

AFRICAN HARARE, 1890–1925: LABOR MIGRANCY AND AN EMERGING URBAN COMMUNITY⁽¹⁾

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ABSTRACT Whilst there have been relatively intensive studies, both sociological and historical, into the African “urban question” for mid-century Zimbabwe, its earlier phases, shortly after the encounter of African societies with colonial capitalism, remain largely a virgin territory as a field of research. This study is an attempt to redress the imbalance by investigating the structure and development of the African community in early Salisbury. It focuses especially on (1) the conjuncture of the advent of mass labor migrancy by the early 1920s and the heightened collective consciousness of migrants in the form of labor protests and mutual aid associations, and (2) the contrast of two emerging African neighborhoods—the inner Salisbury, largely alien and marginalized, and the outer Salisbury, largely indigenous and “respectable.”

Key Words: African urban history; Labor migrancy; African labor protest; Mutual aid associations; Locations; Harare (Salisbury).

INTRODUCTION

One major theme in the social history of modern Zimbabwe is the question of how the “men of the soil” migrated to the town and created a new community there. This paper explores this theme in the context of Salisbury⁽²⁾ before 1925. It looks at a mosaic of African urban experiences, such as labor disputes, welfare/dance societies, protests against the municipal location policy, and African suburbia, and examines them against the background of labor migrancy, rather than as proletarianization. The study argues two points in particular. First, with the advent of mass labor migrancy around the time of World War I, one finds all of sudden massive evidence for the process of African “urbanization”—migrants created and became part of the new social institutions in towns, thereby making their lives more relevant to the urban/industrial situation. Some of the important traits of the popular life of the latter-day Harare township were already there. At the same time, secondly, two distinct types of urban neighborhoods were in the making: inner Salisbury, largely comprised of the non-indigenous, marginalized elements, and outer Salisbury, largely comprised of the indigenous, “respectable” elements—a contrast which had far-reaching implications for the politico-social history of the colony’s capital city.

AFRICAN URBAN HISTORY

In 1890, Salisbury was hastily set up by the British as an urban frontier for the purposes of securing and opening up the trans-Limpopo regions. Although the original hope that the new settlement would soon rival Kimberley or Johannesburg in wealth was not materialized, the settlement gradually tread its way towards an urban core of colonial capitalism. After 1900, but particularly after 1908, Salisbury began to assume the important function of serving the nascent primary industries through its concentration of the services and the facilities of administration, finance, commerce and transport, as expressed in the emergence of the central business district at the Causeway side of Manica Road, near the railway station, around the time of World War I.

On the other hand, Salisbury developed into a residential area for a new generation of colonists, as expressed in the improvements of municipal services and the development of the northern Avenues in the 1910s and thereafter. By the time of the tobacco boom in the mid-1920s, the White community, once predominantly constituted by single men, had become a stable, middle-class one. The community, totaling 7,324 in 1926 (SR, 1927a), was occupationally comprised of company managers, civil servants, policemen, shopkeepers, clerks, engineers, teachers, nurses, artisans, and the like, with few working-class elements. The people who manned the town's workshops, offices, hotels, brickfields, and households were for the most part drawn from the African countryside. These Black laborers, whose total number in 1926 was 12,000 (SR, 1930), were systematically excluded from the "city" and subjected to many restrictive policies and practices.

Salisbury advanced towards an industrial, bourgeois town prior to 1925. Its African community also underwent significant changes during the same period, although the latter development, unlike the former, was far from ostentatious, leaving little trace on the physical, structural environment of the town.

Let us start by reviewing what we know about the change in the ethnic composition of African Salisbury. Initially, many of the town's African workers came from the south. The "pioneer" workers, who were attracted to the interior by the relatively high wages prevailing there, included the "Colonial Boys," Basuto, Xhosa, Zulus, and Bamangwato.⁽³⁾ Then, by 1893, other groups of southerners, like the Shangaans and Ndebeles, and Zambezi (of the Tete region, who exceptionally came from the north) entered the nascent Mashonaland labor market (*Rhodesia Herald*, 1893). Salisbury's conspicuous connections with the south, however, abruptly came to an end toward 1900. The African risings of 1896-97 reduced the proportion of southern workers to such an extent that the police survey conducted in November 1897 found the total number of South African Blacks to be no more than 41, or 3 per cent, out of the town's 1,284 Africans (NAZ, 1897), and in subsequent years this group dwindled in number further.

In the meantime, large numbers of African workers from the northern territories had come into the colony, and Salisbury quickly found itself being a major port of entry for these peoples—Achewa, Angoni, Atonga, Yao, Chikunda, Manganja, Nyungwe, among others. In 1911 half the town's Africans consisted of the men from Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia (especially, North-Eastern Rhodesia),

and Portuguese East Africa (Yoshikuni, 1989b). In the next ten years their percentage increased further, in 1921 reaching no less than 58 per cent, with the Nyasalanders alone accounting for 40 per cent (NAZ, n.d.b.). It was perhaps around this time, it is worth noting, that the proportion of northern groups marked the highest percentage in Salisbury's ethnic history.

The Shona peoples constituted a considerable proportion, 40 percent or so among the African population in Salisbury from the beginning. In the early 1890s some local youths ventured into town to work, and after the Shona-Ndebele risings, the town received an influx of workers coming, in particular, from the eastern districts (*Rhodesia Herald*, 1897, 1899). In November 1897, the Shona elements included 481 "Mashona," 89 "Umtassas," and 7 "Victorias," constituting 46 per cent of the town's African population (NAZ, 1897). When the new century dawned, the inter-district labor trip became more common. The Salisbury labor market expanded into Mashonaland, except the southern region where people tended to go to Midlands and Matabeleland, or to South Africa. The 1911 and 1921 censuses gave the Southern Rhodesian proportion in Salisbury as 50 per cent and 41 percent respectively (Yoshikuni, 1989b). However, it is equally important to note that the indigenous Africans at the time usually kept a job for a very short time—a few months, compared to 12 months or more for the foreigners—so that their contribution to the labor market was much smaller than mere numbers might suggest.

It is clear, therefore, that around the turn of the century there was a significant change in the ethnic make-up of the town's African community—the southern workers replaced the northern, or more broadly central African, workers. Behind the above demographic change lay a great transformation in the whole structure of the political economy north of the Limpopo at the time. Colonial rule was being established, resulting in the regular contact between the indigenous communities and the capitalist economy, the former sector exporting labor, voluntarily or otherwise, to the latter.

Writing of this process, Arrighi (1970: 204) estimated that the proportion of the Africans away for work amongst the colony's able-bodied males rose from around 10 per cent at the beginning of the century to 35 percent in 1927, a sharp rise occurring mainly in the latter half of the 1920s. Industrially, the total number of African employed in the colony jumped from 59,000 in 1909 to 174,000 in 1926 (SR, 1911: 29; SR, 1943: 100). Moreover, the supply of African labor were so regularized over years—notwithstanding a lowering trend in wage rates—that, as Phimister and van Onselen have emphasized (Phimister, 1975; van Onselen, 1976; Phimister & van Onselen, 1978), by the mid-1920s, most of the labor requirements of the mining industry, the colony's leading industry, came to be met by voluntary labor, rather than recruited labor.

After the recent progress of peasant studies which considerably advanced our knowledge on the tempo and patterns of social change in African rural communities, it no longer suffices to equate the increasing flow of African labor into the market with the "strangulation" and "proletarianization" of the central African peasantry. The peasant economy at large proved more tenacious and more resilient in the face of the proletarianizing forces than has once been suggested (Ranger, 1978, 1985; Zachrisson, 1978; Mosley, 1983; Cheater, 1984;

Dopcke, 1985; Dopcke & Davies, 1987; Bessant, 1985).⁽⁴⁾ The rising level of labor export ought to be understood in terms of the development of a migrant labor system, under which men were involved both in wage labor and peasant agriculture by shuttling between town and countryside. Participation in wage employment frequently concurred with—and in some cases even stimulated—agricultural production,⁽⁵⁾ and labor migrancy ought to signify multiple effects. At any rate, it seems too simplistic and one-sided to suggest that the migrants were invariably traveling along a one-way road towards proletarianization.⁽⁶⁾

Indeed, the urban demographic data available to us clearly point to the fact that the rise of an industrial, bourgeois Salisbury before 1925 was matched by the growth of a migrant community, rather than a proletarian community (cf., Elkan, 1960). This is quite evident in the extremely unbalanced age and sex structure of the early African urban population, underlining the predominance of youths and single men. This implies that peasant households sent only their junior male members to the labor market. An analysis of the 1911 census manuscripts (Yoshikuni, 1989b: 277) reveals that no less than 85 per cent of Salisbury's Africans were between ten and 29 years old, while there were very few children and old people among them. Both the 1904 and 1911 censuses recorded that 95 per cent of this population were males, almost all of them employed (NAZ, n.d.a; Yoshikuni, 1989b: 277, 280). Moreover, this all-male composition was to remain throughout the period under review, albeit the continuous trickle of women into town. The 1921 census found the male proportion of African Salisbury to be 94 per cent, which, however, decreased to 64 percent by 1962 (NAZ, n.d.b; SR, 1964).

To conceptualize the early African Salisbury as a town of migrants is of great moment for our purposes. It helps us to confront some of the central issues of African urban history, such as the reciprocal relations between wage labor and agriculture, or between town and countryside, and the profound "ambiguity" inherent in the social processes thereof, to use a fashionable term in southern African historiography (e.g., Marks, 1986).

STRIKES AND SELF-HELP AFTER 1918: MIGRANTS AS A SOCIAL CLASS

In the years immediately after World War I there was an upsurge of African labor action throughout southern Africa, including Southern Rhodesia. No sooner had the 1918 influenza epidemic caused an acute labor shortage than arose a militant mood amongst workers, who were increasingly prone to act collectively in protest against wartime high prices, low wages and other difficulties. This trend, which continued until around 1921, resulted in a series of strikes and work-stoppages throughout the country, in railway, mines, municipalities, and even amongst ricksha-pullers (Yoshikuni, 1989a). The scale and impact of these industrial actions was so novel and substantial that it convinced one Native Commissioner of the necessity of setting up an African Wage Board (NAZ, 1921a) and prompted yet another to comment: "some of the younger generations are acquiring ideas on the question of employers and employment which were unknown until recently (NAZ, 1920a)."

Our findings, then, seem to reinforce van Onselen and Phimister's thesis that, far from being slow and phlegmatic, early African workers were closely attuned to the industrial conditions they were in and capable of transforming grievances into group action (Phimister & van Onselen, 1978). Yet, it is not our intention to merely stress the early—perhaps, unexpectedly early—growth of a “worker consciousness.” The protests in question were, in fact, the *migrants'* protest, with its own features and logic, as opposed to the protests of fully proletarianized workers.⁽⁷⁾

This becomes obvious when one looks at the nature of the issues taken up by the postwar strikers. The workers' demands and concerns were not so much about the problems of the “reproduction of a labor force” in the urban area as about the fundamentals for all wage earners, like wages, rations, and work load. To illustrate the point, the Bulawayo railway strike in July 1919, the largest and most successful strike at the time, revolved around a single problem, “starving” wage rates (*Bulawayo Chronicle*, 1919a),⁽⁸⁾ whereas its better-known counterpart of October 1945 addressed itself to a wide range of problems, including those of family accommodation, pension and gratuity, and recognition of a labor association (SR, 1946; Turner, 1975)—a contrast indicative of the extent to which the social profile of the railway workers changed during the inter-War years.

Also, strike behavior bespoke the class position of the protesters. Since the migrants could return to their homeland, they could exercise protest in the form of desertion and stay-away to defend their interests against the demands of colonial capitalism. How central the matter was to the early capital/wage labor relations may be inferred from the fact that a whole set of labor-coercive policies and practices introduced in early periods, including criminalization of many aspects of labor action, and registration of labor contracts, were primarily designed to curtail and regulate the discretionary nature of African involvement in wage employment.

It can, therefore, be said that the Bulawayo railway strikers acted perfectly in line with migrant resistance when they announced, in a bid to force the railway authorities into negotiation, that they were going to quit the job and go home—a threat which was not used in the “more orthodox” railway strike in 1945. Fully aware that strikes were illegal, striking workers then sought ways to avoid criminalization. They marched to the police station before notifying the employer of their demands, and appealed for the legitimacy of their action. When the management finally gave in to propose a meeting with a few leaders, a crowd of workers were, instead, sent to the bargaining session which followed: indeed, the early African labor actions frequently took a leaderless or anonymous character (Iliffe, 1980).

Notwithstanding, or perhaps because of, the enormous odds against which they were to fight, some other workers adopted strikingly militant, but fairly common, tactics. In the municipal disputes in Umtali and Gatooma in December 1919 and in Bulawayo in January 1921 protesters were determined to “go to gaol” (*Rhodesia Advertiser*, 1919; *Rhodesia Herald*, 1919; *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 1919b, 1921). A newspaper reported on the last case:

On Monday [January 24, 1921] 21 boys working away out in the suburbs left their job at mid-day, and did not return to it. The fact was discovered and the absentees were subsequently arrested. Yesterday morning [the following day] many of the other boys refused to turn out to work, and were thereupon marched down to the police station, where they were given the choice of being arrested, or going on with their jobs. A number chose the latter alternative, but 73 boys preferred to be arrested (*Bulawayo Chronicle*, 1921).

At the Magistrate's Court "the 21 natives who left their work on Monday were first dealt with, and each was fined £ 1, with the alternative of 14 days hard labor. The fines were not paid." Similarly, the other 73 strikers, "of all shapes and sizes, and of many Tribes," did not pay the fines, "saying they would go to jail (*Bulawayo Chronicle*, 1921)." It would appear, therefore, that by opting for group imprisonment, migrants successfully withdrew their labor before the termination of the labor contact.

Nor were migrant workers cohering at workplaces alone. In the very months during which the strikes took place we find workers intensifying their self-help activities at the municipal location and other places of the town.

Returning to the same district year after year, and not rarely, to the same place of employment, migrants gradually developed social networks, comprised of kinsmen and friends, outside the home village. These human ties helped migrants cope with the problems of a changing and often alienating environment. By World War I, such migrant networks had been densely located in Salisbury, as evinced by the ethnic clusters around occupations, churches, and other institutions in town (Yoshikuni, 1989b). The hardships during and after the War, including the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, seriously undermined the migrants' life strategy, thus exerting a catalytic influence on popular associational life. A result was the birth and mushrooming of welfare/dance societies in Salisbury, as well as in other employment centers. The societies most active in Salisbury in this period included the Tete Burial Society, the Senna Burial Society, the Northern Rhodesia Burial Society (of Tonga municipal workers, who were involved in a strike a few weeks before having this society registered with the Government), the Gazaland Burial Society, the Chikunda Club, and the Nyau Society (Yoshikuni, 1989a).

These associations, formalized or not, would bind migrants together under a "chief" or a "king," normally an old-timer in urban life; exchange and pool information about wages, jobs, accommodations, and other matters; organize thrift and mutual aid activities; socialize death in town; control tensions and conflicts within the African community; and stage weekend or annual dances and sports in and around the municipal location.

What was perhaps most striking about these associations was the dynamic way in which the members mobilized their pre-migration resources in adapting to a new situation. Hence it was largely *rural* identities and networks that underpinned the new *urban* institutions and organizations—a kind of paradox which has, justifiably, intrigued many anthropologists studying the Third World towns. True, the styles, symbols, and rituals adapted by the associations were extremely diverse, from clean, *après-guerre* Beni of East African origin to rustic, nocturnal

Nyau of Malawi pre-colonial origin. But their unit of solidarity was, as a rule, a village- or district-based one, or a language and cultural affinity. One key function was to enable the members to maintain a link with the peasant homeland. Identities and networks of this kind have been conventionally described as tribal, but they didn't come from the pre-colonial folklore alone. They had a material basis within the migrant situation, where workers, to some degree, retained access to land in their home village and committed themselves to the rights and obligations therein.

One can see clearly from the above that migrant workers were making their presence felt in the urban/industrial situation, and that the postwar years saw an interesting conjuncture of the advent of mass labor migrancy and heightened collective migrant consciousness.

LACATION COMMUNITY AND BLACK SUBURBIA: SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Yet another way to identify the structure and development of early African Salisbury is to examine how forces were at work, making for social and economic differentiation amongst them.

As noted by Mitchell (1954, 1964) and others (Kay, 1967; Elkan, 1960), one of the important factors to determine the migrants' interactions with the town was the distance they had to travel from the home village. If a migrant living close to the town could relatively easily incorporate wage labor into the cycle of peasant life at home, the situation was very different for a long-distance migrant. Having spent enormous time and energy in getting to the place of employment, he was more likely to bind himself to a long period of labor service. He faced difficulties in keeping in touch with the rural kinsmen, let alone undertaking his part in peasant production. Thus, being a long-distance migrant was not so desirable, hence derogatory Shona nicknames for them, like *mabwidi*, *madzarara homwe*, and *matewera njanje* (those who have followed the railway) (*African Weekly*, 1945). A 1943 article in the *Bantu Mirror* (1943) well illustrates this situation:

Many European employers [in Salisbury] prefer an African from the North rather than employ a Muzezuru [a local Shona]. It is stated that the reason for this attitude is that the Muzezuru people cannot stick to one job for a long time and are characteristically insolent and untruthful. The fact is that a Northern African is bound for economic reasons to accept any conditions by sheer weight of circumstances, that is, by reason of the fact that he is so far away from home and failure for him to work under given conditions would spell hunger. A Muzezuru is not thus circumstanced; he can return home and only come to work if a congenial type of job is secured.... It is generally accepted that the Muzezuru people prefer working in offices, hotels, and stores and have a loathing for heavy type of work on farms, mines or factories.

Separation from the home, then, forced the long-distance migrant to actively participate in urban social relations and institutions. This, combined with their

numerical strength, led to a great infusion of "upcountry" values and culture into popular life in early Salisbury. A case in point was the burial/dance societies we have just seen, which were almost exclusively the product of foreign workers. Interestingly, it was not until around the Great Depression and thereafter, that Shona migrant groups started "pachawo (their own)" associations in Salisbury. However, people had been exposed to a rich variety of urban organizational activities by then. Among the first such associations were the ones representing the Eastern District. A branch of the Young Ethiopian Manyika Society was started in the late 1920s, the Light of Manica Society in 1932 and the Manyika Burial Society in 1933, whilst peoples coming from other districts set up associations like the Chipata (Zwimba) Association (NAZ, 1930, 1934; *African Weekly*, 1947, 1951).

Distance from the home area was also an important contributory factor in the stabilization of urban residence, although we know little about the particular circumstances under which individuals and groups came to settle in town. The first generation of "town-based" Africans had a strong bias towards the extraterritorial peoples in ethnic origin.⁽⁹⁾ This had much to do with the worker coming from a far-away land could not afford to visit home frequently. The major exception was the female population, a considerable proportion of whom were, for an interesting set of reasons, drawn from the Southern Rhodesian countryside.⁽¹⁰⁾

What was the experience and position of this group in early Salisbury? Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to look at the history of official location policy and popular reaction against it; for the location question primarily concerned these men and women. Such an investigation, although it covers but a small minority at this early stage of history, will bring us to a major problematic for southern African urban history. As the settler town created sharp conflicts in the sphere of African living, so popular struggle over living (or consumption) issues assumed a significant part in the social confrontations in town, a theme which has recently been explored by Osmond Stuart (1989) in his study on Bulawayo around the time of World War II.

The history of location policy, which restricted African urban residence to either a state-controlled location or the employer-controlled servants quarters, dated back as early as 1892. In 1892, the B.S.A. Company and the Sanitary Board started the location and the urban pass system in Salisbury, drawing on the experience of the Kimberley "native administration." But the real tightening of the housing restrictions began after the turn of the century. Then, the increasingly civic-minded European community became highly sensitive to the presence of Africans in town, especially to those who rented rooms and plots by themselves, and this resulted in a series of administrative measures to control African housing. In 1907, the municipality established a new location, demolishing the old one. The following year, African free residence was declared illegal for Salisbury in terms of the Native Urban Locations Ordinance (No.4 of 1906), and police raids against African free dwellers intensified.⁽¹¹⁾

Location administration was thereupon consolidated in two ways. First, in 1913, the municipality started a canteen in the location, the first step towards the establishment of a Durban beer monopoly system. By usurping a lucrative beer trade hitherto conducted by Africans and concentrating African beer drinking in

one spot, the local authority found, or so it was claimed, an effective method to finance their African administration and to control alcohol-related problems. Meanwhile, the growth of the location necessitated the appointment, for the first time in the location history, of a full-time and resident European superintendent in 1913. His role, together with the location police, was to enforce the location regulations more strictly than in the past and see to it that the location only accommodated workers and their families, not loafers, cardsharps, prostitutes and the like.

One effect of such state control was the “collectivization” of African protest over otherwise “individual” issues.⁽¹²⁾ At first, shortly after 1907, people’s protest was typically expressed as stay-aways from the location, so that municipal housing was repeatedly plagued with large numbers of vacant huts. But the protest gradually shifted to within the location and assumed the character of residence-based group action. Perhaps the earliest sign for this change was an incident in early 1914, where location tenants came together under the location headman, E. Makubalo. In a letter addressed to the Town Council, the people strongly opposed the administrative changes made in 1913, namely, the beer regulations and the new full-time superintendent, and threatened to vacate the location, if the old order was not restored (NAZ, 1914).

When the ravages of the wartime inflation were compounded by the postwar municipal beer policy to prohibit even home brewing for personal consumption, the municipal housing, which accommodated a total of 765 men, women, and children in mid-1920 (NAZ, 1920b) became a site for a succession of tenant protests against the canteen and beer controls, high rents, and other survival issues. They included a deputation to the Chief Native Commissioner in November 1920 (NAZ, 1920c), a rally to the Magistrate’s Court in January 1921 (*Rhodesia Herald*, 1921), and a petition to the Legislative Council in May 1921 (NAZ, 1921b). In a way reminiscent of township protests in subsequent years, women were at the vanguard of the struggle. What the location residents said at a meeting in 1919 is worth quoting: they demanded that they should be “notified beforehand of any contemplated bye-laws affecting their lives, to enable them to hold meetings and discuss such regulations, and submit to the Government their formal protest if they considered it necessary to do so (NAZ, 1919).”

Clearly, location was becoming, by the early 1920s, a neighborhood, where everyday interactions formed new bonds of co-operation based on a common tenant status before the despotic landlord.

Those men and women, who moved into the municipal location and private locations on farms just beyond the municipal boundary, such as Hatfield, MTC, and William’s, seem to have represented the relatively marginalized segments of African Salisbury: it was this group that was associated with immorality, disorder, and criminality by their contemporaries. By contrast, those who came to settle on the outer fringes of the town largely stood for the “respectable,” wealthier segments.

To understand the origins and development of the latter group, it is necessary to first bear in mind that the emerging Salisbury urban system generated, along with many restrictive institutions, a few opportunities for the indigenous people. This

was particularly the case with a minority of youths who acquired an education at mission schools and made their way into better-paid jobs available to the Africans, like government messengers, the police, "boss boys," and teachers. Once having secured a better position in the labor market, these people quickly became long-service workers. They built sub-urban homes, typically, by renting plots on private or mission farms around Salisbury.

Here, too, was a strong reciprocal relation between wage labor and agriculture. In many instances, these suburban commuters or their wives engaged in market gardening on farms, frequently employing other Africans: "The wage-earners in town," a missionality stated in 1925, "hire a boy to plough for them. Quite a number of boys are hired in that way" (NAZ, 1925a). In the meantime, the day-to-day maintenance of their fields and stock in the home village was commissioned to relatives, friends, or employees. This life allowed for a continuous reinvestment of the proceeds from wage labor into peasant production. The successful adoption of such complex household arrangements presupposed the relative proximity of the home village to the place of employment, and so we find that the people in question were local Shonas, plus some foreigners eventually domiciled in the colony. Evidence suggests that such life proved one of the most effective methods for African accumulation in the early days of colonialism. A South African worker employed in Salisbury thus told the Land Commission of 1925: "Some of the local natives are very wealthy, especially some of the natives who are working here, and if they saw some natives buying land, they would certainly follow their example" (NAZ, 1925b)."

The spatial expression of the growth of such an elite was the African suburban settlements, the expansion of which was at its height shortly after World War I. Thereafter, but more especially after the 1930s, the development of such settlements was brought under strict government control, and by the 1950s the Black suburban settlements near Salisbury, except for those on mission farms, were all closed down under the Land Apportionment Act. In the early 1920s, a chain of African suburbs existed in a semi-circle to the south, east, and north of Salisbury, including places like Waterfall Induna, owned by a Zulu named Frank Sixubu, and had an African-run school on it, with its headmaster Abraham Twala: Seke; St. Mary's; Epworth; Chizhanje; Chishawasha; Domboshawa and Chindamora (Yoshikuni, 1989b).

The suburban settlements were also a cradle of African modern politics. In 1919, a small circle of Christian youths "habitually" employed in the town, mostly Wesleyans residing on the Epworth farm and its environs (Peadar, 1975), launched a Rhodesia Native Association, apparently a Southern Rhodesian version of the Nyasaland Native Association movement. The association, although in practice little more than a debating club at the time, defined its political role in a novel and ambitious way: according to its constitution, the RNA aspired to "secure mutual understanding and unity of action among the various tribes in Southern Rhodesia," to keep the government "informed of Native Public Opinion, and to help the natives in directly representing them to the Government in all matters affecting native life and welfare (NAZ, 1924)."

An examination of the life histories of educated, better-paid workers (like

Abraham Chirimuuta and Bammi Mukandawiri) plainly reveals that notwithstanding their long association with wage labor, they often established themselves as “progressive farmers” (Yoshikuni. 1989b: 156–62). In much the same way, the urban origins and connections of the Native Association presented a deceptive appearance. Few members lived in the riotous, congested town location, and the RNA movement, as it developed in subsequent years, was hardly anchored in tensions and conflicts constantly generated in inner Salisbury: the urban issues the RNA took up largely concerned “unattached” women, a government village settlement scheme, and petty segregation in public places. Rather, the movement came to play, from the mid-1920s onwards, an important role in providing a common political forum for a growing class of progressives and modernizers scattered in rural Mashonaland. As a whole, they endeavored to penetrate into the existing village power structure dominated by the Chief and the Native Commissioner. This politico-agrarian thrust of the RNA caused great suspicion and alarm in the Native Department, especially in the initial stages. A government official wrote in 1947: “The correspondence indicates the Southern Rhodesian Native Association to be law-abiding and harmless, with the exception that they are always trying to open branches in Native Reserves and are being warned against this regularly (NAZ, 1947a).”

DISCUSSION

Now a picture emerges essential to an understanding of the social characteristics of the early African Salisbury. Each of the events we have studied—labor strikes, associations, location protest the RNA, etc.—had its particular meanings and significance, of course, but it seems equally true that they underline a common social process, namely, the emergence of an African *urban* community, in the sense that rural migrants increasingly created and became part of new social institutions in town. Studying these events, occurring almost simultaneously after World War I, one suddenly feels entering a new historical terrain from which the relatively familiar urban landscape of mid-century is not very distant.

Yet the emerging town of migrants was gripped by the process of social differentiation. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the growing contrast between inner Salisbury, inhabited by non-indigenous, marginalized residents, and outer Salisbury, inhabited by indigenous, “respectable” residents. The two neighborhoods, or social groups, were so different in the conditions they lived in and the social institutions they created that each gave rise to separate political traditions.

Drawn closer to proletarianization, the inner Salisbury would produce a tradition of urban grassroots movements concerned with rents, liquor, wages and other survival issues in the town, and often directed against the local authority, a major agent for controlling African urban life. It was this tradition which was to gain tremendous momentum after World War II and to be successfully politicized by the Reformed ICU, when an agro-ecological crisis in the colony’s African areas, on the one hand, and the changing labor requirements of industry, on the other,

began to cause a disequilibrium and re-organization of the migrant labor system.

Yet, it is a serious mistake to suppose that the urban scene was contextualized by the advancing tide of proletarianization alone. Salisbury was simultaneously an arena where a different kind of class formation was unfolding—the transformation of pre-colonial agriculturalists into modern peasant farmers. If the majority of the Africans in Salisbury were toiling for White men in an attempt to channel wage earnings into peasant life, then the life pursued by a small group of educated men in outer Salisbury represented the most advanced case of this trend. To that extent, the African suburbia was linked to the dynamics of peasant history. Such dynamics were particularly pronounced in Salisbury's hinterlands and persistently bred an ambience of counter-urbanization in that region. Thus, paradoxically, for the same reasons which made Salisbury's suburbs a cradle of modern politics, as in the case of the Native Association and, later, the Bantu Congress,⁽¹³⁾ the town proved too barren a place for such politics to grow during the early decades of the twentieth century.⁽¹⁴⁾

NOTES

- (1) This paper is a slightly modified version of the paper which was presented at the Staff/Graduate Seminar, Economic History Department, University of Zimbabwe, in May 1991. It is basically a synopsis of my Ph.D. thesis (Yoshikuni, 1989b). My hope is that a shorter paper in a condensed form would reach a wider audience and facilitate discussion on Zimbabwean urban history. For fuller documentation of the events and processes referred to in the paper one is advised to consult the doctoral thesis itself.
- (2) Now Harare. In this study, colonial place-names are used in most instances.
- (3) See the ethnic background of the defendants at the Salisbury Magistrate's Court in the early 1890s (NAZ, 1893).
- (4) The resilience of the African peasantry was also highlighted by Beinart (1982) for Pondoland in South Africa, and by Vickery (1986) for the Tonga Plateau in Northern Rhodesia.
- (5) Even in the Makoni district, which saw a most dramatic increase in petty commodity production in the 1920s, the migration rate rose to some 60 per cent in 1926 (SR, 1927b). Also, a number of recent rural household surveys have shown complex linkage between wage labor and agriculture: the wealthier peasant households often have better access to wage earnings (Truscott & Pambirei, 1983; Bonnevie, 1987; Adams, 1987; Coudere & Marijsee, 1988; Amin, 1989; Weiner & Harris, 1990).
- (6) Cf. Palmer's argument (1977: 233):
An equally striking feature of accounts written in the 1920s and 1930s is the picture of widespread stagnation and decay which emerges, with a greatly reduced number of crops being grown, with an almost complete cessation of inter-African trade, and with an increasing cycle of rural poverty driving more and more people away to the towns.
- (7) Here I am much indebted to Stichter (1982: 156), who argues that "migrant laborers were in fact a class, in the minimal sense of occupying a similar place in the structure of production," as well as "in the sense of engaging in individual and collective class-related action." She (1985: 190–195), therefore, stresses the peculiar dynamic of

migrant action.

- (8) My description of the 1919 railway strike is primarily based on these sources.
- (9) An indication of this was the fact that in 1915 "no local natives (Mashona) reside[d] in the location (Salisbury Municipality, 1915)." The point I have just made may appear contradictory to Mitchell's observation (1964: 23) in respect to Northern Rhodesian towns: "Paradoxically, therefore, a migrant living within easy reach of town can become more 'urbanized' ... because he is able to maintain his tribal links more effectively." Like Mitchell, Elkan (1960) noted a high degree of urban work involvement among the local Ganda in Kampala. But it should not be forgotten that these scholars refer to a much later phase of labor migrancy in mid-century, by which time urban stabilization had taken place amongst the local Africans.
- (10) The 1921 census gave the total number of African females in Salisbury as 524, of which 320, or 61 per cent, were of Southern Rhodesian origin (NAZ, n.d.b). The importance of the Southern Rhodesian element can be largely attributed to a new opportunity in the town of Salisbury for women living in its hinterlands, through the sale of beer, domestic service to male workers, and as a refuge from patriarchal controls in rural society. It may be of interest to note in this context that, according to an official estimate in 1936, out of the total of 800 women living in the location, 150 were "frequently changing 'husbands'," and 300 were living in "improper" but stable union (NAZ, 1936).
- (11) For a more detailed account of the history of location policy, see Yoshikuni (1989b).
- (12) Cf. Castells's polemic (1983: 94) for the tenant unions in the Parisian *Grands Ensembles*:

Since the relative homogeneity of living conditions made it easier for residents to realize the commonality of the urban problems from which they were suffering, the socialization of housing led to the socialization of protest, overcoming the individual relationship between landlord and tenant. It is in this sense that we can think of the formation of a new type of movement: a collective consumption-oriented trade unionism that paralleled at the residence place what capitalist concentration of production and management has triggered in the form of labor unions at the work place.
- (13) The Bantu Congress was established in 1936 (not in 1934) by the initiative of Aaron Jacha (a member of the RNA and an educated worker-peasant residing in the Salisbury suburbs) and others. It came into being through the "amalgamation" of the Mashonaland-based RNA and the Matabeleland-based Bulawayo Bantu Association (NAZ, 1947b).
- (14) Up until when it became defunct in the 1950s, the Bantu Congress never succeeded in establishing an effective branch in the colony's capital city. It was led by a small but gradually expanding group of African intelligentsia and had a serious setback after World War II, when it "lost" Salisbury to the Reformed ICU and, perhaps more seriously, the central Mashonaland countryside to the revived RNA (the Southern Rhodesia African Association). All this makes a striking contrast with the situation in Bulawayo. In the latter, powerful interaction between town and countryside took place amongst the local Africans from the beginning, giving rise to the town-based movements at the early stages, and a situation where the Bantu Congress boasted of the support of various societies and organizations operating in that town (*Bantu Mirror*, 1944).

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