanded the use of ladders in retrieving or putting grains, often dangerous as one would risk falling.

Figure 9: A disused underground grain storage silo pictured at the late Kufa Mgazi's home. Photographed by the researcher.

Throughout the colonial period, Ndebele women in Buhera were able to disrupt the revolutionary effect of plough technology and agriculture in general by maintaining a seed monopoly. They were responsible for the selection, processing, and preservation of seeds. Unlike grains which were stored in underground silos which were physically engineered and not easily accessible to women, the seed was stored in largely feminine and secluded spaces. Much of the seed was stored in the round thatched kitchen huts in baskets, portable bottle containers, clay pots or paper wrappings.[584] Maize cobs selected for seed were hung in the walls close to the roof with a balanced exposure to both air circulation and smoke from the fire. The smoke would over time accumulate to form an

[584] Personal interviews with Nicodemus Gwebu and Ellen Nkomo.

outer coat of soot around the cobs. The soot would act as a preservative and repellent against insects. This method of preserving maize seed was also practised by the Shona-speaking groups in areas around Nyanga in Manicaland.[585] In addition to providing the necessary conditions and temperatures for preservation, these spaces such as kitchen walls allowed women to closely interact with and monitor their seeds. It was in these quiet, secluded, and feminine spaces where women constantly monitored their seed while they were doing other household-related chores such as cooking. Other seed varieties that did not require kitchen conditions were preserved in secluded rooms and isolated spaces in the domestic sphere.[586]

Among the Ndebele, women's control of the seed was reinforced by taboos embedded in local beliefs. Among the Gwebu, men were not allowed to carry baskets.[587] The handling of baskets by men in Ndebele culture was believed to make them weak in bed.[588] Baskets had several functions in the processing of seeds and grains. They were primarily used by women in shelling, winnowing, sieving and storage of seeds. They were therefore synonymous with women's role as custodians of the seed. However, this tradition was not limited to Ndebele communities in Buhera. Scholars of development studies such as Matsa and Mukoni acknowledge the existence of the belief among various Ndebele-speaking groups in Matabeleland.[589]

[585] Matsa Winniefridah and Mukoni Manuku. "Traditional Science of Seed and Crop Yield Preservation: Exploring Contributions of Women to Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Zimbabwe". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 3 No. 4. (February 2013) 236.
[586] Personal interview with Ellen Nkomo.
[587] Personal interviews with Bambatha Nkomo and Ellen Nkomo. See also Matsa Winniefridah and Mukoni Manuku "Traditional Science of Seed and Crop Yield Preservation: Exploring Contributions of Women to Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Zimbabwe". 236
[588] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
[589] Matsa Winniefridah and Mukoni Manuku. "Traditional Science of Seed and Crop Yield Preservation: Exploring Contributions of Women to Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Zimbabwe". 239.

Figure 10: *An old pounding vessel (duri) which was used for processing grains and seeds by Ellen Nkomo at the Nkomo homestead in Buhera. Behind is a modern two-wheel ox-drawn scotch cart used for everyday transportation of goods.* Photo taken by the researcher.

The existence of these taboos helps in historicising women's control of the seed among the Ndebele. It shows that women's monopoly of the seed had been passed down from one generation to another and collectively maintained and regulated through taboos. The use of such taboos among the Gwebu feeds into the prevailing conversations on decoloniality on indigenous ways of knowing and how they helped in sustainable agriculture and conservation.[590] At the same time, these accounts challenge colonial ways of thinking which viewed all African indigenous practices in Southern Rhodesia as harmful to the environment.

[590] *See* Aditya Nigam. *Decolonizing Theory: Thinking across Traditions*. (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

Both the seed varieties and knowledge of seed preservation were shared in a typical commons fashion among the Ndebele women. Ethnography of seed preservation indicates that it was mainly the elderly women who had the biggest reserves of different crop varieties and could therefore share the seed with other women. Closely related to this, they also imparted knowledge about preservation to the younger generations. Different seed varieties were freely shared among women groups through local networks of kinship and social ties. This was a form of commoning because these seed varieties were distributed freely among the women. Contrary to assumptions that Ndebele-speaking women were confined to their social sphere, a closer look at the seed networks in Buhera reveals close interactions between different ethnic groups. There was interaction and exchange of seed varieties between Ndebele and Shona-speaking women. Shona-speaking women from the neighbouring Makumbe often brought drought-resistant seed varieties of crops such as sorghum and millet which they cultivated in their drier and sandy farmlands.[591] In exchange, Ndebele women had significant amounts of brown rice and sweet potato seed varieties which thrived in their seasonal vegetable gardens. These close relations continued to take place even in the 1960s when there were violent *dzviti ngarirobwe* (let the Ndebele be beaten) clashes between the Ndebele and Shona-speaking Garamwera villagers over boundaries and agricultural land.

At a time when the colonial government was encouraging African farmers to adopt industrially produced and scientifically tested seed varieties,[592] Gwebu women preserved seed in local seed banks and local networks in ways that preserved the environment and fostered social cohesion. The household seed banks and local seed networks were emancipatory to women whose position in rural agriculture had been threatened by the adoption of mechanised equipment by their communities and pre-existing patriarchal traditions. In the face of this double subordination, seed banks and seed distribution networks became important avenues through which women

[591] Personal interview with Ellen Nkomo.
[592] Emory D. Alvord. "The Gospel of the Plough and Superstition". 3.

maintained their influence in farming by using their monopoly of seed to influence aspects like which seed varieties to plant, where to cultivate, and how the product would be distributed. Seeds were also emancipatory because they gave women power and dignity in the household.[593] These nuances show that the successes of agriculture and conservation programs of the greater immigrant group were not necessarily a product of colonial forces, but a local initiative where actors such as women played a key role. As part of the broader immigrant society, Ndebele women interacted with the environment in sustainable ways, thus proving wrong an earlier conservationist alarm by the colonial government.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the origins of the discourse of modernity which was used by colonial officials in Buhera to make sense of the agricultural boom and conservation successes by the Ndebele evictees under Chief Gwebu. It is argued that the effect of the discourse of modernity takes away the agency of African evictees and gives credit to the colonial government and its respective institutions such as native agricultural demonstrators. The chapter locates specific individuals, groups and families and identifies their precise contributions to agricultural production and the conservation of natural resources. The agency of Africans in conservation and agriculture refutes earlier assumptions which linked evicted Africans to the malicious destruction of forests and poor farming methods. The chapter has argued that some of the local groups that shaped agriculture and conservation work included marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, the peasantry and rural women. By locating the specific innovations of these particular groups at different moments in history, the chapter amplifies the agency of Ndebele immigrants in general in making sustainable use of natural resources and interacting creatively with the environment even

[593] Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC). "Advancing Food Sovereignty Through Seed Saving an Activist Guide Our Seed Bank". (2016). 16.

in times of colonial racial vilification and environments marred by insecurities such as lack of belonging - hostile landscapes.

CHAPTER FIVE:

LANDSCAPE, IDEOLOGY AND THE STRUGGLES FOR BELONGING AND LEGITIMACY IN COLONIAL BUHERA

Introduction

The previous chapters have demonstrated that Ndebele immigrants in Buhera deployed various strategies such as waiting in dealing with forced removals. While it is clear that they succeeded in overcoming various ecological challenges, the different ways they used to navigate socio-political challenges remain understudied. Yet the first-comer Shona-speaking Makumbe throughout the entire colonial period challenged and contested the historical legitimacy of the Ndebele in Buhera in various ways. The bone of contention emanated from the belief among the Shona-speaking Makumbe that the immigrants settled in an area that they believed was theirs. The Makumbe argued that the Ndebele did not belong and they were not the legitimate owners of the land. The Makumbe viewed the Ndebele as outsiders who did not belong to the area. This lack of belonging and legitimacy by the Ndebele was one of the uncertainties that confronted them in Buhera throughout the colonial period between the 1920s and 1980.

This struggle for belonging between the Makumbe and the Ndebele saw both groups using landscape to put across their respective narratives and counter-narratives of legitimacy and belonging. This chapter identifies the use of landscape, natural environments as well the built environment by both the Makumbe and the Ndebele to contest and negotiate belonging. The chapter, therefore, uses the environment to make sense of social relations. The merging of the environment and social relations is at the core of environmental history which treats nature and humans as interwoven. This merging of social relations and the environment allows the chapter to understand how aspects of nature were implicated in the ongoing struggles for belonging in Buhera.

To fully understand how the environment was used in the struggles for belonging in Buhera, one needs to go beyond the discipline of environmental history. There is a need for a multidisciplinary approach because the environment means different things to different disciplines. Just like water which can be studied from a biological, ecological, humanistic and philosophical perspective, the environment can also be understood from various perspectives. With this appreciation of the need for a multidisciplinary approach, this chapter uses concepts from ecology, human geography and anthropology to make sense of how the landscape was used in everyday struggles of belonging and legitimacy in Buhera between the 1920s and 1980. Among other things, the chapter relies on the personal lived experiences of the researcher, ethnography, observations, oral histories and colonial records.

The place of landscape in everyday socio-political processes in colonial Buhera

In 2014, I returned to Gwebu Village in Buhera where I had spent part of my childhood. I returned in a new capacity as a researcher doing fieldwork as part of my Masters research.[594] The research was a historical study of Ndebele immigrants and their relations with their Makumbe neighbours as well as their connections with their homeland, Matabeleland. It relied heavily on oral histories and ethnography. In my conversations with both Ndebele immigrants and their neighbouring Makumbe people, there were clear contradictions over land ownership. In their respective and often contradictory accounts, the use of landscape to support their claims was an outstanding aspect. Both the Ndebele immigrant group and the first comer Makumbe people referred to landscape, the natural environment and well as the built environment to support their claims of belonging and legitimacy.

[594] L. Hazvineyi. "Land, Politicisation of Identities, and 'Homeland': a History of the Gwebu and Njanja People of Buhera, 1960s to 2014". Unpublished, University of Zimbabwe. Harare. 2015.

I found these references to the environment similar to my lived experiences as a resident of Buhera earlier in 2002 when my family acquired a piece of land from a local villager. A few days after settling, the village head and two members of the traditional village council visited our new home and informed us that the land we had acquired belonged to someone else who was working outside the country. To support their claim, the village head and his advisors took my family on a tour of the farm and pointed to specific features of the environment. First, they identified several indigenous trees whose barks had been removed and heading in one direction forming a linear boundary that divided one piece of the land from the others. The trees were marked in a fashion that one could see them forming a straight line from the beginning to the end. The marked trees became a point of reference for the Ndebele traditional leadership to claim that the area was marked and belonged to someone else. At this point, the marked trees ceased to be just natural, but they began to enshrine a discourse of ownership, legitimacy, and belonging.

I highlight snippets of my biography because they are an important entry point into human-nature relations in the Sabi Reserve. Personal lived experiences, ethnography, colonial records as well as oral accounts collected from Buhera about the use of the environment during the colonial period make it imperative to conceptualise landscape as text. Bearing in mind the reality that the research and the researcher are intimately connected, my positionality is methodologically vital because I use my experiences to access both similar and dissenting voices.[595] Having previously experienced the use of landscape in localised politics of belonging, I approach the history of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera and their landscape ethnography with practical experiences that an outside researcher might not have.

In his study of pre-colonial south-central Chishanga, Mazarire avers that landscape played an important role in boundary-making processes. The same can be said for internal boundary-making

[595]Rukumbuzi Delphin Ntanyoma. "Fieldnotes, Field Research, and Positionality of a "Contested-Native Researcher". *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.* (2021, 20) 3.

processes in colonial Buhera among the Ndebele immigrants and their Makumbe neighbours. Landscape was used to make boundaries between households, farmlands, and villages. These included but were not limited to trees, springs, forests, rivers, and mountains. According to the 1967 NC report for Buhera District, the boundary which separated Gwebu and Munangati villages in Buhera included Mangwingwindi Forest and a natural water spring known as *Chisipiti chekwaMunangati* (Munangatis' spring).[596] The report gives a nuanced narrative of how the boundary came into existence. It claims that the traditional leaders from the two villages agreed on a specific demarcation and then "walked the boundary" as a way of sealing the agreement.[597] But that was not enough. Trees in the forest had to be marked (by removing the barks) using machetes and axes to give the agreed boundary a visible and readable form.[598]

The use of a natural spring and a forest in separating Gwebu's area from Munangati village highlights the importance of landscape in the making of boundaries among the neighbouring Shona and Ndebele inhabitants of colonial Buhera. The two natural features became important aspects of the broader environment in physically separating two villages which had different historical experiences. On one hand, the forest and the spring separated the Shona-speaking Munangati households from the main Gwebu block by allocating them land in the eastern parts of the area generally referred to as *nyika yaGwebu* (Gwebu's land).[599] The two landscapes gave the Shona-speaking Munangati clan complete control of the natural spring, the Mangwingwindi forests and the mountainous terrain east of the main Gwebu territory.

Landscape was also a site of collective and individual memories for the people of Buhera. Memory is defined by historians Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe as "making sense out of historical details in

[596] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: "Chisipiti chaMunangati and Mangwindwindi". To DC Buhera, Meeting Held to Discuss the Problem of Ndebele Kraals Living Outside Fish's Area, 25 April 1967.
[597] Ibid.
[598] Ibid.
[599] Telephone interview with Mthandazo Nkomo, 28 April 2020.

direct relation to political legitimacy".[600] Both collective and individual memory is in constant dialogue with the present and is subject to change depending on the existing present realities.[601] Collective memories of the Ndebele immigrant community are closely tied to the broad landscape of black soil ecologies. Each branch of the vast landscape historically served a specific function. For example, water bodies such as Chidzikisa River located at the centre of the main Gwebu territory were used as collective memory sites for the history of irrigation farming and agricultural success of Ndebele immigrant families dating back to the 1930s. With the aid of ox-drawn scooping dishes, Ndebele immigrants managed to construct makeshift dams by blocking the flowing water.[602] In the 1940s, people such as Bambatha and Ellen Nkomo harnessed water from the river into their man-made dams and thus had thriving perennial gardens near this river.[603]

[600] B. Jewsiewicki and V.Y Mudimbe. "Africans Memory and Contemporary History of Africa". *History and Theory.* (1993, 312: 4) 10.
[601] Ibid.
[602] Personal interview with Ellen Nkomo.
[603] Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.

Figure 11: The photo shows a broken-down scooping dish used by the Nkomo family to construct a makeshift dam close to their home. Photo by the researcher.

These individuals accumulated wealth and managed to send their children to school because of the income from market gardening. The official and nostalgic narrative constructed by Ndebele immigrants is that the river enabled them to carry out commercial farming by using irrigation equipment which enabled them to outdo their Shona neighbours. Chidzikisa River was therefore a site of collective memories about a successful past when Ndebele immigrants dominated their Shona neighbours when it comes to agricultural production and water harvesting techniques.

These can be qualified as memory and not history because they were narratives constructed from selected historical processes. Theorist Robert Novick differentiates the two by arguing that memory is subjective and operates from a single perspective while history strives for a complex

and objective account of the past.[604] These memories of agricultural superiority have been sustained over time and preserved across different generations to legitimise Ndebele claims to territory and belonging in Buhera while simultaneously challenging the hegemony of the first-comer Makumbe community. These processes reveal the power of landscape in constructing political and ideological discourses relating to belonging and land in colonial Buhera. The phenomenon of river landscapes as sites of memory in the environmental historiography of Zimbabwe is not new. In his historical study of the Dandawa chiefdom in north-western Zimbabwe, socio-environmental historian Ivan Marowa examines the role of a river valley landscape in sustaining memories of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe.[605] He argues for the importance of landscape not only as a site of life experiences but also as an active participant in historical processes.

Landscape in Buhera has also served an important function as a site for remembering the war of independence which reached its zenith between 1975 and 1979. On 12 January 1978, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) guerrillas killed Chief Gwebu in cold blood after accusing him of being a sell-out.[606] Disguised as Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF), the guerrillas tricked Gwebu into giving information about ZANLA fighters.[607] Chief Gwebu's fate was sealed after he fell for the trap and gave information about guerrilla operations. As the only Ndebele Chief in the whole of Manicaland and the founder and leader of the community, his death was an important event which was captured and preserved in the memories of the Gwebu community.

[604] Robert Novick cited in James V. Wertsch, "Texts of Memory and Texts of History" *L2 Journal*. (2012, 4) 12.
[605] Ivan Marowa. "Crossing the Boundary: Memories and Narratives of a River Valley Landscape during Zimbabwe's War of Liberation c. 1976–1980". *Landscape Research*. (2015, 40:1) 110-111.
[606] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: The Provincial Commissioner, Manicaland to the Internal Affairs Department, 26 September 1978.
[607] Personal interview with Goli Mgazi.

Nharirire mountains located near Gwebu School is the site where memories of Chief Gwebu's death were embodied. According to oral recollections surrounding Gwebu's death, the guerrillas came and left in the direction of Nharirire mountains just adjacent to the Gwebu royal court where the chief lived.[608] The mountain landscape is associated with sombre narratives of the death of a chief who was a victim of guerrilla brutality. The official narrative around Chief Gwebu given by his grandsons (Nicodemus, Phillip and Richman) exonerates him on the basis that he was questioned under duress and ended up giving out information about guerrilla operations[609] In addition, some individuals from the Gwebu community were suspected of selling out where also tortured and publicly flogged on the foot of Nharirire Hills where most ZANLA conscientisation meetings took places.[610] In 1980 when the war finally came to an end, the mountain landscape became an embodiment of stories of suspected sell-outs who were tortured and killed.[611] The Nharirire mountain landscape, therefore, carried sombre memories of allegedly innocent Ndebele civilians who were subjected to killing and torture at the hands of ZANLA guerrilla fighters.

It is important to note that the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe has been remembered differently. Physical places however played an important role in reconstructing the stories. For example, the Lupondo family in south-west Zimbabwe attaches recollections of war experienced to their homesteads which were battle sites during the Second Chimurenga war.[612] In a related study, Marowa chronicles how the Dandawa community in north-western Zimbabwe made specific reference to the Musukwe River landscape in their recollections of the liberation struggle.[613] Marowa takes the discussion forward by highlighting that the river landscape was a site of multiple and often contested interpretations of the liberation struggle.[614]

[608] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[609] Personal interviews with Nicodemus, Richman and Phillip Gwebu.
[610] Telephone interview with Dumisani Gain Makhoba, 17 July 2021.
[611] Ibid.
[612] Ivan Marowa. "Crossing the Boundary: Memories and Narratives of a River Valley Landscape during Zimbabwe's War of Liberation c. 1976–1980". 111.
[613] Ibid.
[614] Ibid.

In addition to being a site of remembrance, landscape in the Sabi Reserve played an important role in regulating local gender relations. This was particularly prevalent in the Ndebele-dominated Gwebu village where certain spaces in the natural environment were reserved for women and girls. Judging by the age of the informants, this took place in the 1960s and 1970s.[615] Areas along rivers where women did their laundry and bathed were no-go areas for men and boys.[616] Women did their laundry and bathing downstream along rivers where there was running water to avoid contamination of clean water sources upstream.[617]

According to Bambatha Nkomo, young boys were even forbidden from letting cattle drink from those spaces because they were entirely reserved for women.[618] Such waterscapes became salient due to their interactions with women and girls who frequented the areas for bathing and laundry. Although Gwebu ethnography does not give specific reasons why such spaces were reserved for women, there was a general belief among many sub-Saharan African communities that the naked female body was sacred.[619] In communities such as Buganda, the potency of the female body increased when the women were married or mothers.[620] In both Apartheid and contemporary South Africa, naked protests were historically used to attract the attention of those in power against injustices.[621] While the two given examples demonstrate the relationship between power and the female naked bodies, the case of Ndebele women in Buhera demonstrates that certain landscapes derived power from their interaction with female bodies. The salience of women and girls resulted in such places being reserved for females.

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615 Personal interviews with Bambatha Nkomo and Ellen Nkomo.
616 Ibid.
617 Personal interview with Bambatha Nkomo.
618 Ibid.
619 Mpho Mahebula "Nudity and Activism in South Africa". Forthcoming PhD Thesis. University of the Witwatersrand.
620 Sylvia Tamale. "Nudity, Protest and the Law in Uganda". Unpublished Inaugural lecture presented at the School of Law, Makerere University, 28 October 2016. 5.
621 Mpho Mahebula "Nudity and Activism in South Africa". Forthcoming PhD Thesis. University of the Witwatersrand.

In most historical writings on the colonial history of Zimbabwe, the position of women has largely been viewed as inferior in the power matrix that has male authorities such as kings and chiefs at its helm. Such studies have associated male figures such as kings and chiefs with the sacrality of landscapes. In his study of Great Zimbabwe, anthropologist Joost Fontein argues that the monumental landscape historically derived its power from the presence of spirits and voices of the dead.[622] In a separate study, Fontein chronicles how Great Zimbabwe and abounding areas such as Lake Mutirikwi were burial sites for the Mugabe, Nemamwa and Murinye chieftaincies with some of the graves belonging to the pre-colonial period.[623] The presence of the dead who then transformed into ancestors and spirits in these landscapes has been singled out as an important quality that makes these spaces powerful and thus has been used in claiming legitimacy by traditional leaders for the different chiefly lineages. In both studies, ancestors, and spirits are largely given agency and they are generally described as males. These assumptions playback the argument that women were on the peripheries of power. The case of Ndebele immigrant women in Buhera reveals women's power allowed them to have monopolies over certain landscapes, thus challenging the assumption that African women were always in the margins.

According to Beinart and McGregor, one of the key functions of landscape in society is to categorise different social groups.[624] This is supported by anthropologists Matanzima and Saidi who argue that the Zambezi Valley landscape inextricably gave meaning to the BaTonga even in instances when they were very far away. Matanzima and Saidi argue that,

> For the Zambezi Valley as a landscape, traditional (or historical) inhabitants therein, the Shangwe and BaTonga, have related and continue to relate to the landscape even as we

[622] Joost Fontein. *The Silence of Great Zimbabwe: Contested Landscapes and the Power of Heritage.* (New York: UCL Press, 2006).
[623]Joost Fontein *Remaking Mutirikwi.* 4-10.
[624] William Beinart and JoAnn McGregor. "Introduction". 4.

> find them far away from their ancestral lands after being dislocated by 'modernity'. Their relationship to the landscape is communicatively observable.[625]

This is true for Buhera where landscape played the role of categorising the first-comer from the late-comer groups. The Shona-speaking Makumbe identified themselves with the sandy soils which their forefathers had cultivated for centuries. They avoided setting in areas with black clays scattered in the area. As argued by Mazarire in his study of the pre-colonial historical geography of Chishanga in south-central Zimbabwe, Shona communities avoided landscapes that they deemed environmentally hostile.[626] Indeed, the Makumbe avoided areas with heavy black clays because they deemed them hostile in favour of the sandy light *senya* soils. According to Makumbe oral traditions, *senya* landscapes were easy to work and ideal for cropping even during drought years.[627] In addition, the sandy soils had the advantage of catalysing early maturity and early harvesting because they did not withhold water for a long time.[628] Comparatively, Ndebele oral histories indicate that the immigrants from Matabeleland preferred heavy black clays**.** One of the historical reasons was that their areas of origin in Mzingwane had black clays.

Although both Makumbe and Ndebele oral histories give the impression of clear-cut and linear land preferences and rigid settlement patterns, this was not entirely the case. The Makumbe relied on the black soil landscape for other things such as game meat because there were different wild animals.[629] The narrative that Ndebele immigrants occupied only black clays and the Shona preferred only sandy soils is rather a construct of local memories. These memories blur some important social dynamics. In the 1970s, some Ndebele-speaking individuals and families relocated to the main Makumbe country.[630]

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[625] Joshua Matanzima and Umali Saidi "Landscape, belonging & identity in North-west Zimbabwe: a semiotic analysis". *African Identities*. (2020,18:1-2) 237.
[626] Gerald C. Mazarire. "Changing Landscape and Oral Memory in South-Central Zimbabwe: Towards a Historical Geography of Chishanga, c. 1850–1990." *Journal of Southern African Studies.* (2003, 29: 3) 707.
[627] Telephone interview with Timothy Zandile Mushaikwa.
[628] Ibid.
[629] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[630] Telephone interview with Headman Makabeni, 27 June 2020.

One of the reasons for these internal movements was intermarriages between Ndebele and Makumbe families. Some of the marriages even involved the ruling Makumbe and Gwebu families. For example, one daughter from the Gwebu family was married off to the Makumbe, thus cementing relations between the two families.[631] Some Shona-speaking Makumbe families relocated from their ancestral lands into Gwebu territory due to land shortages.[632] As people moved across landscapes over time, identities and languages changed correspondingly.[633] As argued by Musoni, these interactions produced a hybrid culture as both groups borrowed each other's linguistic and cultural aspects.[634] In the face of this hybridity, it became difficult for members to categorise each other based on ethnicity alone. As averred by Timothy Zandile Mushaikwa who grew up in Doba Village, Buhera, it was difficult to tell if one was Ndebele or Shona due to historical interactions.[635] For both Ndebele and Makumbe people in the Sabi Reserve, categorising the self from the other was not always done using ethnic identities alone.

It is against this background that landscape was deployed as an alternative tool in social categorisation. Communities who inhabited black soil landscapes largely of Ndebele origin identified themselves with other societies which cultivated similar soils. Terms such as *varimi vechidhaka* (tillers of black clays) and *vagari vekusenya* (occupiers of sandy soils) were used to refer to the Ndebele immigrants and the Makumbe respectively.[636] Different landscapes became the common denominator through which people categorised themselves and other societies around them. This demonstrates that landscape, in addition to ethnicity, became an important tool in defining the self from the other.

631 Telephone interview with Headman Makabeni, 27 June 2020.
632 Ibid.
633 Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)Making of Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". *African Studies Review*. (2014,57:3) 80.
634 Ibid.
635 Telephone interview with Timothy Zandile Mushaikwa.
636 Ibid.

While landscapes were used by communities to define the self from the other, within the immigrant community, they were in some instances used to blur ethnic and historical differences to create homogenous and unified identities. As discussed in the previous chapters, the immigrant group referred to as the Ndebele was not homogenous and did not share a common identity. It was made up of the original Khumalo families such as the Gwebu and other smaller groups such as Xhosa, Fengu and Swati who had immigrated to Southern Rhodesia between 1890 and 1910.[637] Yet throughout the colonial period, this diverse group was known only as the Gwebu people. The creation of a unified Gwebu identity was done in two major ways. First, following their occupation of tracts of black soils in Buhera, the minority groups began to conveniently identify themselves with the broader Ndebele identity based on living in a shared geographical space characterised by black soil landscapes. Second, the neighbouring Shona broadly categorised all Ndebele-speaking immigrants as Ndebele. This is because the diverse group of immigrants had come in and occupied tracts of land with black soils and this created the assumption that the community had a similar ethnic identity.

The ideological role of landscape in Makumbe discourses of legitimacy

Oral interviews with Chiefs Makumbe and Gwebu, respectively, gave a picture of their communities' relations in Buhera as cordial. They both backed their arguments by citing an event in 1928 when Chief Makumbe welcomed Chief Gwebu and his people at a royal ceremony where goats were exchanged as gifts.[638] They both posit that the settlement of the Ndebele in Buhera was smooth and the parcelling out of the land was done cordially. However, by refocusing the historical gaze from social relations to a landscape approach, the relations between the two were much more complex and not as simplistic as the two traditional leaders portrayed. One of the factors that complicate the relations is the belonging of the Ndebele group in the Gwebu area of Buhera was

[637] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)Making of Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 80.
[638] Personal interview with Chiefs Makumbe and Gwebu.

always contested by their first-comer Shona-speaking neighbours. In navigating this challenge, the Ndebele immigrants deployed landscape to counter Makumbe contestations and persistent questions of legitimacy and belonging.

Since the settlement of the Ndebele in the 1920s, the Shona Makumbe communities, especially the Garamwera and Munangati clans who were their immediate neighbours, claimed that the former had no legitimate claim to the areas they settled in. Said differently, the Makumbe argued that the Ndebele did not have historically valid reasons to claim ownership of the lands. This narrative is backed by oral histories which claim that although the areas occupied by the Ndebele were not settled, they were not unclaimed.[639] The areas were traditionally used by the Makumbe for other purposes such as hunting wild game.[640] The Makumbe maintained the discourse that the Gwebu immigrants were newcomers (*vauyi*).[641] This can be qualified as a discourse because it was consciously crafted to achieve hegemonic dominance over the Ndebele immigrants.

The 1965 NCs report for Buhera acknowledged the lack of clear boundaries separating the Gwebu and Makumbe territories.[642] The lack of clearly defined boundaries put the two communities on a "collision course" as argued by Musoni.[643] On one hand, the Ndebele immigrants had the assumption that all tracts of land with black soils were unoccupied before their arrival and were therefore open for settlement.[644] The only boundaries that existed on the part of the Ndebele immigrants were therefore imagined and cognitive, thus making boundary-related conflicts inevitable.[645] On the other hand, the Shona "...claimed a boundary which included a portion of Chapwanya, Mbundiri and Marume, plain Chief Fish (Gwebu) and his kraals within his area".[646]

[639] Personal interview with Chief Makumbe.
[640] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.
[641] Ibid.
[642] NAZ Files S2929/1/1 Delineation of Communities: General Report on the Buhera District, 1965.
[643] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)Making of Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 84.
[644] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[645] See Lloyd Hazvineyi. "Land, Politicisation of Identities and Homeland". Unpublished MA Thesis. Department of History, University of Zimbabwe. Harare. 2015.
[646] NAZ Files S2929/1/1 Delineation of Communities: General Report on the Buhera District, 1965.

The boundaries claimed by the Makumbe were "not worth noting" according to colonial administrators because they were not only problematic but also contested by the neighbouring communities.[647] In the early 1960s, conflicts over these boundaries turned violent. The Garamwera community under Makumbe accused the Ndebele immigrants of taking over areas that historically and traditionally belonged to them. The Makumbe invoked violence to push their agenda resulting in the popularisation of the *dzviti ngarirobwe* (beat up the Ndebele) campaign of the 1960s. Violent skirmishes extended to public spaces such as Gwebu Shopping Centre where the two groups clashed against each other.[648]

Another strategy used by the Shona-speaking Makumbe to challenge the legitimacy and belonging of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera was through the naming of local landscapes. An area near Munangati village and Chidzikisa river was historically characterised by a thick forest of indigenous trees, *madungambeva* grasses and a perennial stream. The Makumbe referred to this area as *Gwidi raMunangati* (Munangati's forest).[649] In addition, there was also a natural spring where people got drinking water.[650] The spring was referred to as *Chisipiti chekwaMunangati* (Munangatis' spring), and the name delegated ownership to the Shona-speaking Munangati people under Chief Makumbe.[651] Like in colonial Gutu where names such as Bethel Farm were given to demonstrate their Christian belonging, names such as *Chisipiti chaMunangati* were meant to show that the spring belonged to the Munangati clan of the Makumbe.[652]

The Makumbe subjects such as Chafa Chigwende who grew up in the Munangati village insisted that the area was not only their forefathers' hunting ground but also an area they controlled and owned according to traditional customary laws.[653] Although the Makumbe did not necessarily build

[647] NAZ Files S2929/1/1 Delineation of Communities: General Report on the Buhera District, 196.
[648] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[649] Personal interview with Pardon Munangati.
[650] Ibid.
[651] Ibid.
[652] Joseph Mujere. "Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists, and Progressive Farmers: Basotho Struggles for Belonging in Zimbabwe 1930s-2008". 83-84.
[653] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.

their houses in these areas, the spaces were not unclaimed. Historian Mazarire terms these spaces "maximum exploitable areas" which were outside the "home range" and were not always defended yet they were habitually exploited.[654] These discourses enshrined in local landscapes and ethnography were deliberately churned out as a constant challenge to Ndebele belonging and historical legitimacy.

Closely related, the Makumbe chieftaincy official account heavily relies on landscape and physical geographical pointers to propagate the notion that the Ndebele immigrants did not have a legitimate claim to the territory and belonging in Buhera. According to Chief Makumbe's autochthonous knowledge of the area, the lands given to chief Gwebu and his people in 1928 were a landscape reserved for future agricultural use.[655] Despite being characterised by heavy black clays which demanded mechanised equipment, Makumbe revealed that the area was under the custody of his forefathers. This is supported by colonial district maps drafted in the 1930s showing Gwebu's area as only a small circular fraction inside the vast Makumbe territory.[656] It is further argued that the area was only given to Gwebu and his people as a site of temporary settlement (*nyika yekuzorora*) as the immigrants had given the assumption that they only wanted to rest en-route to the Chizhou area further south.[657] A similar account went on to claim that Chief Gwebu tricked the Makumbe by giving the assumption that they only wanted to temporary break from the journey.[658] Considering these historical processes, the official Makumbe chieftaincy account treats the area inhabited by the Gwebu as a landscape of temporary encampment they momentarily offered to the Ndebele. This account does not only delegitimise the immigrants but incriminates them for holding on to lands entrusted to them for temporary settlement.

[654]Gerald C. Mazarire. "Changing Landscape and Oral Memory in South-Central Zimbabwe: Towards a Historical Geography of Chishanga, c. 1850–1990". 706.
[655] Personal interview with Chief Makumbe.
[656] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Map of Makumbe Territory.
[657] Personal interview with Chief Makumbe.
[658] Ibid.

Throughout their history in Buhera, the Ndebele were historically viewed in exclusionary terms by their neighbours, the Makumbe. Among other things, the term *vauyi* (outsiders) had the effect of keeping the Ndebele at bay as perpetual outsiders.[659] Again, the term *madzviti* which was used especially during the early years of settlement was not only derogatory but also exclusionist in the sense that it evoked memories of the first arrival of the Khumalo people in the Zimbabwean plateau around 1840 under the leadership of Mzilikazi.[660] The term was used as a constant reminder that the Ndebele immigrants were late comers.

Ndebele counter-narratives of belonging through landscape

The Makumbe exclusionist discourses from 1928 to 1980 which sought to challenge Ndebele immigrants' claims of legitimacy and belonging did not go uncontested. To counter Makumbe discourses, the Ndebele immigrants invoked landscape to ascertain their claims. Aspects of the natural environment such as agricultural lands, river landscapes and the built environment such as schools were used to ascertain and negotiate their belonging and legitimacy in Buhera. Through various ways, the Ndebele immigrants constructed a specific discourse of legitimacy and belonging through how they narrated the landscape (both the natural and the built environment). How the immigrants narrated and accounted for the agricultural lands (characterised by black clay soils) and the Gwebu Primary School concentrated on how the arrival of the Ndebele transformed both the environment and society.

My first interview in Buhera in 2019 was a casual walk-about chat with the village head Nicodemus Gwebu at his residence. As one of the traditional leaders in the area, I anticipated that the walk-about would be an opportunity to be re-introduced to the community to pave the way for my research. Instead, he took me on a tour of the village farmlands where he showed me different

[659] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.
[660] Ibid. See also Musiwaro Ndakaripa. "Ethnicity, narrative, and the 1980s violence in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe." *Oral History Forum.* (2014, 34) 17.

pieces of land where Ndebele families grew various crops from as early as the late 1920s when they arrived in Buhera from Matabeleland. Some of the fields visited include the Gwebu, Nkomo, Ngulube, Moyo and Siziba farmlands - all in Nicodemus Gwebu's village. The farmlands visited were all in one area on the east of Nharirire Mountain near Gwebu School. As we surveyed one of the fields, Gwebu remarked that:

> You see this whole area? It was idle when our forefathers arrived in this area. There was nothing except thickets and forests. It was grandfather and other Ndebele families who first tilled these black soils. The Makumbe did not like the heavy black clays because *ivhu iri rinonamira* (the soils are sticky). We (the Ndebele) were the first to till these lands.[661]

To support his account, Nicodemus referred to some mundane commonplace features around the fields. Pointing to a thicket of indigenous trees (*gwidi*) at the edge of the field, Gwebu claimed that before the arrival of Ndebele immigrants, the entire area was like that forest - with only thickets and wild game. He claimed that the Ndebele transformed the area by clearing all thickets and cultivating the black soil landscapes into productive tracts of land from around 1928 when the first group of immigrants arrived and settled in the area. One of the farmlands that we visited had overgrown bushes and grasses after not being cultivated for several years. Shoving aside the knee-level grass and shrubs, Gwebu showed me old markings and furrow lines left behind by an ox-drawn plough. He used these almost invisible plough markings to support his claim that the Ndebele immigrants were the first to utilise black soils in Buhera. Picking up a pinch of the soil from the ground and mixing it with water from my bottle, Gwebu demonstrated the adhesive nature of the black clays on the hands of the farmer, and tools such as hoes and ploughs. The mixture formed a paste-like soil stuff that would continuously stick on fingers. According to Gwebu, the Makumbe people in the area shunned this sticky texture and referred to the soils *tsvina/ivhu rine tsvina* (dirty/filthy soils).[662]

[661] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[662] Ibid.

On a separate occasion towards the end of my fieldwork in 2021, while coming from Gwebu Shopping Centre going towards Gwebu Secondary School, Goli Mgazi instructed me to pull over because he wanted to show me one of his family farmlands. It was in April and they had already harvested and the fields had been ploughed in preparation for the next season.

Figure 12: *The photo shows part of Goli Mgazi's plot with the distinct black clay soils. Photo taken by the researcher.*

Mgazi spoke about how his father had worked hard to make lands cultivable and productive farmland out of a mere forest of indigenous trees and thickets that had been condemned by the Shona-speaking Makumbe communities.

> Before our parents migrated to Buhera, people could not freely move around this area because it was infested with dangerous wild animals such as snakes. It was through the hard work of our predecessors that we see this land as it is today. Even the Makumbe now envy us because of our lands. [663]

[663] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.

Mgazi, albeit with overtones of nostalgia, bragged of how the Ndebele used advanced agricultural technology such as two furrow ox-drawn ploughs to turn the landscapes into productive tracts of land. According to Mgazi, the Ndebele immigrants thrived agriculturally because they settled on and cultivated fertile lands. Mgazi justified his claim on the basis that the Makumbe preferred to cultivate on sandy soils which he referred to as *senya* in Shona.[664]

A similar narrative was also echoed by Ellen Nkomo who spent her entire adult life with her extended Ndebele immigrant family in Buhera. Nkomo's narrative was based on oral histories she got from her father-in-law, Duba-Duba Nkomo who had immigrated to Buhera from Esigodini together with Chief Fish Gwebu. She described how the area was infested with wild animals such as *nhoro* (kudus) and *mapimha* (antelopes) and thorny *jeka-cheka* (sharp bladed grasses).[665] Nkomo went on to claim that the black clay soils were difficult to cultivate, and it was through the ingenuity of the Ndebele that the areas were transformed into productive tracts of land.[666]

An important characteristic of these three different accounts collected from the Ndebele community in Buhera is that they are strikingly similar in making specific references to the black soil landscapes. This is not a coincidence. They all claim that Ndebele immigrants were the first to utilise tracts of lands with black soils following their settlement in 1928. While prioritising the pioneering role of Ndebele immigrants, these accounts attempt to distance Shona-speaking Makumbe communities from the areas with black soils by magnifying the belief that the latter had a natural dislike of the black soils, and they did not have sufficient technologies to transform the thickets into productive farmlands. These similarities which reflect the general nature of Ndebele immigrants' oral histories in Buhera reveal that these are carefully crafted discourses that were authored by the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera. This discourse was consciously created in a

[664] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[664] Ibid.
[665] Personal interview with Ellen Nkomo.
[666] Ibid.

specific moment in history between 1928 when the first arrived and the mid-1940s when the last group that included the Mgazi and Masaile families arrived.

The second fundamental characteristic of these accounts is that there is an unscrupulous absence of the Shona-speaking Makumbe people's agency in the Ndebele immigrants' narratives of landscape transformation in Buhera. There is historical evidence to suggest that following their settlement in Buhera in 1928, the Munangati and Garamwera clans who were the immediate neighbours to Chief Gwebu, and his people played a pivotal role in ensuring the success of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera. This was after Chief Gwebu and his people had been officially welcomed by Chief Makumbe at a public event in 1928 where gifts in the form of goats were exchanged between the two leaders.[667] Musoni supports this by noting that the two communities met not as adversaries but as friends.[668] Following their settlement, Makumbe traditional leaders such as Munangati and Garamwera closely interacted with the immigrants and supported them in their endeavours.[669] Some Shona-speaking Makumbe worked as wage labourers and this helped the Ndebele in agriculture.[670] Despite this evidence of general cooperation in the formative years of settlement, the agency, contributions and impact of the Makumbe in their individual and representative capacities are absent in the Ndebele narratives of landscape transformation.

These two characteristics consistent with Ndebele narratives of landscape transformation show that the accounts served a particular ideological agenda. In the face of persistent questions of legitimacy that were being propagated by the Makumbe, the Ndebele narratives of landscape transformation were crafted as a counter-narrative to justify and legitimise their presence in Buhera. By arguing that they were the first to use black soils, the Ndebele gave the assumption

[667] Personal interview with Chief Makumbe.
[668] Francis Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity and the (Un)Making of Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe". 84.
[669] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Speech by the Minister of Local Government and Public Works Honourable I.M.C Chombo at the Occasion of the Installation of Gaberones Gwebu as the Seventh Chief Gwebu of Buhera District at Gwebu School. 7 March 2006.
[670] WhatsApp interview with Dumisani Gain Makhoba.

that the area they occupied was unused and unclaimed. In addition, by erasing the agency of their Shona neighbours in discourses of landscape transformation, the immigrants propagated a pioneer discourse in which they delegated ownership of the lands to their Ndebele forefathers.

The acts of making specific and even physical reference to the black soils by Gwebu, Nkomo, and Mgazi during my fieldwork were very telling. It opened an analytical window to view landscape as an ideological script that embodies specifically crafted narratives. The narrative was that the Ndebele immigrant community were legitimate owners of the lands because they had played an important role in transforming the landscape from an uninhabitable territory into an agriculturally productive area. The similar narrative simultaneously silenced Makumbe voices and deliberately ignored their agency. The coherence of the narratives given by Nkomo, Mgazi and Gwebu, a second generation of Gwebu immigrants in Buhera, demonstrate that it was a narrative handed down to them, collectively embraced, and reproduced over time with the mission of negotiating their belonging and legitimacy.

The Gwebu school and counter-discourses belonging

Historian Klas Rönnbäck used the term the built environment to describe different structures erected by Africans on the West African Coast since the 15th Century.[671] These structures included temples, palaces, houses, and markets. An important contribution of this study is the notion that these man-made structures alter the environment and become part of everyday landscapes. It is against this background that buildings such as schools can be understood as part of the landscape through which communities express their being. I analyse the Gwebu School through the lens of theorist Ellen Hostetter who propounds that a building is a "living place, working primary

[671] Klas Rönnbäck. "The Built Environment of the Precolonial West African Coast: Materials, Functions, and Housing Standards". J*ournal of West African History*. (2020, 6:2) 2.

document, a direct, unmediated, and unfiltered source of information about people, their lives, and their experiences."[672]

The school was established in 1935 as the first educational institution in the Ndebele-controlled area under chief Gwebu.[673] This was after Duba-Duba Nkomo and Chief Fish Gwebu had spent several years consulting with Chef Makumbe, government officials and missionaries specialising in African education stationed at the Dutch Reformed Church-run Makumbe Mission School.[674] Before it received official recognition from the government, the school operated informally with people such as Chief Gwebu and his wife, MaNkomo, providing young children with basic reading and writing skills.[675] The school was built a few metres from Chief Gwebu's residence.[676] From the onset, the school was dominated by Ndebele-speaking teachers and students for two reasons. The first reason was that the school was built right at the centre of the Ndebele community. The geographical location of the school made it easy to be part of the fast-emerging Ndebele-built landscape in the 1930s Buhera. Second, the school was the only one of its kind offering IsiNdelele language education instead of Shona in the whole of Manicaland province.[677] The likes of Victor Nkululeko Mgazi and Albert Masaile are some of the beneficiaries who later returned to work as teachers at the institution after completing secondary education.[678]

[672] Ellen Hostetter. "Reading Place, Reading Landscape: A Consideration of City as Text and Geography". *Journal of the National Collegiate Honours Council.* (2006, 17: 2) 66.
[673] Personal interview with Ellen Nkomo.
[674] Ibid.
[675] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[676] Nicodemus Gwebu could not remember MaNkomo full name.
[677] Personal interview with Victor Mgazi.
[678] Personal interviews with Goli Mgazi and Masaile.

Figure 13: Chief Richman Gwebu standing in front of Gwebu Primary School constructed in 1935.
Photo credit: *Chronicle*, Nqobile Tshili.

Besides providing formal western education, the school was also used as an informal clinic by MaNkomo (chief Gwebu's first wife).[679] MaNkomo had earlier between the 1920s and 1930s trained as a nurse aid in Bulawayo and used her knowledge to provide basic healthcare services to the community.[680] In addition, the institution served as a meeting place for local community developmental meetings (*misangano*) presided over by Chief Gwebu and his traditional council.[681] These processes in history demonstrate how the built environment of the school was closely tied to Ndebele everyday social realities. Besides its role in spreading western education, the school was an important source of forging a unified Ndebele identity in Buhera and it was thus used by the immigrants to mirror their positive contributions to the development of the area they inhabited.

From the 1940s, Shona-speaking families from as far as Garamwera and Munangati areas began to send their children to acquire education.[682] Through formal learning and informal interactions

[679] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[680] Ibid.
[681] Ibid.
[682] Ibid.

with fellow children from Ndebele families, the Makumbe began to gradually adopt isiNdebele as a second spoken language and vice-versa.[683] The school as an idea and as part of the built environment was transformative in the sense that it became the source of Ndebele cultural hybridity. Young children from Shona-speaking families were introduced to the Ndebele language at school and eventually became fluent speakers.[684] During my fieldwork in April 2021, I encountered one Francis Madziva at a beer party. Born into a Makumbe Shona-speaking family, Madziva was educated at Gwebu Primary School between the 1950s and 1960s, but he could still recite Ndebele poems and sing Ndebele songs which he had learnt whilst he was still in school. He conversed in fluent Ndebele with Goli Mgazi. Mgazi and Madziva nostalgically ignited their childhood memories and even made a few dance moves they learnt at school in the 1950s, thanks to the convivial effects of traditional sorghum beer (*doro rematanda*) that they were imbibing that Saturday afternoon. These nuances around the history of the school are important in understanding why Ndebele immigrants maintained the narrative that they transformed the area by building the school.

The school had in many ways contributed to the transformation of the area. As a result of this, the Ndebele immigrants used this evidence of the school and its developmental effects to argue that they had made positive contributions to Buhera through education and infrastructure development. As a result, they argued that they were not outsiders but had immersed themselves to become part of the broader and diverse Buhera community. To construe their claims, the Ndebele referred to Gwebu School as evidence. As argued by cultural geography theorist Nancy Carlson Schrock, "the best sources for information about the built environment are the buildings or landscapes themselves".[685] The school as part of the built environment was read as a form of text to support their claim for legitimacy. It is against this background that the school landscape

[683] Ibid.
[684] Personal interview with Goli Mgazi and Francis Madziva.
[685] Gavin Schrock cited in Elizabeth England. "The Archive of Place and Land Art as Archive: A Case Study of *Spiral Jetty*. *The American Archivist*. (2017, 80: 2). N.p.

can be equated to text because it was used to sustain the narrative of Ndebele transformative developments in Buhera. In the same manner historians use evidence to sustain their arguments, Ndebele immigrants used the school as evidence of their contributions to local development in Buhera.

Historically, communities in different parts of Zimbabwe have used landscapes to support their claims of belonging and legitimacy. According to anthropologists Joshua Matanzima and Umali Saidi, the BaTonga communities in the Zambezi Valley area of north-western Zimbabwe have historically used their imaginative constructions of the environment to assert their claims of legitimacy and belonging.[686] They did this even in the face of hegemonic narratives around the construction of the Kariba Dam by western scholars which excluded their agency and visibility.[687] While equating landscapes to archives and text, Jeanette Bastian avers that:

> As communities construe their own spaces, their members often refer to archival records to support their interpretations, while others, standing outside a particular community or even within the same one may read those same spaces and those same records in very different ways.[688]

The physical existence of the school and its transformative effects on neighbouring communities became instrumental in the Ndebele community's claims for belonging and legitimacy in Buhera. Different oral narratives collected among Ndebele community members made clear reference to the school while simultaneously claiming their belonging. According to Ellen Nkomo:

> There was not a single school in this area when our forefathers arrived here. Gwebu Primary School was introduced in 1935 after my father in-law, Duba-Duba Nkomo and Chief Gwebu had made a formal application for a school to be established here. Chief Makumbe initially shot down the idea of establishing a school before we got support from missionaries at Makumbe Mission School.

[686] Joshua Matanzima and Umali Saidi. "Landscape, belonging & identity in North-west Zimbabwe: a semiotic analysis". *African Identities*. (2020, 18:1-2) 237.
[687] Ibid.
[688] Jeanette A. Bastian. "Locating Archives within the Landscape: Records, Memory and Place". *Public History Review*. (December 2014: Winter, 21) 48-49.

In addition, other informants such as Nicodemus Gwebu argued that the institution was christened Gwebu Primary School because it was an initiative of the Ndebele immigrants under the leadership of Chief Gwebu.[689] In these two accounts, the existence of the school is used to put forward the argument that Ndebele immigrants brought transformative development in Buhera through education. Claims by the Makumbe which portray the Ndebele as outsiders are countered by the argument that even the Makumbe were beneficiaries of the school which enrolled indiscriminately from around the communities as evidenced by people such as Francis Madziva who were educated at the institution.

It is against this background that the school landscape is read in Gwebu oral histories as a text inscribed with the history of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera. The way the Gwebu School was used to claim legitimacy shares some similarities with Bethel School in the 1930s Gutu Purchase Areas. According to Joseph Mujere, the school which was established by BaSotho immigrants was important in the "sustenance of Sotho culture and identity" in the broader struggles for belonging in colonial Zimbabwe.[690] By having a school of their own, a cemetery and a church building, BaSotho immigrants in Gutu were able to counter exclusionary discourses churched out by the first-comer Karanga groups in the area.

It is important to note that the different ways in which Ndebele immigrants narrated the school landscape were characterised by silences and omissions. The narrative that it was exclusively Ndebele immigrants who built and contributed to the development of the school ignores the roles played by Shona-speaking community members especially those from the neighbouring Garamwera and Munangati villages. Pardon Munangati from the Shona-speaking Garamwera community narrated how the school project was one of the many beneficiaries of *mishandirapamwe*

[689] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.
[690] Joseph Mujere. "This is our school…': Identity, cultural hybridity and the development of an education system among the BaSotho in the Dewure Purchase Areas, Gutu 1932-1960". Unpublished paper presented at the 'Society, State and Identity in African History' 4th Congress of the Association of African Historians, African Union Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, 22nd-24th May 2007. 16.

(cooperative work schemes) local development scheme.[691] Under this scheme, villagers from areas surrounding the school, both Makumbe and Ndebele, came together and provided labour. According to Chafa Chigwende, villagers from Garamwera and Munangati equally contributed through the provision of bricks for building additional classrooms and timber for roofing.[692] Yet all these historical processes are silenced and ignored in various Ndebele reconstructions of the school.

Contested readings of the school landscape demonstrate the divergent ideologies of the two communities. This phenomenon of contested landscapes has been quite common in the historiography of Zimbabwe. In the 1950s following the arrival of white settlers in the Honde Valley and Nyanga areas of eastern Southern Rhodesia, Africans treated the mountainous rainforest landscapes as sacred spaces.[693] European settlers, on the contrary, viewed the lands as territories that were awaiting exploitation through farming and other activities. This "vision of penetrating virgin forests" by European settlers is what historian Heike Schmidt terms the "sexualisation" of African landscapes.[694] By promulgating this narrative of an unoccupied frontier, Europeans sought to legitimise their occupation of large tracts of rainforest that had been untouched and littered with religious sacrality for centuries. For Schmidt, these contested readings of the landscape represent how Europeans reading of landscape challenged existing ideologies.[695] In another study, historian Terrence Ranger demonstrates how African communities and white European settlers in colonial Southern Rhodesia read the Matopos landscapes differently. White settlers romanticised Cecil John Rhodes' burial site in the Matopos as a symbol of the triumph of Europeans in the region.[696] In contrast, Africans drew from pre-colonial and early colonial histories

[691] Personal interview with Pardon Munangati.
[692] Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende.
[693] Heike Schmidt. "Penetrating' Foreign Lands: Contestations Over African Landscapes. A Case Study from Eastern Zimbabwe". *Environment and History*. (1995, 1:3) 361.
[694] Ibid.
[695] Ibid.
[696] Terence Ranger. *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*. (Oxford: James Currey, 1999) 5-11.

to create a counter-narrative that the Matopos was a site of anti-colonial resistance.[697] For Ranger, the Matopos was a contested landscape where white settlers' and Africans clashed in their readings of the area. Echoing similar sentiments in a study on the contested readings of the Victoria Falls area, JoAnn McGregor asserts that "landscape was appropriated and turned into a playground for whites, which celebrated colonial science and modernity and commemorated a past generation of explorers".[698]

The text-like qualities of landscape

It is important to note that the landscape in Ndebele struggles for belonging and legitimacy was not static. The Ndebele community deployed landscape for different reasons at different times in history. Landscape was constantly reinterpreted over time. This highlights an important similarity between landscape and text. Text or archives in general are under constant re-interpretation. As Jeanette Bastian notes, landscapes, just like archives are "part of an ever-evolving continuum, always in a state of creation, open to new interpretations and offering new dimensions of meaning depending on who is reading them, under what conditions and where".[699]

Landscape narratives changed as the natural landscape changed. It is important to note that the physical landscape, particularly the soils, and their properties did not remain in a fixed state over time. When the Ndebele immigrants settled in the area in 1928, the lands were highly fertile because the area had not been cultivated for years. Oral testimonies from the Makumbe affirm that the area had been neglected for agriculture, thus allowing the soils to accumulate fertility. However, oral accounts show that the period from the 1960s was marked by declining soil fertility, both real and imagined, as the once fertile black soils gradually began to depreciate in fertility. I qualify this as a form of landscape change because it involved a shift in some aspects of the physical

[697] Terence Ranger. *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills, Zimbabwe* (Oxford, James Currey, 1999) 5-11.
[698] JoAnn McGregor. "The Victoria Falls 1900-1940: Landscape, Tourism and the Geographical". 719.
[699] Jeanette Bastian. "Locating Archives within the Landscape: Records, Memory and Place". 50.

environment. However, some environmental historians such as Butterbury and Bebbington argue that environmental degradation and soil erosion were politicised especially during the colonial period.[700] They argue that the colonial state in territories such as Tanzania determined land use and soil quality through western science.[701] The so-called soil degradation was sometimes imagined or a deliberate misconception of environmental realities. Some of the changes in the landscape were therefore not real but imagined. Whether the landscape change was real or imagined, it is important to note that it resulted in the reshaping of the discourse among the Ndebele in Buhera.

In his study of Chishanga, Mazarire concludes that the changes in the spatial configurations and landscape resulted in corresponding changes in memory.[702] In the case of colonial Buhera, landscape changes can be said to have been both real and imagined. The Ndebele shifted from an earlier discourse in which they had described the soils as fertile. They were real in the sense that soil fertility was bound to happen and is natural especially when the lands are continuously cultivated. They were imagined in the sense that the Ndebele exaggerated the levels of soil infertility by the 1960s. In support of this notion of landscape change, Jean Bastian avers that "landscape can be read as a constantly changing text, a collection of information amassed and redefined over centuries and millennia, layered records of the relationship between the land and its occupier".[703]

The deliberate silences and omissions found in Ndebele immigrants' narratives of the school mirror the very nature of text and archival records in general. As historian Jeannette A. Bastian argues, landscape, just like text, is always authored "from a particular point of view, out of a particular context, through a distinct lens".[704] Landscapes are therefore described as texts that are

[700] S. P. J. Batterbury and A. J. Bebbington "Environmental Histories, Access to Resources and Landscape Change: An Introduction". *Landscape Degradation and Development.* (1999, 10) 281.
[701] Ibid.
[702] Gerald C. Mazarire. "Changing Landscape and Oral Memory in South-Central Zimbabwe: Towards a Historical Geography of Chishanga, c. 1850–1990." 715.
[703] Jeannette A. Bastian. "Locating Archives within the Landscape: Records, Memory and Place". 47-48.
[704] Ibid.

not neutral, but rather subject to specific historical contexts in which they were created.[705] Landscapes, therefore, became an equivalent of text that is created to give precedence to a specific ideology. In this instance, the narratives of the school and the black soils were authored during a time when the Ndebele immigrant community's belonging and land claims in Buhera were being questioned and challenged by their Shona-speaking neighbours. The narratives of landscape were therefore created as part of an ideological battle to counter Makumbe narratives which sought to regard them as perpetual outsiders (*vauyi*). In turn, the way landscapes were narrated by the Ndebele immigrants played back discourses of power in which the immigrants viewed themselves as more innovative than their first-comer Shona-speaking neighbours. The narratives of the school and soils produced selective worldviews - worldviews that saw Ndebele immigrants as more innovative than the Makumbe. These developments in colonial Buhera resonate with cultural geography scholar Federico Bellentani's argument that landscapes often aid social processes of inclusion and exclusion.[706] If this argument is taken into consideration, landscape constructions of the Ndebele immigrant community can be equated to historical texts which are by and large authored from a particular standpoint and propelling a specific ideology.

The argument of Gwebu landscapes as text provokes a discussion on the question of authorship. All informants interviewed for this research were born post-1928 after the first group of Ndebele immigrants had settled in Buhera. Yet their narratives of the school and soil landscapes contain striking similarities and the vividness of eyewitnesses. This is because each of the participants was directly related and had interacted with the first generation of Ndebele migrants who migrated from Matabeleland to Buhera around 1928. Nicodemus Gwebu who was born in 1957 in Buhera was raised in his grandfather's (Chief Fish Gwebu) house and got the opportunity to closely interact with him.[707] It was through his proximity to the chief that Nicodemus got access to family

[705] Jeannette A. Bastian. "Locating Archives within the Landscape: Records, Memory and Place". 47-48.
[706] Federico Bellentani. "Landscape as text". 80.
[707] Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu.

histories, narratives of eviction, and stories of settlement in Buhera. Ellen Nkomo and her husband, Bambatha, were both born in Buhera and revealed that it was their father Duba-Duba Nkomo who chronicled to them the history of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera.[708] Goli Mgazi, Victor Mgazi and Albert Masaile were all born in Buhera, and their narratives were based on the stories and experiences of their parents who migrated to Buhera in the mid-1940s.

These connections reveal that the narratives of landscape among Ndebele immigrants in Buhera were authored by the first generation of Ndebele immigrants between 1928 and the late 1940s. They justified their presence in Buhera by referring to how they had occupied an unoccupied territory and transformed it through agriculture, buildings, and schools. These narratives about the landscape are what can be equated to text because they were created by human actors and were not natural. The immigrants as authors of this narrative were engaged in a process of silencing and deliberate omission to carve a discourse that served their interests of creating a counter-narrative to answer persistent questions of belonging and legitimacy. The silencing of other social groups from history through landscape has not been unique to the Ndebele immigrants in Southern Rhodesia. In her study of the Leya community on the Zambia side of Victoria Falls, JoAnn McGregor found their narratives of the landscapes controversial because they promote ancestral links to one Chief Mukuni and elevated the position of a particular group at the expense of others.[709] This phenomenon that man-made and natural features became communicative devices to put across an ideology reveals what Bellentani terms the "text-like qualities" of landscape.[710]

Other scholars of cultural geography such as human geography scholar John Wylie went further to conceptualise landscape not only as text but as an "autobiography of those who have lived and died in it."[711] Arguing from a similar perspective, Joshua Matanzima and Umali Saidi argue that

[708] Personal interviews with Ellen and Bambatha Nkomo.
[709] JoAnn McGregor. "The Victoria Falls 1900–1940: Landscape, Tourism and the Geographical Imagination". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (2003, 29: 3) 719.
[710] Federico Bellentani. "Landscape as text". 79.
[711] John Wylie. *Landscape*. 71.

"landscapes are definitions of ourselves".[712] This assertion can be used to frame how the Gwebu landscape was a self-authored history of collective Ndebele lived experiences in Buhera. Instead of viewing the school and the black soils as neutral, it can be argued that landscape in the Gwebu area of Buhera was a construct of the society that should be read along the archival grain as theorist Ann Stoler suggests.[713]

Gwebu landscapes which can be equated to text played an ideological role in the struggles for belonging in Buhera between 1928 and 1980. The ideology engendered in Gwebu narratives of the landscape transformation consisted of a discourse that justified the Ndebele immigrants' legitimacy in Buhera. In addition, the discourse also sought to legitimise the immigrants' occupation and use of the black soils which the Makumbe were claiming. The Ndebele narratives which focused on the school give the impression that the institution was a product of Ndebele innovation in Buhera. It also gives the assumption that the Makumbe people did not have the required innovation to bring modern education into their area. The narratives are therefore beset with an ideology of how Ndebele immigrants were legitimate settlers due to their contributions in constructing the school and transforming the once uncultivated black soil landscapes into productive tracts of arable land.

Landscape as an alternative text

Environmental historians have argued that one of the most important contributions of the discipline is that it brings new methodologies and new sources. For Carruthers, the environment is a "historical document and one able to suggest new narratives about human society and ideas on how better to understand human action".[714] Building on this argument by Carruthers, this section argues that if the environment is a historical document, then landscape is text that can be used as an alternative source in historical writing. What makes landscape an important alternative

[712]Joshua Matanzima and Umali Saidi. "Landscape, belonging & identity in North-west Zimbabwe: a semiotic analysis". *African Identities*. (2020, 18:1-2) 233.
[713] Ann N. Stoler. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010) 17.
[714] Jane Carruthers. "Africa: Histories, Ecologies and Societies*". Environment and History*. (November 2004, 10: 4) 380.

source in the reconstruction of the history of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera is the inadequacies, biases, and silences of the colonial archive in articulating social issues. Local colonial administrators in Buhera between 1928 and 1980 were particularly interested in reporting political and economic issues while discounting social issues. For example, archival records covering the period from 1978 to 1980 were entirely focused on resolving the power disputes that had arisen following the death of Chief Gwebu. The District Commissioner for Buhera, D.F.T. Dufton, wrote several letters to the Gwebu family suggesting that they come up with a resolution on the next leader.[715] Besides these letters, Dufton went on to invest extensively in studying the Gwebu family genealogy to ascertain the legitimate heir to the vacant throne.[716] These correspondences are highlighted to demonstrate the point that the colonial office in Buhera was only interested in issues of power and governance. These biases reflect the lack of social life in the colonial records found at the Buhera District Office.

This lack of nuance described above makes it difficult to reconstruct a socio-environmental history of the people by entirely relying on colonial texts. It is against this background that landscape becomes an important alternative in the reconstruction of the history of social relations among Africans and their interactions with nature during the colonial period. Landscape can be used to examine inter and intra-group relations. Landscape can also be used to contextualise and historicise conflicts, struggles for belonging and inherent discourses of exclusion and inclusions that characterise histories of colonial Africa. While the colonial records on Buhera fail to capture how the Ndebele and the Makumbe collided on issues of belonging and legitimacy, landscape unravels the nuances around the Gwebu being treated as perpetual outsiders while the Makumbe regarded themselves as the legitimate custodians of the territory. Landscape complements the colonial

[715] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Division of District Administration to Provincial Native Commissioner, Umtali "Appointment of Chief Gwebu Fish", 7th November 1980.
[716]CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Minutes of Meeting Held at the Office of the District Commissioner, Buhera, at 12 NOON 1 October 1980 to Decide the Gwebu Fish Chieftainship.

archive in the sense that it covers up for the silences of colonial records on the nature and dynamics of social relations among Africans under colonialism.

One of the challenges posed by the local colonial archive in studying human-nature relations is the silence and absence of immigrant Ndebele women. A study of colonial records focusing on the history of Ndebele immigrants archived at the Buhera District Administrator's offices shows that the only women mentioned were wives, mothers and daughters related in one way or the other to the Gwebu family. These were mentioned in relation to their male relatives such as sons, brothers, and husbands. According to a Gwebu family history archived at the Buhera District office, Chief Fish Gwebu had two wives who are not even mentioned by their names. They are only mentioned as "first wife" and "second wife" respectively.[717]

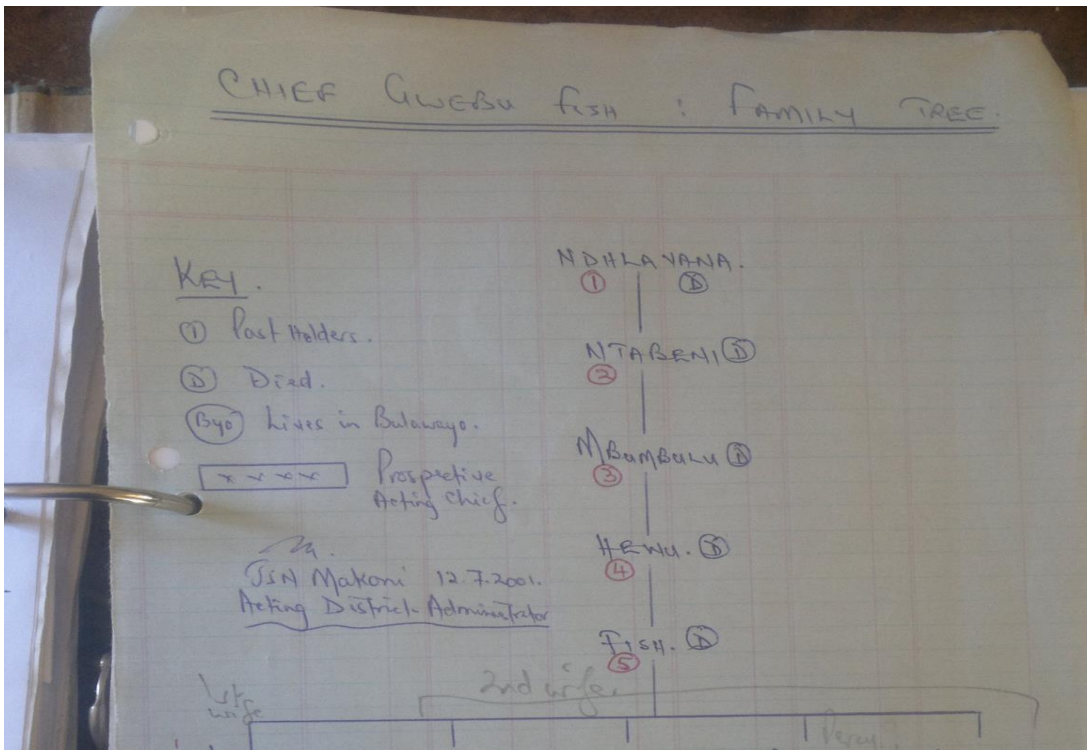

Figure 14: *The Gwebu family tree archived at the Buhera District Office compiled in July 2004.*

[717] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Fish Gwebu Family Tree.

On the contrary, male members of the ruling Gwebu family such as Isaiah Gwebu are well documented with his biography covering the period from 1926 to 2000.[718] The lived experiences of ordinary Ndebele immigrant women in Buhera are visibly absent in the archives. This is however not unique to colonial Buhera. The absence of women's lived experiences in the colonial archive has been decried by African historians. Historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza captures this problem which is also mirrored in the corresponding secondary history texts:

> In more extreme cases women are not even mentioned at all, or if they are, they are discussed in their stereotypical reproductive roles as wives and mothers. The language used often inferiorises the women's activities, or experiences being described. Also, women's lives are usually cloaked in a veil of timelessness: the institutions in which their lives are discussed, such as marriage, are seen as static. In viewing them as unchanging, as guardians of some ageless tradition, women are reduced to trans-historical creatures outside the dynamics of historical development.[719]

Zeleza evokes the notion of trans-historicity to show how women's place over centuries has been viewed in both archives and texts as unchanging. Their roles as mothers, wives and daughters have been unchanging in most records and changes in discourse only started in the 1970s when women's history emerged.[720] Although the colonial archive is not entirely useless, its silence on the lived experiences of women had a negative effect on historians interested in capturing social relations especially during the colonial period.

In the face of these biases and silences on the agency of historically marginalised groups, the landscape approach to human-nature relations offers an important window to capture the role of women in social relations. The landscape approach captures not only the experiences but also the traction of women in everyday social relations. In fact, if the notion of landscape as text is taken

[718] Isaiah Gwebu was Fish Gwebu's first son with his first wife, MaNkomo. He took over as chief in 1980 following the death of his father in 1978. See CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: Burial Eulogy for Isaiah Fish Gwebu, 16 January 2001.
[719] Paul T. Zeleza. "Gender Biases in African Historiography". In: Imam, Ayesha M. and Mama, Amina and Sow, Fatou (eds.). *Engendering African Social Sciences*. (Dakar: Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa CODESRIA, 1997) 208.
[720] Ibid.

into consideration, Ndebele immigrant women were part of the authors. This is because they were involved in the process of creating the narrative that certain waterscapes were sacred because of their relationship with female bodies. By so doing, women actively and consciously created and disseminated an ideology that gave them power over their male counterparts. The fact that these dynamics have only been revealed through landscape makes it reasonable to argue that the concept plays a complementary role of an alternative text in reconstructing certain important parts of history that are absent in the colonial archive.

In addition, a study of local colonial records on Buhera District in general and the Gwebu Chieftaincy, in particular, reveals a tendency by the government to reveal the landscape and environment as unchanging and fixed. In the same way as women were treated as trans-historical creatures with fixed and never-changing roles over time, landscape and environment in the colonial archive are depicted as serving as occupying a static place in social processes.[721] For example, records from as early as the 1920s up to as late as 1980 consistently maintain the assumption that the Ndebele immigrants preferred the black clay soils because they were fertile.[722] Yet the Ndebele immigrants also made use of the sandy soils at different moments in history. Their preference for the black clay soils was not cast in stone. The landscape approach, therefore, helps to understand changing human-nature relations over time by showing that the Ndebele's preference for the black and clay soils in Buhera was shaped by their ever-changing environment.

Conclusion

This chapter makes a methodological argument that landscape was imbued with divergent ideologies of both the Shona-speaking first-comer community and the Ndebele-speaking immigrant community in Buhera between 1928 and 1980. Setting off by making a declaration of

[721] The argument that women's roles in history have been viewed as rigid is made by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza.
[722] CHK5/Gwebu/Volume 1: C. J. Hard, Secretary for District Administration Buhera to Provincial Administrator Manicaland, 8th October 1980.

positionality and personal experiences, the chapter highlights the different roles that landscape played in social processes at different moments in the history of the Gwebu area. Among other things, it has been highlighted that landscape played in key in boundary-making processes as well as serving an important role as a site of individual and collective memories about important historical events such as the 1970s war of independence.

This chapter has argued that landscape played an ideological role in the history of the Ndebele and Makumbe in Buhera. This argument has been presented at two levels. At the first level, the Makumbe deployed landscape as a tool to contest Ndebele immigrants' claims to territory. At the second level, the Ndebele immigrants deployed landscape not only to counter Makumbe discourses but also to justify and legitimise their ownership of tracts of black soil farmlands in Buhera. These contested readings of landscape are explored to argue that landscape played the role of text in propagating a specific ideology in society.

CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSIONS

The overarching research question set out at the beginning of this thesis is that following the eviction of Ndebele-speaking groups from areas around Mzingwane in 1925, how exactly did they interact with the environment during and after their migration and settlement in the Sabi Reserve? This question was framed based on two important assumptions. The first problematic assumption was from the broad colonial racist tradition that viewed Africans as a danger to the environment. In 1927, colonial officials even warned that the evicted Ndebele immigrants were bound to cause environmental damage because they were moving from one place to another in search of lands for settlement. The second assumption was informed by existing environmental realities and bordered around the ecological hazards that characterised the Sabi Reserve landscape. The area was dry, the soils parched, and prone to perennial droughts. Based on these two assumptions, it is therefore important to understand how the Ndebele-speaking immigrants in Buhera interacted with nature during migration and after settlement in Buhera.

This broad question has been answered in four focused ways. First, the thesis argues that the Ndebele evictees demonstrated mastery of nature even before they had acquired new lands for settlement. The thesis has identified and magnified African agency in a historical period that has generally been described in ways that insinuate victimology, for example. While most historians of colonial Zimbabwe have acknowledged that evicted Africans were victims of colonial forced removals at the mercy of the state, this thesis uses the case of the Ndebele evictees to argue that evicted groups dealt with evictions in creative and dynamic ways that challenge the traditional interpretation which used only overtones of victimology. When confronted with the existential challenge of forced removals from their ancestral lands, Ndebele evictees deployed the strategy of active waiting. During the waiting period which lasted as much as 20 years for families such as the Mgazi and Masaile, the evictees used the time productively to acquire agricultural equipment,

knowledge, wealth, livestock, as well as scout different areas to identify alternative areas for settlement. The waiting period was therefore productive. The importance of the Ndebele strategy of waiting is that it demonstrates a creative way in which a small group of evictees subverted the power of the state to resettle the people. Even the Ndebele evictees knew very well that the colonial government could evict them from the places they had temporarily inhabited during the migration process, this did not, however, leave them dormant. Waiting was to a greater degree successful because the evictees subsequently identified and occupied lands that perfectly suited their agricultural interests.

This thesis makes historiographical and conceptual inroads by treating eviction and migration not as events but as temporalities in which several processes are embedded. Whilst all reviewed literature on colonial forced removals in Zimbabwe treats evictions, migrations, and settlement as linear and straightforward events, this study stretches these as temporalities that engender several processes, agency, resilience, insecurities and uncertainties. This argument uncovers an important area for further inquiry. There is a need to revisit histories of colonial evictions and reconsider the agency of Africans within these previously ignored temporalities between eviction and settlement. Such an approach has the potential to produce new accounts of the past.

For the Ndebele evictees, the period of waiting differed across different families but covered the period between 1925 and 1945. There were some families and groups whose period of waiting was shorter. These include the Gwebu family who settled in Buhera around 1928. Some of the environmental specificities that the Ndebele were concerned with included pastures for their livestock as well as fertile black soils which they had mastered over many generations. By having an established vision of the environments that they wanted to inhabit, the Ndebele evictees assumed control of the migration process. Their subsequent settlement in Buhera was not a coincidence but rather a well-calculated decision after making the necessary environmental considerations. The Ndebele assumed control of their futures by moving from one place to

another while investigating the lands to figure out if they were ideal for settlement. This was even though the colonial officials wanted them to settle in the Gwayi and Shangani Reserves which had been specifically created earlier in the 1890s to accommodate evicted Africans. By providing some of the Ndebele families with transport to travel from Bulawayo to Mvuma in 1927, the colonial government only facilitated an already ongoing migration process which was internally initiated.

Such an argument is not only relevant in reading anew the histories of colonialism in the context of southern Africa but is also relevant in rethinking contemporary migrations in the region. As a result of climate change-induced calamities, droughts, cyclones, and increased human-wildlife conflicts, there is a new wave of migrations in the region. Studies have largely portrayed various migrating communities, groups, families and individuals as entirely victims whose agency is overshadowed by crises. Such an approach gives an incomplete account because it ignores the various innovative ways in which evictees and migrants deal with the challenges they encounter.

By locating the agency and environmental consciousness of Africans at a time when they were subjected to violent forced removals, the thesis contributes to debates about African agency in times of crisis. This is particularly important in the case of southern Africa which has seen increased regional migration as a result of climate-induced floods, cyclones, droughts, economic collapse, and forced removals. As communities, families, and individuals are moving from one place to another, there has not been much attention given to the agency of these groups during the migration process. In this era of the Anthropocene where human activity has greatly shaped the universe, there is a need to reconsider how such groups interact with the environment as they move from one place to another as these movements are not always precipitous but slow and therefore likely to result in a clearly defined human-nature relationship. New questions should be asked about how indigenous environmental knowledge has also travelled as people increasingly migrate from one area to another.

Second, the key question of the Ndebele interactions with nature in Buhera is answered by a close examination of their indigenous constructions of soil fertility. The thesis has argued that the Ndebele indigenous constructions of nature delegated agency to black soils. One of the ways soils were given life-giving agency was through the *isidhaka siyanikeza* philosophy (black soils produce good harvests). This philosophy rested on the belief that black soils were productive and had the capacity to give farmers good harvests. It is this thinking that informed the immigrants' choice of lands in Buhera. In Ndebele oral histories, this capacity to give good harvests was equated to generosity. Black soils were therefore conceptualised as generous ecologies that gave farmers good harvests. It has been argued that this Ndebele philosophy shares strong intellectual connections with the discourse of material turn which has been used by social scientists to study material objects.

While the study acknowledges that Ndebele immigrants settled in an area with black heavy clay soils and became successful farmers, this does not necessarily mean they only interacted with *isidhaka* ecologies. It has been highlighted that soil preferences were not cast in stone as there were specific moments when the Ndebele immigrants found *senya* ecologies more productive than their *isidhaka*. During the rainy seasons, Ndebele immigrants often made use of pastures in the sandy soil ecologies to avoid their cattle from drowning in the waterlogged gullies. The Shona-speaking Makumbe also made use of their winter gardens located in the black soil areas during the dry season when their farmlands had no water. These moments have been identified as important breaking points in the environmental history of Buhera. In as much as the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera saw black soil ecologies as more productive, this does not necessarily mean they were isolated or separate from sandy soil ecologies. Both the sandy soil ecologies used by the Shona-speaking Makumbe and the black soil ecologies inhabited by the immigrant Ndebele were connected in complex ways.

Against the backdrop of an ongoing debate on soils in the historiography of Zimbabwe, this argument of interconnected ecologies takes the discussion forward. The debate on soil preferences in Zimbabwe is dominated by the narrative that Ndebele-speaking societies historically preferred the heavy black soils while the Shona preferred sandy light soils. With its roots in travellers' accounts and perpetuated by contemporary scholars, this discourse views the country in simplistic dichotomies of two major distinct ecological zones separated from each other. This thesis refutes this argument and advocates for a more holistic approach to ecologies and environments. It treats both the *senya* and *isidhaka* ecologies as interwoven and interconnected through a web of complex relations such as geographical proximity, agricultural activities, seed exchanges, and livestock production. This argument offers a new opportunity to revisit the environmental history of Zimbabwe and reconsider ecologies as interconnected despite their different material qualities.

Closely related to the idea of the interconnectedness of people and nature, the thesis' socio-environmental approach to the history of the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera has responded to the wider debates on Shona-Ndebele relations in the historiography of Zimbabwe. While most revisionist studies by scholars such as Musoni identified intermarriages as some form of social relations that brought the Shona and the Ndebele immigrants together, the important role of agriculture has been overlooked.[723] Agricultural interactions between the Shona-speaking and Ndebele-speaking Gwebu facilitated transactional relations. As argued in this thesis, the Ndebele immigrants relied on Shona labour force because the former was a relatively small group. At the same time, Shona-speaking households made use of the black heavy soils traditionally during drier seasons of the year for vegetable gardening since their sandy dry soils would not withhold moisture for long periods. Thus, the different environmental conditions of the soils they farmed made them

[723] See F. Musoni. "Forced Resettlement, Forced Resettlement, Ethnicity, and the (Un)Making of the Ndebele Identity in Buhera District, Zimbabwe".

depend on each other resulting in them being entangled in complex webs of agriculture-based relations.

Third, the thesis has answered the question of post-eviction human-nature relations by revisiting the assumption that the agricultural boom and conservation successes recorded in Buhera between 1940 and 1980 were a result of Alvord's gospel of the plough. This assumption was systematically produced and disseminated by local colonial administrators in their annual reports while riding upon pre-existing notions of racial superiority. It credited Alvord's gospel of the plough for the work that was being done in crop production and conservation of natural resources specifically in the area under Chief Gwebu. By so doing, the discourse of modernity created by local colonial administrators ignored the agency and contributions of Africans in everyday agro-conservation work. In light of this, the thesis takes a methodological detour and privileges the previously marginalised voices of individuals, families, as well as underrepresented groups such as women and ethnic minorities such as the Xhosa and the Fengu who were part of the broader Ndebele immigrant group. These marginalised voices provide a completely different interpretation of the agricultural and conservation successes of the 1940s-1980. Contrary to assumptions enshrined in the discourse of modernity, the development of agriculture and conservation among the Ndebele between 1940 and 1980 resulted from Africans and their indigenous agro-conservationist initiatives. Africans were able to sustainably manage nature while simultaneously producing abundant food. Although the role of the modernisation of agriculture to a lesser degree contributed to the development of agriculture among the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera, this thesis takes a holistic approach and augments the agency of Ndebele immigrants. The conservationist approaches by Africans even in a hostile landscape proved wrong earlier assumptions by colonial officials who had, earlier in 1927, predicted that the Ndebele immigrants were going to cause massive environmental damage because they were moving from place to place in search of lands for settlement.

Fourth, human-nature relations in the Sabi Reserve were not confined to only agriculture and conservation. Both the natural and the built environment meant a lot to the immigrants. Courtesy of the flexibility offered by environmental history to borrow from other disciplines, the thesis draws from ecology and human geography to understand the other uses of the environment for the Gwebu. Living in times when their existence was threatened by lack of belonging while at the same time surrounded and vastly outnumbered by the Shona-speaking Makumbe, the Ndebele used the environment to assert their belonging as well as countering possible domination by their neighbours. Using concepts of human geography and ecology, the thesis argues that the environment ceased to be neutral and began to embody ideologies of belonging and legitimacy. Through this argument, the thesis makes a fundamental methodological contribution. The methodological argument is that landscapes and environments in Zimbabwean historiography have the potential to be used as sources of history because they embody ideologies, discourses and narratives of people around them. While most attempts to reconstruct colonial histories are hindered by the lack of documentary evidence and oral histories, landscape can be used as an alternative.

These four responses to the overarching research question point to one overall argument; the Ndebele immigrants who were evicted from Matabeleland to Buhera during the colonial period were able to inhabit and thrive in a hostile landscape. Despite the colonial uncertainties resulting from forced evictions, the Ndebele were successful in influencing the relocation process by deploying the strategy of buying time to carefully plan their futures. This, they did, despite the colonial government desiring them to relocate in a haste to nearby native reserves such as Gwai and Shangani. These native reserves were parched and did not possess the desired environmental qualities that the evictees desired. By heading to Buhera, the Ndebele-speaking evictees took charge

of their post-eviction futures. Moreover, by deploying the strategy of buying time, the evictees also set the pace for the migration process. They did not live the state to determine their futures.

Furthermore, the area inhabited by the Ndebele-speaking immigrants in Buhera had its ecological hazards despite having the desired soil textures. When the Ndebele immigrants arrived in Buhera, the area they went on to occupy was previously unoccupied because of its hazards including thickets which had become home to animals such as venomous snakes which were a threat to both humans and wildlife. The soils were often described as "dirty" and presented farmers with difficulty in ploughing. Despite all these ecological challenges that the Ndebele-speaking immigrants encountered upon relocating, they were able to use their indigenous knowledge of environments to master nature and ultimately become successful farmers. By the 1940s, barely two decades after the first group had settled in the area, the once hostile area had already become the breadbasket of the entire Buhera District; a position that the Ndebele maintained throughout the entire colonial period.

In addition, the Ndebele were able to establish their autonomous chieftaincy despite being a comparatively small immigrant society surrounded and outnumbered by the Shona-speaking Makumbe. Led by Chief Gwebu, an autonomous Ndebele chieftaincy allowed the immigrant group to institute environmental laws based on the group's beliefs. One such important law introduced by Chief Gwebu's traditional court was the banning of the wanton use of axes in the community. This law was specifically designed to conserve indigenous forests. The Ndebele also instituted internally driven pasture management schemes that were enforced locally outside the realms of state power.

According to historian of Africa John Iliffe, Africans' greatest contribution to global history is that they have been frontiersmen who occupied and transformed once hostile landscapes into habitable

areas on behalf of the rest of humanity.[724] Because of this, argues Iliffe, Africans should be carefully studied and acknowledged.[725] This argument applies to the case of Ndebele immigrants in Buhera who went and settled in an area that was shunned due to its ecological hazards such as wild game and heavy soils. After years of work, this once-rejected area was transformed into a beacon of agricultural success and sustainable conservation of nature. Unlike the arrival of European settlers in Southern Rhodesia where occupation was accompanied by massive deforestation and denigration of once sacred areas, the settlement of the Ndebele in Buhera exhibited co-existence with nature. The reason why the Ndebele immigrants ought to be celebrated is that they did so on behalf of many other Africans who later came to settle in the area after the pioneering work of transforming the landscapes into a habitable area.

Due to time and word limitations, there are two important themes partially raised in this study that require further inquiry. One of these niche themes is the place of women as a historically marginalised group in environmental conservation. Although Chapter 4 has briefly highlighted the role of women in agriculture and seed conservation, a more in-depth study is required on their role in the broader conservation of forests, soils, water resources and livestock production. In addition, the post-colonial environmental history of the Ndebele immigrants in Buhera has not been touched in this study because it is an area beckoning for the next stage of this important research. It is an area that is worth exploring to trace the changes and continuities that have unfolded over time with regard to the conservation of natural resources and agriculture in general.

[724] John Iliffe. *Africans, the History of a Continent*.
[725] Ibid.

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Personal interview with Chafa Chigwende, Garamwera Village, Ward 3, 9 March 2015.

Personal interview with Ellen Nkomo, Nkomo Homestead, 6 April 2021.

Personal interview with Francis Madziva, Gwebu Homestead, 6 April 2021.

Personal interview with Garikayi Tungamirai, 74 years old, Mutava Village, Ward 3, 10 March 2015.

Personal interview with Gil Masango, Gwebu Homestead, Ward 3, Buhera, 7 April 2021.

Personal interview with Goli Mgazi, Mgazi Homestead, 6 April 2021.

Personal interview with Lungile Jane Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 21 June 2017.

Personal interview with Masitulela Dema-Dema, Gwebu Shops, Buhera, 8 July 2019.

Personal interview with Mirriam Marenge, Garamwera Area, Ward 3, March 2015.

Personal interview with Mr Chikonyora, Gwebu Secondary School, 7 March 2015.

Personal interview with Mr Madondo, Buhera District Administrator's Office, Buhera, March 2015.

Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu (Headman Gwebu), Gwebu Homestead, Buhera, 7 July 2019.

Personal interview with Nicodemus Gwebu, 58 years old, Gwebu Village, 8 March 2015.

Personal interview with Pardon Magaya, Gwebu Shopping Centre, Buhera, 10 July 2019.

Personal interview with Paul Mbulelo Tshabalala, Charlton Village, Buhera, 8 July 2019.

Personal interview with Peter Wasarirevhu, 67 years old, Malombo, Garamwera Area, Ward 3, 11 March.

Personal interview with Philip Gwebu, Gwebu Village, 51 years old, Ward 3, 11 March 2015.

Personal interview with Phillip Gwebu (Chief Gwebu), Gwebu Homestead, 6 April 2021.

Personal interview with Richman Gwebu, Gwebu Homestead, 6 April 2021.

Personal interview with Richman, 44 years old, Gwebu Village, 12 March 2015.

Personal interview with Shepherd Chengeta (Chief Gwebu), Harare, 28 August 2020.

Personal interview with Victor Nkululeko Mgazi, 68 years old, Ward 3, 8 March 2015.

Personal interview with Victor Nkululeko Mgazi, Mgazi Homestead, Buhera, 7 July 2019.

Telephone and WhatsApp Interviews

Telephone interview with Dumisani Gain Makhoba, 17 July 2021.

Telephone interview with Headman Makabeni, 27 June 2020.

Telephone interview with Marvellous Ncube, July 2021.

Telephone interview with Mthandazo Nkomo, 28 April 2020.

Telephone interview with Timothy Zandile Mushaikwa, 23 March 2021.

WhatsApp interview with Dumisani Gain Makhoba.

WhatsApp interview with Headman Makabeni July 2021.

WhatsApp interview with Mthandazo Nkomo, 30 April 2021

WhatsApp interview with Timothy Zandile Mushaikwa, 10-15 October 2021.