



Zimbabwe's Chinhoyi Caves: 1845-1945

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This study historicises environmental issues at the Chinhoyi Caves that are of contemporaneous resonance with the ecological crisis faced by the modern world. It deals with important themes like water-resource management, indigenous knowledge and its efficacy in the preservation of nature, colonialism and its environmental implications, forest use and deforestation, dislocation and displacement of indigenous people, and the interaction of the local with the global. The subject addressed here has global dimensions and is related to the ongoing debate on Western-indigenous and human-nature interactions. From about 1845 to 1890, the Leya and Kore Kore communities strategically established homesteads, pastures and hunting grounds in proximity of the Chinhoyi Caves, Chinhoyi District, northern Zimbabwe. They survived on the available natural resources: fertile and well-watered soils for the production of various food crops, particularly millet, pastures for livestock, as well as edible wildlife and spontaneously growing fruit and roots. As a strategic niche offering a source of water as well as protection from enemies, the Chinhoyi Caves played a role in political conflicts. The caves also had significant cultural and religious importance, as they served as a sacred religious centre for rainmaking ceremonies (mupwerera). Sacred forests around the caves (rambotemwa) could only be cut with political and religious sanction. Indigenous knowledge and practices of water-forest consumption and conservation were embedded in religion and taboo. These customs were changed from the 1890s under British colonialism. The caves came to international prominence in 1888, when hunters and travellers like Frederick Selous wrote about them. European settlers of Italian origin expropriated indigenous lands, displacing the Leya and Kore Kore onto dry and infertile areas. A wealthy Italian officer, Margherito Guidotti, sponsored the first agricultural group settlement scheme, involving ten Italian settler farmers. In 1900, the caves were gazetted as a national park. From a sacred site, the Chinhoyi Caves thus became a tourist destination.

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Nineteenth-century communities in Chinhoyi District would certainly not have survived in an environment without caves and woodland. Humans appear to have been drawn to the area by its caves, wet vlei areas, fertile river valleys and rich land. Other features advantageous to settlement included types of trees and shrubs as well as the absence of tsetse flies or poi-

sonous plants in areas where cattle and game grazed and browsed. The Leya and Kore Kore communities occupied the Chinhoyi Caves area for agricultural and pastoral purposes as well as for hunting and security. They cultivated various food crops, particularly a variety of cereals, kept livestock and supplemented their diet with game meat, edible leaves, fruit and roots. Caves supplied not only a reliable and permanent source of clean water but also offered a measure of security against infrequent Nguni and Ndebele attacks for much of the nineteenth century. They were an important cultural and religious centre for rainmaking ceremonies (*mupwerera*). The area's sacred forests (*rambotemwa*) could only be exploited with political and religious sanction. Indigenous knowledge and natural resource management practices were embedded in religious beliefs and practices. When the British South Africa Company (BSAC) colonised Zimbabwe in 1890, it dispossessed the local population of productive land, relocating the Leya and Kore Kore people to the dry and infertile Zvimba Reserve. In 1900, the caves were designated and gazetted as a future national park. From a sacred site, they were transformed into a tourist attraction. European settlers placed great commercial value on the caves. They mobilised local labour for the construction of roads linking the caves to the colony's sprawling towns, Harare, Chinhoyi and Kariba. Indigenous civilisation in Chinhoyi District was dismissed as 'pagan and barbaric' and swept aside. Fences, iron staircases, electricity and viewing fees charged on visitors replaced local tradition at the caves.

Historical Context

In the eighteenth century, modern Zimbabwe and parts of western Mozambique were under the jurisdiction of the Rozvi Empire, whose territory was bounded by the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers to the north and south, respectively. The empire was largely populated by the agricultural Shona-speaking people, whose economic mainstays were crop cultivation and cattle rearing. The Shona people comprised of seven communities, each with its own dialect: Kore Kore, Manyika, Zezuru, Karanga, Kalanga, Ndau and Tonga. The

Shona King, the *Mambo*, was the supreme ruler of the empire. Shona and non-Shona speaking people like the Leya, San and Venda paid taxes to the king through local chiefs. Under *Mambo* Dombo, the empire collapsed due to Portuguese interference and internal disputes. Political developments in South Africa also had an impact on it. In 1821, Mzilikazi broke away from King Shaka's Zulu Empire in South Africa. He migrated north of the Limpopo River and established the Ndebele State (1837-1894), conquering and succeeding the remnants of the Rozvi state. From the 1880s onward, British imperial interest in the region increased, encouraged by speculative mineral discoveries thought to rival the Witwatersrand gold mines in South Africa. Cecil John Rhodes obtained the controversial Rudd Concession in 1888 from Lobengula, Mzilikazi's successor. The Rudd Concession formed the basis of the 1889 Royal Charter granted to Rhodes' BSAC, empowering the firm to occupy the region. The pioneer column, consisting of 200 white men (*makiwa*), occupied the area in 1890, and Matebeleland was provisionally brought under control through war in 1893. The two major ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, the Shona and Ndebele, subsequently suffered defeat in the first *Chimurenga* or liberation war of 1896-7. The country-wide resistance against imperial occupation was staged separately in Matebeleland and Mashonaland, after which white settlers regarded the region's natural resources – land, minerals, cattle and natural wonders, as well as people – as war booty.

Pre-colonial communities, 1845-1890

Archaeological evidence suggests that there was a long history of human settlement at the Chinhoyi Caves prior to the mid nineteenth century. According to Robinson, stone implements and pottery artefacts excavated by archaeologists around the caves indicate that Stone Age people knew and probably occupied the caves for strategic reasons. Robinson maintains that the different layers and artefact types of the fossil record are crucial pointers to the presence of Iron Age settlers attracted to the caves over a fairly long period. Some doubt and controversy surround the identities of the

various waves of inhabitants believed to have settled in the Chinhoyi District before 1845. However, archaeological evidence points to a copper-smelting ethnic group occupying the low hills near the caves.¹ Archaeologists describe these people as an “alien copper working group” who possibly migrated either from the Inyanga Mountains in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe or the Transvaal in South Africa. Evidence suggests that the Leya (Balea or Musina) community mined and smelted copper near the caves, causing limited environmental damage to the wilderness and wildlife through fires. They were a pre-Shona, not proto-Shona people, and were known to migrate to distant habitats in search of high-grade copper ore. They moved on the command of the *Mambo*, who allowed them to work mines in the empire on payment of an annual tribute in “cross copper ingots” or “copper crosses”, a valued trading currency.² Warmelo, one of the first European mineral prospectors in Chinhoyi District, describes the *Leya* in a typically Victorian manner of differentiating and classifying the local population:

...of a very independent temperament marrying only among themselves, giving no hospitality to members of any other tribe. Their habits, in the eyes of other peoples were more like those of Europeans than Bantu. Moreover, when people came to buy copper their girls would laugh at them. For this reason, the chiefs of the various tribes of the country attacked them with cruelty to make an end to their pride and arrogance.³

Native Commissioner E.G. Howman states that from the mid 1840s onward the *Mambo* permitted the nomadic and migratory Kore Kore people to settle among the Leya on condition that they

¹ National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), K.R. Robinson, “Preliminary Excavations in the Vicinity of the Sinoia Caves, Lomagundi District, Rhodesia”, in *Rhodesia Scientific Association Proceedings and Transactions, (RSAPT)*, S.H. Harper (ed.), Vol. 51, Salisbury Printers, Salisbury 1966, p.137. NAZ, Sinoia Papers, S34/A/15, S307, L2/1/101, 144/169, “The Sinoia Caves”, Report dated 26 April 1909 from Native Commissioner (NC) to Chief Native Commissioner (CNC).

² *Ibid.*, p.149. Cross copper ingots were excavated at the Caves site in 1964.

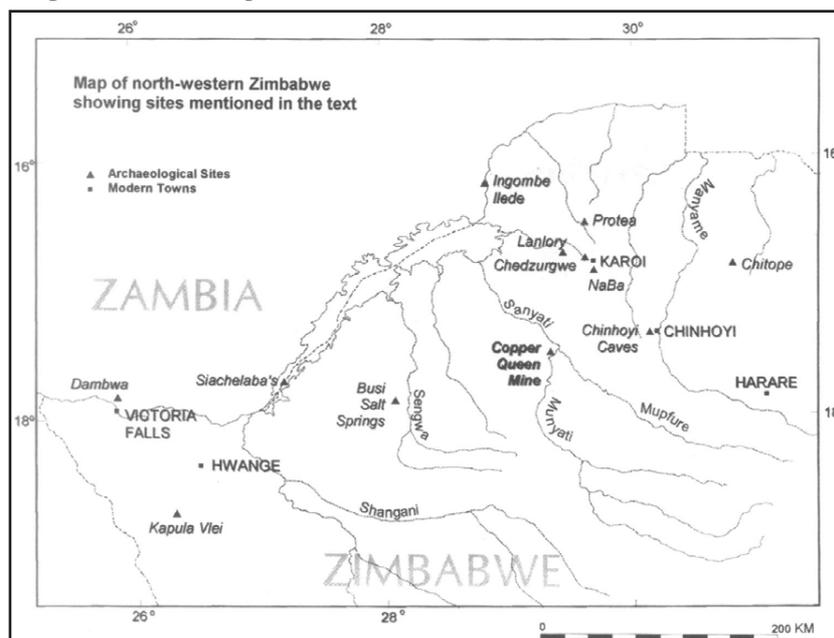
³ NAZ, L2/1/101, 144/169, “The Sinoia Caves”, memo dated 10 June 1899 from Warmelo to the NC.

paid annual tribute. Rozvi rulers demanded loyalty and tribute from the various ethnic groups under their jurisdiction. Chief Kaguda was the reigning Kore Kore chief. The Leya and Kore Kore communities had a peaceful and trading co-existence until the 1850s, when the former defaulted on tax payments due to the *Mambo*. The *Mambo* not only ordered Kaguda to exact punishment on the Leya, but also allowed him to take control of the caves and the district. Kaguda died in the ensuing battle, which caused political instability in the region. It was a time of great social upheaval that caused population displacement among both the Leya and Kore Kore of the Nemakonde region in north western Zimbabwe.

Howman and Robinson claim that following the political upheaval the Chinhoyi Caves area was vacated and abandoned.⁴ Now, relatively high-density settlements were common among the Ndebele but quite rare in non-Ndebele communities such as the Leya and Kore Kore. While it is true that certain portions of Chinhoyi District were uninhabited and inhospitable for various reasons, such as insalubrity, notions of an empty landscape as described by Howman and Robinson ought to be regarded with suspicion and scepticism, being the kind of argument used to justify the claiming of valleys that had actually been depopulated by violence. Local civil wars were also extensively manipulated by colonisers and used as a pretext for imperial occupation. The colonial contrasting of dense settlement and empty land fails to do justice to the complexity of pre-colonial human settlement patterns. Accordingly, the image invented by some Europeans of mid nineteenth century Chinhoyi District as a deserted, vacant place, inhabited only by fugitives and wild animals, was overdrawn and inaccurate. Some areas were indeed sparsely settled due to unfavourable climate or social conditions, wild animals or tsetse flies, but the disinclination of local people to show themselves to Europeans armed with rifles may have been enough for an area to be pronounced uninhabited. Colonial sources may have actually exaggerated the extent of depopulation

⁴ Robinson, *Preliminary Excavations* cit., p.148. NAZ, S34/A/15, S307, L2/1/101, 144/169, "The Sinoia Caves", Report dated 26 April 1909 from NC to CNC.

Figure 1. Chinhoyi Caves



Source: Lorraine Swan, 'Excavations at Copper Queen Mine, Northwestern Zimbabwe', *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 176 (Dec., 2002), pp. 64.

precipitated by warfare, drought, famine and conflicts over tax and natural resources (pasture, wetlands and forests). Both the Leya and Kore Kore cultivated staple bulrush millet (*rukweza*) on red and black heavy soils. Their communities lived in permanent valley and hill settlements. Some European observers did note that most communities and fields were of small scale, with very few scattered villages.⁵

Leya and Kore Kore spiritual beliefs and custom perceived forests as having conservation value in that they enriched soils and preserved vital water sources for humans, livestock and game. The consumption, conservation and management of woodland resources such as

⁵ V.C. Kwashirai, *Green Colonialism in Zimbabwe*, Cambria Press, New York 2009, pp. 36-37.

fruit, firewood, medicinal plants, timber and wildlife were regulated by taboos and traditional practices. The indigenous inhabitants of the caves evolved practical forest management systems influenced by religious beliefs and ideology as well as economic needs. The link between economy and religion in Leya and Kore Kore conservation ideology manifested itself in several ways. Those holding political and economic power also exercised religious authority. This empowered them to make and enforce conservation rules. The ownership, allocation and control of economic resources thus all fell within the spiritual realm. Several environmental features, such as caves, trees, rocks, mountains and pools, were declared holy and conserved.

Early missionaries, travellers and hunters recorded descriptions of Leya and Kore Kore traditional agriculture in NemaKonde. The crops included a whole range of grains and other plants: maize, sorghum, millets, rice, beans, groundnuts, melons, sweet canes, vegetables, cotton, tobacco and cannabis or dagga. These domesticated plants, some of which provided the staple food of the Leya and Kore Kore cultivators, originated in forests. According to Reid, both the Shona and the Ndebele were engaged in a pre-European form of agriculture. Their farming practices fit Vaughan and Moore's description of Zambian *chitemene*, the frequently studied Bemba form of shifting cultivation, known as *gombomakura* in Chinhoyi District, aimed at providing sufficient produce for people's short-term needs. Under the shifting cultivation system, wood and branches were burned and the ashes spread over the land. Old land (*makura*) was rested and left fallow for new fields (*gombo*). Grass, bush and trees grew on old land, allowing nature to revert back to something akin to the original state of forests. Cultivation was believed to damage or scar the face of the earth. Land was rested as a restitution of the wounds inflicted on it. Shifting cultivation was useful in conserving the land and forests. According to Reid:

Pre-European agriculture in Rhodesia was an example of classical cut and burn shifting agriculture for subsistence. The system was adequate and produced a wide range of products but could not withstand unfavourable conditions. Crop production was the most important single economic activity of all peo-

ple of Matabeleland and Mashonaland and attracted a greater input of sustained effort than any other activity.⁶

Crop cultivation was at the heart of Leya, Kore Kore and Ndebele economic activities prior to colonisation. They also kept livestock; cattle, goats and sheep. Hunting, gathering, mining, craftwork and trade were the other branches of production that diversified the local economy.

The Ndebele, more than the other groups in the region, have usually been categorised as pastoralists, and cattle undoubtedly played an important role in their society. They identified wealth with the possession of large herds of cattle and other domesticated livestock originally acquired through raids and trade. In fact, the Ndebele probably elected to settle on the Matabeleland plateau because it was free of tsetse flies and, hence, ideal cattle country. They built up an enormous herd of cattle, in the neighbourhood of a quarter million head.⁷ They also equated wealth with the domination of many people. The Ndebele customarily incorporated large numbers of captive young men and women into their polity to augment its strength. Such strength was important not only in military terms but also in agricultural production because, like the Shona, the Ndebele were basically agriculturalists, their state having succeeded the Shona-speaking Rozvi and other chiefdoms, which influenced them in many ways. Indeed, much of the Ndebele's cultivation work was performed by the incorporated Shona. Partly for ecological reasons, the settled existence of the Nde-

⁶ T. Morgan, quoted in M.G. Reid, "The Early Agriculture of Matabeleland and Mashonaland", in *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 74, 1977, p.101. See also, R. Palmer, "The Agricultural History of Rhodesia", in *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, R. Palmer, N. Parsons (eds), University of California Press, Los Angeles 1977, p. 224. I. Phimister, "Peasant Production and Underdevelopment in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1914, with Particular Reference to the Victoria District", in *ibid*, p. 259. H. Moore, M. Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990*, Heinemann, Portsmouth 1994, p. 57.

⁷ Palmer, *The Agricultural History* cit., p. 224. Phimister, *Peasant Production and Underdevelopment* cit., p. 259. J.H. Bannerman, "The Land Apportionment Act; A Paper Tiger?", in *Zimbabwe Agricultural Journal*, 98, 1982, p.100.

bele was shattered in the early 1860s by a major drought and, at the same time, outbreaks of smallpox and measles, while lung-sickness, brought in by the infected cattle of missionaries and hunters, decimated many of their herds. Livestock disease, deforestation and soil erosion mostly affected the core Ndebele settlement areas around Bulawayo. In 1863, prosperity returned to Matabeleland, rain fell and harvests were plentiful. However, continuous cultivation eventually exhausted the shallow Kalahari sand soils. The demographic overload upset the ecological balance enjoyed by pre-Mzilikazi communities and the consequent economic decline undermined the wealth and position of the Ndebele aristocracy.

Zwangendaba's Nguni migrants passing through the Chinhoyi District from South Africa in the 1830s preceded Ndebele influence on the Leya and Kore Kore. The Kore Kore named the caves Chirorodziva after the following episode:

Zwangendaba's impi raided past the Nemaikonde area in the 1830s [and] laid waste the countryside. On arrival in the caves locality, the indigenous Zwimba [Kore Kore] were taken by surprise and rushed for safety to the Cave and in their hurry to escape from their pursuers many fell from the precipitous walls and were either dashed to pieces or drowned....the indigenous people called the Caves Chirorodziva, literally to mean "Pool of the Fall."⁸

However, Ndebele raids and trade had a much more lasting impact on the Leya and Kore Kore than the Nguni had had. The Ndebele initially concentrated on raiding the local population for cattle and captives, both to assert their control and establish security in a foreign land. As their raids became more and more infrequent, the Ndebele traded and co-existed with the locals. Nonetheless, their

⁸ NAZ, "Chinyandura" (pseudonym, a white writer preferring to use a nickname), "The Sinoia Caves-A Historitte", in *The Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual 9*, N.D.B. Spicer (ed.), Salisbury, Rhodesia 1931, p.67. NAZ, S34/A/15, S307, L2/1/101, 144/169, the Sinoia Caves, memo dated 26 April 1936, from NC to CNC. Another version of the incident reads: "...the Nyamakweri, a part of Chikunda people, captured Mashona natives and through [sic] the men, women and children into the pool...." Also see Robinson, *Preliminary Excavations in the Vicinity of the Sinoia Caves* cit., p. 134.

forays had brought turmoil and suffering among the Leya and Kore Kore. Most people abandoned the Chinhoyi Caves area and sought refuge under the protection of paramount Chief NemaKonde, including Kaguda's successors Chiefs Murenje and Chinhoyi. Chinhoyi returned to the country of his forefathers, an area twenty kilometres south of the caves where one Buru, Chinhoyi's paternal uncle, was chief. After Buru's death in 1860, his son Nyajichi succeeded as chief, but abdicated the chieftaincy in favour of his cousin Chinhoyi, to whom he gave the royal drum (*Nyautali*) to signify that Chinhoyi was the heir apparent to the chieftainship.⁹

Chinhoyi became chief in 1868. His chieftom was a tract of land bounded by the Manyame River to the east, the Nyatandi and Munwa Rivers to the north, and the Angwa River to the west, with Biri Hill – later to become Rhodes' Portelet Citrus Estate – marking the southern limit. He built his homestead on the Hunyani range of mountains. Most villages of the time were built on hilltops ringed with stone walls for greater security, but these proved ineffective in the face of the (infrequent) Ndebele raids of the 1860s and 1870s. Chinhoyi and his people were compelled to move to the area around the caves, where he found an '...ideal sanctuary from the marauding Matebele.'¹⁰ The caves provided a fairly adequate stronghold for the Kore Kore. The two small entrances to both the Dark and Silent Pool parts of the caves could be closed and easily defended. According to Gordon, a high wall of stone and poles around the caves was constructed to boost security. Outside this wall, thorn bush was grown to make the fortress even more impregnable. As Gordon relates:

The Mashona scouts diverted Ndebele attention whilst the Chief and older men guided women and children through thick forest from villages and Cave hill into ruse [sic]. On finding the Cave, the Ndebele were unable to enter since the entrances could be closed using flat stone [sic]. The Ndebele named the Cave Hill Siso to describe the disappearance of the Shona into the belly of a hill.¹¹

⁹ Chinyandura, *The Sinoia Caves-A Historitte* cit., p. 67.

¹⁰ NAZ, S34/A/15, S307, L2/1/101, 144/169, The Sinoia Caves, memo dated 26 April 1936 from NC to CNC.

¹¹ NAZ, A.W. Gordon, "Reminiscences", in *Sinoia District News*, 4, 8, N. McNeilage (ed.), March 1972, p. 15.

Adequate supplies of grain and firewood were stocked in readiness while water could be fetched from the Sleeping Pool. Food, dogs and valuable possessions were taken into the caves. Livestock were driven in from the pastures and secured in huts and kraals inside the enclosure for a few days each time till the invaders had gone and normalcy had returned. On hearing mere rumour of *impis* in the neighbourhood, an approximate population of 400 people would prepare to retreat into the Dark Cave (*ninga*). Chinyandura argues that the core cave settlement was never molested during Chinhoyi's reign because the dual stronghold taxed the patience of invaders.¹² On the contrary, Robinson asserts that Chinhoyi's army successfully resisted all attacks from Ndebele raiders. Nonetheless, the Dark Cave was pitch dark and damp and unsuitable for prolonged human occupation. The Kore Kore learnt to offer resistance at the cave mouths. This is what happened, according to Mennell, when the Shona people fought against the BSAC forces: 'Chief Chinoia occupied the Caves during the 1896-98 risings.' However, the BSAC army succeeded in dislodging the Kore Kore people from the caves by using dynamite.¹³

Besides having strategic importance, the caves were a religious centre and holy shrine for the Kore Kore, where they performed annual rainmaking ceremonies called *mupwerera*. Early European settlers Cheeseman and Chinyandura dismissed indigenous cultural practices as superstition. According to Cheeseman, '...a female native child used to be thrown into the cave pool from the top of the cliff in times of drought in compliance with some superstition, possibly as a propitiatory sacrifice to the rain god.'¹⁴ Chinyandura adds that this '...superstition connected the Silent Pool...to a serpent that

¹² Chinyandura, *The Sinoia Caves-A Historitte* cit., p. 68.

¹³ NAZ, F.P. Mennell, A.E.V. Zeaaly, "Sinoia Caves, Lomagundi", in H.U. Moffat (Vice Chair), *PRSA*, Vol. 10, (Glasgow, Robert Maclehose and Co. Ltd., December 1910), p. 17.

¹⁴ NAZ, S34/A/15, S307, L2/1/101, Sinoia Caves, memo dated 26 April 1936 from NC to CNC. NAZ, E. Cheeseman, "The Sinoia Caves, Rhodesia's Wonderful Shrine of Nature", in *British South Africa Annual*, Hortors Ltd, Cape Town 1928-29), p. 132.

inhabited its depth and for this reason the African never ventured to bathe, the white people bathe in its clear and tepid waters.¹⁵ In contempt of local norms and values, the hunter-traveller Frederick Selous had swum the Silent Pool in 1887. F.T.R. denied that the caves had any cultural importance: '[The] place was not known to have been connected with any particular native customs or traditions'.¹⁶ Actually, although some of the local customs were difficult to interpret, indigenous people's beliefs and rituals regarding unique natural phenomena often served practical conservation needs. The Kore Kore could not bathe in the silent pool, a valuable permanent clean water supply during wartime and recurrent drought periods. Male and female village spirit mediums (*masvikiro*) and ethnic spirit mediums (*mbondoro*) closely advised local rulers at their councils (*dare*) in matters of sacred caves and groves. It is naïve to ignore the role of political power and religion in traditional resource consumption and conservation; still, indigenous knowledge and the role of guardian spirits and holy shrines in the functioning of ritually controlled ecosystems has yet to be fully appreciated.¹⁷

The caves were managed on a common property basis, either community or ethnically based. Boundaries between ethnic groups were vague, but were known to follow prominent geographical features like rivers and hills. Land was communally owned, but vested in the chief who held it in trust for the people. The *dare* allocated land to individuals for homesteads and plots. Pasture was communally owned and used equally by all under a common property regime. Individual families retained usufruct rights on allocated land, provided they did not display political disloyalty, migrate, commit a legal offence or violate conservation laws. Likewise, all trees belonged to the

¹⁵ Chinyandura, *The Sinoia Caves-A Historiette* cit., p. 68.

¹⁶ C. Blake, *The Legend of Lomagundi*, Art Printopac, Salisbury 1967, p. 7. NAZ, F.T.R., *The Rhodesia Annual*, 1926-27, p. 40.

¹⁷ F. Matose, J. Clarke, "Who is the Guardian of the Indigenous Forests?", in *The Ecology and Management of Indigenous Forests in Southern Africa*, G.D. Pierce, D.J. Gumbo (eds), Harare 1993, p. 63. D.J. Gumbo, "Is There Traditional Management of Indigenous Forest Resources in the Communal Lands of Zimbabwe?", in *ibid.*, p. 83.

community. Forests and caves were viewed as *sango* or wilderness, to which all had equal access to collect the multiple forest products on which indigenous material culture was based. Hillside cultivation near the caves was rare regardless of the availability of flat land. Core Shona settlements were the exception, since population pressure made common property management vulnerable. The resource shortages associated with high population densities created competition and tensions that local institutions and mechanisms failed to resolve and often led to breakdowns in local resource management. Certainly, the authority and sanctions of the *dare* were critical for resource conservation. Peasants generally observed cultural values, fears and superstitions which deterred them from breaching laws pertaining to the collection or damaging of forest resources without proper political and religious sanction. Collective action was taken against individuals settling or herding in reserved pastures and sacred forests. Communities were compelled to preserve forests at the caves not only for religious reasons, but also as a resource to draw upon during *shangwa*, the cyclical droughts and famines experienced throughout Southern Africa. It was believed that ancestral wrath inflicted punishment on offenders defying chieftaincy laws on resource conservation. The system of forest management operated on taboos (*miko*) having strong conservation value. However, investing a lot of power in the hands of a ruling chiefly elite meant that the sharing of available resources was not always egalitarian. Accumulation was possible, but generally few people were excluded from resources.¹⁸

British colonial intrusions, 1890-1945

The foremost concern of the BSAC administrators was the exploitation of mineral resources – for which there were great expectations – and the acquisition of fertile farmland. Each pioneer settler was granted fifteen claims on mineral deposits and a large land allow-

¹⁸ Kwashirai, *Green Colonialism* cit., p. 58.

ance, 3000 acres or 1210 hectares. Gold became, and long remained, the territory's leading export. However, mining the extremely localised alluvial gold deposits offered limited opportunities for acquiring the instant riches the settlers had expected. According to Palmer and Phimister, the BSAC soon officially acknowledged that there was no gold mining bonanza, but other minerals like copper, chrome and tin were eventually discovered and mined, in parallel with the development of commercial settler agriculture.¹⁹ The acquisition of farmland became a priority for early settlers. The state built a bureaucratic and technocratic apparatus to serve its own interests and those of the metropole. It adopted universal land-use planning categories – white commercial farms, national parks, and “native”, forest and game reserves – as a basis for rational and scientific management, but especially as an instrument of state control. The 1894 Land Ordinances and the laws succeeding it were part of a policy of creating reserves for indigenous people, starting with the Gwai Native Reserve and Shangani Native Reserve in Matebeleland. Apart from making room for European settlement, “native” reserves functioned as labour reservoirs for the settler modern sector: mining, farming, forestry and manufacturing. Local people, however they have tried to resist the new status quo, became de facto tenants, labourers or “squatters”. European-acquired land was generally invested in commercial agriculture, the second pillar of the economy after mining. The BSAC sought to diversify the economy into other sectors such as forestry.

Many gold and copper mining centres emerged in the Chinhoyi District, including Chinhoyi itself, Mhangura, Golden Kopje, Lions Den and Alaska. The Alaska gold and copper mine was established at the Chinhoyi caves in 1900. A few settlers with South African farming background immediately realized that the land surrounding the caves was both fertile and well watered. They imagined themselves comfortably housed with families, surrounded by labourers and countless herds, growing tobacco, rice, mealies and other tropi-

¹⁹ R. Palmer, N. Parsons, “Introduction”, in *The Roots of Rural Poverty* cit., p. 7. I. Phimister, “Peasant Production and Underdevelopment in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1914”, in *Africa Affairs*, 73, 291, 1974, pp. 218-219.

cal produce. Settlers acquired the first large-scale commercial farms in Chinhoyi District and elsewhere by dispossessing indigenous people of the better-quality arable land located in higher and more reliable rainfall areas. Settlers of mostly Italian origin expropriated tracts of land and the indigenous people were relocated to the dry and infertile Zvimba Reserve, established in 1904. Settler farms on the Nemakonde plateau increased especially after the construction of the railway system that linked the major urban centres of Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare and Chinhoyi. Under pressure from settlers, the BSAC Government appropriated more and more prime land and made investments in the railway and road infrastructure to promote export-oriented tobacco, maize and cotton agriculture in order to restore the value of its depreciating shares on the London Stock Exchange. Land alienation became widespread, often building up to punitive evictions of local people from lands claimed by settlers. A wealthy Italian officer, Margherito Guidotti sponsored the first agricultural group settlement scheme for ten Italian settler farmers. A series of land commissions established by settlers in 1915, 1920 and 1925 culminated in the 1930 Land Apportionment Act, which provided the main legal framework for racial land segregation, guaranteeing settler economic dominance over black poverty. Colonial land policy, being geared to attract more settler immigrants into fertile parts of Zimbabwe, acted to further dispossess the local population and displace them to less productive lands. It thus gave rise to an intensely emotive, acrimonious and protracted contestation over indigenous and settler land rights and claims in the short, medium and long term. Mining and agriculture in the Chinhoyi District caused deforestation and soil erosion as a result of clearing vegetation and timber cutting. The rehabilitation of lands around abandoned mines was expensive and often difficult due to waste material affecting the soil, vegetation and water. Quarrying in the vicinity of the caves was believed to have led to a dramatic decrease of water levels in the Silent Pool.

Robinson and *Chinyandura* contend that Chief Chinhoyi voluntarily vacated his people's lands at the Chinhoyi Caves and moved further afield when settlers occupied the fertile area. Chinhoyi and

Banda, however, argue that the Leya and Kore Kore people were forcibly evicted from their homelands. They migrated to the Zvimba Reserve and other parts of the colony in search of an alternative existence, land alienation having come as a shock to many indigenous people of the region. The vast Sinoia Citrus Estate, owned by Rhodes' BSAC, was arbitrarily carved out of prime plateau land previously under Chief Chinhoyi's jurisdiction. The Chinhoyi Caves were designated and fenced as a national park in 1908. Generally, colonial policy on land, taxation and labour was tailored to thwart competition from local people. Colonial policy was designed to weaken the locals, especially through land dispossession, the imposition of several taxes, and inducing or forcing them to work on settler mines, farms, construction and homesteads. Labour mobilisation, utilisation and retention was critical to the survival of the colonial cash economy. The sectors of agriculture, mining and public construction were a "labour devouring machine" which invariably experienced endless shortages, partly as a result of disaffection among locals due to maltreatment from settler employers. In the early colonial period, forced labour (*chibharo*) was extensively used to alleviate labour shortages in railway and road construction.²⁰

The colonial state gave top priority to the development of transport infrastructure to stimulate the production and marketing of cash and food crops, as well as minerals. In 1917, the road engineer in colonial Chinhoyi, Briggs, assured settler farmers, miners and merchants that the government was committed to providing good roads in the area. It was hoped that the resulting railway and road network would ease transport and communication difficulties and facilitate overall economic development in the colony for the benefit of settlers and the colonising power. In the event of another outbreak of armed resistance by local people, roads were a security measure offering escape routes to safer places.²¹ The Harare Chinhoyi Road was

²⁰ Robinson, *Preliminary Excavations* cit., pp. 132-134. Chinyandura, *The Sinoia Caves-A Historite* cit., p. 68.

²¹ NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, General Out Letters, Labour for Roads, Memo dated 10 December 1917 from Assistant Magistrate, (AM) to the Secretary, (Sec.) of Farm-

regarded as a lifeline to a mining and agriculturally important region. In addition, tourists and settlers were eager to visit the natural attractions of the colony, including the Victoria Falls and Chinhoyi Caves. The nascent tourism industry provided revenue to the state, so the Harare Road ranked highly as a priority in the upgrading of the road network. Apart from these officially stated objectives, the road and railway infrastructure were a lubricant for colonialism. Cheaply produced primary commodities were exported to the Western capitalist system while overpriced manufactured wares were purveyed in the colony, stifling indigenous food and craft industries.

Not only did the state finance road construction, it also actively participated in the mobilisation of labour for that sector. In 1901, the Secretary of State for Colonies legally prohibited District Native Commissioners from direct or indirect involvement in labour recruitment. However, many District Native Commissioners, including Keigwin and Howman for Chinhoyi District, continued to requisition local labour for state roads and other requirements in collaboration with some chiefs, headmen, village heads, “native” messengers and the police, including the notorious BSAC police. From 1900 to 1923, the BSAC Department of Administration asked settler farmers in Chinhoyi to lend carts, oxen and a number of “boys” for road work. The Roads Department provided full compensation for carts damaged while on government service. Ironically, labourers injured on public service were not entitled to compensation.²² In 1910-1912, the Commercial Branch of the BSAC was financed by P. Inskipp to build the Chinhoyi Caves Road to cater for settler interests and especially tourist and com-

ers Associations. NAZ, NSF, 2/1/2, 185/87, Roads. Famine Relief, memo dated 07 June 1922 from NC to Superintendent of Natives (SN).

²² NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, *Salisbury Road and Problems*, memo dated 1 June 1918, form AM to Sec. Mines and Roads, SMR. NSF, 2/1/1, *Road Work in Lomagundi District*, memo dated 18 May 1918 from AM to SMR. In the 1920s the Lomagundi Roads Department received twenty pounds per month for road work. Considered to be inadequate, the vote was heavily subsidised by cheap African labour and supplemented by tolls collected from all road users in the district. Part of the road levies was used to pay chiefs and headmen for their role in labour recruitment. Road levies were also used to pay drivers, road gang leaders or ‘drivers’, for

mercial traffic. As a result, the road was regarded as private property. The Commercial Branch was against general traffic and, even more, the transportation of logged timber on the Caves Road. The Branch put up signs directing general wagon traffic to use narrow and hilly tracks that proved very expensive for the state to maintain. From 1917 to 1925, H.U. Moffart, Minister of Mines and Public Works, banned private wagon traffic on the Caves road ‘...in the interest of the travellers and visiting public.’²³ While the Branch could make profits by charging the tourists high road tolls, farmer and merchant traffic tended to congest and destroy the road by eroding it.

The Road Board attended to and solved many disputes over road and forests rights that arose among local miners, farmers and traders. Merchants and mine owners usually paid road and forest levies to farmers, since most major roads passed through farms. Wood traders often cut timber and firewood on privately owned land without the permission of the landowner. The wood cutters caused not only anxiety among the commercial farming community, but also deforestation and soil erosion. Along with unregulated mining activities, environmental degradation in the Chinhoyi District was recognised early on as one of the most serious negative impacts of the colonial cash economy. However, when Moffat lifted his ban in 1925, he toured the roads in Chinhoyi District and was full of praise for Native Commissioner Howman for a well-done road building job. Howman’s successor, Native Commissioner Charles Bullock, maintained and sustained the vigorous road building programme from 1927 to 1932. Bullock’s successor also continued to harness and exploit local labour for the improvement of the road and other infrastructure.²⁴ On average, about twenty gangs of labourers would

buying rations, and for hiring scotch carts from miners and farmers. NSF, 2/1/1, *Labour for Roads in Lomagundi District*, memo dated 10 December 1917 from AM to Sec. Farmers Associations.

²³ NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, Caves Road M/42/17, memo dated 12 September 1917 from AM to SMR. NSF, 2/1/1, Caves Road M/42/17, memo dated 23 April 1918 from AM to SMR. NSF, 2/1/1, Caves Road M/42/17, memo dated 12 September 1917 from AM to SMR.

²⁴ NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, Caves Road M/42/17, memo dated 23 April 1918 from

be engaged at the same time throughout the district to construct roads, bridges, dams and both public and private buildings. In the Zvimba and other reserves, village labour conscripts were allocated road stretches to work, supervised by badly paid messengers rather than settler overseers, who were perceived as expensive.²⁵ Divide and rule tactics were used to pacify the local population.

Prison Labour

The available voluntary and forced labour supplies failed to satisfy the high labour demands of the public and private sector. Labour shortage in the settler economic sectors was a permanent outcry in the colonial economy. Private employers and the government thus resorted to the exploitation of prison labour. In colonial Chinhoyi, there was no distinction made between *chibharo* and convict workers. Many locals were arbitrarily arrested on flimsy charges, tried, convicted, and sentenced to long hard labour jail terms as a labour mobilising mechanism for both state and private sector employers. As labour agents, the BSA Police acted with extra-judicial powers, becoming “a law unto themselves”, a “brigandage that unleashed a reign of terror” on local adult males. In the force, ‘... a policeman could arrest a per-

AM to SMR; S34/A/6, S307, *Labour Shortage*, memo dated 20 July 1925 from NC to CNC. In this memo the NC also reported that : “I have received during the last week, applications for labour amounting to 120 Natives from the Mines and Works Department and the Chief entomologist. Might it be pointed out to the Department concerned that there is no quantity of labour offering at this station at any time and officials requiring natives for work in this district would be advised to get them from Salisbury or to send a runner ahead to collect labourers were able. There is only one method by which I can procure labour and that is forbidden”. Forbidden or not NCs continued to coerce Africans into work gangs for the needs of the state and the private sector. S2837/9/1, *Taxation, the Hunyani Bridge*, memo dated 05 May 1956 from NC to the Master of the High Court.

²⁵ NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, *Labour for Roads in Lomagundi District*, memo dated 10 December 1917 from AM to Sec. Farmers Association. NSF, 2/1/1, Caves Road M/136/18, memo dated 27 April 1918 from AM to SMR. The PWD experienced a serious shortage of tools such as axes, hoes, picks, spades and shovels.

son for certain offences if he had reasonable suspicion that an offence had been or was about to be committed.²⁶ There was fierce competition for hard labour prisoners between the public and private sectors because they worked without pay. From the 1910s, the *Lomagundi* Road Board and *Lomagundi* Farmers' Association frequently complained about low inmate numbers at the Chinhoyi prison. With regularity, these private employers would urgently require several 'gangs of 10 to 12 boys from prison' to work on their estates or repair one of the roads leading from Chinhoyi to Angwa, Umboe, Alaska, Harare and the Chinhoyi Caves. In the late 1920s, the Chinhoyi Roads Department wrote to Native Commissioner Bullock:

The Roads Department are desirous of more prisoners to work on the roads near Sinoia and put that while they are unable to get them prisoners are working for private individuals, eg. cleaning stands....the District Road Engineer makes special reference to willing co-operation, but it is suggested that instructions on this point are not clear. Circular 3 of 1926 is however quite explicit and the Roads Department have priority over all work other than specially authorised Government work.²⁷

²⁶ NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, roads, memo dated 30 June 1917 from AM to SMR. Also see NAZ, NSF, 2/1/2, Crimes, memo dated 05 September 1922 from Assistant NC to W.A. Smith of Leverdale Store, NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, Crime, memo dated 21 March 1922 from NC to SN, NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, Civil Cases, memo dated 11 March 1918 from AM to Sec. Law Dept., (SLD), NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, Criminal Cases, memo dated 08 June 1918 from AM to SLD and NSF, 2/1/1, Criminal Cases, memo dated 04 May 1918 from AM to SLD. Petty offences for which Africans went to jail included failure to control their barking dogs, making any noise disturbing to whites, hunting game without a licence, moving around without passes, and loafing. Some Africans were actually imprisoned for serious crimes ranging from general theft, stock rustling, house breaking, rape, stealing children, tax evasion, culpable homicide, murder and desertion from work. NAZ, NSF, 2/1/2, Crimes, memo dated 05 September 1922 from Assistant NC to W.A. Smith of Leverdale Store.

²⁷ NAZ, S/34/A/16, S307, L2/1/104, 173/61/27, 2143, *Prison Labour on Roads*, memo dated 23 June 1927 from SLD to AM. Before 1934 each prisoner with tools contracted to private employers was hired out at 1/6 per day without tools. The rates were reduced in 1934 to make prison labour more cheap and attractive. Those with tools cost 9d and those without 1/- per day. Also see NAZ, S34/A/11, S307, L3/1/5, 212/1553/31, memo dated 27 November 1931 from AM to SLD and S34/A/14, S307, L3/1/22, *Rates*, memo dated 08 August 1934 from AM to Direc-

Similar competition for prison labour took place elsewhere in colonial Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Mutare, and Kadoma, especially with regard to roadwork.

The living and working conditions of African workers and prisoners in the construction industry were appalling. Prison warders like Macmillan and A.W. Kidd were violent and brutal to inmates. Local jail guards like Charlie and Gereya also committed atrocities on prisoners that went unpunished. Medical records show that in the inter-war period Doctor Heweston, the Chinhoyi District Surgeon, failed

Table 1. Prison population at Chinhoyi jail 1915-1917

DATE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
27 May 1915	60	0	60
31 May 1915	52	0	52
12 June 1916	52	0	52
23 June 1916	51	0	51
1 July 1916	70	0	70
8 July 1916	67	0	67
15 July 1916	56	0	56
7 April 1917	51	1	52
17 April 1917	49	1	50

Source: NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, Inspection of Prisoners, Memo dated 15 June 1918, from AM to Medical Director, Salisbury.

to keep proper records of the health condition of prisoners. When he did file reports it was without actually conducting physical check-ups or an inspection. Successive Native Commissioners refused to expand the overcrowded jail facilities.²⁸ Chinhoyi prison was always

tor of Prisons. NSF, 2/1/1, *Labour for Roads in Lomagundi District*, memo dated 30 June 1917 from AM to SMR. S34/A/16, S307, L2/1/104, 173/61/2, 2143, *Prison Labour on Roads*, memo dated 23 June 1927 from SLD to AM.

²⁸ NAZ, S34/A/14, S307, L3/1/22, 101/22/35, *Prison Labour*, memo dated 11 January 1935 from Director of Prisons to T.C. Fynn. S34/A/66, S307, *Goal Staff*, memo dated 06 October 1925 from AM to SLD. S34/A/9, S307, 161/515/29 *Goal Guards*, memo dated 17 June 1929 from AM to SLD. NSF, 2/1/1, *Inspec-*

filled beyond capacity. Serious overcrowding resulted in a high mortality rate. Although the jail was officially designed to house less than forty inmates at any given time, Table 1 illustrates how congested it actually was during the First World War. The prison cells were almost always 'crowded to an unhealthy extent'.²⁹

The indigenous people were not docile victims of colonial rule: they responded to workplace oppression with frequent absenteeism and desertions. Their dodging of construction and farming duties was certainly in protest against appalling working conditions and crowded accommodation in compounds. Housing was invariably of poor quality, since labourers were denied access to the good quality timber necessary to construct decent huts. Most labourers worked long hours at arduous tasks. In spite of the onerous demands of construction work, wages remained desperately low. From 1900 onward there was widespread poverty among construction and agricultural workers, because employers neither raised wages nor improved general working conditions. The incidence of poverty among labourers had deep historical roots. Labourers had never been granted statutory minimum wages or minimum food rations. During the twentieth century, the antiquated 1901 Masters and Servants and later on the 1931 Industrial Conciliation Acts governed labour relations and the power relationship was profoundly unequal. Most labourers were illiterate, landless and undernourished, with few possessions or savings, and bleak future prospects. Generally they had little or no security of tenure. They were not allowed to form trade unions or bargain for better wages and living and working conditions. A beer hall permit was required under the 1918 Kaffir Beer Act before employers could provide beer outlets at the farms. Several woman beer brewers operated illegally without licences in order to supplement their meagre family incomes. Due to the lack of recreational facilities there were few opportunities for social entertainment. In

tion of Prisoners, memo dated 15 June 1918 from AM to Medical Director. NSF, 2/1/1, M/173/18, *Diseases in Prison*, memo dated 31 May 1918, from AM to District Surgeon.

²⁹ Ibid.

response, incidents of loafing at work places were quite high. Many workers feigned illness. Others stole or destroyed equipment. Both individual and mass desertions from places of employment were rampant. Every year prisoners would escape to freedom en-masse. Labour flight to the Rand in South Africa was further testimony of worker consciousness and resistance to the excesses of colonial exploitation.³⁰ The critical shortage of docile and cheap labour continued unabated because colonial capitalists were abusive and wasteful of the abundant labour supplies available to them, which they neglected and chose to maltreat. These labour supplies hence voted with their feet and simply disappeared.

In spite of the labour wastage problem, the development of the caves area as a tourist attraction centre began in earnest from 1917. Construction work was carried out to make the caves accessible and safe to tourists. The Public Works Department contracted Joseph Parhart to set up a camping site with ample space to park several cars. Parhart also cut steps leading into the Silent Pool and Dark Cave, erecting fences in several parts to serve as guardrails. He built a stairway to the Main Cave and placed wooden and steel ladders in the Dark Cave to make it easier for visitors down and up the dark tunnels. Strong doors were placed at the entrances to keep the baboons out. The project cost the department £50.70.³¹ Further improvements were made in 1929. Thirty-three convicts were employed to cut steps leading to the Dark Cave and Sleeping Pool, since the steep and slippery slopes continued to pose grave danger to tourists. Such work became a perennial requirement since the structures were fragile and vulnerable to bad weather. At a cost of £69.78, Truby refurbished dangerous spots in 1933. However, even Truby's brick and iron structures were not durable and failed to provide a

³⁰ NAZ, S34/A/16, S307, L2/1/04, *Labour Shortages*, Report dated 10 August 1927 from NC to Ass. District Superintendent BSAP Sinoia. NSF, 2/1/1, *Escapes from Prison*, memo dated 27 October 1917 from AM to SLD. S34/A/7, *Africans Going to the Rand*, memo dated 15 July 1926 from NC to CNC.

³¹ NAZ, NSF, 2/1/1, M48/17, *Stair Cases at Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 9 October 1917 from AM to Sec. PWD.

lasting solution to the hazards of going down into the caves. In an attempt to provide permanent security at the caves, the government invited tenders for the putting up of galvanised piping guardrails in the Dark Cave to prevent people from falling off in steep places. W.A. Shultz won with a bid of £65.56. Shultz carried out comprehensive work that provided some measure of safety to tourists. In the early 1940s, the Caves were electrified, the use of candles and torches underground having proved futile and often disastrous.³² These developments had a significant impact on the local environment, altering not only the caves themselves but also the flora and fauna of the area. The engineering of nature robbed the caves of some of their unique and pristine features.

Baboons and Tourists

In a further effort to make the caves more hospitable to tourists, the question arose as to what to do with the local wildlife, especially the baboons. Two opposing views existed regarding the legion of “marauding and aggressive baboons” that had inhabited the spot from time immemorial. The authorities, farmers and tourists were divided over whether they should be eradicated or preserved. The majority of farmers would rather have all baboons shot, as they caused incalculable damage and losses to them, destroying entire maize fields. The crude Wildlife policy of the time went to the advantage of the settler farmers, as it classified baboons as both “venom” and “vermin”, precisely because they ravaged crops. In the inter-war period Native Commissioners supported a baboon-shooting policy arguing that the animals were fouling the caves. According to Native Commissioner H.S. Keigwin ‘...baboons should be shot steadily as a way of keeping them out.’³³ The animals, however, were not deterred by

³² NAZ, S34/A/9, S307, 177/653/29, *Contract Labour to Cut Steps at Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 21 August 1929 from AM to SLD. S34/A/13, S307, L2/1/9, 180/774/33, *Tender to Contractors on Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 01 June 1933 from NC to Dir. PWD. Cheeseman, *The Sinoia Caves* cit., p. 132.

³³ NAZ, S34/A/16, S307, L2/1/104, 9/59/27, *Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 24

the slaughter policy. Considerable numbers continued to descend into the caves to drink water, soiling the entrance to the Sleeping Pool. Cheeseman captures the mood of a baboon population under persecution: ‘...troops often passed solemnly round tops of cliffs, swinging and climbing over bushes and rocks, barking sharply and carrying several babies on their bellies.’³⁴

In 1933, Native commissioner E.T. Palmer attributed the decline in tourist figures not to the worldwide Great Depression but to the baboon menace. Palmer suggested: ‘A trap and a few deaths will result in them abandoning the Caves as a watering place. The Caves have been cleaned and washed of baboon excreta...but the foulness and stench was as bad as ever.’³⁵ Those against an extermination policy argued that such a policy was ineffective and wasteful. Charles Bullock wrote:

The Sinoia Caves were fenced many years ago...the idea was to keep the baboons out: of course, it is utterly impossible to erect a fence that baboons cannot climb, so it was so much wasted money...I am not in agreement with the proposal to keep out the baboons. They are a source of interest to everyone, except farmers.³⁶

In the 1940s, Native Commissioner A.G. Yardley pointed out that despite the war on baboons the animals continued to attempt to access to the Caves. Many indigenous leaders were also hostile to the mass slaughter of baboons by boisterous hunting teams of farmers. Apart from considering some of the killed animals as sacred, they strongly felt that settler farmers, miners, tourists and officials were

February 1927 from NC to CNC. NSF, 2/1/1, *Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 1 December 1917 from AM to Dir. PWD.

³⁴ NAZ, S34/A/13, S307, L2/1/9, 180/774/33, tender to contractors on Sinoia Caves, memo dated 01 June 1933 from NC to Dir. PWD. Cheeseman, *The Sinoia Caves* cit., p. 132.

³⁵ NAZ, S2837/11, Sinoia Caves, General, 1938-1939, Water Tests, NC Report 1945. S34/A/13, S307, L2/1/9, 180/774/33, tender to contractors on Sinoia Caves, memo dated 01 June 1933 from NC to Dir. PWD.

³⁶ NAZ, S34/A/16, S307, L2/1/104, 9/59/27, Sinoia Caves, memo dated 24 February 1927 from NC to CNC.

the real culprits of the fouling of the religious shrine. Although the controversy over baboons took time to solve by a gradual extermination policy, F.T.R. states that the objective of many Europeans visiting Nemaikonde District was to see the Caves and then come back again and again. Colonial officials advertised this tourist attraction in local and international journals, newspapers and magazines. Some of the adverts aptly described the Caves as 'A grotto of unique features. Its fame attracts yearly an increasing number of visitors and it is one of the sights of Mashonaland which should on no account be missed.'³⁷

Several aspects of the caves attracted tourists. Three geographical formations were prominent and popular. Their most popular feature was the Sleeping or Silent Pool, *Chirorodziva*. Stuart Chander says visitors marvelled at the '...extraordinarily vivid blue of the water and its extreme clarity, a spectacle in the deep, silent Cave of Sinoia which is unique.'³⁸ The second main attraction was the Dark Cave, with its maze of underground chambers and passages, some still unexplored, '... a sheer precipice where no one to this date is prepared to venture.'³⁹ One passage is said to come out at Maningwe Hill some eight kilometres from the Main Cave. Certainly there is a cave entrance there. Visitors were also interested in seeing the beautiful patterns formed by stalactites and stalagmites. Further sources of pleasure to be found around the caves included an assortment of birds, rabbits and insects, and the silence and echoes interspaced with strange sounds.⁴⁰

Arriving tourists were directed to and informed about the caves by signs and notices. From the mid 1930s, the increasing volume of

³⁷ NAZ, S2837/11, Sinoia Caves, General, 1938-1939, Water Tests, NC Report 1945. In 1929, whites mined bat guano at the Chinhoyi Caves. F.T.R. p. 40.

³⁸ Robinson, *Preliminary Excavations* cit., p. 132. F.T.R. p. 40.

³⁹ NAZ, C.D. Priest, "The Caves at Sinoia", in *Candid Opinion, A Review of Rhodesian Affairs*, 1, 29, and 1, 30, Art Printing Works Ltd., N.H. Wilson, Salisbury 1931 p. 5.

⁴⁰ F.T.R. p. 40. White enthusiasts shot off the beautiful stalagmites and stalactites in the 1930s and 1940s. F.P. Mennell describes the Caves as a crater-like swallow or sink hole. Previously thought to be bottomless, the pool has been found to have a depth of between 450-500 feet. Priest, *The Caves at Sinoia* cit., p. 15.

tourists warranted the employment of local guides and caretakers, since rudimentary signs were no longer good enough. The duties of the guides and caretakers included showing tourists around, scaring away the baboons, boiling water for visitors, cleaning footpaths and guarding the pole and *dagga* chalets where some of the visitors stayed overnight. Their average wage was a paltry £2.00 per month at a time when the annual poverty threshold was £20.45. Authorities denied local workers shotguns or small-bore rifles to defend themselves against lions, elephants and leopards on the pretext that they would pose a far worse danger to visitors.⁴¹ During the 1940s, one of the caretakers and custodian of the caves was Mapfumo, a descendent of Chief Chinhoyi. On that basis he was granted a shotgun, but with blank ammunition to scare away baboons when they interfered with the pleasure of tourists. Workers were supervised by a Commission for the Preservation of Natural and Historical Monuments and Relics, the caves having been gazetted and proclaimed a National Monument in 1936. In 1945 the caves were taken over by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management. Despite the services of caretakers, many tourists complained about inadequate facilities. The first problem they encountered was the difficulty of obtaining transport from Chinhoyi Town to the caves. After the Second World War, Native Commissioners, garage proprietors and the Automobile Association of Southern Rhodesia failed to cope with the increasing numbers of tourists wanting to reach the caves, especially during public holidays.⁴² The absence of decent accommodation was the second major problem. In 1938, Yardley made the following proposal:

⁴¹ NAZ, S34/A/16, S307, L2/1/104, 9/59/27, *Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 24 February 1922 from NC to CNC. S34/A/14, S307, L3/1/22, 172/243/34, *Caretaker at Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 14 June 1934 from AM to CNC. S34/A/13, S307, L2/1/9, 180/774/33, *Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 01 June 1933 from NC to Dir. PWD. S34/A/14, S307, L3/1/22, 172/243/34, *Caretaker at Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 14 June 1934 from AM to CNC.

⁴² NAZ, S34/A/15, S307, L2/1/104, 172/243/34, *Caretaker at Sinoia Caves*, memo dated 26 April 1936 from AM to CNC. In 1937 alone, about 157 tourists visited the Caves and some of them wrote remarks such as "SMELLY" but fa-

I should like to suggest that buildings of a permanent and sanitary nature be provided for visitors at Sinoia Caves. At present there are few mud and thatch huts which need constant repair and however well kept are not healthy owing to the continued fall of borer dust from wooden rafters. Should this recommendation be considered it would be well to follow the design of those guest huts in the Kruger National Park which are built of brick walls, cement floors, iron piping in place of wooden rafters and thatch. I think that a few more huts would be sufficient and one open air building with a roof, cement floor and low wall, to be used as a dining room, tea room etc. In the huts, iron beds with mattresses of the 'biscuit' type might be provided and a small charge of 2/6 per night to be collected by the caretaker for their use. Locks have to be provided.⁴³

Despite the implementation of these measures in the 1940s, many tourists continued to be accommodated in guest houses eight kilometres away in Chinhoyi Town. It was not until after 1945 that steps were taken to build the Caves Motel.

Human-to-human and human-to-nonhuman actions and interactions at the Chinhoyi Caves have a long history. The Leya copper smelters were subjugated by the Kore Kore agricultural and pastoral civilisation. Both groups used the caves for both religious and security purposes, especially against the threat of the Ndebele. British colonial intrusions modified nature and transformed the caves into a modern tourist resort. The presence of colonial settler farmers and miners not only displaced the local population from productive lands but also significantly impacted biodiversity in and around the caves. Both wilderness and wildlife retreated further away from the caves in the face of land clearance for commercial farming and mining for gold, copper and quarry stone. The core of the conflict and competition between humans and wildlife over water at the caves was the extermination of the local baboon population. Western ideas of conserving nature disparaged indigenous knowledge and practices of natural resource consumption and conservation embedded

vourable'. S2837/11, Sinoia Caves, General, 1938-1939, Water Tests, NC Report 1945. Robinson, *Preliminary Excavations* cit., p. 131. NSF, 2/1/1, *Sinoia Garages, Puzey and Payne*, memo dated 03 September 1918 from NC to CNC.

⁴³ NAZ, S2837/11, Sinoia Caves, 41/256/38, memo dated 28 November 1938 from NC to Sec. National Museums of Southern Rhodesia.

in religion, superstition and taboo. Local people were employed at the Chinhoyi Caves to develop the area, scare baboons away and as caretakers and guides for visiting tourists. The advertising and marketing of the caves attracted more tourists from within and outside the colony, who expected and recommended the development of better roads, modern accommodation and recreational facilities at the cave site.

Notes

The present paper draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including official and private reports kept at the National Archives of Zimbabwe, and archival memoranda, notes and writings by farmers and private individuals who contributed to press debates regarding the Chinhoyi Caves, deforestation and soil erosion. Secondary literature was used for context.

Figure 2. Chinhoyi Caves in Summer



Figure 3. Chinoyi Caves in Winter

