Ethnicity, not class? The 1929 Bulawayo faction fights reconsidered

Enocent Msindo

History Department, Rhodes University, Box 94, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa.

Abstract

From Christmas Eve of 1929 to the end of that year, Bulawayo was an ungovernable city marred by fights between Shona, on the one hand (perceived as a 'common enemy'), and forces that were predominantly Ndebele and groups sympathetic to them. A brilliant attempt to explain these clashes a generation ago, nevertheless falls short. This article seeks to revise the popular interpretation of this violence and re-contextualise it historically. A longer timeframe would give us an alternative view of the conflict. It also vindicates the ethnic interpretation of the violence that Phimister and van Onselen, concentrating on the then popular Marxist 'class struggle' paradigm, either minimised or failed to assess thoroughly.

Introduction

When Shona are ranged against Sena in boxing matches in the African township of Harare in Salisbury, when tribal fights break out in the single quarters on the mines, when men choose wives from their own tribes rather than from others, it is difficult to argue that that we are dealing with detribalized people. Nor can we argue this when members of local government councils express their personal hostilities in tribal terms… [J. Clyde Mitchell, 'Tribalism and the Plural Society', in J. Middleton (ed.), Black Africa: Its Peoples and Their Cultures Today (London, Macmillan, 1970), p. 263]

The fights that broke out in the last days of December 1929 help inform our understanding of Bulawayo history. The events marked an important turning-point in the administrative structure of Southern Rhodesian urban areas in general, and Bulawayo in particular. From the 1930s, at least, the colonial regime had to problematise the urban African more than before. There was, for the first time, a great need, increasingly, to control urban housing, entertainment and sport, as well as to tighten up urban administration, which in most cases before this had been loose and chaotic. For the first time, there was also an attempt to give Africans a facade of control through the newly enacted Native Advisory Boards. Even more important an aftermath of 1929 in Bulawayo was the increase in ethnic politics, which together with other alternative urban identities, made Bulawayo history especially complicated. For this reason, it is imperative that historians have a fair understanding of the 1929 Bulawayo fights or even earlier events before probing the later period.

A Critique of Phimister and van Onselen's Perspective

A major piece of research on this subject by economic historians Ian Phimister and Charles van Onselen appeared in this journal in 1979. In the article, the two scholars were convinced that the 1929 Bulawayo fights, far from being manifestations of 'mindless tribalism', were explicable 'only in the general context of the town's economic and geographical situation within the regional political economy, and specifically only in the context of the conditions, controls and constraints existing in the Bulawayo location and railway compounds'.[1] They maintained that this violence was primarily a manifestation of 'intra-working class conflict ... an expression of competition within the working class about limited job opportunities'.[2]

To buttress their argument, the duo wrote of the fall in cattle prices from 1921-1923 followed by a short-lived boom in tobacco sales (giving African farm employees a temporary respite); the region later saw a heavy fall in the prices of agricultural products between 1928-1930 that resulted in extensive retrenchments of labourers from white-owned farms. This brought about a 'sharp increase in African participation in the [urban] labour market'. In Mashonaland, where the fall in tobacco prices was more acutely felt, the unemployment crisis hit the Shona hard. Consequently, these now economically tottering Shona looked to Bulawayo for jobs, offering themselves as cheap labour and
thereby displacing those Ndebele workers who, because they had worked for longer in town, demanded better wages, which employers were not prepared to pay due the onset of the Depression. Consequently, Ndebele employees found themselves squeezed out of the labour market at a time when their rural assets were also being eroded by the Depression. This, plus the lack of effective control over the location, made the fight possible.\[3\] In short, Phimister and van Onselen suggest the following: first, that the arrival of new foreign (largely Shona) people in Bulawayo and the lack of scrutiny over the location's population, resulted in a concentration of foreign migrants in the location. Second, that since Shona constituted the majority of the late-comers, they occupied low-wage jobs, if indeed they did find such jobs. Those who were unsuccessful became loafers, committing petty crimes and gambling.

In a bid to give credence to their class-based view of the conflict, Phimister and van Onselen tried to catalogue three 'classes-in-formation' among Africans in Bulawayo in the late 1920s. These 'classes' are first, the 'tiny African petty-bourgeoisie' comprising small traders, businessmen and school teachers; second, the working class (the largest group), and lastly, a rapidly expanding 'under class' composed of the unemployed, which at times merged with the 'lumpen-proletariat'.\[4\] It is this last group that the authors blame most for making the life of 'decent natives' unpleasant in town. Curiously, they concluded that since Shona were the most recent migrants, they would have occupied (at least temporarily) this criminal group. It is noteworthy that in their account, there is no evidence to prove their assertion that Shona were the largest group of recent newcomers to Bulawayo in the late 1920s. Their main statistical evidence (see pages 15-17) relates to figures of total African employees, total loss of jobs in agriculture, and to increasing crime rates, all at national level without reference to the Shona or any other specific group of people. Therefore, these figures cannot, by themselves, constitute proof that the new migrants were mainly Shona. Notwithstanding this loophole, the two scholars continued with their class line and argued that 'the first outbreak of the trouble followed the socio-economic cleavages outlined above, and not purely “tribal” divisions … nor did the trouble emanate from all Shona'.\[5\]

Explaining the outbreaks on Christmas Eve, Phimister and van Onselen suggested that they were mainly robbery of workers and gang assaults on the workers. As for the second outbreaks beginning on 27 December, it is suggested that these were about workers attacking recent migrants, 'which explains why the Location, home of most new migrants was the subject of persistent attacks'.\[6\] To shrug off the 'tribal animosity' thesis, they pointed to the involvement in the fiasco of 'Northern Natives' on the side of Ndebele in a fight against Shona.

Contrary to the line taken by the two scholars, I read in the evidence a tendency to categorise and specify an enemy: the enemy was Shona, not any new poor immigrant, and to the fighters Shona was a tribe. In their collectivity, whatever the case might be, they fought 'Mushona'. Second, the evidence suggests that the fight did not necessarily target newly arrived Shona alone, but any Shona, old or new. One Shona victim of the attack on the Railway Compound, Mtero, a crippled storekeeper, lost £21 in cash and goods worth over £80 when his property was burnt while he was in hiding.\[7\] So rich a man could not have been a newcomer to Bulawayo. Evidence from The Chronicle, a source the two authors used (albeit selectively), also suggests that large numbers of Shona who were attacked were in fact decent workers, and not loafers. Apart from living in company accommodation - the Railway Compound - they also had valuable possessions. The Ndebele and 'aliens' who raided the Railway Compound, where about 300 to 400 working Manyika (a Shona group) lived, gathered and burnt between 'nine or ten huge piles' of clothes, the then prestigious items such as bicycles (which obviously loafers and poor urban newcomers could not afford to buy) and other belongings.\[8\] They then drove Shona out of the compound.\[9\]

To maintain that the fights were between 'established workers and new immigrants' is to represent this violence unfairly. It is reasonable to argue that if some Shona were new immigrants, so too were some Ndebele, Kalanga, Northern Rhodesians, Tonga, Nyasalanders and others. It is misleading to look at Shona newcomers and ignore Ndebele and Kalanga newcomers, who even maintained strong ties with their rural homes where they withdrew for weekends to see their wives, attend to their property and do other things.\[10\] If conflict was between 'old' and 'new', why then did the fights target an ethnic group, the Shona, even though those who fought the Shona might have been a mixed crowd of both Ndebele and aliens? The sources have not a single instance of 'old' Shona teaming up with 'old' Ndebele against either 'new' Shona, or 'new' Kalanga, or anything relating to newness at all.
It is therefore time, with due respect, to debunk the reductionism of the late 1970s historiography that saw 'everything' in terms of specific pigeonholes, such as 'class struggle', 'labour' or other reductionist explanations. The Phimister/van Onselen article is part of that historiography. Reductionism has yoked scholars to an unenviable rigidity, which, for instance, cannot appreciate the possibility of merging, say, the class interpretation of the fights with an ethnic one, or see the potential relationship between social forms, such as sport, and ethnicity. Ethnicity is influenced by different things, such as labour, sport, class, politics and culture. Without denying outright the effect of the Great Depression on urbanisation and Africans' reactions to the trauma of shifting goal posts in the unstable colonial economy, I would contend, however, that these explanations alone fall short. Moreover, the period on which the duo focused was too short to help us understand the breadth of Bulawayo's agonies. More informed analysis calls for a longer timescale.

Meanwhile, it may be helpful to discuss sources briefly. Apart from using evidence that Phimister and van Onselen also used, as well as other colonial sources, this article employs a wealth of court records and sworn statements collected by criminal investigation authorities from African witnesses and accused persons. It also draws on marvellous oral history testimony collected from some of the few remaining early comers to Bulawayo. A key weakness of court records lies in the possibility that some of the evidence was collected under duress. Moreover, some witnesses might have unjustly accused innocent people or unfairly defended criminals. I therefore use such evidence with caution. Nonetheless, the tendency of most Africans not only to defend their friends but, in some cases, falsely to accuse victims of violence, mostly members of another ethnic group, as perpetrators, gives interesting insights into the level of ethnic polarity. Second, through court records, Africans themselves speak, as either participants or observers of the fights. They give us the voice that is often scarcely present in most colonial records and enlighten us as to Africans' own interpretations of the 1929 fights, despite their different viewpoints.

Contextualising and Historicising the Bulawayo Problem

Bulawayo history is one of gradual and continuous migration of workers and other peoples into that town over a long period, from around 1897 onwards. A few years after the invasion of Bulawayo and the 'flight' of Lobengula, which saw the opening up of mines nearby; the setting up of Bulawayo as a major railway headquarters of the colony; and the growth in manufacturing industry; it became clear that Bulawayo was developing into a major industrial hub in southern Africa. For this reason, it desperately needed African labour. Unfortunately, in the early years, local people were unprepared for town life. This unwillingness to work was not necessarily a case of any tribal instinct, as the early labour recruiters and administrators thought.[11] The locals had options available to them. For instance, they could live and pay taxes from their proceeds as subsistence gardeners,[12] or cattle farmers, or work in South Africa, where the Rand offered higher pay than in Southern Rhodesia.[13] Also, their chiefs, the Kalanga especially, would not co-operate with the government in labour recruitment.[14] Consequently, the town sought labourers from southern, eastern and central Africa, and from among the Shona peoples. Bulawayo therefore began with a foreign outlook, inhabited in its core by people of different ethnicities.[15] By 1910, the Bulawayo 'alien' African population had risen to 25,086 from 11,359 in 1906. Locals, who included Ndebele, Kalanga and others from Matabeleland were still outnumbered, only increasing from 6,345 in 1906 to 12,739 in 1910.[16] There were of course, apart from Ndebele workers, a few prominent Ndebele inhabitants in town, some of whom were born in the location, such as the Manyobas[17] (including Siphambaniso Manyoba, who became a prominent Ndebele activist after 1929), and others, such as Jojo Mkatjane, originally from the Shangani, who by 1930 appeared to have lost touch with home.[18] There were also remnants of Lobengula's family, such as Queen Moho, who usually housed visitors from the royal family when they came to town;[19] and the children of Muntu (Lobengula's brother), who deserted their father when he became a pauper in Bulilima-Mangwe and went to Bulawayo for 'immorality'.[20] To this number should be added a few local women already living in Bulawayo by 1897, whom the Native Commissioner Malema stereotyped as 'prostitutes',[21] whereas some, on the contrary, formed a reasonably prosperous class of women who made money from leasing their properties to urban male workers.[22]

The labour shortage that had engulfed Bulawayo in the early years had become history by as early as 1913. By then, Bulawayo had a 'more than adequate' labour provision, with a 'large floating population' wandering between all the
principal centres of employment.[23] It would seem then that the unemployment crisis and the competition in the labour market that Phimister and van Onselen talk of as if it were just characteristic of the late 1920s only, began well before 1920. Just how then it sufficiently explains the 'faction fights' becomes more complicated. It would be more useful for this article briefly to track the influence of early urban dwellers on Bulawayo's ethnic and moral fabric, as this also helps explain the 1929 violence.

The influx of 'foreign' labour saw earlier Shona arrivals (also foreigners to Bulawayo) and non-Rhodesian migrants becoming the 'owners' of Bulawayo, as their presence predated the birth of Ndebele activism. These residents defined the moral, linguistic and social tone of Bulawayo. This fossilisation, in a settlement previously an Ndebele pre-colonial headquarters, of 'foreign' languages, different ethnicities and modes of behaviour, explains why it took a heavy and protracted struggle for the Ndebele and other inhabitants of Matabeleland to 'regain' Bulawayo. Even now, Bulawayo is not that highly 'Ndebele-ised'. As I came to realise, the 1929 violence was part of the effort to regain lost Ndebele moral authority over Bulawayo. Apart from the economic situation and urban stresses, the fights were part of a spirited response to a moral and ethnic panic by the 'real' claimants of the town. In this project, Ndebele people, being less co-ordinated and less rigidly unified a category, did not mind help from any other ethnic group that had a bone to pick with insolent Shona.

Early settlers of urban Bulawayo were in different senses both 'cosmopolitan' and 'ethnic'. They interacted freely at workplaces through a created convenient medium of communication, Lapalapa (also called Kitchen Kaffir), which was a mixture of numerous languages and 'broken' English.[24] Lapalapa, viewed by contemporary employers as a language 'adequate for the ordinary purposes of life', was respected as an emergent language that, according to Tudor Trevor, 'spreads from Durban to the Congo, and in almost every kraal someone can be found to understand it'. Some employers, like Trevor, believed that learning 'Kitchen Kaffir' would make them better communicators with Africans than those who were proficient only in individual African languages.[25] The Native Commissioner (hereafter NC), Bulawayo, wrote of the 'mixed character of [the] Native population'.[26] At least to many early urban dwellers, this new cosmopolitanism was not necessarily a move towards detribalisation and a simple birth of ambiguous identities. Evidence suggests their tendency to congregate by homeboy and ethnic loyalties. There was also a construction of new ethnicities. Whilst Nyasaland, for instance, meant a place of origin, it became an ethnic label used by both Ndebele and Shona to describe people from Malawi[27] and at times it described foreigners in general who had become full-time urban dwellers. Moreover, although the manner in which early Bulawayo workers constructed their dwellings and villages appeared haphazard, it reflected, rather, their attempts to congregate as ethnic groups, as the NC Bulawayo reported:

In Bulawayo, Natives from all the tribes of South and central Africa are to be found, while large numbers of Aliens have built Kraals and are living under a semblance of tribal conditions, in the vicinity of the town.28

Because of the tendency to settle together by ethnicity, by 1929 certain areas had come under the sway of 'foreigners', so that it was inviting trouble for Ndebele people to pass through a Shona kraal area, especially in Riverside.[29] Such mutual hostility must have been a factor of both imagined pre-colonial animosities and the newly emerging politics of urban control born out of feelings of urban insecurity. A common complaint of the Ndebele and even other people in Bulawayo seems to have been that Shona were insolent. Such accusations of insolence would not have characterised an urban newcomer, but a group of people who felt themselves to be in control of the city morally, economically (being lucratively employed) and socially, who could (be rumoured to) have dealt corruptly with bureaucratic white officials to allow them to commit crimes with impunity.[30] Because of all these advantages, they bullied their competitors who were in a less strong position - something they had been doing since 1925 or earlier.[31]

Apart from trying to live as 'home boys', most immigrants also preferred to work with friends and acquaintances from 'home'. This tendency was mistaken by the colonial authorities as a natural ethnic preference for certain types of work. Thus, the NC Bulawayo said:
The Aliens, to a greater extent monopolise the house work, while the Mandebele continue to prefer employment as drivers, store and office boys, Policemen and similar outdoor service. The aliens being more careful in their work and cleanly in their habits make better indoor servants than the Mandebele.[32]

It was not ethnicity per se that made people prefer certain types of work to others. It was a matter of social necessity. Working with homeboys meant no hassles of learning Sindebele or other languages. It also made a foreigner feel socially and economically secure. It was a way of making one another feel at home in a foreign country.[33] Colonial agents, however, must have reinforced these homeboy loyalties by reserving certain jobs for specific ethnic groups.

We have seen how workers tried to define themselves, but they also were prepared, for reasons of sex and social life, to go out of the bounds of their ethnic shells. Thus, sexual relations with local Ndebele women, especially unmarried women whom native commissioners tended to label 'prostitutes', were rampant. Because men did the bulk of urban paid labour, most women were self-employed, if not unemployed. Moreover, since colonial regulations considered them illegal in town, they were a rare 'commodity' in early Bulawayo. By 1915, about 700 men were officially registered as resident in the Bulawayo location and all but two of them were unmarried. The rest, according to the assistant police commissioner, relied on about 250 adult females who lived in the locations on their earnings from 'prostitution'.[34] The police commissioner must have unfairly judged all such women to be prostitutes to give the impression that they were illegal and unwanted persons in town. Evidence suggests an emerging middle class of women who owned property and relied on renting out their huts.[35] However, some who had no alternative means of survival turned to prostitution.

Although sexual life prompted, in some cases, a breakout of the limits of ethnicity, it also created an ethnic problem. The sexual relations between Shona men and Ndebele women for instance, attracted the ire of some old 'respectable' Ndebele inhabitants of the town, who began, in 1914, to voice their displeasure through two associations, the Loyal Amandebele Patriotic Society and another rival one, Ihihlo Lomuzi, which later became the Matabele Home Society (and was linked to the 1929 fights). The Loyal Amandebele Patriotic Society consisted of men who, by reason of their education, however little, and their attachment to Ndebele culture were both modern (desiring modernity and decency in town) and traditional (hence their quest for the observance of strict Ndebele laws in a modern town). These, few as they were, expressed disquiet about how 'prostitution risked wiping out the land', and consequently, 'breaking the ancestors' heart', the 'Christian law', and 'the law of Mzilikazi'.[36] Their activism had little impact, perhaps because of the low number of Ndebele followers at that time.

It seems that the local urban Ndebele men were annoyed by these 'new' and seemingly casual cross-ethnic sexual relations between their Ndebele 'cousins' and Shona and other foreigners in Matabeleland who had more money to attract such women. This sounds similar to the 1929 grievances where Ndebele people bitterly complained of the 'association of Mashona males with Matabele females'.[37] The association of Shona men with Ndebele women cited in some of the sources raises a number of questions. First, one wonders whether the Shona, by trying to monopolise the company and sexual services of unmarried urban Ndebele women (to the annoyance of Ndebele men), were being retributive to Ndebele men by attacking them where it pained them most, their masculinity. By that token, one also wonders whether Ndebele reaction was a response to that felt assault on their masculinity - that Shona came all the way from Mashonaland and took Ndebele women to themselves in the presence of Ndebele men. Alternatively, were Shona men trying to portray an imagined public moral authority over the 'children of their nieces, aunts', or what they imagined as their female relatives violently trafficked into Matabeleland during the pre-colonial era? It seems both views are plausible, but future research work is still needed.

The increased Ndebele presence in town and their ethnic revival explains the developments that led to the 1929 fights. Their numerical increase was in part a result of the Depression, but chiefly a factor of the evictions of the early and mid-1920s from private locations and white-owned farms where they had been settled all along, having for more than two decades either resisted or been too slow to go into the reserves, especially the notorious Gwaii and Shangani ones.[38] Official statistical evidence, though fraught with imprecision owing to the ineptness and incapacity of the early urban administrators to compute the so-called 'floating population' or even the unemployed
urban inhabitants, does reveal that by 1921, Bulawayo had about 2,258 Ndebele inhabitants (classified as 2,223 Ndebele, 22 Zansi and 13 Enhla). It also had a large number of people of the Shona group: 355 'Mashona', 12 'Bakorekore', 131 Manyika, 18 Zezuru, 1 Budya, 54 'Bahungwe', 3 Njanja, 1,075 Karanga, among others, making a total of about 1,649 people.[39] The figures demonstrate an increase in Ndebele settlement in town, resulting in a greater presence than was the case in previous years. This numerical growth and the development of a more radical society, the Matabele Home Society (MHS) an Ndebele pressure group, will be discussed further.

So far, a sound historical tracking of Bulawayo's development has already begun to offer some clues to our problem. It is also necessary to investigate other social arenas that gave order to society and made the need to fight sensible. Were there any socio-cultural platforms for the expression of common grievance? It seems that boxing, beer drinks (illegal 'kaffir' beer) and informal social meetings, as well as the birth of the MHS, provided good platforms for ethnic ideology-formulation and strategic management. The annoyance allegedly caused by 'Mashona' taking what were seen as Ndebele jobs and 'Ndebele' wives/women in Bulawayo were not of themselves enough to trigger a well-organised and prolonged 12-day fight. It was on such platforms that popular views and shared discontent were voiced, resulting in a particular modus operandi being agreed upon by the affected people. I will briefly relate the Ndebele-Shona fight and then consider Kalanga-Ndebele relations in this light. In the process, I refrain from endorsing the impression created by Phimister and van Onselen of one big Ndebele movement into which Kalanga should also be lumped.

Reporting the 'Faction Fights'

The fights were sensationally reported in the government-controlled Bulawayo newspaper, The Chronicle. The headlines, in bold letters, read, 'Knobkerrie Warfare in Bulawayo: Matabele and Mashona in Combat'. The article described 'an ugly situation' that had 'developed in Bulawayo on Friday and continued through the weekend, when native inter-tribal disturbances broke out', where two people were killed and from 40 to 50 were hurt.[40] How this all started was described as follows:

First indications of trouble were about 3:15 pm [of 29 December 1929] when the Police at the District Camp and the Town Office received messages from the residents in Lobengula Street near the town location that a large and noisy crowd of [Shona] natives had collected.[41] A force of mounted police from district headquarters and town police, armed with batons, immediately went to the spot and succeeded in dispersing the crowd without difficulty. Shortly afterwards, however, the situation took a serious turn when a force of between 300 and 400 natives were seen marching across the veld from the railway location in the direction of the Bulawayo location, shouting and waving sticks, and behaving in an exceedingly bellicose manner. Each of the natives was well armed, their weapons including heavy studded knobkerries, bicycle chains attached to short sticks which could be used with tremendous effect, large and apparently well-sharpened axes, knives, some of which had blades 10 to 18 inches long, and several were armed with bayonets.[42]

With the intervention of the police, most of the people who had prepared for a fight disappeared, hiding in dongas, bushes, or seeking shelter with relatives nearby. As darkness fell, some Ndebele and other aliens in cohort invaded the railway location where most of the Shona workforce lived. In utter excitement, they piled and burnt belongings of the Manyika people (a Shona group), in a public display of both anger and jealousy:

Just when things were at their quietest, shortly before eight o'clock, urgent messages were received at the town and district police headquarters that the railway location was being burnt down. A rosy glow of flame in the southern sky lent colour to the report and all the available forces, with the exception of a number of troopers left on guard at the Bulawayo location went as quickly as possible to Raylton. As the railway compound was neared, a tremendous noise of shouting and screaming could be heard and flames were seen everywhere. On arriving at the location, it was found that all the clothing, bicycles and belongings of some 300 to 400 Manicaland natives living in the location had been seized by the Matabele, placed in nine or ten huge piles and set alight. In the light of the raging fires, natives could be seen around, shouting war-cries and threats and waving sticks, knobkerries and knives,
inciting each other on to kill the Mashonas. The police surrounded the compound, but did not venture inside, the savage spectacle of the jumping, screaming, shouting natives continuing until the fires had burned down.[43]

As police withdrew from the location and went to the railway compound, those belligerents from the location who had dispersed earlier now regrouped, just before 10 o'clock at night. Almost 300 of them attacked Shona residents and destroyed their huts. These zealots were soon joined by 'their tribesmen' in the location. In the fracas, one was killed. The gangs would attack and, on seeing policemen, disappear into the bush, only to reappear to continue the attack once the policemen had left. The violence saw a total of 150 people brought to court for public violence.[44] While this was a large number, many perpetrators may not have been caught so that the actual participants may have been many more than those estimated by The Chronicle. The fights caused Shona to flee in fear. They did not return until 2 January.[45] They had clearly become a threat and to evict them from the Ndebele town had become necessary. Such sentiments were often expressed at social platforms such as beer drinks, and even during one crucial official meetings with the NC: 'Why are these people here? We do not go to their country and molest them and take their jobs and wives. Let us drive them out'.[46]

The writer of the above Chronicle article was not the only one to make this observation. Even members of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) alleged, at a meeting called by Carbutt, the Superintendent of Natives, that the Ndebele intended to drive the Shona out of Bulawayo.[47] According to Masoja, secretary of the ICU, the Ndebele and 'alien natives' did not wish the Shona to re-enter the location or live there again.[48] Other Ndebele activists like Mdutshwa, a possible Ndebele assimilado from Bubi, made more open remarks:

These Victoria natives are the 'Ringleaders' of this trouble, and it would be advisable if the Government put them back to their own country as they will continue to be a source of trouble if left in Matebeleland. They have given a very bad 'Spirit' to the Manyika.[49]

The fights, described in detail in The Chronicle, help us understand the violence of that date but not its causation. It remains difficult to find the real cause and whatever suggestions one can make remain tentative. The days before 29 December were scarcely peaceful, but unfortunately received little press coverage. The preparations for this fight were not captured in the media, but it subsequently turned out that the different groups had prepared an assortment of weapons for use, suggesting that the fighting had long been anticipated, to a greater extent than the police realised. One of the men called to testify at the court of enquiry - whose records Phimister and van Onselen did not use - said, 'This trouble has been brewing since the beginning of 1925 when these Fort Victoria natives (Mashona) commenced to hit the Matabele natives if they met them in the street, and not only the Matabele natives would they assault but any tribe they come across'.[50] It could have been even earlier. Another witness emphasised that trouble had 'been brewing for some long time'.[51] Unaware of such planned violence, the police had taken only their normal precaution of seizing weapons from people to prevent the usual Christmas hooliganism. They did this on 23 December 1929, purportedly seizing in the municipal location and adjoining premises some 930 offensive weapons, comprising knobkerries, iron bars, sticks and assegais. They also destroyed over 600 gallons of 'kaffir' beer that they thought was connected with Christmas violence.[52]

The preponderance of such dangerous weapons in a city almost 35 years after its establishment might be deemed to show the extent to which its urban dwellers viewed one another as dangerous enemies, against whom to guard themselves or to attack where convenient. They might have kept their weapons anticipating the outbreak of violence over Christmas that year, as court records show. At the same time, weapons such as walking sticks and knobkerries must also have been a marker of masculinity, especially amongst the Ndebele. As The Chronicle noted, more weapons were readily available to the fighters on 29 December despite the earlier raid. This indicates that the police had not managed to seize all weapons, presumably because people had cached some in the location or even made new ones after the raid. Apart from showing that people did not want to live without their weapons, it is likely that somehow members of different ethnic groups were determined to clash as they usually did over Christmas.

On 24 and 25 December, isolated fights were reported. On 27 December some Ndebele complained to Superintendent Carbutt of 'molestation and threatened assault on the part of the Mashonas' and serious fights broke
out between Shona and Ndebele with the result that Ndebele, assisted by Barozvi and Tonga, attacked and drove Shona out of the railway compound and destroyed their effects by fire. On 28 December, Carbutt called a meeting attended by about a thousand Bulawayo Africans. Asked about their problems, some Ndebele argued that the Shona were aggressors, fomenting disturbance in the city. The ICU officials, taking a pro-Ndebele side, complained that Shona were loafers and gamblers, taking Ndebele women as wives; that Shona displaced Ndebele in the labour market; that Shona had better clothes and enjoyed greater amenities of civilisation and were favoured by recruitment into the police (which was incorrect); that Shona sought revenge on behalf of their ancestors against the Ndebele by committing petty assaults on Ndebele at bioscopes and causing them annoyance generally; that the Superintendent of Natives' office was corrupt and had received money from Shona to allow them to commit crimes with impunity; and warned that Ndebele would drive all Shona from Bulawayo. The ICU complaints were themselves contradictory. They labelled the same group (Shona) both as loafers and as civilised, as poor and rich. This is perhaps where Phimister and van Onselen were deceived by this source and surmised a class dimension to the 1929 fights. What is clear from this source is that both loafing Shona and rich Shona were a nuisance in Bulawayo, and for that reason, the class dimension, which tended to delineate 'old' from 'new' and 'rich' from 'poor' in analysing this violence, does not make much sense. Meanwhile, we must consider the social structures that gave order to these clashes, making them possible.

Social Structures and the Violence

In an urban environment where there were no officially provided sports or recreation facilities, Bulawayo Africans developed their own forms of entertainment such as night dances, tea parties and sports like football and boxing. Boxing was becoming especially popular in Bulawayo in the late 1920s, and continued to be so up to the early 1950s. An investigation into the 1929 clashes showed that Superintendent Carbutt and a number of Africans interviewed by the CID Superintendent Brundell believed that boxing had encouraged the violence. Carbutt thought the root of the problem was that 'quite recently the young bloods have taken up boxing as a pastime', but, unfortunately, 'they boxed without any idea of fair play or of the rules of the game [as] no stroke was prohibited and no grip banned. Although the matches started in a friendly way, they ended in bad blood being established'. One of the witnesses, Kaula a.k.a. George, thought that the trouble had started with young boys who enjoyed fighting and boxing, but did not clarify how this was directly related to the location fights. Isaac Chikawa explained more directly:

At the boxing bouts in which the Fort Victoria Mashona take a great part, it is also known that if a Matabele gets a good hiding, he says, 'That's alright, I will meet you at Christmas'. The Fort Victoria Mashonas and other Manyicas [sic] are very powerful at 'Boxing' and generally give the Matabele a good hiding when all present made fun of the loser by laughing at him. This boxing has been going on for about three years or so and very large crowds gather together at the bouts. It is always seen that the Mashona are one side and the Matabele the other.

Chikawa's evidence yields us two major points about boxing. First, boxing gave losers the moral justification for retribution at some later stage outside the ring. Second, it was demeaning for the Ndebele to be beaten in their own town, and worse still by Shona, vulgarly labelled the Amahole who, in the nineteenth century, were their social and political inferiors. Since not all Shona were Amahole in the pre-colonial era, this new usage of the term Amahole as an ethnic label to describe all Shona was a recent creation by Ndebele town-dwellers and may not have involved colonial stereotyping at all. Boxing made losers combine with their friends and even mobilise acquaintances to fight the Shona enemy who always boasted of winning against other tribes. That is perhaps the reason why the most offended Ndebele enlisted in December 1929 the services of other gangs already annoyed by Shona behaviour. This was observed by the Assistant Police Commissioner, Bulawayo, who concluded:

A fight between natives invariably results in the losers seeking revenge by enlisting the services of others, though they are not always of the same tribe. They then attack the victors with the intention of proving to them their superiority. This appears to be what took place at Bulawayo when the Matabele, outclassed in boxing and one of their tribe being killed, decided to seek revenge and became the aggressors.
Second, there was a sociological element to boxing that saw fans attaching themselves to ethnic groups. Boxing was itself a means of celebrating ethnic culture in an environment where people were becoming so ‘mixed up’ and physically intermingled that they risked losing all cultural distinctiveness. Boxing fanatics were usually ethnic fanatics. Much evidence reported then and remembered later suggests that, because the Shona had the best boxers in town, they bragged to other ethnic groups, annoying them. Whilst Ndebele superiority was often provocatively expressed by their use of the sensitive notion and terminology of caste to denigrate all people of non-Ndebele descent as permanently inferior Amahole, some Shona tried to redefine their better social standing by parading their good jobs, money and the ability to speak better English. Referring to the economic and social gap between Ndebele and Shona in the 1940s, Nzandolo Banda said,

The Shona had money and so attracted more Ndebele women. They grouped and made co-operatives where they contributed money to buy houses, cars and other things. The Ndebele did not do so. We had a saying that goes as: 'When the Ndebele were holding on to bicycle pumps, the Shona would be holding to their car keys'. Very few Ndebele owned houses in town.

Shona also boasted of their alleged monopoly of the mangoromera magic that was thought to make them strong and fearless fighters able to overcome the Ndebele. This monopoly offered them an emotional boost, helping them to ward off any inferiority complex and overcome the irresistible image of Ndebele as violent warriors, an image that Ndebele men also cherished. Mangoromera also made the Shona needlessly provocative and insolent, it was alleged, especially to Ndebele. He who won in the boxing ring was the hero not only to himself but became part of the pride of the tribe.

What was important in boxing was not the sport itself, but its motivation and after-effects. Native authorities did not realise this in the late 1920s, but came to appreciate it a decade later when government paid more attention to sport and recreation mainly because of their increasing popularity and out of a fear that boxing was a potential danger to urban peace. Boxing was by then organised along ethnic lines and each group had its own distinct uniform. Notwithstanding this increasing order, most fans still came armed with knives and sticks, to attack other ethnic groups after the contests. For this reason Benzies, the new Superintendent of Natives, thought boxing would lead to 'rekindling of the old feelings of animosity between the tribes'. It offered to the different boxing fans a sense of collective ethnic solidarity, each community competing for prowess against another. A victory would be a victory for an ethnic group rather than for the single fighter. Above all, boxing also offered an opportunity for people to show their ethnic patriotism in an urban arena where identities were supposedly complicated by other interactions.

Apart from boxing as social practice, we need to consider another social platform, the beer drinks. There were parts of Bulawayo that colonial officials deemed to be ungovernable because of their strong beer-drinking culture. Hyde Park was one. It posed problems of classification - whether it was a rural area/communal land reserved for chiefs and native commissioners, or an urban neighbourhood. Attempts to put a chief over the area did not work. Hyde Park used to be a private farm occupied under the 'Private Locations Agreement' but today it comprises the high-density residential areas of Magwegwe, Pumula, parts of Nkulumane and parts of Lobengula. Between the wars, it had a strong Ndebele presence, but it also had pockets of non-Ndebele people settled there but mainly working in Bulawayo town. Hyde Park was ideal for those Ndebele who preferred to live and cultivate while working in town, living a dual life. Here they also brewed the highly alcoholic illegal 'kaffir beer' so that Fynn, the Assistant Magistrate, described it as 'a notorious kaffir beer resort'. Bulawayo location residents usually spent their weekends there, drinking heavily. It also became a haven for tax evaders.

There was a closer connection between Hyde Park and the 1929 ethnic violence than Phimister and van Onselen appreciated. They restricted their analysis of the 'faction fight' to two main areas, Raylton and Makokoba. In Hyde Park, there was a thorough search for 'Mashona' with Ndebele shouting, 'We want to hit them'. A defence witness at the trial, Elijah, denied all knowledge of the violence but said that before it broke out, he found Banya Dakamela, a member of the MHS, and others 'sitting down drinking beer. They were quite peaceful and were unarmed'. However, he testified that they had walking sticks, not knobkerries; and that they had left towards sunset...
and went to a place he did not know.[78] This was the very night that some Shona houses were destroyed in Hyde Park. On 26 December in the location, Mdutshwa a.k.a. Sixpence, himself a Nyai (Rozvi) from Bubi who spoke Sindebele, overheard a number of Ndebele people assembled near the location beer hall planning to chase away all Manyika (Shona) who wanted to enter the location that day.[79] There is no mention of what class, generation, or gender those Ndebele people belonged to - they were rightly classified simply by ethnicity. One conclusion can be drawn from the testimony of this source; that beer drinks were relaxed platforms for strategic planning, making the fights more organised than the police initially supposed.

Beer drinks gave Africans an informal arena to debate common urban problems. As observed by Paul la Hausse in his Durban study, alcohol in the form of utshwala (African beer) symbolised 'the continuity between town and countryside'.[80] In Bulawayo, similarly, beer made possible the development of a culture of discussion forums characteristic of rural life, where men informally sat down over gourds or tins of beer to explore common problems with a view to finding the best solutions. It is possible to connect this popular culture with the 1929 fights. George, for instance, without elaborating, said, 'The present troubles seem to have been caused by young men of both tribes, who attend dances, the football grounds and beer drinks'.[81]

This evidence also gives the impression that the violence was of a generational nature - in which young people, both Ndebele and Shona, got caught up in new urban forms of life. However, this line of argument, plus a slight reference to it in Babanyana's account,[82] remains very slender evidence and difficult to substantiate. Moreover, the generational interpretation fails to explain the role of elders/old inhabitants of modern Bulawayo in this violence, either as direct participants or as accomplices, or even as targeted victims of this violence. The MHS and the Kalanga cases below make the point clearer. The Kalanga case will show how the elderly, with better urban experience, recruited and trained recent migrants (themselves members of their ethnic group), and through organised drills, created a culture of violence in their gang, in which both old and young men joined forces. The same applied to the MHS, which, through imagining an Ndebele military tradition, carried out organised military-like drills in the Inketa hills. With this, we must return briefly to the discussion on beer and violence.

Beer-drinking places provided a relaxed social venue, where it was convenient to circulate rumours, spread justified falsehoods and mobilise anger outside the knowledge of colonial power and, at times, outside the knowledge of another ethnic group. Public and private discussions at beer drinks and other platforms were not debates made just to 'while away time' or to create a 'to-do list' for the younger urban generation. Instead, such debates inevitably invited a broader engagement of people into finding a common solution to their problem, irrespective of generation and class. Rumours that Shona were planning to attack Ndebele as retribution for the sins of their forefathers (the alleged cattle raids, human killings and the trafficking of Shona women) spread quickly through beer meeting-points, making people restless and spoiling for a fight.[83] Such persuasive rumours of Shona retribution allegedly made by MHS activists, such as Dakamela, three years before 1929,[84] and rumours of imminent Shona attacks 'at Xmas', where it was commonly believed 'there will be no trouble and they will not be arrested if they should kill anyone',[85] were circulated during beer drinks. These rumours of an ethnic fight whose basis was in part the imagined historical tensions between Shona and Ndebele must explain the popular interest in weapons that the classist interpretation fails to. It also gives a clue as to the connection between Christmas and the fights. Africans knew that colonial administrative offices normally closed for Christmas, hence there would be little control should they turn violent. Moreover, since companies normally closed for Christmas, it was easier to mobilise friends to participate in the violence.

Once the fights began, it did not seem to matter how long a person stayed in town or the nature of their employment. What mattered was ethnic identity. Isaac Chikawa, a Shona and an employee who had lived in Bulawayo for the past 15 years, was struck on the head and back with a knobkerrie by one Ngoni 'alien' just after his public speech before the NC, Bulawayo, who was enquiring about the rumours of the violence. Chikawa was bruised and so despite being a member of 'the old generation', and despite his very balanced debate at the said meeting, he openly challenged the Bulawayo NC to answer for the widespread rumour that he had accepted some money from some Shona to allow them to commit violence with impunity.[86] Tandazo, a Rhodesian Railways motor driver, himself a Sotho man (whose mother was Ndebele), escaped Ndebele violence because of his
ethnicity, being non-Manyika (Shona). However, days later, the Manyika Shona attacked him, his wife, and mother-in-law (an elderly Ndebele woman). Consequently, he hastily left town and went into hiding about 14 miles from the location. He gave a fascinating account of his experience:

I heard a crowd of Matabele natives passing through my house in the Location on Thursday night last, 26th December, saying they were looking for the Manyika natives. I had not then seen any of the Manyika natives looking or fighting with the Matabeles. About 11 pm on Friday night last, the 27th December, a crowd of Matabele, Blantyre and Mlozi natives came to my hut, asked my name and tribe, and then asked me if I had any Manyika natives in my hut, because they wanted to kill them. Some of them searched the dining room and then went away, telling me to lock the door.[87]

We also need to examine the role of up-coming societies such as the MHS in the 1929 fights and its aftermath, likewise the position of Kalanga in this violence and find how far it gives us a clue to Ndebele-Kalanga relations in town and how far it also dispels a possible generational and a class-based interpretation of the violence.

The activities of the MHS, a society formed to cater for the needs of the Ndebele people, are little known before 1929, perhaps because it was not yet well organised. Government officials only began to suspect its influence around 1929 when they investigated its alleged role in the fights. Nonetheless, the people who later gave it much order and publicity had already begun secret Ndebele meetings in the Bulawayo location as early as 1924,[88] two years after its formation.[89] MHS was formed to unite Ndebele people, guide them in the way of 'purity, peaceful advancement, good, and right living in their homes' and represent the Matabele people before the government.[90] The fact that the MHS was formed to 'unite' Ndebele shows that Ndebele were not all that united beforehand. Earlier associations like Ilihlo Lomuzi and the Loyal Mandebele Society were not strong enough to represent popular culture. The MHS began with a strong royalist outlook, being intimately associated from its inception with the educated members of the royal family, Rhodes and Albert Lobengula. Their return from South Africa in 1926, three years before the faction fights, had aroused excitement among some Ndebele people.[91] They became so involved in the MHS, a civic organisation, that the NC Gwanda strongly suspected that it disguised political ambition.[92] As educated young royals, the two princes became popular in a town where the search for Ndebele tradition and ethnic revival were becoming important. With their superior experience of long-urbanised South Africa, they were well placed to make an impact in urban Bulawayo. In the rural areas, where there were different debates, however, I demonstrate elsewhere how their role in the MHS and as private individuals further divided the Ndebele instead of uniting them. Their looting of people's cattle in the name of reclaiming 'King's cattle' and their alleged immorality aroused questions about their integrity.[93]

Apart from the influence of Rhodes and Lobengula, the MHS also benefited from other people with experience of Johannesburg to mobilise and train secret fighters. 'Amalaita' gangs (vigilante groups) were formed with the help of some returned Ndebele migrants from Johannesburg.[94] With the growth of such gangs, organised drilling, parades and other secret manoeuvres became common at the Inketa Hills (now part of Nkulumane Township) and elsewhere at night.[95] The Inketa area had a pre-colonial history. It was a former Ndebele army parade ground on which a number of Ndebele soldiers were executed by Lobengula for alleged disobedience.[96]

The training of these amalaita gangs on that site suggests it was an attempt to envisage and popularise the notion of Ndebele as warriors. It was a process of recreating Ndebele imagery and history. This reaped some success as it generated a strong fighting enthusiasm in some members of the MHS, and among Ndebele in general, which perhaps helped overcome their present cowardice that had been developed over time through their interaction with aggressive and insolent Shona, whose boxers boasted of mangoromera. James Dakamela, an MHS activist teaming up with others who also included angry 'aliens', zealously destroyed the houses of Shona people, assaulting some and committing other riotous acts in Hyde Park on 29 December 1929.[97] These might have been part of well-trained amalaita gangs. But Ndebele patriots had more plans, even after 1929. They wanted to mobilise support even from their rural counterparts to join the bigger project of flushing out all African foreigners from Bulawayo - a goal which was not successfully accomplished. One active member of the MHS, Mantshontsho from Plumtree, told chief Mafindo of how he was going to take part in the fight against all the non-indigenous elements in Bulawayo
and threatened the chief with unspecified action if he did not organise his men for this.[98] With this warrior tradition becoming popularised, at times through such violent means, a public Ndebele image was in formation. The attempts to flush out Shona in 1929 and the abortive one after 1929 illustrate something about the moral economy of the Ndebele in Bulawayo. They felt morally obliged to get back their historical town from insolent Shona aliens who had beaten Ndebele in the boxing ring, in employment and - as if that was not enough - had won the favour of Ndebele women, challenging Ndebele masculine power. Most of the stated grievances of the Ndebele centred on these three main points.

One also has to examine what part the Kalanga played in this 1929 violence. There seems to be little direct evidence regarding this, but it seems that Kalanga had their own vigilante group that targeted Shona and spared Ndebele. They seemed to have treated Ndebele as good regional neighbours. Kalanga had an independent movement with its own leadership. This does not exclude the possibility that some Kalanga may have crossed the floor to identify themselves with the Ndebele where it was beneficial.

The Kalanga vigilante group was very active between July and September 1930, some months after the 1929 fights. Evidence for Kalanga ethnic activism became known when police arrested and charged one of their leaders, Mketani, for public violence. The state argued that he did 'wrongfully and maliciously incite, instigate or procure diverse persons to assemble … and by violent and forcible means disturb and endanger public peace and security … [and also accused him of]…organising meetings of Kalanga natives and commanding them to arm themselves with spiked armbands, sticks and other weapons'.[99] The gang would march, armed, through the Bulawayo location at night, seeking to attack Shona and Portuguese East African people.[100] Evidence collected by the state from members of this gang suggests that they were well organised and led by veteran Kalanga town-dwellers who thought they had a duty to foster a sense of Kalanga community among their Kalanga newcomers. The community was so organised and ready to absorb new Kalanga immigrants to Bulawayo who might have found it a helpful association in a modern place where everyone seemed a stranger, and where family relatives were scarce. Strong urban orientation was given to the newcomers at Kalanga-only gatherings on the verandas of popular eating-houses.[101] At those restaurant meetings, new recruits were given weapons such as bicycle chains and were advised to buy sharp wristlets for use in inter-ethnic fights.[102] These cost 1 shilling at Indian shops in town.[103] For most newcomers who lacked socialisation wider than their ethnic solidarities, ethnicity was more important than other possible identities.

Kalanga meetings were fairly frequent and were often followed by martial drills and marches in the location. A Kalanga activist gave important evidence in court:

I have previously attended gatherings of Kalanga natives five times in all. We always met at this eating house not any particular days. I attended the first of such meetings about two months ago. A native named Joseph and [the] accused were the leaders at these meetings. We marched about to the playing of a mouth organ, both in the Location and in daytime. In the Location at night, we marched on one side of the road. It was a game. One man played a mouth organ; the remainder clapped their hands and marched in steps … we have wristlets, some of us … I wore the wristlet (Exhibit A) whilst marching. The wristlets were worn for use in fighting (boxing).[104]

The night marches sometimes attracted large groups of about 20 Kalanga. Marchers divided themselves into small squads - one on one side of the road and another on the other. This allowed them to surround their enemies for a good beating. Precisely how they identified a Shona and a Portuguese African is not clear, but it would appear that identity cards, though colonial creations, were important ethnic identity markers. Language would have been another important identifier. A common method of identifying the enemy was to ask directly for his ethnic identity. They asked, 'What tribe are you? If he replied, a Matabele, we would let him go. If a Mashona, we were to strike him. That was the arrangement explained to me by the accused and by Joseph'.[105] The hitting of all non-Kalanga save the Ndebele might suggest a view of Bulawayo as a joint Kalanga-Ndebele town to be cleansed of foreigners. It was a case of convenient Ndebele-Kalanga goodwill. What is striking about this Kalanga case is the clear evidence that the 1929 violence was not strictly a product of a class of new, lumpen youths disturbing the peace of the old prosperous urbanites. Instead it was one in which both the old town dwellers and the newcomers...
participated as members of certain ethnic groups, in much the same way old Ndebele town dwellers like Dakamela and new young Ndebele townsmen participated in the violence on one side against Shona elders and their youths.

Conclusion

Considering the weight of the evidence presented here mainly from previously untapped bodies of sources, and operating in a different historical paradigm from the late-1970s scholarship in which labour and class dominated historical enquiry, we are persuaded to accept the new interpretation of the crucial events surrounding the 1929 violence in Bulawayo. Drawing on developments from the foundations of the city, it has been demonstrated that the fights were not about the relationship between old and new Bulawayo inhabitants and the failures of colonial control. On the contrary, the grievances had a longer history that lay at the heart of the emergence and development of the town itself; an important part of which was the struggle for the control of the city by emerging bigger and dominant ethnic groups. In this light, this article has exposed one complication about urban ethnicity, an identity that I believe goes beyond the stretch of urban cosmopolitanism. It was possible to be cosmopolitan, yet at the same time ethnically conscious. I have proved a case of the increasing significance of ethnic attachments in town in which Southern Rhodesians were becoming divided into Shona, Ndebele, Kalanga and perhaps into other smaller groups, even though those groupings might not necessarily have been rigidified.

Second, I have tried to contextualise the violence in terms of its sociological basis. By assessing social platforms that gave legitimacy to violence, I have gone beyond the search for causation in history and analysed such elements of society as help us better understand the perpetrators' view of the reasonableness of violence. From such an analysis, one discovers how well organised the fights were to be simply condemned as the work of lumpen elements disturbing the peace. The existence of weapon caches, the organised drills, plus the increasing significance of planning at beer drinks and the development of societies to cater for Shona, Ndebele and the Kalanga points to a high level of planning that culminated in this fight.

Third, that some 'aliens' fought on the side of the Ndebele in 1929 seems to have confused earlier scholarship, which failed to discover the role in the violence of the ethnicity of the Kalanga, a people often mistaken as Ndebele. Aliens were instruments of convenience who, together with Shona, themselves became victims of the more organised Ndebele assertiveness in the city after 1930. Originating from different countries, with different languages and cultures, 'aliens' were not an organised ethnic group. For that reason, they could have temporarily supported any group of people with whom they shared at least similar discontents. For instance, 'aliens' were annoyed by Shona arrogance at boxing matches and their beating of people at bioscopes, just as Ndebele people were. However, the Ndebele obviously had more and other grievances, over and above those of their 'alien' companions. In this light, we are right to see 'aliens' as loosely organised aggrieved partners in the violence, who, in a fight for their own cause, found companionship and associates, at least temporarily, among the Ndebele, who had a more persuasive ethnic agenda. To argue that they were not an ethnic group, and 'therefore' the fight was not ethnic, would be naïve, as we risk failing to understand the deep motivation of Ndebele, Shona and Kalanga in the conflict. Lastly, this article has exposed a particular view of Kalanga-Ndebele relations in town. The slender evidence suggests that whilst Kalanga saw Ndebele as reasonable regional partners in town and therefore avoided being hostile to them, they still thought of organising themselves separately.

Notes

* This article, originally a small part of the 'Urban Ethnicity' chapter in my PhD thesis, has been made possible with the generous funding from Rhodes University, where I am currently an Andrew Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow. All archival references are from the National Archives of Zimbabwe (hereafter NAZ), Harare, save where indicated.


4. Phimister and van Onselen, 'Political Economy', especially p. 36.


10. Interview with Mr Hadrick Nzandolo Banda, Magwegwe, Bulawayo, 7 March 2003.

11. NB 6/1/1, Annual Report of the Chief Native Commissioner (hereafter CNC), Matabeleland for the Year ending 31 March 1898.

12. NB 1/1/11, Report of an Official Visit by the CNC, Matabeleland to Empandeni, Mphoeng's Location on the Inkwesi River and Tegwani, 1900; NB 6/1/10, Report of the Native Commissioner (hereafter (NC), Bubi District, for the Year ended 31 December 1910.

13. NB 6/1/10, Report of the NC, Bubi District, for the Year ended 31 December 1910. Phimister and van Onselen thought that the 'Rand movement' was characteristically a popular response to the economic breakdown of the 1920s (slump in cattle prices after the First World War and the overcrowding of the reserves), when it was in fact an option the people of Matabeleland utilised from the beginning of colonialism. As most of the people there still lived on private farms even up to the 1920s, for Matabeleland, we have to talk of 'fresh evictions' rather than pressure on the reserves as such. I had a grandfather (now deceased) who in 1913 was already working in 'Joni' [Johannesburg] - Personal communication with Mr E. Matangira, Chipesa-Venge, 1992.

14. NB1/1/12, P. Nielsen [NC, Bulilima-Mangwe] to the CNC, Bulawayo, 4 January 1901; NB1/1/12, P. Nielsen to the CNC, Byo, 16 January 1901.


17. Personal communication with T.O. Ranger, St Antony's College, Oxford, 12 June 2004.

18. ZAN 1/1/1, Native Affairs Commission, 1930, Evidence: Written.


20. NB1/1/4, CNC, Matabeleland: In-Letters-General, 1898.
21. NBE 7/1/1, NC, Malema to the NC, Bulawayo, 25 August 1897.

22. S235/477, Notes of Evidence: Enquiry into Bulawayo Location, 1930, pp. 85-87. Some rich women featured prominently in the inquiry. They expressed their reservations about the accommodation situation, especially the possibility of the government destroying their huts.

23. NB3/1/34, CNC to the Secretary, Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau, 20 May 1913.


25. T.G. Trevor, 'Native Education from an Employer's Point of View', NADA, 5 (December 1927), pp. 97-99.

26. NB3/1/34, CNC to the Secretary, Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau, 20 May 1913.

27. Interviews in Old Magwegwe, Bulawayo, with Mrs Banda, 28 October 2002 and Mr S. Mombe, 13 March 2003.


29. D3/6/163/26 and 61 (1930), Bulawayo District Court Criminal Cases; Rex vs Hlabati; Jonnie; Tuguzo, Palilama; et al. See evidence of accused Hlabati and evidence of Tsekai alias Eddie.

30. S482/805/39, Evidence of Isaac alias Chikawa, alias Jonela, before Justice of the Peace for the Colony of Southern Rhodesia [this last phrase, a formula repeated for further examples of African evidence below, is omitted hereafter], 30 December 1929.

31. S482/805/39, Evidence of Mdutshwa alias Sixpence, 30 December 1929. Masotsha Ndlovu of the ICU stated that the Shona had always challenged Ndebele to fight and that they had been too haughty, blocking the entrance to the bioscope hall to beat Ndebele. See S482/805/39, Evidence of Masoja alias Sergeant, 30 December 1929.


33. M. Wilson and A. Mafeje, Langa: A Study of Social Groups in an African Township (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 1, 34, 47-73. Langa, however, a poor township on the fringes of Cape Town, was 'Xhosa-dominated', hence had an uncontested ethnic character unlike Bulawayo, where foreigners to the town dominated the social sphere and dictated the urban tone.

34. NB2/21/1, Assistant Commissioner, B.S.A. Police [A.J. Tomlinson] to the Secretary to the Administrator, Bulawayo, 6 December 1915.


41. That these were Shona people can be deduced from the evidence in S482/805/39, J.C. Brundell to the Commissioner, BSA Police, Salisbury, 4 January 1930. Those who later attacked the railway compound were from the Ndebele section.

42. _Chronicle_, 4 January 1930.


45. Phimister and van Onselen, 'Political Economy'.

46. 'Why Matabele are Hostile', _Chronicle_, 4 January 1930.

47. S482/805/39, Bulawayo Native Disturbances, 1930-1932, Brundell to the Commissioner, BSA Police, Salisbury, 4 January 1930.


53. S482/805/39, Bulawayo Native Disturbances, 1930-1932, J.C. Brundell to the Commissioner, BSA Police, Salisbury, 4 January 1930

54. S482/805/39, Assistant Commissioner of Police to the Secretary, Law Department, 10 January 1930. A table he drew to show the number of African policemen in Bulawayo by tribe shows that from 1927 to 1929 there were always far more Ndebele policemen than Shona. Between these years, the ratio was 296:12. In fact Shona were the people least employed in the police - even fewer than 'Aliens' (Nyasas) and Northern Rhodesians.


60. S482/805/39, Assistant Commissioner of Police to the Secretary, Law Department, 10 January 1930.


62. Interview with Mrs Buyile Maseko, Magwegwe, Bulawayo, 29 October 2002. This woman, born in 1902, told me that Shona had better jobs as they worked as clerks, being better educated than the Ndebele. (Indeed, historically, mission education grew in Mashonaland earlier and spread faster than in Matabeleland.)

63. Interview with Mr Hadrick N. Banda, Magwegwe, 7 March 2003.

64. S998/3, Acting Assistant NC, Gutu to the Acting NC, Gutu, 28 June 1933.


66. S1542/S12, Superintendent of Police, Salisbury to the Chief Superintendent, BSA Police, Salisbury, 13 July 1938.

67. S1542/S12, Secretary for Native Affairs to the Staff Officer, BSA Police, 17 November 1938.

68. S1542/S12, Constable B.S. Bowling to the Superintendent, BSA Police, Salisbury, 26 June 1938; Supt. of Police, Salisbury to the Chief Supt. BSA Police, Salisbury, 13 July 1938.

69. S1542/S12, Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo to the CNC, 18 May 1938.

70. S1542/S12, NC, Salisbury to the Secretary of Native Affairs, Salisbury, 29 June 1939. He wrote a paper entitled 'A Study of Recreation for Urban Natives, with Special Reference to Boxing amongst Natives in Salisbury'.

71. S1542/C6, Supt. of Natives to CNC, 21 October 1937.

72. Formerly called Curti's Farm.

73. ZAH1/1/2, Land Commission, 1925, Evidence, Oral - Martha Ngano, pp. 603-604.

74. D3/6/161/Case number 4463, Magistrate, Bulawayo, Rex *vs* Chisati, 23 November 1929.

75. S1542/C6, Supt. of Natives, Bulawayo to the CNC, Salisbury, 4 November 1937.

76. Phimister and van Onselen, 'Political Economy'.

77. D3/6/163, Bulawayo District Court, Rex *vs* Banya James Dakamela, Chiriya Jack and others, 15 January 1930.
78. D3/6/163, Bulawayo District Court, Rex vs Banya James Dakamela and others; Evidence of Elijah. See also in the same file, Evidence of Jack Chiriya in his defence.


82. S482/805/39, Evidence of Babanyana, 30 December 1929.


84. S482/805/39, Evidence of Joni, 30 December 1929.


86. S482/805/39, Evidence of Chikawa alias Johnela, 30 December 1929.


88. S138/22, Superintendent, CID, Bulawayo to the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, 12 February 1924.

89. S2584/4251, Matabeleland Home Society Chairman (A.S.B. Manyoba) to the Provincial N.C., 11 November 1946. The letterhead of the Society proclaimed, 'FOUNDED 1922'.

90. S2484/4251, Matabeleland Home Society: Constitution of the Matabele Home Society, dated to 1923, but filed amongst all MHS papers, mostly for the 1940s.


93. For these debates, see Msindo, 'Ethnicity in Matabeleland', Chapter 3.

94. S482/709/39/1, Private Secretary to the Premier to the Secretary, Law Department, 6 October 1930; Private Secretary to the Premier to the CNC, 30 October 1930.

95. S482/709/39/1, Private Secretary to the Premier to the Secretary, Law Department, 6 October 1930; Private Secretary to the Premier to the CNC, 30 October 1930 Evidence from both letters above applies.


100. S569/5113, Criminal Cases, Magistrate, Bulawayo, Rex vs Mthla alias Mketani, 29 September 1930

101. S569/5113, Rex vs Mketani, Evidence of Kalanga juvenile Silapi, who said he had just come from home two weeks ago. A day after arriving, he had already been caught up in the society and introduced to other Kalanga men of his kind.

102. S569/5113, Rex vs Mketani, Evidence of Ndladhlambani; Evidence of Madiwa (same file).

103. S569/5113, Rex vs Mketani, Evidence of Bona.

104. S569/5113, Rex vs Mketani, Evidence of Ndladhlambani.

105. S569/5113, Rex vs Mketani, Evidence of Ndladhlambani See also evidence of Bona suggesting that as the group of the marching Kalanga was growing big, spreading across the road, it was at one time dispersed by the police in the Location.