

“Pumpkins Just Got in There”: Gender and Generational Conflict and “Improved” Agriculture in Colonial Zimbabwe*

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SUMMARY: This essay explores how gender and generational dynamics in peasant communities in colonial Zimbabwe were reshaped between 1930 and 1965 by factors introduced by colonization. British rule brought dramatically greater market opportunities and access to new agricultural tools. Some peasants readily adopted ploughs, combining these new tools with indigenous methods of production and environmental management to increase output and market sales while developing new hybrid ways of working the land. These options allowed some young men to evade the demands of, and obligations to, their fathers, while the new methods often increased women’s workloads, exacerbating gender tensions. In the wake of World War II, Rhodesian state agricultural programmes sought to reshape African farming practices dramatically, initiatives that were justified as protecting the environment and modernizing the peasant sector. These measures permanently allocated and demarcated peasant land, imposed onerous environmental protection measures, and encouraged peasants to follow labour-intensive production methods based on European techniques. These conditions restricted young men’s access to land and imposed intense demands on women of all ages; in practice, however, these changes led to a renegotiation of gender and generational dynamics, most obviously in a wave of protests that threatened state control of the countryside.

* I would like to acknowledge gratefully financial support for this project from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Alberta, as well as the Graduate School, History Department, and the MacArthur Interdisciplinary Program on Global Change, Sustainability, and Justice of the University of Minnesota. I would also like to thank the members of the Department of Economic History at the University of Zimbabwe for their input and support for my research. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the vital assistance of my research assistants in Madziwa, Rangarirai Gurure, Obert Kufinya, and Solomon Mahdi, who not only helped with introductions and translation when my Shona failed me but also provided important insights into my work.

VaJonga and Amai Jonga built their homestead in Madziwa, Zimbabwe, in the late 1950s, on a ridge overlooking a small river. Many years later I interviewed them in the shade of a mango tree along the edge of that ridge, mainly to ask how they had changed their farming practices over their lives, and what they recalled of the methods their parents used in the 1930s. VaJonga spoke more than his wife; an accomplished and materially successful farmer, he described how well he had learned the “improved” techniques promoted by the colonial state, disdaining indigenous practices such as intercropping and cultivating close to water courses as “primitive”. Late in our conversation, I pointed to the river flats below, and quietly observed that the vegetable gardens that spread out from the banks of the river were very nice. Amai Jonga spoke up, pointed to one of the closely fenced plots, and said “That one, there, that’s ours, it gives us lots of vegetables.”¹ VaJonga rejoined the conversation, although it was his wife who mainly explained the advantages of planting in the river flats, particularly that ground water made it possible to grow vegetables year round.

This exchange captured several dimensions of the legacies of white minority rule in Zimbabwe. The gardens on the river flats were illegal under state regulations that were imposed in Madziwa in the late 1940s and remain in effect, yet peasants throughout the country defy such bans to get access not only to more land, but also to valuable areas that tap groundwater resources, reducing their dependence on the capricious rains. Moving beyond a didactic confrontation between peasants and the state, the disjuncture between VaJonga’s stated approval for “improved” agriculture and his household’s willing evasion of land-use restrictions may speak to the complexities of gender dynamics.

Gardens are widely considered to be women’s areas, and I knew from other conversations that husbands and wives argued over many years about how to work the land, which areas to use, and what to plant, as part of the complex negotiation of gender and authority within households. I did not feel like I had a strong enough rapport with Amai Jonga and VaJonga to ask questions along these lines with both of them present, but these dynamics certainly emerged in other interviews.

This essay builds on these themes by exploring the social disruptions that intensified among Zimbabwe peasants during the colonial period, as Africans reshaped their lives around the pressures and new options brought by British rule. I am particularly interested in the shifts in gender and the generational dynamics that played out around agricultural practices, in household priorities, as well as in how people responded to state

1. Interview with VaJonga (male, in his eighties) and Amai Jonga (female, seventies), 3 November 1997.

restrictions and vastly greater market opportunities. Beginning in the 1930s, many households in Madziwa readily adopted European ploughs and cultivators, often combining these new tools with indigenous methods of production and environmental management to increase output and develop new hybrid ways of working the land. These options allowed some young men to evade the demands of, and obligations to, their fathers and elders, enabling them to pursue greater autonomy. However, new methods and agricultural strategies often increased women's workloads, which included particularly onerous tasks such as weeding, exacerbating gender tensions.

State intervention in the peasant sector intensified in the wake of World War II, as officials permanently allocated and demarcated peasant land, imposed onerous and often dubious environmental protection measures, and encouraged Africans to follow production methods based on modern European techniques such as mono-cropping and manuring. By restricting farmers' access to land and demanding peasants adopt labour-intensive production methods, state policies threatened most young men's options and imposed intense demands on women of all ages. In many rural communities, including Madziwa, these factors led peasants to renegotiate gender and generational dynamics as women and young men resisted the demands placed on them and older men recognized the limits of their authority.

These arguments engage a number of important themes that run through the social history of southern Africa, including the reshaping of rural gender dynamics, the onerous demands that state agricultural betterment programmes imposed on peasants, ostensibly to protect the environment, and the different forms of resistance Africans used to challenge official demands.² While the historiography of the region recognized the connections between social change and government environmental policies comparatively early in

2. See Allen Isaacman, "Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa", in Frederick Cooper *et al.* (eds), *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison, WI, 1993), pp. 205–317; Terence Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study* (Berkeley, CA, 1985); William Beinart, "Soil Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas about Development: A Southern African Exploration, 1900–1960", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11 (1984), pp. 52–83; Michael Drinkwater, *The State and Agrarian Change in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas* (New York, 1991); Ian Phimister, "Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context: Conservationism and Ideas about Development in Southern Rhodesia 1930–1950", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 263–275; Victor Machingaidze, "Agrarian Change from Above: The Southern Rhodesia Native Land Husbandry Act and African Response", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 24 (1991), pp. 557–588; Donald Moore, "The Crucible of Cultural Politics: Reworking 'Development' in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands", *American Ethnologist*, 26 (1999), pp. 654–689; and William Beinart and Joann McGregor (eds), *Social History and African Environments* (Oxford, 2003).

the 1980s, these arguments have generally been advanced in isolation from efforts to understand indigenous knowledge.³

I want to draw out the connections between these two literatures by highlighting the contradictions between indigenous understandings of agriculture and the environment and the models promoted by the white minority government of Rhodesia that were ostensibly based in Western scientific practices. I also want to push this material further by exploring how peasants actually used the new tools they adopted, as my interviews in Madziwa revealed that many Africans combined the labour advantages of ploughs and other European tools with indigenous agricultural techniques, creating not only new hybrid production methods but also means to reshape social obligations within and beyond their households. Moreover, little attention has been drawn to the importance of rural protest in Zimbabwe in the early 1960s, which is ironic as peasant opposition clearly threatened state control over the countryside – and this open resistance to government policies was deeply rooted in the generational and gender tensions within rural communities.

While I will argue that the tensions and dynamics that played out around farming practices occurred across much of Zimbabwe, this essay draws heavily on interviews I undertook with 115 elderly residents of Madziwa Communal Area, a community of roughly 30,000 people about 125 kilometres due north of Harare. In common with all the designated communal areas, Madziwa is a legacy of Rhodesian racial planning, when certain parts of the countryside were designated as “native reserves”, to be the permanent homes of the black majority when they were not in waged employment in the white-controlled economy.

While the reserves are often described as isolated, dry, and lying on poor soil, this portrayal obscures wide variations in conditions between reserves, and a long history of peasant efforts to produce a marketable surplus and have some control over their engagement with the colonial economy.⁴ Madziwa receives more rain than most reserves and has better than average soil, although it is far less fertile than much of the land designated for white settlers; thus it allowed at least some individuals and

3. See Ken Nyamapfene, “Adaptation to Marginal Land amongst the Peasant Farmers of Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 384–389; Ian Scoones, “Landscapes, Fields and Soils: Understanding the History of Soil Fertility Management in Southern Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23 (1997), pp. 615–634; K.B. Wilson, “Trees in Fields in Southern Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 369–383; W. Wolmer and Ian Scoones, “The Science of ‘Civilized’ Agriculture: The Mixed Farming Discourse in Zimbabwe”, *African Affairs*, 99 (2000), pp. 575–600.

4. This imagery dominates much of the older historiography, as well as ZANU-PF propaganda from the 1960s to the present. See Robin Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (Berkeley, CA, 1977), and Henry Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land in Rhodesia* (Gweru, 1984).



Figure 1. Map of Zimbabwe.

households not only to avoid waged labour, but also to earn significant income from crop sales, options that were much more difficult to pursue in many other reserves.

Colonial communications and state power developed comparatively slowly in Madziwa, much later than in districts such as Makoni, Goromonzi, and Victoria, which were far closer to towns and areas where European farms were concentrated.⁵ This means that commercial pressures and large-scale market opportunities emerged comparatively late, in the 1930s, within the lifetime of most of the people I interviewed. Thus these peasants could describe changes in work regimes, production methods, market options, and

5. See Ian Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890–1948* (London, 1988).

household dynamics that began much later than in regions close to the main areas of white settlement.

Methodologically this is important, because interviews provide the main mechanism to explore these dynamics within peasant communities. State bureaucrats, and the records they left behind, paid little attention to social and agricultural change. With a few rare exceptions, officials did not discuss generational or gender dynamics, and resorted to stereotypical descriptions of African apathy, resistance to innovation, and lack of environmental concern when they reported on agricultural developments. Thus state records reveal little about the main concerns of this essay.

However, the archival holdings in Harare do provide significant insight into the issues that preoccupied government officials, particularly the development of communications and state agricultural initiatives. They even provide some insight into how peasants responded to these efforts, including careful reports of the acts of defiance and violence that threatened government control of the countryside in the early 1960s. That said, the official records shed little light on why farmers reacted as they did; as I argue, the roots of the range of peasant responses lay in the consequences of state interventions, particularly the social disruptions, labour demands, and conflicting understandings of the environment, which emerged in my meetings with Madziwans.

All of the interviews that I conducted were open-ended conversations. While I certainly had questions in mind, I pursued interesting leads, and encouraged my research assistants to suggest questions and lines of inquiry. Several people I met clearly had strong ideas of what I needed to know, and pushed the interview in the directions they thought best. I was surprised that Madziwans readily discussed gender tensions and generational dynamics, issues I assumed could be too personal for many people. However, a number of times, peasants initially responded to my questions about the roles of men and women, and how people farmed their fields, in highly normative terms, or with assurances that they used the methods prescribed by the state. When I followed up with questions that showed I knew people often broke the rules, or that relations between husbands and wives could be complicated, many Madziwans gave much more revealing answers.

MADZIWA IN THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD

In accounts of their childhoods in the 1920s, the oldest farmers I met described the area as virtually untouched by colonial demands. Archival records generally support this image. Although state control of the area was established in the wake of the 1896–1897 *chimurenga* (uprising), the reserves in the district were not demarcated for another twenty years, and the dirt road that ran through Madziwa was so poor that police patrols

could not enter the area for four months of the year.⁶ There was no commercial development in Madziwa itself, just a few stores in Mount Darwin, 30 kilometres north. Bindura, 40 kilometres to the south, was a significant mining and farm supply centre, although getting there required climbing a high mountain pass. Taxes were certainly collected, and this meant that many men, particularly young ones, had to leave Madziwa to work in the colonial economy. Officials reported that in the early 1920s one-quarter to one-third of the men in the district left to find waged work annually; while the accuracy of this estimate is doubtful, it does indicate high levels of labour migrancy, and that the area was not as isolated as oral accounts suggest.⁷

Given the poor road and lack of stores, there was little pressure for agricultural change into the 1920s. Oral and archival records agree that farmers in Madziwa tilled the land exclusively with hoes throughout this period, growing mainly millet, but also maize, sorghum, and a wide variety of vegetables, such as beans, pumpkins, and tubers. Peasants reported that they, and their parents, used a variety of planting methods. However, there are a number of common techniques that appeared in most accounts, reflecting agricultural strategies that balanced food security, labour demands and availability, fertility, and environmental protection. These included a local system of shifting cultivation that involved clearing a new field every two or three years, working it for a few years, then leaving it fallow to allow the thin soil to recover. Fertility was also promoted by burning vegetation and crop residues. Tree stumps were left in place to reduce erosion and encourage regrowth when a field was fallowed.

Most farmers practiced intercropping, planting a range of foodstuffs and different varieties of each crop together to manage the vagaries of Zimbabwe's rainy season, which could bring prolonged dry periods and bursts of intense rain. Intermingling low growing plants such as beans and groundnuts with taller ones such as millet helped to keep moisture in the soil, while simultaneously limiting the growth of weeds. Peasants built elaborate ridges with the soil, in part to manage the flow of water, trapping light rain in their field, or directing heavy run-off away to limit erosion. Using ridges concentrated the top soil in the raised areas, making the ridges much richer and more fertile than undisturbed land. Moreover, in addition to growing crops in their conventional rain-fed fields, many households also grew rice in a wetland area, or raised vegetables and some grains on a riverbank or in a dry streambed garden, drawing on the

6. National Archives of Zimbabwe [hereafter, NAZ] S235/508, Report of the Native Commissioner for the Darwin District for the Year Ended 31.12.1930, p. 13.

7. NAZ S235/501, Darwin District, Report of the Native Commissioner for the Year Ending 31.12.1923, p. 4.



Figure 2. Peasants trading in Bindura in 1928. While European clothing had replaced indigenous fashions in many parts of Zimbabwe by this time, the continuation of local styles of dressing and adornment is clear in this image, reinforcing the recollections of peasants in Madziwa. *Copyright National Archives of Zimbabwe.*

accessible groundwater to produce early crops that met household needs when supplies from the previous year might be running low.⁸

The techniques that people reported using varied from household to household, but also from year to year for the same family. Peasants explained these variations in a number of ways, including their own knowledge, experience, and expectations for the coming season, but the key variable was the availability of labour. Production was organized largely along household lines, so that labour migrancy, advanced pregnancy, or illness could limit the number of hands available to work the land, leading the members of the household to adopt less demanding strategies such as extending the life of a field, undertaking little weeding, or not increasing the growing area by transplanting seedlings to new land.

During the 1920s, Madziwans used several means to draw on labour beyond the nuclear family unit. These included marrying polygynously, and expectations that adult children would continue to cultivate and plant for both sets of parents for some time after they married. The most effective mechanism peasants used to bring in extra-household labour was communal work parties, known as a *nhimbe* or *hoka* in the Shona language. These events were open to all members of the community, who would receive food and beer from the hosts in exchange for work, particularly during the demanding periods in the agricultural cycle, such as clearing a new field, weeding, and threshing. To contract another marriage, men had to pay the bride price (*lobola*) in cattle; calling a *nhimbe* required grain and meat, so that these strategies to expand household labour resources were open mainly to the relatively affluent, households that already had surplus food and animals.⁹

1930–1945: EARLY AGRARIAN CHANGE IN MADZIWA

In 1927, the local Native Commissioner (NC) reported that two ox-drawn ploughs had been sold to Madziwans, marking the beginning of a long period of agricultural and social change. In the following years, other farmers, mainly young men who had worked on white commercial farms, slowly adopted ploughs.¹⁰ Peasants acquired ploughs for a number of reasons, but the most basic was that they made preparing fields much easier, reducing the labour involved while effectively extending the

8. Interviews with Amai Chaparira Paiena (female, sixties), 7 May 1998; Mandizva Mandizva (male, sixties), 9 May 1998; Levison Chavakaira (male, sixties), 30 May 1998; and Cyrus Nyamapfukudza (male, sixties), 28 May 1998. For a full discussion of indigenous knowledge and agricultural techniques, see my doctoral dissertation: Guy Thompson, “Cultivating Conflict: Modernism and ‘Improved’ Agriculture in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1920–1965” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2000).

9. Interviews with VaMusonza (male, eighties), 14 June 1998; Handidya Mazaradope (female, seventies), 6 May 1998; and Shingaidzo Madeve (female, sixties), 24 May 1998.

10. NAZ S235/505, Darwin District, Report of the Native Commissioner for the Year 1927, p. 2.

growing season as it was possible to prepare the land much more quickly, as VaKapfunde explained:

VaKapfunde: From the first day a plough was different, it was much easier to use.

Guy Thompson: How was it different?

VaKapfunde: It was different because with a hoe you could only till a small area, while with a plough you could work a big field. With a hoe it would take a month to clear the land, but with a plough only a few days.¹¹

Ploughs also allowed farmers to work a larger area of land, potentially resulting in a bigger harvest.

Increased production and peasants' interest in ploughs both reflected important changes in market conditions in Madziwa. The road through the reserve was upgraded in the late 1920s, which allowed Rhodesia Railways to introduce a scheduled lorry service linking the reserve with Mount Darwin, and more importantly to the rail line in Bindura. Although both developments were primarily intended by the state to encourage the settlement of white farmers around Mount Darwin, they opened up options for Madziwans, and soon brought in itinerant traders and, in 1932, the first store in the reserve.¹² Initially sales of crops – mainly maize – were limited, but as agricultural prices improved in the late 1930s and into the 1940s sales grew dramatically. Selling crops not only brought increased income and access to consumer goods, especially cloth, ready-made clothes, sugar, tea, and bread, it also gave men in Madziwa a new option to avoid or limit labour migration.

When they acquired ploughs, peasants generally did not adopt modern European planting techniques as part of a broader technological package. During the interviews I undertook, Madziwans described how they, or their parents, blended the labour advantages of the plough with indigenous methods of production and environmental protection in the 1930s through to the early 1950s. Virtually everyone continued using shifting cultivation, fallowing, and burning. Most peasants intercropped, although some reported that they grew maize in discrete plots, on its own or mixed only with pumpkins, while intermingling millet, beans, groundnuts, and other crops in another area.

Intriguingly, most did not plant seeds in the furrows created by the plough. Some men reported that they made two passes with the plough to create a ridge, and their wives and children used hoes to plant crops in the fertile ridges, at times broadcasting seeds between the ridges. Others

11. Interviews with VaKapfunde (male, sixties), VaNyamapfene (male, sixties), 23 October 1997, and Mazaradope and Chavakaira.

12. NAZ S235/506, Darwin District, Report of the Native Commissioner for the Year 1928, p. 3; S481/175 Darwin to Fura Farm Road, Minister of Mines and Public Works to Chief Road Engineer, 24.11.1925, p. 1; and S235/510, Darwin District Report for the Year Ended 31.12.1932, pp. 3, 8.

simply ploughed to break up the soil and then broadcast a mixture of seeds on the tilled land, or broadcast and then used the plough to cover the seeds.¹³ In either case, the raised areas would yield well in years with average rainfall, and produce something in very wet periods, while the crops in the low lying areas acted as insurance for very dry seasons. A few farmers did move closer to European practice, planting seeds deep in the furrows, a technique that was well suited to the types of white maize introduced by colonization but which did not work with millet and local varieties of maize – a crop introduced by the Portuguese in the 1500s during an earlier phase of globalization that had been indigenized.

The variation in planting methods continued to reflect different understandings of the environment and expectations for the season, but this was also deeply rooted in two new agricultural strategies opened up by peasants who adopted ploughs. The first I have identified as hybrid production, where peasants used the new tool to reduce their need for labour while drawing on a variety of indigenous techniques such as intercropping, ridging, and planting in wetlands to secure their household's food supplies regardless of the weather that year. The second strategy was maximizing production, which appealed mainly to younger male heads of households who dramatically increased the amount of land they worked and planted mainly maize because there was a much better market for it than other grains.

Peasants who sought to maximize production were much more likely to adopt modern European planting techniques such as row planting, mainly because it made it possible to use a plough like a cultivator to clear weeds between rows of plants, something that was impossible on an intercropped field. While a few men who aimed to produce on a large scale bought cultivators, planters, or other European tools, most households acquired only a plough.¹⁴ By concentrating on maize and row planting, large-scale producers took on a much higher risk of crop failure, so some households continued to draw on indigenous techniques in part of their field or a separate area while trying to maximize production in their main field; I suspect women used indigenous methods in their part of the field as a food security strategy. While many households sold maize in this period, the small number of peasants who sought to maximize output produced the bulk of the marketed grain in the 1930s and 1940s, so that some were well known to local government officials.¹⁵

13. Interviews with VaMusonza, Garawa Nhembe (male, sixties), 7 October 1997; and Mazaradope and Tobias Chikuya (male, fifties), 21 May 1998.

14. Interviews with VaMusonza, Mai Kondo (female, seventies), 3 November 1997; Bowas Musonza (male, fifties), 8 November 1997; and Godfrey Reza (male, seventies), 15 May 1998.

15. NAZ S1563, Mount Darwin District Report of the Native Commissioner for the Year Ended 31.12.1934, p. 8; S235/515 Report of the Native Commissioner, Darwin, for the Year Ended 31.12.1936, pp. 3, 6.

By adopting ploughs and new agricultural strategies, peasants created different work dynamics within and beyond their households. Increasing production meant more weeding, labour that was done largely by women. While Madziwans aiming to maximize production used their cattle and equipment to clear undesirable plants between rows, women and children were generally expected to dig out the weeds between the plants within rows with hoes, so women's workloads within households following this strategy likely increased. Women who chose also to cultivate an intercropped area to secure food supplies worked even more. As men were expected to clear and prepare land for their household, some women were not able to develop separate intercropped areas or plant the crops they wanted. Mai Kondo explained:

When a woman said "this part is where I want to plant groundnuts" and the man felt it should be for maize, then the woman was told to put her crop somewhere else. He would say "It's my field, I'll do as I want". They can discuss it, but usually it is useless.¹⁶

Women were not powerless in this situation, although they often had to assert themselves in indirect ways, as Amai Chipo recalled.

Amai Chipo: Sometimes I asked my husband for a small portion of land for myself.

Guy Thompson: How did you ask him?

Amai Chipo: It is a lot of work to get the portion, but by talking softly and politely I might get him to change his mind and give me part of the field. Sometimes I had to try very hard to get a portion released to me [laughs].¹⁷

Crop sales, and the growing importance of money, also fuelled conflict along gender lines. Amai Chaparira Paiena and several other people argued that commercialization in this period led men and women to lay claim to particular crops:

Guy Thompson: What crops belonged to women then, and which were for men?

Amai Chaparira Paiena: This idea came after people began to sell [crops]. When we made ridges [intercropped], it was hard to say these are mine. This practice came when we sold and needed money.¹⁸

Although most Madziwa elders disagreed with this idea, claiming that crops had always been divided along gender lines, I believe that the essence of this idea is true, that claims intensified as the value of crops grew. Peasants also presented competing attitudes, although conflict is a strong theme in many accounts.

16. Mai Kondo.

17. Interviews with the women of the Dambaza family (seven women married to the same man, ranging from their thirties to their sixties), 27 October 1997, and Amai Chaparira Paiena.

18. Interviews with Amai Chaparira Paiena, Simion Kagonda (male, seventies), 29 May 1998, and Morris Makaza (male, eighties), 30 October 1997.

Lillian Gurure claimed that women controlled the household’s produce, and had oversight rights to men’s crops and the money that came from selling them.

If a man sold any crop without the woman’s consent, then the woman would demand the money as she would be suspicious that the money had been given to another woman. In some cases, disagreements and fights erupted. It was the woman who had the right to sell the crops. If the man wanted to sell even his own crops such as maize, he had to seek his wife’s consent.¹⁹

As struggles over crops and the proceeds of selling them continued into the present, these statements also reflect ongoing public debates about gendered roles and responsibilities, not just the dynamics of individual households.

Shifts in generational dynamics rooted in the adoption of new tools and agricultural strategies in the 1930s and 1940s are not as clear as the gendered ones. Initially it was mainly young men who acquired ploughs, often with money from migrant labour. They used their new tools and income from crop sales to assert their autonomy from their fathers, especially when it came to marital negotiations. By paying their own bride price, young men reduced their obligations to work for their father’s households, or had more discretion over the timing and nature of labour.²⁰ Pearson Jera recounted his desire to free himself from his father’s claims and to establish his own independent household in the 1940s very clearly:

Guy Thompson: How long did you stay without your own cattle?

Pearson Jera: Not very long. Father did not want me to buy cattle, he said “What about all these animals that we have here?” But this was just a way to encourage us, if a child is told that this herd is yours and believed it, he was foolish! At court, people argued about whether the cattle were theirs or ones that they had been given. Don’t trust your father’s wealth, it is not yours! You have to know how to clap [show deference and respect].²¹

Other men spoke of easier relationships with their fathers. VaManyika’s father not only helped him pay the bride price but also gave the newly married couple a plough and cattle. However, VaManyika’s description of these arrangements neatly encapsulates how ties between generations were secured by such assistance: “I did a lot of farming for my father. A man who was helped to pay bride price by his father was a trusted son. My home was close to my father’s home as I was still required to help him with work.”²² As older men acquired ploughs, and those who had

19. Interview with Lillian Gurure (female, seventies), 29 May 1998.

20. Interviews with Mazaradope and Amai Chaparira Paiena.

21. Interview with the Jera family (three men, in their forties, sixties and eighties, one woman in her forties), 16 May 1998.

22. Interviews with VaManyika (male, nineties), 14 May 1998, and Nyamapfukudza.

acquired the new tools aged, cattle and ploughs became a mechanism by which older men reasserted claims on their sons. As young men sought to marry and establish their own independent households, fathers loaned cattle and equipment as a way to help the new household, but also to draw on labour from their son and members of his household, especially his son's wife.²³

Social dynamics within the wider community also shifted in important ways in this period, particularly as the new tools and farming strategies reduced labour needs, creating new options for plough users. Producers who followed hybrid strategies reduced their need to call on extra-household labour without endangering food security. As Mai Matumba explained, "After ploughs were introduced, life got better. A family of three could finish work in the field early."²⁴ These households were therefore able to get through one of the crunch periods in the labour cycle without calling on relatives or others to assist them. Thus, farmers following this strategy were also able to pursue greater household autonomy, reducing their need for, and obligations to, parents, relatives, and community members, so that new farming strategies opened up new social options.

Peasants who worked large areas to maximize output continued to draw upon extra-household labour, but the conditions of these work arrangements changed. Most continued to call *nhimbe* during the 1930s and 1940s, but these now took two different forms. The first was a restricted work-group called to prepare the fields, limited to plough owners; only people who were directly invited could participate, rather than the entire community. This shift meant that large-scale farmers effectively created a closed mutual assistance group among those who were looking to maximize production. Often it was the sons of prominent men who did the actual work of tilling the soil while the older men relaxed. Participants received beer and food, including chicken or some other kind of meat.²⁵ The second type of work-group was called for weeding and harvesting. These events remained open to all members of the community, but participants received only beer as payment. No solid food was provided. Thus, a clear distinction appeared between ploughing groups and harvesting or weeding parties, a distinction that was reinforced as it became increasingly common for women to organize weeding groups that were restricted to women.²⁶

These changes in work-groups reflected the desire of households looking to maximize output to maximize too their returns on their

23. Interviews with Amai Bowas Musonza (woman, seventies), 8 November 1997, and Mazaradope.

24. Interview with Mai Matumba (female, nineties), 17 October 1997.

25. Interviews with Nhembe, Mazaradope, Chikuya, and Mazivaramwe Kanyerere (male, seventies), 2 June 1998.

26. Interviews with Mai Matumba, Kanyerere, and Reza.

investment in beer and food supplied to workers from beyond the household. Open work-groups were hard to control and discipline, as Amai Manderere explained:

Guy Thompson: Were there problems with *nhimbe*?

Amai Manderere: Aha! Yes, because everyone would know there was a work party. How could people not know and come? Then perhaps you will see that this one is a lazy person. Have you seen a lazy man who has been drinking beer?

Guy Thompson: Would you give such a man beer?

Amai Manderere: Oh yes, yes you would. That is what was done.²⁷

Labour discipline was often difficult; convenors could not exclude people and could not impose rigid work discipline when there was an open invitation.²⁸ Members of restricted communal groups, where reciprocal work on participants’ fields was common, were more likely to work hard, especially when young men laboured under the supervision of their fathers.

These changes in labour patterns marked an important shift in large-scale producers’ attitudes, as they became more concerned with income and financial returns than social prominence or acquiring influence over other members of the community through work parties and generosity.²⁹ For the poor, this change marked a significant loss, as open work-groups became less common, and the labour opportunities open to them were more closely supervised than they had been earlier. Moreover, the growing importance of the money economy that underlay the focus of materially successful peasants on production for the market reflected a fundamental shift in the bases of power within Madziwa. Income and material success gradually displaced other forms of social influence, as peasants were drawn into globalized markets and the values that underpinned them.

1945–1961: STATE INTERVENTION AND AGRARIAN CHANGE IN MADZIWA

The shifts in agricultural strategies and social dynamics that flowed from new tools and market opportunities continued through the 1940s and 1950s, but they were overshadowed by another dimension of colonial control, the growing interest of the white minority government in directing peasant production and conditions of life. State agricultural

27. Interview with Amai Manderere (female, seventies), 7 May 1998.

28. Interviews with Amai Bowas Musonza and Reza.

29. Jojo Mandaza and VaMakombe both tied the declining interest in *nhimbe* to the spread of money and the desire to acquire it; interviews with Jojo Mandaza (male, roughly 100), Mai Sophia (female, eighties), Mai Rita (female, seventies), 16 October 1997, and VaMakombe (male, sixties), 24 October 1997.

extension efforts in the reserves began in 1926, but remained small scale through the 1930s because of opposition from white farmers concerned about black competition, particularly during the depression. In the late 1930s, white alarmism about environmental degradation in the reserves, and its potential spread to European areas, grew dramatically, leading to calls for regulation and state intervention. These concerns continued to grow during the war, so that by 1944 officials were arguing:

As is to be expected, the Native is rarely alive to the importance of conserving the soil; his concern is to get crops, with the consequence that the disease of erosion is spreading at an alarming pace where the primitive methods of agriculture have given place to the plough. [...] In some districts, the Natives' quest for more and more land has transformed once beautifully clad hills into gaunt spectres of ruin. One trustworthy witness instanced a hill, formerly covered with grass and trees, losing every atom of soil after having been attacked by Native cultivation.³⁰

Environmental alarmism among officials and the white community more broadly were reinforced by calls for greater state direction of economic and social change in Europe and metropolitan demands tied to reconstruction after World War II. The colonies were called upon to increase outputs, exports, and productivity to support the devastated economies of Britain and France. Low and Lonsdale famously described these dynamics as the second colonial occupation, a new regime marked by government planning and economic intervention by the colonial state, public and private sector investment, and demand for increased productivity and output in African territories in particular.³¹

In much of Africa, the new postwar planning regime focused on labour stabilization, that is, as Fred Cooper argued in *Decolonization and African Society*, improving wages and working conditions for formal sector workers to boost productivity.³² In Southern Rhodesia, however, white anxieties about African urbanization and the potential erosion of racial segregation blocked such efforts. State officials concentrated instead on restructuring peasant production. In part these efforts reflected ongoing environmental alarmism, but officials also promoted state intervention as a means to stimulate peasant output of basic foodstuffs to meet the dramatically increased demand within the colony.

The Rhodesian economy grew rapidly in the late 1940s and early 1950s, fuelled by mineral and tobacco exports that were vital for British imperial priorities, as well as industrialization to meet local demands. However,

30. Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Native Production and Trade Commission* (Salisbury, 1944), pp. 12, 19.

31. D. Low and J. Lonsdale, "Introduction: Towards the New Order, 1945–1963", in D. Low and A. Smith (eds), *Oxford History of East Africa*, III (Oxford, 1976), pp. 1–64.

32. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996).

shortages of basic agricultural goods and the high prices that resulted were seen as significant economic constraints, as were problems with the labour supply that drove up wages and encouraged militancy among black workers. Officials promoted state intervention in the peasant sector under the rubric of rural stabilization, presenting it as a solution to both problems. By restructuring landholding and production practices, state officials argued they could increase production and the marketed output of foodstuffs, while encouraging African men to devote themselves to farming or waged work, thereby increasing the labour supply. As *What the NLHA Means to the Rural African and to Southern Rhodesia*, the white minority regime's major propaganda booklet promoting state intervention in the countryside, explained:

Many thousands of land users [defined as male] who are no better than subsistence squatters will be given the choice of entering the market economy through proper land use or of seeking a livelihood in the expanding industries of the Colony, and the majority of them will be attracted by the opportunity to develop their stake in the land. [...] They [labour migrants] will find their long absences from the Reserves make it impossible to meet the farming responsibilities which the acceptance of farming rights entail.³³

White opposition to investment in African agriculture diminished because of these promises to redress the labour and food shortages, but Europeans were much more strongly influenced by official pronouncements that intervening in the reserves would allow more Africans to live in them, thereby deepening racial segregation. These arguments had particular saliency in the context of the growing European immigration and the government's desire to make space for new white settlers by forcibly relocating the 135,000 black households occupying designated white land in the late 1940s.³⁴ Officially decried as squatters, the 600,000 Africans living on white farms represented not only roughly 20 per cent of the colony's black population, but a number 10 times the size of the European community.

The key means state planners in Southern Rhodesia developed to allow the reserves to accommodate more Africans and thereby support forced relocations and white settlement was the 1951 Native Land Husbandry Act [NLHA]. This law gave officials new coercive powers and consolidated earlier agricultural "improvement" mechanisms into a single plan. Native Affairs Department administrators could now proclaim permanent arable, grazing, and residential areas within the reserves, bringing an end to shifting

33. Southern Rhodesia, *What the NLHA Means to the Rural African and to Southern Rhodesia* (Salisbury, 1955), p. 13.

34. Phimister, *Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*, pp. 267–268; Southern Rhodesia Development Coordinating Commission, *First Interim Report* (Salisbury, 1948), p. 10; Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*, pp. 42–51; and Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, pp. 10–13.

cultivation. Once the land was consolidated, peasants would receive an arable plot, grazing rights, and residential areas based on their existing holdings; in areas with reasonable rainfall such as Madziwa, the formula was six acres and six cattle. Most reserves, however, were already too crowded to give every current resident a full plot, and many farmers faced a significant reduction in their stock holdings. Moreover, most households had to move to new fields and build a new house on their assigned residential plot, with no control over who their new neighbours would be.

The law also gave officials a variety of powers that were justified as environmentally necessary, including banning planting in wetlands and near watercourses, and imposing occupancy conditions on arable land that required plot holders to construct massive drainage ditches and contour ridges to control erosion. These requirements were enforced by various means of punishment, including fines and eventual confiscation of a peasant's arable land for repeat violations. Under the NLHA, officials were also supposed to promote state-sanctioned methods of working the land, although they did not have coercive powers to enforce these techniques.³⁵ While officials argued they were bringing modern scientific methods of production to the reserves, the interventions they promoted had been developed by missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and had received limited input from agronomists.³⁶

Although the NLHA was only partially enacted in most reserves, including Madziwa, it significantly disrupted peasant livelihoods and social dynamics. The measure represented a massive extension of state power into rural people's lives that Africans deeply resented; as the law was enacted, it provoked large-scale resistance throughout the countryside. The NLHA cut off many of the mechanisms of rural accumulation such as crop sales and strategies to maximize output, while threatening dramatic cuts in individual stock holdings – even if many peasants evaded these provisions. Further, in many areas young men were told they would not receive landholdings once the law was enacted, forcing them onto the waged labour market. The permanent allocation of individual arable plots also forced peasants to adopt a different agricultural regime, one that was much more labour-intensive. Ensuring the fertility of the soil presented a

35. The following discussion of the main provisions of the NLHA is based on Southern Rhodesia, "The Native Land Husbandry Act", in Southern Rhodesia, *The Statute Law of Southern Rhodesia, 1951* (Salisbury, 1952), pp. 893–922; A. Pendered and W. von Memerty, "Native Land Husbandry Act of Southern Rhodesia", *Journal of African Administration*, 7 (1955), pp. 99–109; and J.E.S. Bradford, "Survey and Registration of African Land Units in Southern Rhodesia", *Journal of African Administration*, 7 (1955), pp. 165–170.

36. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago, IL, 1989); Beinart, "Soil Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas about Development"; Drinkwater, *The State and Agrarian Change in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas*, pp. 39–52; Donald Moore, *Suffering For Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe* (Durham, 2005), pp. 80–83.



Figure 3. Hilltop photograph of peasant fields in Madziwa. The distinct boundaries around each household's plot are the contour ridges prescribed by state planners.

Photograph by the author.

particular challenge, as the solution promoted by the state required moving to a household's fields one to two tons of cattle manure every year from the pens where stock were confined at night.³⁷

Peasants clearly recognized the demands of this new agricultural system, and contested its assumptions verbally and in practice. Some peasants, such as Handidya Mazaradope, voiced overt complaints: "People felt that the agricultural demonstrators were being very unfair when they made them dig contours. It was just too much hard work for us! We started asking them why contours were needed, we did not use them in the past, but we still got good harvests."³⁸ Levison Chanikira advanced a broader critique of colonial rule in his account: "When the period of cutting the cattle ended, then came the cutting of the land. People began to see how bad the white man was because of the shortage of land and because they were left with few cattle."³⁹ As the post-independence Zimbabwean government has continued to promote the same agricultural

37. Interviews with VaMusonza, Dahwa Gono (male, eighties), 22 May 1998; NAZ S2827/2/2/3, I, Report of the Native Commissioner, Mount Darwin, for the Year Ended 31.12.1955, p. 6; NAZ S2797/4539, Meeting of the Madziwa Reserve Native Council, 28.9.1948, p. 2.

38. Interview with Mazaradope.

39. Interview with Chavakaira.

models as the colonial state, most Madziwans were more cautious in their direct statements. However, many spoke openly about their farming methods and encouraged me to visit their fields, gardens, and other arable plots, where there was clear evidence of people rejecting the new agricultural practices imposed on them and state restrictions on land use, as Amai Jonga and VaJonga did with their garden on the river flats.

While state intervention through the NLHA disrupted virtually all peasants' lives, its implications were particularly serious for young people and women in general, so that implementation of the law deepened gender and generational tensions. Much of the demanding work of moving manure, digging drainage ditches, and building contour ridges fell on them, given the expectations of parents and in-laws. Moreover, their future livelihoods were threatened by the NLHA. The new individual arable plots could be inherited only by a son or male relative, and so widows and any other sons would be left landless, their only options lying in the low-wage white-controlled economy. Restrictions on cattle holdings and arable areas made it difficult to accumulate resources to pay the bride price, so that the prospects to marry and establish independent households were threatened for an entire generation of young people.⁴⁰

The state's efforts to control peasant farming had important implications for household gender dynamics. Women lost access to the wetland areas that they controlled under the centralization mechanism and environmental regulations. This was, however, partially compensated for by the creation of designated garden areas under the NLHA, which were placed in locations where it was possible to dig a well to allow plot holders to water their crops.⁴¹ Gardens were readily accepted as women's areas, but allocations were generally smaller than wetland plots, and it was not possible to grow rice in these areas. Moreover, these holdings required much more work to irrigate, as the water sources tended to be much deeper than in plots close to the river, while digging and sharing wells could cause social strife.⁴²

The difficulties women encountered because of the bans on using wetlands were far more complicated than they initially appear, as the consequences were not confined to the loss of these areas. For, in combination with the restrictions on the size of state-assigned plots and changes in methods of production, these changes triggered struggles

40. Interviews with VaKapfunde and VaNyamapfene, Mai Matumba, and VaHore (male, seventies), 31 May 1998.

41. While the ban on tilling land close to rivers remains, some agronomists now hold that it is possible to work wetlands without causing significant environmental damage, and it is being allowed in some areas. See R. Owen *et al.* (eds), *Dambo Farming in Zimbabwe: Water Management, Cropping and Soil Potentials for Smallholder Farming in the Wetlands* (Harare, 1995).

42. Interviews with Chief Nyamaropa (male, sixties), 18 October 1997, and VaKapfunde and VaNyamapfene.

between husbands and wives over the use and allocation of arable land. Handidya Mazaradope asserted that he decided how the family holding would be used and allocated, and his wife accepted his decision. He presented this as a social norm, saying: "The women just followed what their husbands said. If he said no to something she wanted to do, she would just follow with no objection."⁴³ Amai Chaparira Paiena echoed his comments, saying that her husband had insisted on controlling the arable plot, and had used it exclusively for grains. She was forced to rely only on her garden plot to raise the range of crops that were needed to support the family. As she saw it, there was nothing that a woman could do in such a situation, which she tied to bride price.

Guy Thompson: How did a family decide how to use their land then [after individual allocation]?

Amai Chaparira Paiena: A husband said it out loud. He would say, "Wife, you are putting your crop here, or this one here. In this land I want to put such and such a crop." All the crops sold at the Grain Marketing Board were for men.

Guy Thompson: What could a woman do then?

Amai Chaparira Paiena: There was nothing to do, you are a prisoner. There is no answer because you were bought!⁴⁴

Many women, however, did not have to accept these kinds of restriction. Women whose husbands were away at work for protracted periods controlled the fields on their own, although some men asserted their managerial role when they visited during the rainy season.⁴⁵ A few married couples said that they continued to work the land together, and collaboratively planned how to use it each year, so that they avoided serious conflict over land use. Others divided the field peaceably; Mai Matumba said her husband regularly gave her an acre of her own to work and an additional area for groundnuts.

Some women fought back against their husband's restrictions, drawing on a variety of techniques to win concessions. These included pleading softly, as Amai Chipo explained, being obstreperous, or even threatening divorce or suicide, according to Mai Virginia.

In some households there were problems when the husband or wife disagreed about how to divide the land or if the man refused to give his wife some of the money from the crops. Then the woman might refuse to work in the fields the next year. Some wives went so far as to commit suicide by drinking poison, and others divorced after the man squandered all the money.⁴⁶

43. Interview with Mazaradope.

44. Interviews with Amai Chaparira Paiena and Mai Jessie (female, nineties), 1 November 1997, and Morris Makaza (male, eighties), 30 October 1997.

45. Interview with Amai Mazengere (female, seventies), 24 May 1998.

46. Interviews with the women of the Dambaza family, Mai Virginia (female, nineties), 19 October 1997, and Mai Jessie. Elizabeth Schmidt argues that women also used tactics such as burning the dinner, complaining publicly, singing derisive songs, or giving names to dogs and

Isaac Maviko complained that his wife was so stubborn that he had to give her part of the field after she demanded a share. This dynamic is also evident in VaKapfunde's comments about farming practice and the division of land, when he admits to allowing his wives to each control part of the field, ironically after asserting that they followed the cropping methods that he dictated: "As for me, my wives understood that I did not want to see any other crops in the field [intercropped]. I would tell them this, or give them part of the field to plant with their crops."⁴⁷

As this comment reveals, wives and husbands also argued over how to plant and use their land. This was an area where women were able to assert their rights particularly successfully, illustrating marital negotiation and contestation very clearly. Many women who controlled part of the main field area chose to densely intercrop their own plot, even if their husbands insisted on planting the main crops separately.⁴⁸

Madziwa residents advanced two main reasons to explain why women continued to follow indigenous methods more closely than men. One was the small size of the individual allocations. As Levison Chavakaira explained, this encouraged women to reject other dimensions of "improved" agriculture: "The demonstrators had no way to convince the mothers to change their farming, because they were irritated, and the reason was the fields were too small."⁴⁹ Amai Chipo explained that women were forced to continue to intermingle their crops because the small plots did not leave them with enough land to cultivate the range of foodstuffs that they needed to provide for their families.

Well, it is better to grow the crops separately, you get more that way. But it takes more land, so we women could not separate the crops as the plots we were given were too small. By mixing the crops together, we could plant many different things and get everything we needed for our children.⁵⁰

The second reason that people put forward to explain women's preference for intercropping reflected the labour demands of different cropping systems. Women wanted to continue mixing crops together, as it reduced the amount of weeding, simplifying their lives. As VaKapfunde explained: "They [his wives] wanted to mix [crops] because they said it would be easier for us to weed the same land once than to go from here to there, to the fields of the different crops, and do the weeding."⁵¹ Many people also said that adding

children that made their grievances evident, although none of the women I met mentioned these strategies. See Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939* (Portsmouth, 1992).

47. Interview with VaKapfunde and VaNyamapfene.

48. Interviews with Mazaradope, Levison Chavakaira, VaKapfunde, and VaNyamapfene.

49. Interview with Chavakaira.

50. Interview with the women of the Dambaza family.

51. Interview with VaKapfunde and VaNyamapfene.

manure to their fields increased the number of weeds, requiring greater maintenance, as the seeds passed through the animals’ digestive tracts.

Thus the men and women in many households were advocating different farming strategies. Men who actively pursued “improved” methods wanted to maximize production, particularly of crops that could be sold, bringing cash into the household. Women who continued to extensively intermingle different crops sought to retain the benefits of intercropping, particularly for food security, labour maximization, and crop diversity.

Household conflicts over cropping methods were not confined to the parts of the field that were designated as women’s areas. Some women asserted their right to have access to land prepared by their husbands as part of the marital contract, by continuing to mix their crops, particularly pumpkins, in with the male plants in the main arable area. Many men accepted this, but serious difficulties erupted, however, when men wanted to closely follow “improved” techniques, particularly if they were collaborating with the agricultural demonstrators to earn their master farmer’s certificate.⁵² Amai Chipso recounted how her husband, a master farmer who had been away for several weeks, returned and was infuriated to find that his wives had planted pumpkins in the maize field. After yelling at them, he went out and uprooted all the pumpkins, ordering the women to confine their crops to their plots and follow his directions in the main field.⁵³

In a very masculine exchange between three men in their sixties – VaKapfunde, VaNyamapfene, and my research assistant Solomon Mahdi – and myself, VaKapfunde described similar circumstances in his household in the early 1960s:

Guy Thompson: So then how did you plant your crops after the field was individually allocated?

VaKapfunde: Oh, we separated them.

Guy Thompson: Did you mix anything together at all?

VaKapfunde: No, we planted each crop on its own, maize in its field, millet on its own, groundnuts in their own place.

Guy Thompson: What about pumpkins?

VaKapfunde: [laughing] Oh pumpkins, you know, pumpkins just got in there, mixed with the maize.

Guy Thompson: How?

VaKapfunde: Women! You know wives, they just go and do these things, what they want to do. They just don’t understand. What can you do?⁵⁴

52. The master farmer’s certificate was a state-sponsored programme encouraging men to work with the agricultural demonstrators and to adopt approved agricultural methods. While some men who took part in the programme did see “improved” methods as superior, others took part because certification provided access to government loans; interviews with VaMusonza and Amai Chipso.

53. Interview with the women of the Dambaza family.

54. Interview with VaKapfunde and VaNyamapfene.

VaKapfunde presented his wives as irrational, reflecting the ongoing public debates about gender roles and responsibilities. However, the women's strategy worked; as VaKapfunde said, he then began allocating part of the arable plot to each of his wives to plant as they saw fit.

Similar struggles took place in the Musonza household while VaMusonza was working towards recognition as a master farmer in the late 1950s. Despite his objections, his wife continued to plant pumpkins in the maize field. VaMusonza, however, was unwilling to face the consequences of confronting his wife and declaring that she could not intercrop pumpkins. Instead, he went out at night and cut the pumpkin vines, so that the plants would mysteriously wither and die. "Clean" fields helped him to earn his master farmer's badge quickly, so that after a few years the pumpkins flourished, once the demonstrators were no longer intensely supervising the household's plot.⁵⁵ This incident is a prime example of how farming strategies of men and women differed, as well as of the subtle, shifting balance of power within a household.

While gender dynamics in this period were strongly influenced by the state's efforts to control peasant production, growing commercialization continued to play an important role, as it had in the 1930s and 1940s. The struggles over control of crops and income continued, lying at the root of many of the conflicts over allocation of the household field to different crops. Women asserted their right to plant their crops and earn income from them, while many men tried to maximize their cash returns by increasing the area planted to maize. More direct household struggles over money and resources also flared up, often tied to farming, as Morris Makaza explained. "Men and women troubled each other after they sold their crops, and men will eat [spend] some of the money drinking beer. Some ended up going to the chief and asking for divorces, especially the young couples!"⁵⁶ My conversation with VaKapfunde, VaNyamapfene, and Solomon Mahdi also illustrated these dynamics well:

Guy Thompson: So how did you and your wife handle money as it became more important?

Solomon Mahdi: Aha, here comes the story that results in fights! That is, how did you keep money?

VaKapfunde: When I sold my crops, I would give part of the money to my wife. When she sold some of her crops, she would keep all the money and use it herself.

Guy Thompson: What did she use the money for?

VaKapfunde: Well she would use it for her expenses – for dresses, plates, and pots, and also for food for the family like bread.

55. Interview with Bowas Musonza.

56. Interviews with Makaza, Mai Kondo, VaHasve (male, nineties), 9 October 1997, and Amai Mushamba (female, eighties), 10 November 1997.

VaNyamapfene: Similar things happened when we were buying seed. I went to buy the seed. If I gave money to my wife to buy the seed, she would return and say, "These seeds are not yours, these are for me".⁵⁷

Implied in these comments is the idea that claims to crops and other resources are tied to labour. Women in households that did not work the land collaboratively expected part of the income from the primary male crop, maize, as they did much of the work of planting, weeding and harvesting it. They were not, however, willing to share income from their own crops if their husband did little more than till the soil, which women considered to be part of a man's marital obligations.

1958–1965: EVASION, CONFLICT, AND RESISTANCE

When the NLHA was initially being implemented, peasants tried to evade and question bureaucrats' orders, but in the late 1950s it became clear that the state would strictly enforce the law. As the different provisions of the act were imposed in Madziwa the pressures on peasants intensified, triggering growing anger with officials. Mai Matumba recalled this shift, arguing that "They [officials] distressed us by changing where we could live. People ended up saying 'We don't want these demonstrators! We want to stay living the way we are!'"⁵⁸ As their resentment grew, residents turned to open protest and angry confrontations with agricultural officers, although complaints often focused on broader colonial restrictions, not just the provisions of the NLHA being enforced in the reserves.

Much of the initiative in Madziwa and other rural areas came from young men and women, reflecting the demands placed on them by their elders and the restrictions of the NLHA. By turning to overt resistance, young people challenged rural age and gender hierarchies, inversions that left deep rifts in communities, so that many people in Madziwa were reluctant to discuss the turmoil of the early 1960s with me. Shingaidzo Madeve, who was in her forties at the time of the demonstrations, denied that there had been confrontations:

Guy Thompson: Did people shout and chase the demonstrators when they came to cut the fields and cattle?

Shingaidzo Madeve: There was no opportunity to do that, we could only agree.

Guy Thompson: Why was that?

Shingaidzo Madeve: They were feared! A police officer, an agricultural demonstrator, a child [assistant] of the chief, we were afraid of all of them!⁵⁹

57. Interview with VaKapfunde and VaNyamapfene.

58. Interview with Mai Matumba.

59. Interview with Shingaidzo Madeve.

Eventually I met a few people who would discuss the protests, such as VaHore, who described how residents threatened agricultural staff.

People resisted having to dig contour ridges as they were a lot of work, an awful lot of work. Some even chased the agricultural demonstrators, waving axes and tools so that they ran away! It was only after the Native Commissioner [NC] intervened that the agricultural demonstrators were able to come back.⁶⁰

Some of the people who were willing to discuss these angry confrontations and the later sabotage efforts directed against white farms and state institutions in the district were relative outsiders, retired teachers, and others who had arranged to settle in Madziwa but did not have deep social ties in the community. The others were men who had taken part in the protests, who spoke with pride of their activities in their teens and early twenties. But these men generally denied that women had been involved, I think reflecting their struggles with their wives and children over the next forty years. I also suspect that these partial silences, and the general reluctance to discuss the protests, were rooted in the painful memories of the gender and generational inversions, aspects of the past that people were reluctant to share with an outsider.⁶¹

State records clearly show that there were a number of confrontations in Madziwa. The NC for the area reported in 1961 that: “Demonstrators and Land Development Officers were tagged with the label ‘policemen’ and their role as advisors was lost sight of. The [agricultural] demonstrators themselves appeared to have lost heart and were in conflict with the people.”⁶² Later he observed that the last two years had both seen “vicious political agitation that seeks to breed any sort of opposition to Government as a means to achieve its end”.⁶³

In the early 1960s, similar reports came in from forty-one of the colony’s forty-four districts, involving protests, defiance of official orders, and open confrontation. The NC responsible for Mhondoro Reserve described developments there:

More and more of what the people called “Freedom Farming” took place. This “Freedom Farming” took the form of ploughing outside demarcated areas, ploughing up and over contours, drainstrips, demarcated waterways and so on.

60. Interview with VaHore, 31 May 1998.

61. These painful memories also likely reflect later disruptions, as Madziwa was very deeply involved in the liberation war. Guerrillas entered the reserve in 1971 or 1972, and the area was largely under the control of ZANU forces until independence. The 1970s were therefore marked by further generational and gendered conflicts, particularly as young men joined the guerrilla forces.

62. NAZ S2827/2/2/8, III, Report of the Native Commissioner, Shamva, for the Year Ending 31.12.1961, p. 3.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Pressure of other multifarious duties prevented as much attention being paid to these matters as should have been.⁶⁴

There were also frequent reports of sabotage directed against government institutions and other symbols of settler control, such as Land Development Officers’ offices, NLHA records, cattle dips, phone lines, chiefs’ courts and offices, and schools.⁶⁵

As the protests spread in 1961, the white minority government worried that it was losing control of the countryside. It deployed the police and army in the reserves, slowed NLHA implementation, and ordered a series of sweeping policy reviews to find ways to contain opposition. In February 1962, the cabinet suspended NLHA implementation, slashed funding for African agricultural services, and gave chiefs the power to allocate arable plots in the designated grazing areas to reduce the grievances over access to land.⁶⁶ The wave of protests, defiance, and challenges to government authority slowed, partly because the state was no longer antagonizing people by trying to enforce the NLHA and “improved” farming methods.

While these protests, driven by tensions along generational and gender lines, forced the settler regime dramatically to reduce state intervention in peasant landholding and production methods, they did little to address the broader constraints – and options – brought by colonial rule. Moreover, while the protests in Madziwa and other reserves could be seen as a simple confrontation between peasants and the state, I would argue that the dynamics were much more complicated. Young men and women initiated overt resistance to challenge their elders as well as the white minority government. These protests reflected more than the uneven impact of the NLHA and “improved” agriculture; rather, their roots lay in the social disruptions brought by colonial rule and integration into global markets, which led peasants to reshape production practices, agricultural strategies, and their environmental management techniques.

64. NAZ S2827/2/2/8, II, Report of the NC Hartley, for the year ended 31.12.61, pp. 16–17.

65. NAZ S2827/2/2/8, I, Report of the NC Nkai for the Year Ended 31.12.1961, pp. 9, 15. Report of the NC Ndanga, p. 10. For other instances of sabotage including arson and attacks on dip tanks and hide sheds, see the annual reports in the three volumes of this file for Makoni, Mangwende, Shabani, and Umtali. See also Ngwabi Bhebe, “The National Struggle, 1957–62”, in C. Banana (ed.), *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe 1890–1980* (Harare, 1989), p. 97.

66. NAZ S3240/21 SRC (61) 55th Meeting of the Cabinet, 3 October 1961, pp. 6–11; NAZ S3240/21 SRC (62) 7th Meeting of the Cabinet, 2 February 1962, pp. 6–8; NAZ S3240/22, SRC (62), 16th Meeting of the Cabinet, 22 March 1962, p. 3; NAZ Records Centre Box 84526 DSD 38/1, “Special NAAB Meeting, 20–22 March 1961”, pp. 1–3; Southern Rhodesia, *Financial Statements, 1961–1962* (Salisbury, 1962), p. 7; Southern Rhodesia, *Financial Statements, 1962–1963* (Salisbury, 1963), p. 7; and NAZ Records Centre Box 98229 1195/DSD.39/10/2 Working Party D Paper 8.