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Poverty in the Gwai Forest Reserve, Zimbabwe: 1880-1953*

Vimbai Chaumba Kwashirai



Introduction

The subject of poverty in Zimbabwe's forest sector has not received any scrutiny so far in the existing historical literature. This study examines the problem of poverty in the Gwai Forest Reserve (GFR) of North-Western Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, from 1880-1953. The region was endowed with the largest commercial and most important indigenous hardwood forests in

the country, and indeed in the whole of Southern Africa. The Ndebele people call these forests *gusu*. They are also known as “Zambezi teak woodland” or “*Baikiea* forests”. Specifically, the present study explores the significance of forest rules and regulations in causing poverty among Africans. I argue that white forest officials in the GFR were ruthless in controlling African access to land and forest products like timber, firewood and grass. I also show that, in cahoots with commercial timber loggers, foresters exploited Africans resident in the forest zone under appalling working conditions of overwork and low wages. The interests of foresters and timber merchants on one hand, and those of the Native Department, on the other, clashed over Africans and forestry resources, fracturing colonial state power as settlers, officials and imperial scientists often failed to resolve differences between economic sectors, departments and individuals within the colony. Understanding the genesis of poverty among African forest dwellers is therefore necessary to explain the particular trajectory of natural resource management in the region.

* This paper draws on multiple sources: archival, secondary, and interviews. Information was gathered from the Zimbabwe Forestry Commission’s archives, the Chesa and Forestry House Archives in Bulawayo, and the Highlands Archives and Library in Harare. The relevant written documents are preserved as folders or files stored in these institutions’ archives. The Bulawayo Archives in particular are rich in annual forest reports, reports by hired foreign forest experts, general or specific correspondences between foresters, or between foresters and timber merchants, memoranda on departmental interactions on issues such as land designation, labour recruitment, forest fires and the retention and welfare of forest tenants. The Harare Archives and the National Archives of Zimbabwe also hold written documents of a similar nature on forest matters. Examples of the nature of written documents are provided in the footnotes. It should be noted that official documents of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s invariably contained forestry information for the early colonial period; hence, footnote dates do not provide a chronological order, but the text does. This project also builds on the so-far patchy academic literature on Zimbabwean poverty and other secondary works. I became interested in poverty issues while conducting field-work for my post-doctoral studies at Oxford University; hence the interview sources and the writing of this article.

Historical Context

In c. 1700-1800, the entire Zimbabwean plateau between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers was controlled by the cattle-based Rozvi Empire of the Shona people. Under King Dombo, the empire disintegrated due to Portuguese intrusion and internal disputes. 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), succeeding the Rozvi as the dominant power in the region. British imperial interest in the area accelerated in the mid 1880s, motivated by speculative mineral discoveries thought to rival the Witwatersrand mines in South Africa. Cecil John Rhodes obtained the controversial Rudd Concession in 1888 from Lobengula, Mzilikazi's successor. King Lobengula had been concerned but prophetic about the dilemma he faced. To quote: "Have you ever seen a chameleon catch a fly? The chameleon gets behind the fly, and then remains motionless for some time, putting one leg first, and then another; at last, when well within reach, it darts its tongue out and the fly disappears. England is the chameleon and I am that fly."¹ The Rudd Concession formed the basis of the 1889 Royal Charter granted to Rhodes' British South Africa Company (BSAC), empowering the firm to occupy the country. The pioneer column, consisting of 200 white men, 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 countrywide resistance against imperial occupation was staged separately in Matebeleland and Mashonaland. From the Mazoe Valley, the greatest spiritual medium of the region, Charwe, also known as Mbuya Nehanda, a heroine of national importance, led the *Chimurenga* in Mashonaland until her capture and hanging by BSAC authorities in 1898, after which white settlers regarded the region's natural resources as war booty, especially its land, minerals, forests, cattle and wildlife.

¹ Chief Bhekezile Ndhlovu, interview with author, 10-12 June 2003, Gwai Centre, Matabeleland.

In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, both absolute and relative poverty – measured, respectively, relative to the minimum means necessary for a person’s survival and the average living standards of a particular society – existed in most African communities. African philosophy depicted the poor in various and changing ways. The poor were often viewed negatively: *urombo uroyi*, “poverty is witchcraft”; or *murombo haarove chine nguwo*, “poverty is a curse.” The poor, in their turn, depicted the rich as witches who exploited their labour by sorcery. However, in Shona idioms, expressions such as *murombo munhu*, “the poor have feelings”, and *seka urema wafa*, “never ridicule the poor”, show a sympathetic perception of the poor.² In the 1890s, London Missionary Society preachers based at Inyathi observed the way African societies provided for the poor. Under the *kupemba* customary practice, begging was discouraged, and poor people who could not rely on the robust extended-family social security net managed to provide for some of their basic necessities through song, dance and work. The *kuronzera* custom encouraged wealthier peasants to loan livestock – especially cattle – to the poor for up to ten years for draught power, milk and manure, after which the keepers were entitled to a few beasts as *ufudzi* or payment for herding responsibilities. Furthermore, poor people were often elected to live as part of welcoming rich households for five years under *kutema ugariri*, performing agricultural work, following which they could either marry from within the family or get paid in kind with land or livestock.

According to Chiefs Chivi and Dotito, the *nchimbe* system pooled together village labour resources for cultivation, harvesting and construction work to assist the whole community, including the poor, and meet basic food and housing needs. Work performed along gendered lines, like hunting, for men, and firewood-water fetching, for women, incorporated the needs of the weak and poor.³ More

² Chief Bhekezile Ndhlovu, interview with author, 10-12 June 2003, Gwai Centre, Matabeland; Chiefs Kunatsa Dotito, interview with author, 23-4 July 2003, Dotito Growth Point, Mashonaland; Grace Maponga, interview with author, 25 July 2003, Chitsa Vollage, Nyombwe, Mount Darwin, Mashonaland.

³ Chief Timothy Chivi, interview with author, 16-20 August 2003, Chivi

importantly, Africans managed land and other natural resources on a common property basis, either community or ethnically based. Boundaries between ethnic groups were blurred but were known to follow prominent geographical features, rivers or mountains. Natural resources, such as land, forests and game, were managed and conserved in the awareness of the recurrence of *shangwa*, the cyclical droughts and famines experienced throughout southern Africa. Land was communally owned by all the people, but vested in the king or chief who held it in trust of the people. The *dare* or council allocated land to individuals for homesteads and fields. Pastures were communally owned and used equally by all under a common property regime. Individual families retained user rights on allocated land, provided they did not display political disloyalty, migrate, or violate conservation rules and taboos. Likewise, all trees belonged to the community. Forests were viewed as common property, where all had equal access to collect the multiple forest products on which indigenous material culture was based.⁴ Nonetheless, there was room for accumulation and economic differentiation because the religious and political ruling elite appropriated the best resources for themselves and benefited more from tributes and communal labour.

Land and Forest Use

The foremost concern of the BSAC administrators was the exploitation of mineral resources – on 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 allowance of 3,000 or 1,210 hectares. Gold became, and long remained, the territory's leading export. However, mining the extremely localised alluvial gold deposits offered limited opportunities for the ac-

Growth Point, Chivi District, Masvingo; Father Peter Mutume, interview with author, 11 July 2003, Chinhoyi Parish, Chinhoyi.

⁴ Chief Zini Ncube, interview with author, 10-12 June 2003, Gwai Centre, Matabeleland; Chief Timothy Chivi, interview with author, 16-20 August 2003, Chivi Growth Point, Chivi District, Masvingo

quiring of 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. Both mining and agriculture caused deforestation and soil erosion resulting from 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. The acquisition of farmland became a priority for early settlers.⁵ 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, African, forest and game reserves – as a basis for introducing rational and scientific use, but especially as an instrument of state control. Significantly, the 1898 Land Ordinances legislated for a reserve creation policy that delineated reserves for Africans, starting with the Gwai Native Reserve (GNR) and Shangani Native Reserve (SNR) in Matebeleland (tab. 1 and fig. 1). Apart from creating room for white settlement, African reserves functioned as labour reservoirs for the white modern sector: mining, farming, forestry and manufacturing. Africans resisting 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. The rapidity of its survey of indigenous forest resources attests to their expected commercial value. Above all, company shareholders were determined to establish the commercial value of the Zambezi teak woodland, occurring mostly in the first two African reserves, and especially in the GNR. In 1898, the company directors hired James Blocker, a South African forester, to carry out two surveys

⁵ R. Palmer, N. Parsons, “Introduction”, in id. (eds), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, Heinemann, London 1977, p. 7; I. Phimister, “Peasant Production and Underdevelopment in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1914”, in *Africa Affairs*, 73, 291, 1974, pp. 218-219.

Table 1. Demarcated State Teak Woodland in North Western Matabeleland 1907-40

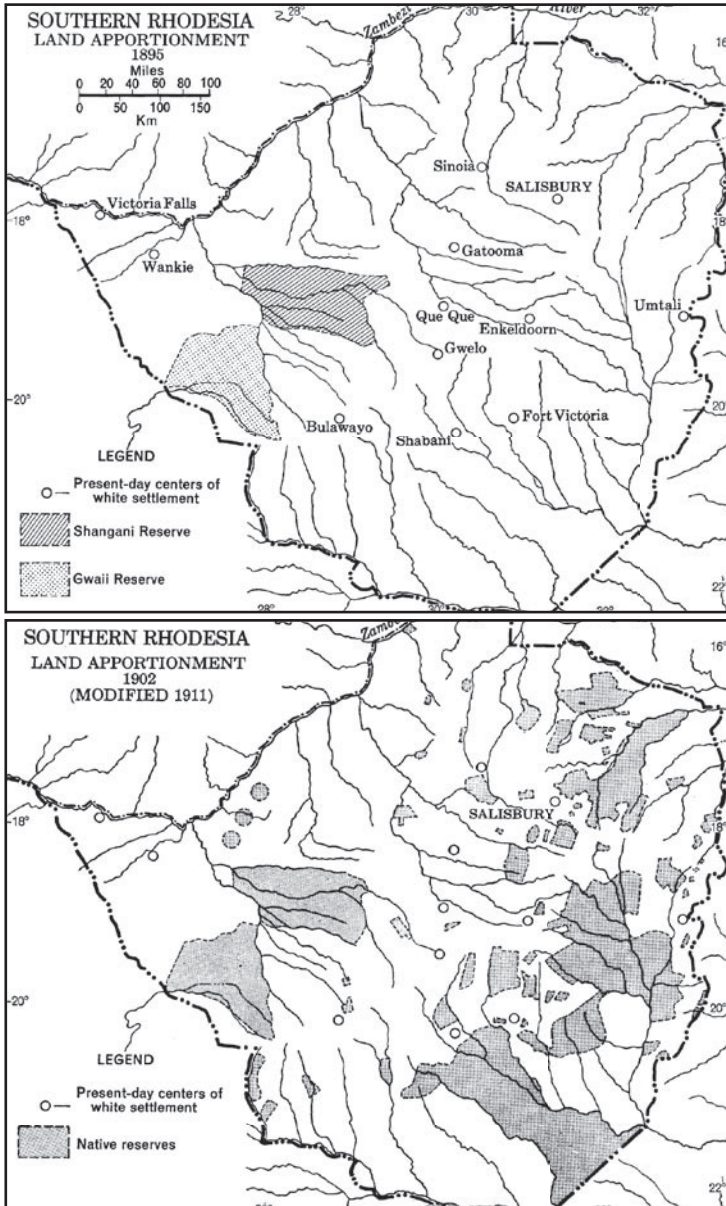
| Type | Locality and Name | Acres |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Reserved State Forest | Gwai Forest Reserve | 299 500 00 |
| | Ngamo Forest Reserve | 291 000 00 |
| Unreserved State Forest | Masue Forest Reserve | 134 000 00 |
| | Fuller Kesi Forest Reserve | 57 000 00 |
| Proposed State Forest | Gwampa Forest Reserve | 75 000 00 |
| | Mbembesi Forest Reserve | 109 000 00 |
| | Inseze Forest Reserve | 86 000 00 |
| | Sikumi Forest Reserve | 124 000 00 |
| State Forest in NPA | Portion in the Gwai Reserve | 70 000 00 |
| | Portion in the Bubi District | 30 000 00 |
| State Forest in African Reserves | Part of Gwai Native Reserve | 304 000 00 (619 000) |
| | Part of Shangani Nat. Res. | 66 000 00 |
| Total | North-western Matabeleland | 1 646 500 00 |

Source: Compiled from Forest Officers' Annual Reports 1920-31

of the *gusu*. The Blocker Report identified and recommended four species for commercial exploitation: the *mkusi*, *mtshibi*, *mangwe* and *mopani*. It condemned the rest of the trees as commercially worthless but important for fuel. According to Blocker, “The timber of the Ikusi, or Native Teak, has proved very useful and is found in areas drained by [the] Gwaai, Shangani and Khami Rivers. The fibre is compact, and therefore the wood is of great durability.”⁶ It ap-

⁶ National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), GF3/2/2, Blocker, “Extract from Report of the British South Africa Co., Forests 1898-99”, p.1.

Figure 1. Land Alienation 1895-1911 SOURCE: NAZ, Map File GRC/34/Z100-22



pears Blocker's findings temporarily cooled widespread speculation in Matabeleland about the riches that could be derived from exploiting *gusu*. As a result, there was only limited commercial felling of hardwood trees from 1900-1908, with only one concessionaire, the Matebele Timber Trust, being granted a licence to cut the *mkusi* and *mtshibi* species between 1905 and 1906. However, illegal wood cutters like Douglas and others operated without licences.⁷

In 1909, the BSAC Government verified Blocker's findings through a nationwide "survey of indigenous timbers". The Director of Agriculture, Eric Nobbs, requested all thirty native commissioners to provide information on the extent and nature of the forests in their respective districts. This "enquiry into forestry resources" was a preamble to the 1910 official visit by James Sim, a District Forest Officer from King William's Town in South Africa. In contrast to Blocker's limited assignment, Sim's mandate was to tour the whole country to carry out a close personal examination of indigenous forests and report back with a view to their commercial exploitation and conservation.⁸ Responses from native commissioners varied greatly in value and many of the reports displayed limited official knowledge of the multiple benefits the indigenous population derived from forests in the form of food, energy, medicine, timber and pasture.⁹ The Sim Report fed into the imaginations of timber concessionaires because it proclaimed fifty *gusu* species as commercially viable. Blocker and Sim agreed that much of the forest was scrubby tree growth of little commercial value save for fuel and charcoal. Both experts noted the importance of marketable species, demonstrating the significance and economic potential of the region for the establishment of a timber industry, as hinted by native com-

⁷ NAZ, A11/2, Rhodesian Teak, wire cable dated 3 Feb. 1906 from Secretary Board of Directors London, D. E. Brodie to Sir William Milton KCMG, Administrator Southern Rhodesia.

⁸ NAZ, GF2/1/8, Government Circular A/O49/09 dated 8 Sept. 1909, "Indigenous Timber Survey, Replies from NCs on the Enquiry on Forestry Resources" to E. Nobbs, Director of Agriculture.

⁹ V. Kwashirai, "Indigenous Management of Teak Woodland in Zimbabwe 1850-1900", in *Journal of Historical Geography*, in press, 2007, p. 5.

missioners of Gwai, Tegwani and Inyati.¹⁰ The opportunity of an early industrialisation process based on locally available timber as a raw material appears to have attracted government interest in the character and value of *gusu* and its management. *Mkusi* (teak) and *mtshibi* accounted for approximately 80 per cent of the *gusu*. Although *mtshibi* was less plentiful, it gave better and sounder balks of timber than teak. Teak also grew in association with other important species like the *umkamba*, *umsimba*, *umvagazi* and *mopani*. Blocker and Sim stated that the local teak tree only resembled the American or Burma teak (*Tectona grandis*, *Verbenaceae*). Actually, British settlers used names like “teak” and “mahogany” to describe tree species expected to have commercial value, even if the species had no actual relation to the South East Asian timbers from which these names were derived. The “Rhodesian teak”, for example, was neither real teak nor closely related to Burma teak.¹¹

Officials established the importance of *gusu* parallel to the process of evicting Africans from state and white-owned land to the “native reserves”. In the 1910s, many of the Ndebele people had been coerced to establish themselves in the GNR under the 1909 Private Location Ordinance. Native Commissioner Mathews for Gwai District remarked on the state of the GNR:

The whole of the Gwai Reserve is quite useless for occupation by Natives, except along the Gwai and one or two streams running into the Gwai when there is water. The whole of the Gwai is not suitable either, as in portions of it there is no water during the dry season.¹²

Native Commissioner Hermans for Wankie District agreed: “The whole area is a practically waterless waste, excepting during the rainy season, when isolated temporary pools are formed, which, however,

¹⁰ Zimbabwe Forestry Commission Archives (FCA), Bulawayo, GF/3/2/1, James Sim, District Forest Officer, (DFO) King Williams Town, South Africa, “Report on Forestry in Southern Rhodesia”, Salisbury 1910, pp. 1-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹² NAZ, A3/18/39/15-17, General Forestry Correspondences, Salisbury 1909, pp. 1-2.

rapidly evaporate.”¹³ In the first decade of colonial rule, the state had delineated different land use categories before conducting extensive geographical surveys and reports. Officials therefore found themselves frequently amending the initial boundaries for African reserves to reduce the quality of the land and forests allocated to the indigenous population. In the GNR, Native Department and Forestry officials primarily focused on repossessing the Zambezi teak woodland and the limited fertile areas of the Gwai River basin. Re-examining African reserves with a view to annexing rich soil was less important in the GNR and SNR than designating *gusu* as state forest. Africans living along the Gwai River were evicted and told that the land was reverting to the state. According to the Estates Office, the Chief Native Commissioner for Matebeleland Taylor reported that nine tenths of the newly appropriated land from the region was commercial forest area and the remainder was:

very good and although not occupied by natives, nor likely to be, owing to the fact that the class of land, though good for ploughing with heavy ploughs, is not suitable for cultivation by native methods. As regards the forest area it is, of course, at present, no use to either natives or Europeans for settlement, but may eventually be of some sort of value to the latter.¹⁴

Taylor’s attitude served to perpetuate the mythical view of white immigrants discovering and occupying empty land. Another misconception generated by Taylor and other whites was the general belief that Africans never occupied deep-red and black rich soils because the level of pre-colonial agricultural technology handicapped and discouraged them from cultivating such land. In 1910, Africans evicted from the repossessed forest areas were earmarked for resettlement on the Dope, Kezi and Luna Farms, located on infertile parts of Matopo District, a preposterous land swapping arrangement mooted by Taylor and Native Commissioner Thomas. However, the

¹³ NAZ, SRG2-S/FO668/CSR8, memo dated 12 August 1911 from NC Hermans to CNC Matabeleland.

¹⁴ NAZ, A11/2/11/18/53, 277/08/9/12, GNR, memo dated 3 Dec.1908 from Acting Manager, Estates Office, (EO) Bulawayo to Secretary Estates Office, Salisbury, p. 7.

Managers of the Estates Office reneged on that promise and instead let many of the evicted Africans drift to other places, arguing that:

a suitable equivalent for Matopo land, [from the GNR] is of practically no value for European settlement and that the interests of the British South Africa Company would be prejudiced by effecting any such exchange, which would, in fact, be contrary to the spirit of the Board of Directors' instructions that no more land will be set aside for the use of Natives. Unless a fair equivalent in land can be obtained, I think it unfair to the Company to make any exchange at all.¹⁵

The company also repossessed expanses of forest lands from other Matabeleland reserves, 7,600 hectares from the Insangu Reserve, and 5,332 hectares from both the Insisza and Manzanmyama Reserves.¹⁶ The reconstruction of the gold mining industry led the BSAC to reassess and maximise its land holdings. The largest area repossessed for European settlement and forest purposes, 257,132 hectares, was carved out of the GNR in 1915 to create the Gwai Forest Reserve (GFR). Table 1 sums up the extent of state forests carved out of African reserves. The manager of the Estates Office commented on land alienation from the GNR:

It is necessary to make an effort to encourage white settlement along the Victoria Falls Railway Line and the land between the Gwai bridge and the Southern boundary of the resumed area. The best interests of the country will be served by settlement of a white population upon it. More land should be added to the Southern boundary.¹⁷

Much of the *gusu* became reserved state forest exploited under licence by big firms such as the BSAC, Rhodesia Native Timber Concessionaires (RNTC) and the Matebele Timber Trust.¹⁸

¹⁵ NAZ, A3/18, GNR, letter dated 15 Mar. 1909 from Acting Manager EO Salisbury to Sec. EO, p.1.

¹⁶ NAZ, A3/18, GNR, letter dated 15 Mar. 1909 from Acting Manager Estates Office (EO) Salisbury to Sec. EO, p.1; NAZ, LB2, Native Reserves, memo dated 28 Sept. 1911 from Manager EO to Director Land Settlement (DLS).

¹⁷ NAZ, LB2, Native Reserves, memo dated 16 Nov. 1911 from Manager EO to DLS.

¹⁸ NAZ, GF3/1/1, J. P. Henkel Forest Officer, (FO) "First Annual Report on Forestry for 1920", from FO to Director of Agriculture, (DA) p.14.

The speculative commercial net closed in on the teak tree because its timber possessed several qualities useful for industrial manufacturing purposes. Through their own observations and experiments, and by tapping African knowledge, foresters and timber firms discovered that teak heartwood is hard, strong, heavy, compact and durable. Teak timber had a high heating power and, unlike most Zimbabwean timber, was ant and borer-proof.¹⁹ Most foresters and timber merchants concurred that the teak was the principal and most commercially viable indigenous hardwood tree in the country. The indigenous inhabitants of north-western Matabeleland had utilised teak timber in diverse ways, for corn bin, beehive and canoe manufacture as well as hut and granary construction. In contrast, colonial timber merchants used teak for flooring, panelling, cabinets, and mining, but chiefly to make railway sleepers for export to South Africa. Appendix 1 lists the key commercial species and the diversity of their uses bears witness to the determination of the settler community to become self-sufficient in timber supply. There was heavy demand on species like *mopani*, *Grysappel*, *ulugaku*, mountain acacia or *umpapama*, Zambezi teak, and *mtondo*. The first four made fine poles for hut, shed and kraal construction. In addition, almost thirty species were used to make fences and live hedges around homesteads, gardens and fields. The mining sector also utilised trees such as the teak, *mnondo*, white thorn, *mfuti*, *umdwadwa*, mountain acacia and *mopani*.²⁰

Forest Management

The government administered the whole teak-growing area of commercial value on state and African land. 1890–1920 was a trial and error period for soil and forest conservation. Soil and forest management in the entire country was the responsibility of a single irrigation official,

¹⁹ NAZ, GF3/2, Blocker, “Extract”, p. 3; FCA, A.A. Pardy, “Notes on Indigenous Timbers”, in *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal (RAJ)*, XLIII, 3, 1951, p.171.

²⁰ FCA, A.A. Pardy, *RAJ*, XLVIII, 5, 1951, p. 402; FCA, A.A. Pardy, *RAJ*, 50, 6, p. 4; FCA, A.A. Pardy, *RAJ*, 49, 5, 1952, p. 256; Interview with Paul Ncube, 66, Village Councillor, Siziba Village, Tsholotsho, 22 Sept. 1999.

W.M. Watt, from 1910 to 1920. In 1920, the government appointed James Henkel as the first Forest Officer in Zimbabwe. It was his task to manage all the territory's forests, but especially the Zambezi teak woodland. Henkel had relevant South African experience, having worked as a forest conservator in Natal. The general practice of managing commercial forests in South Africa centred on two key tasks: regulating felling operations by licensed concessionaire companies, and controlling human-induced fire hazard. Zimbabwe borrowed and depended on South Africa for both personnel and conservationist ideas. A key issue in the debate on capitalism, colonialism and ecology is the origin and significance of conservationist ideas in Southern Africa. Existing forest literature shows that foreign influences played a significant role in the transfer of Euro-American conservation knowledge on deforestation and soil erosion to African colonies. However, colonial governments often pursued conservation policies and strategies suited to local conditions. As Grove points out, the environmental impact of European expansion throughout the colonies gave rise to the localised domestic antecedents of twentieth century conservation policies.²¹ Also, home-grown conservation ideas were enriched by intellectual exchanges between individual colonies and primarily driven by fears of ecological disaster based on empirical observation of rapid deforestation, erosion and recurring floods. There were various flows of personnel and ideas in the British Empire. Catinot notes that forestry scientists and modified conservationist ideas moved from British colonial Burma, Malaysia and India to Southern Africa.²² Grove traces the development of conservationist thought and its implications for land and forest resource management at the Cape and, more generally, in southern Africa.²³

Conservationist policies and strategies adopted in Zimbabwe were rooted in the South African forestry experience. However,

²¹ R. Grove, "Scottish Missionaries, Evangelical Discourses and the Origins of Conservation thinking in Southern Africa 1820-1900", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, pp. 165-166; R. Catinot, *The Sustainable Management of Tropical Rainforests*, Scytale, Paris 1997, p. 15.

²² Catinot, *The Sustainable Management* cit., p. 15.

²³ Grove, "Scottish Missionaries Evangelical" cit., p. 15.

the Forestry Service of Zimbabwe modified this borrowed regional and international conservationist knowledge to suit local ecological conditions, such as the fragility and infertility of the soils of Matabeleland. The Forestry Department endeavoured to conserve and manage *gusu* through enumeration surveys and fixed cutting quotas, regarded as critical in controlling timber exploitation. The Forestry Service managed commercial forests in the GFR for the sustainable production of timber. Foresters calculated annual cutting quotas for timber concessionaires in order to minimise damage to soil, water and genetic resources,²⁴ and reinforced tree counting with frequent patrols by certified African forest rangers whose responsibility was to report on illegal encroachment upon commercial species. As a conservation measure, patrols were difficult to sustain given the vastness of the GFR. Foresters also carried out extensive inspections in the GFR of both unexploited and exploited areas. In the latter, they did this to verify whether cutting instructions had been followed.²⁵ In the African reserves, officials centralised villages and demarcated areas for homesteads, fields and woodlots. However, the Forest Service employed most of its time and spent the bulk of its funding on preventing and fighting fires. In addition, secondary forest growth was nurtured and protected against animals and premature exploitation.²⁶ In these ways the practice of conservation policy sought to combat the exploitative tendencies of concessionaires and Africans in the eight gazetted forest reserves of North Western Matabeleland, which had a combined total area of 1.6 million acres (tab. 1).

When concessionaires established timber mills in the “virgin bush”, deforestation and soil erosion emerged as the major chronic environmental hazards to be faced, along with the logistic and financial difficulties of starting a new industry. These problems were

²⁴ NAZ, GF3/1/1, J.P. Henkel Forest Officer, (FO) “First Annual Report on Forestry for 1920”, from FO to Director of Agriculture (DA), p. 14.

²⁵ NAZ, ZAZ2/1/1, No.1663/399/38, E. Kelly-Edwards, “Parliamentary Report on Rhodesian “Teak”(Umgusa) Industry”, dated 22 Mar. 1938 from CCF to Sec. Department of Lands and Agriculture (DLA), p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

recognised early on, within 20 years from the beginning of European colonisation. Indeed, according to Henkel and other forestry officials, the primary causes of environmental degradation in Matabeleland were to be sought within the framework of logging and settler agriculture.²⁷ Soil exposure through deforestation in combination with torrential rains was documented as the major aggravating factor. Also, the incidence of bad cutting methods was often attributed to limited forest staff rather than wilful neglect on the part of the commercial farmers and concessionaires. Foresters' reports concluded that the felling of trees in the reserved forests and indeed elsewhere constituted reckless over-exploitation of resources for maximum profit, especially by the RNTC.²⁸ Commercial trees of twelve inches and over in diameter at breast-height were fast disappearing. The volume of timber in better stocked areas had dropped by 80 per cent, from fifteen mature trees per acre in the pre-colonial era to four exploitable trees per acre in the mid 1930s.²⁹ To a large degree, cutters were only interested in the main stem or "bole" of the tree, and hence failed to utilise good timber available from tree branches. Cases of bad felling included the shattering or splitting of the main trunk of the tree when the tree fell to the ground. Logs were often left in the bush and tree crowns left lying across railway fireguards, facilitating the spread of fires.³⁰ Forester reports indicate that the first 40 years of timber logging were difficult times, due to poor communication and limited markets for timber.³¹ The Natural Resources Board was one of several organisations that condoned settler excesses, arguing that under such adverse conditions the land was necessarily subjected to the hazards of deforestation and erosion. Thus, a combination of ignorance and neglect resulted in the widespread destruction of natural resources in state forests. Neglect there was indeed, because from 1920 onward concessionaires were shown,

²⁷ NAZ, GF3/1/1, J.P. Henkel Forest Officer (FO), "Fifth Annual Report on Forestry for 1924", from FO to Director of Agriculture (DA), p. 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ NAZ, ZAZ2/1/1, No.1663/399/38, E. Kelly-Edwards, "Parliamentary Report on Rhodesian" cit., p. 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

talked to and read about conservation practices, most of which they ignored. The 33 years from 1890 to 1923 had set a dangerous precedent in forest destruction by concessionaires. The felling of all types of trees accelerated at a ferocious speed since mining and agriculture also depended exclusively on timber and wood fuel, given the inefficiency of the railway and road infrastructure meant to deliver low-grade coal to tobacco farmers, and the scarcity or absence of viable alternatives such as metal and hydroelectric power.³²

A countrywide ban on tree cutting along rivers and tributaries on private and state land raised key questions about the conservation of woodland, as it implied that landowners were no longer allowed to exploit forests on their own properties for timber and firewood. There was a protracted conflict between concessionaires and farmers over timber cutting in settled areas that endangered water sources and woodland in the Gwai District and the country as a whole. Available archival evidence suggests that the concessionaire sector caused the most havoc in the Gwai state woodland, which was already under severe pressure from farmers, miners and wood contractors.³³ Existing mining legislation worsened the situation. Government policy not only permitted but even encouraged miners and prospectors to exploit tree resources free of charge, and as and when it pleased them. No royalty was due for timber and fuel in gold-mining districts. Miners paid a token or favourable fixed tariff for cutting trees on non-gold belt private land.³⁴ The state initiated measures to protect water sources in the GFR by prohibiting the cutting of the riparian vegetation of the Gwai River. Tree cutting was believed to threaten water supplies and cause soil erosion. Hence, cutting riparian timber was prohibited on both private and state land up to 150 metres of either side of water bodies. This ban applied to all the major rivers of the country: the Gwai, Mazoe, Zambezi, Limpopo and Sabi, and included their sources.³⁵

³¹ E.J. Kelly-Edwards, Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF), *The 29th Report, Forestry Department 1938*, Salisbury 1939, p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Kelly-Edwards, "Parliamentary Report on Rhodesian" cit., p. 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Poverty among Forest Tenants

In 1920, the Morris Carter Commission was set up to investigate the distribution and use of land in Zimbabwe. With regard to the *gusu*, the commission discouraged the disturbance or removal of Africans who had remained within the borders of state forests, living almost exclusively in open patches and near fertile marshes where crop cultivation was possible.³⁶ Africans resident on gazetted *gusu* cultivated the valley areas and grazed livestock on woodland. The Forest Department opposed the recommendations of the Carter Commission, seeking instead to retain only a limited number of African families. Such Africans came to be known as “forest tenants”. They were the descendants of indigenous inhabitants of Matabeleland – Ndebele, Kalanga, Tonga, Abayaye, Shangwe and Nyai – but their small communities were later joined by labour-seeking migrants from Malawi and Zambia. Foresters legalised their stay with passes and permits, and thus acquired the status of forest tenant farmers, with an obligation to work for the Forestry Service and timber millers. A pass was essential when moving within the forest areas, while a permit bestowed residential rights. Tenants’ rights to land and grazing were not clarified in legal terms.³⁷ The Native and Forestry Departments often wrangled over the land rights of tenants. In 1923, the native commissioner for the GNR annexed a 3,000 acre farm called “Lonely” to settle landless and destitute tenants evicted by foresters from the GFR. Lonely Farm had been surveyed by the Forest Department and provisionally set aside for forestry purposes.³⁸ Chief Forester Henkel

³⁶ Kelly-Edwards, *The 29th Report* cit., p. 4; T.O. Ranger, J. Alexander, J. McGregor, *Violence and Memory, Life in the Dark Forests of Matabeleland*, James Currey, Oxford 2000, p. 33; T. Ranger, “Whose Heritage? The Case of the Matobo National Park”, in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, p. 223.

³⁷ NAZ, S2217/2, J.S. Wilkins, “Native Reserves Trust Report No. 14, General Inspection of the Timber Operations Carried out by Messrs The Rhodesia Native Timber Concessions in the Gwaai Native Reserve”, Bulawayo 1934, p.7; NAZ, ZAZ2/1/1, The Natural Resources Commission (NRC), Evidence taken at Salisbury on 13 Oct. 1938, p. 20.

³⁸ FCA, F361, Gwai Extension, Conservator of Forests (CF) to Forest Officer Matabeleland (FOM), memo dated 19 Nov.1925.

put forward the Department's case as follows:

this Division considers that it has a very strong claim on the area now sought by the Native Department, particularly as a survey of the resources has recently been carried out....our hand will be strengthened when we are in a position to state what timber the area contains and what the future management should be.... steps have been taken to declare this land as Forest Area by an amendment of the Land Ordinances because the area is included in the Schedule of Demarcated Forests.³⁹

In his annual report of 1924, Henkel wrote: "natives resident in state forests would be a continued source of fire danger and their location of cultivation must be controlled in the interests of the forest, soil erosion and water supplies in the Gwai River."⁴⁰ The Forest Department declared that: "we do not think that more than one native kraal should be established every mile, so there is considered to be room for 5 to 7 kraals, or 10 at the most. A kraal is considered to consist of twelve families, each with 2 acres of land and a total 20 head of cattle. Cattle would destroy the forest and Bird Sanctuary."⁴¹ In the inter-war period, pass and permit holding tenants were not spared from eviction because foresters believed that forests had become "overpopulated and overstocked" along the Gwai and Bembesi Rivers. From the Bamischette, Insuza and Matundhla valleys, which offered tenants excellent and extensive pastures, foresters evicted:

Natives found on the area...usually (with) several head of cattle to each kraal and another abundance of Native kraals along the length and breadth of the Gwai River, an isolated kraal at the head of Bemischette Vlei occupied by Chief Mabigwa, a few kraals to the Southern end of Insuza Vlei where the Natives had cultivated patches at the edge of the Kalahari Sand Forest and on the black vlei ground producing crops of mealies, groundnuts etc.⁴²

Fearing that a large tenant population would be a threat to conservation efforts, officials expelled hundreds of Africans from the

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² FCA, A. Pardy, "Preliminary Report on Gwai Forest Reserve, 1931 to 1939", p. 4.

GFR. Other tenants voluntarily moved out of the GFR in protest against the provision of a maximum of two acres of land per family. The displaced population wandered from place to place in search of food and land to establish homes.

The eviction policy was applied in conjunction with regulations imposed on tenants' livestock. Foresters considered indigenous management of livestock to be incompatible with soil, forest and water conservation. Africans traditionally herded livestock – cattle, donkeys, goats and sheep – by day and closed them in pens at night to protect them from wild carnivores and keep them from straying.⁴³ The going back and forth of humans and livestock to and from fields, pastures and water sources created paths. Foresters believed these paths to be the head-starters of soil erosion, especially under conditions of overstocking and overgrazing. Few tenants could afford livestock, and those who did were allowed to own five animals at most. Africans invariably relied on livestock for food and draught power, and as a form of security against recurrent drought and famine.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, foresters discouraged leading large numbers of domestic animals into *gusu* to avoid the trampling of young trees and the hardening and erosion of soil. Efforts were also made to drive out elephants and other herbivorous wildlife out of *gusu*. According to Wilkins, "Trampling by livestock and game causes more damage than is superficially visible. The continual passage of animals hardens the surface of the earth, making conditions extremely difficult and often impossible for the young seedlings to take root and become established."⁴⁵ Official restrictions on land and livestock were very unpopular among tenants because they retarded Africans' ability to produce adequate food supplies, especially where implemented by bullying forestry instructors. Indeed, forest departments

⁴³ Chief Bhekezile Ndhlovu, interview with author, 10-12 June 2003, Gwai Centre, Matabeleland; Chiefs Kunatsa Dotito, interview with author, 23-4 July 2003, Dotito Growth Point, Mashonaland; Grace Maponga, interview with author, 25 July 2003, Chitsa Vollage, Nyombwe, Mount Darwin, Mashonaland.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ FCA, S2217/2, Wilkins, "Native Reserves Trust Report No. 14" cit., p. 7.

in Africa and India were part and parcel of the colonial administrative structure, which generally tended to exclude locals from forest resources. Foresters believed that tenants were ignorant about forestry and conservation, and spoiled the environment.⁴⁶

In 1931, foresters introduced monthly rents of 10 shillings per head. This was in addition to the monthly poll tax of 50 shillings payable by every adult male in the colony. Tenants from the Dabi and Silonka part of the GFR refused to pay and were asked to leave, but many of them defied the order. Forester Wilkins observed: “Many of them prefer the Forest Reserves where they have grazing and watering facilities. When the glad tidings are made public that they are now to pay rent, you will have more moving.”⁴⁷ Most tenants leaving the GFR went to the neighbouring GNR, which was however also plagued by poverty, for similar reasons, particularly land shortage and regulations on livestock ownership. While foresters relentlessly pursued an eviction policy of tenants from areas they perceived to be overpopulated, the 1935 Natural Resources Commission (NRC) reiterated the need to retain Africans in the GFR as a source of labour. The NRC affirmed: “The presence of natives in forest areas is not inconsistent with conservation if settled on conditions imposing upon them the duty of guarding against fires and other damage ... [they] serve a useful purpose in assisting in the control of fires and trespassers in search of timber, honey etc.”⁴⁸ However, Kelly-Edwards’ interview with the NRC indicates that control was exercised over the Africans’ access to land and forest produce:

KELLY-EDWARDS: the native has right to timber in native reserves, complete right to all timbers in [their] own reserves except such timber which is reserved.

COMMISSION: under the law yes, “But is that the law of the Medes or Persians? Is it in the Order in Council or Charter?”

KELLY-EDWARDS: It simply means that if a native wants to build a hut, he can go out and cut trees and he has right to other forest produce.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ FCA, F363, CF to CFM Memo dated 28 May 1931.

⁴⁸ Kelly-Edwards, “Parliamentary Report on Rhodesian” cit., p. 5; Ranger, “Whose Heritage” cit., p. 222.

COMMISSION: Is that a desirable state of affairs?

KELLY-EDWARDS: It is desirable in principle, but it certainly needs supervision. His activities should be controlled. That would be one of the Native Forester's main duties ... the native word for "Forester" means "a watcher." He would be what a European Forester is in a European plantation.⁴⁹

The taxation was grievous for the tenants, whose wages in the late 1930s were of only one shilling per day. In 1940, a wage increase of one penny per day for those earning one shilling and over per day raised the average monthly wage in the forestry sector to £3.30. Taxation wiped out all the earnings of the tenants, who were forced into debt and were often behind on their tax payments. Foresters Ashburner and Allen failed to put together the labour gangs required for conservation duties because tenants were wary of the parsimonious wages. Labour shortages caused by low wages persisted despite an increase of rations in mealie-meal and beans. It was claimed that meat was not always supplied in fresh condition. The RNTC, Falls Timber Syndicate and Zambezi Sawmills generally maltreated their labourers. This led to a strike in the sawmill industry in 1944. The Forest Department tried to make up for the sub-standard meal and meat rations by improving provisions, but difficulties in mobilising, retaining and utilising labour continued to dog the sector.⁵⁰ Tenants were not docile victims of colonial rule: they responded to workplace oppression with frequent absenteeism and desertions. Absence from forestry conservation and timber cutting duties was certainly in protest against appalling working conditions and crowded accommodation. Housing was invariably of poor quality because tenants were denied access to the good quality timber necessary to construct huts.⁵¹

Most forests tenants worked long hours at arduous tasks. Forester Wilkins attested or employed "reliable" Africans as Special Native Constables to periodically patrol and take care of fire lines in their

⁴⁹ NAZ, ZAZ2/1/1, The Natural Resources Commission cit., p. 20.

⁵⁰ FCA, F361, Trading FOM to CF, memo dated 13 Apr. 1944; FCA, F361, Trading CFM to CCF, memo dated 10 May 1947.

⁵¹ Chief Bhekezile Ndhlovu, interview with author, 10-12 June 2003, Gwai Centre, Matabeleland.

respective areas during the fire season, generally from June to November. State police provided “patrol boys” with special armlets, to be returned at the expiration of the six-month contract work in state forests. Besides beat patrols, the work included burning discarded light wooden railway sleepers, dead and dry stumps, logs found near fire lines, 300-500 foot-wide fire strips, and keeping foresters informed. White police officers and foresters “(inspected) the work of Special Native Constables, to instil keenness and act as deterrent to rogue natives.”⁵² The Special Native Constables had authority to summon fellow Africans living in or near state forests to come and assist in extinguishing fires or help apprehend timber and game poachers. During the fire season, particularly at weekends, labour gangs were on standby for fire fighting. In the inter-war period, more Africans were employed as forest guards, wardens, rangers, firewatchers or “blackwatchers” in the Matebeleland Forest Conservancy. Some were regularly posted with drums on prominent points such as Mount Chililankwe. Others worked night shifts. At that stage, the state believed there was a greater degree of control on tree cutting, hunting and other activities in forests considered illegal. According to Kelly Edwards, “the resident natives on the Gwai Forest Reserve are gradually developing a forest conscience, and the assistance of the Native Department to this end is gratefully acknowledged.”⁵³

In spite of the onerous demands of forestry duties, wages remained desperately low. Forest tenants received cash wages far below the poverty datum line. In 1945, a tenant family of five required £14.50, quadruple the level of existing forestry sector wage payments, to remain above the poverty datum line.⁵⁴ According to Clarke and Riddell, from 1900 onward there was widespread pov-

⁵² NAZ, GF3/1/1, J. Wilkins, “Annual Forest Report for 1944”, p. 52; NAZ, S2217, 78/41/35, Gwaai Fire Protection, memo dated 28 Apr. 1942 from FO to CNC, p. 3; CFA, Division of Forestry, “The Control of Veld Fires”, in DA (ed.), *RAJ*, 35, Salisbury 1947, p. 245.

⁵³ NAZ, S2217, memo dated 28 Apr. 1945 from FO to CNC, p. 3; NAZ, Division of Forestry, “The Control of Veld Fires”, p. 245; NAZ, E. Kelly-Edwards, “Annual Forest Report for 1937”, in DA (ed.), *RAJ*, 35, Salisbury 1946, p. 563.

⁵⁴ NAZ, GF3/1/1, J. Wilkins, “Annual Forest Report for 1946”, p. 29.

erty among forestry and agricultural workers because employers neither raised wages nor improved general working conditions. The average wages actually fell during the Second World War, when forestry was not considered a major priority. The incidence of poverty among forest tenant labourers had deep historical roots. Forest labourers had never been granted statutory minimum wages or minimum food rations.⁵⁵ The antiquated 1901 Masters and Servants and 1931 Industrial Conciliation Acts governed labour relations and the power relationship was profoundly unequal. Most tenants were illiterate, landless and undernourished, with few possessions or savings, and bleak future prospects.⁵⁶ Generally they had little or no security of tenure. Like their counterparts in agriculture and the domestic service, tenants were not allowed to form trade unions or bargain for better wages and living and working conditions. Foreign migrant workers were not treated differently from the local population and their entry into the colony began to dwindle in the post Second World War period. Also, the northern territories began to keep their labour for their own purposes. The permanent African labour in the Forestry Service declined by 100 men over four years, from 750 in 1946 to 650 in 1950, despite the opening of new forest reserves.⁵⁷

As “landowners”, the Forestry Department outlawed many facilities in the GFR to guard against timber poachers and the fire hazard. A beer hall permit was required under the 1918 Kaffir Beer Act before employers could provide beer outlets at the farms or mills. However, mill managers often granted beer licences without informing the foresters. Also, several woman beer brewers operated illegally without licences in order to supplement their meagre family incomes. For instance, Forester van Collier inspected an African tenant village and found signs of illegal beer brewing and “frequent visitations by prostitutes”. According to van Collier, “natives have been given a final

⁵⁵ R. Riddell, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, Alternatives to Poverty*, Mambo Press, Gwelo 1978, p. 9; D. Clarke, *Domestic Workers in Rhodesia: The Economics of Masters and Servants*, Mambo Press, Gwelo 1974, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ NAZ, GF3/1/1, J. Wilkins, “Annual Forest Report for 1950”, p. 14.

warning but it was not expected that this would act as a deterrent.”⁵⁸ In another similar incident the District Forest Officer Pencil found: “abafazi (women) clothing, sacks, monkey nuts, pots (including one of my own), mealie meal, 4 gallons of beer, an easy chair (desk type) and sundry articles. Natives denied any knowledge of any of the contents (and) so the (hut) was burnt as there seemed to be no owner.”⁵⁹ Because of the lack of recreational facilities there were few opportunities for social entertainment, and a ban on stores, butcheries, grinding mills and public transport from forests removed economic opportunities for enterprising tenant traders. Discrimination and intolerance was also practiced in the granting of access to forest products. Foresters did not allow tenants to cut commercial tree species for basic construction needs such as for homesteads, kraals, gardens or fences. Kelly-Edwards added: “A further method of avoiding the enormous waste of sapling timber is carried out successfully ... where pise and unburnt Kimberly brick are replacing pole and dagga in the construction of huts.”⁶⁰

Tenants found violating forestry rules, such as bans on timber cutting, lighting fires, snaring, hunting and trespassing, were either sentenced to hard labour or evicted. In the 1940s, many Africans were arbitrarily arrested, convicted and sentenced for trespass and many other petty forest offences. According to Wilkins, “At present little control is possible and natives do not even turn out to assist in quelling fires when called upon to do so. The fires which have occurred in this Reserve are known to have been set maliciously but it has not been possible to arrest the culprits.”⁶¹ Regardless, hundreds of Africans continued to be arrested on flimsy grounds, but it appears many escaped with a warning. In one instance, 804 cases were reported to the police in a single year and 600 were found innocent. The majority of those convicted were found guilty of causing grass fires.⁶² Colonial court records indicate an endless game of hide and

⁵⁸ FCA, Box 66, Report from van Collier, DFO to CCF, May 1950, p. 13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁰ NAZ, E. Kelly-Edwards, “Abstract of Forest Report of CF for 1950”, in SDAL SR Dept Reports 1936-1953, p. 33.

⁶¹ NAZ, SRG3, Wilkins, “Annual Forest Report 1949”, Salisbury 1950, p. 46.

seek between the state and tenants. Atampugre characterises colonial forest departments in Africa and Asia as part and parcel of the colonial administrative structure. They implemented the colonial policy and shared the colonial priorities and objectives, notably that of facilitating the extraction of forest products, especially timber.⁶³ The attitudes and actions of foresters were those of policemen guarding natural resources from illegal exploitation. Foresters also acted as tax collectors, gathering revenue from fines and cutting permits.⁶⁴ Beinart argues that the traditional rights and privileges of indigenous peoples were largely overridden to favour the powerful interests of concessionaire capitalism.⁶⁵ Forestry officials openly criticised timber firms for wreaking havoc in the *gusu* in the form of deforestation; at the same time, however, they viewed local communities not only as a source of cheap labour, but also as troublesome illegal encroachers.⁶⁶ Speaking at the global level, however, Agnoletti argues that the dominant discourse in forest history has overestimated the role of human agency in destroying forests, since societies have also endeavoured to use natural resources in sustainable ways.⁶⁷

Problems of Food and Education

Foresters bore the legal responsibility to provide food and create boreholes, dams and dip tanks for forest tenants. The Native Department criticised forestry officials for failing to provide adequate food rations and water for tenants. Native Commissioner Cockcroft

⁶² NAZ, E. Kelly-Edwards, "Annual Forest Reports for 1950-1951", pp. 2-4.

⁶³ N. Atampugre, "The Search for New Perspectives", in M. Hisham, N. Atampugre (eds), *Whose Trees? A Peoples' View of Forestry Aid*, London 1991, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ W. Beinart, "Introduction: Politics of Colonial Conservation", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, p. 159.

⁶⁶ Atampugre, "The Search for New Perspectives" cit., p. 4; D. Poore, "The Sustainable Management of Tropical forest: the Issues", in D. Poore et al. (eds), *No Timber Without Trees*, London 1989, p. 15.

⁶⁷ M. Agnoletti, "Introduction: The Development of Forest History Research", in M. Agnoletti, S. Anderson (eds), *Methods and Approaches in Forest History*, CABI Publishing, Wallingford 2000, p. 7.

observed that, due to a long running drought, many tenants in the GFR had become destitute. He stated that:

The position must be faced... if you want tenants, then rations and facilities must be provided. If tenants are not wanted then they will have to be moved to the Reserve where they can be cared for... your Department will have to make a decision one way or the other... if you want the natives moved, they are entitled to 12 months notice so in particular the food and dipping questions must be dealt with.⁶⁸

The persistent severe drought and famine of 1946-48 forced the government to import Kenyan yellow-maize meal for local African requirements. Government offered the Forest Department the option to evict some tenants who were in a condition of extreme poverty and allowed foresters to curtail the movement of other destitute and hungry tenants within the GFR in search of fruit and other wild foods, as when the people of Ngazimbi attempted to camp near available water spots.⁶⁹ The Forest Department also fought against the arrival of new entrants in forest reserves.⁷⁰

In line with general government education policy, forest tenants did not have access to schools and hospitals. Foresters viewed schools, and especially schoolchildren, as a fire hazard. Since missionaries endeavoured to educate Africans, their actions brought them into conflict with colonial officials. In 1948, Reverend E.N. Stuart ran Ntabeni and Solusi Mission Schools at Loskey Farm and Umgusa River, respectively, for the tenants' children. Presumably, Stuart was ignorant of the fact that this was illegal in a reserved forest area. Forestry officials instructed him to relocate the "kraal schools" next to Souter's store in the GNR. According to the district forest officer, "kraal schools" were inimical to the interests of forestry.⁷¹ The District Forest Officer, T. Wilkinson wrote:

⁶⁸ FCA, F361, Report on Forest Tenants from NC Cockroft to FOM, dated 27 June 1949.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ FCA, Box 98 F363 1612 GWFR, Report on Forest Tenants, Chief Forest Officer to District Forest Officer Matabeland, dated 4 Sept. 1949.

⁷¹ FCA, F363, School Sites, District Forest Officer to Chief Forest Officer

I am opposed to the formation or retention of schools or other settlements in this or other forest reserves in the district as unfortunately whatever care is taken they always add to fire and other hazards. I recommend that the schools in question be removed from the Gwaai Forest reserve... The schools have never given the slightest of trouble but I do not think the retention of any school on the Gwaai Forest Reserve is desirable as it abuts a nature reserve.⁷²

However, the demand for education by Africans became quite high from the mid 1930s onward. Most of the local African schools, known as “bush schools”, consisted of pole and dagga buildings. Missionaries played a central role in attempting to meet that demand, and thus helped in the rise of an African middle class with a nationalist outlook. Foresters appeared keen to thwart the missionaries’ action, both in forests and on African reserves bordering forest areas. Allen objected to the establishment of Dangambele in the SNR near Dagamellas Pits. He also objected to the establishment of Dondadema Spring School, because it was in the middle of teak forest and he feared it would interfere with fire protection operations. Missionaries appear to have deliberately defied Forestry Department policy on schools. Reverend P. King of the London Missionary Society built Selonka and Dabe Schools near Hlawe Pan, on the edge of *gusu* forest, without a permit, cutting commercial trees in the GFR in the process. Mvoli, the African teacher in charge of Selonka School, supervised the felling and clearing of more than ten acres of indigenous trees for school premises. Allen strongly warned Mvoli for not providing for adequate fire precautions around the school. Reverend King feigned ignorance, telling foresters that the development of the schools emanated from a long-existing church in the same locality.⁷³

In 1950, P.S. King added an interesting dimension to African educa-

Matabeleland, Memo dated 12 Apr. 1945: FCA, F363, School Sites, Rev. N.C. Stuart to H.R.G. Howman, Dir. Native Dev., memo dated 4 July 1948.

⁷² FCA, F363, School Sites, District Forest Officer to Chief Forest Officer Matabeleland, memo dated 8 Aug. 1949.

⁷³ FCA, F363, School Sites, Forest Officer (FO) to Forest Officer Matabeleland (FOM), memo dated 15 Nov. 1950; FCA, F361, School Sites, FO to Conservator of Forests and Circuit Inspector, Dept. of Nat. Dev., memo date 8 Aug. 1953; FCA, F361, School Sites, FO to FOM, memo dated 27 May 1952; FCA, F363, School Sites, FOM to CF, memo dated 18 Apr. 1953.

tion that touched on the use of commercial timber. He applied for a permit to cut commercial trees to enable Africans to acquire industrial skills at Dabe and Selonka. Industrial lessons and work included wood carving of small articles like hoe and axe handles and utensils using relatively small pieces of *mkusi* and *mtshibi*. This industrial education also involved making school equipment and furniture, such as desks and benches, as it had always been the practice and tradition of the London Missionary Society priests to have these manufactured by school pupils. Pupils carved the tops of benches and desks from trunks of *mkusi* and *mtshibi*. King also pleaded with the Native and Forestry Departments about the poverty among Africans evicted from private lands commonly called the Gourlays Block, asking if they could be settled in the GFR so that their children could continue benefiting from the industrial instruction at Dabe School.⁷⁴ Missionary access to *gusu* directly challenged and competed with the entrenched interests of timber traders. A number of restrictions were therefore imposed to regulate and limit their access. They were not allowed to cut commercial species of larger dimensions, that is ten inches and above in diameter over bark at four feet above the ground. They could only cut a limited quantity of one or more specified species of small trees during specified periods. Also, the movement of people in forest areas was severely restricted and according to Wilkins:

this has been going on in the last 2 or 3 years and especially in the Gwai and Gwampa Forest Reserves. Both Native Commissioners Gwai and Shangani are aware of the position and have taken steps to forbid entry until such time as the position can be cleared up. The Gwai and Gwampa Forest Reserves are in fact over populated, and it is very likely a number of natives will have to be moved out of the Forest Area. Government notice number 44 of 1946 controls all settlement of natives in Forest Areas.⁷⁵

Conclusion

I have explored here the connection between colonial forestry and African poverty in the indigenous state forests of North-Western

⁷⁴ FCA, F363, School Sites, FOM to CF, memo dated 18 Apr. 1952: FCA, F361, School Sites, King to FOM, memo dated 17 Jan. 1953.

⁷⁵ FCA, F361, School Sites, FOM to King, memo dated 7 Feb. 1953.

Matabeleland, particularly the GFR. I argue that land dispossession was a key factor in explaining African poverty in teak woodland. Colonial officials allocated and re-allocated land to exclude Africans not only from the fertile areas, but also from regions bearing important indigenous hardwood forests or Zambezi teak woodland. Teak woodlands were set aside and preserved for their commercial value and to benefit concessionaire timber companies. The firms were also winners in exploiting the cheap labour provided by African tenants. Africans were the losers, due to taxation and their being cheap labourers with neither land rights nor adequate access to forest products like timber, firewood, pasture and grass. Although Africans resisted exploitation by the Forestry Service and timber merchants through absenteeism and desertion from work, migration and sabotage, they were generally impoverished in the colonial period. Also, the methods of timber exploitation caused environmental problems such as deforestation, soil erosion and the loss of biodiversity through fires. Foresters frequently reported that tree felling in state forests as well as elsewhere in the country constituted reckless over-exploitation of finite resources for maximum profit, especially by large companies like the RNTC. African poverty and environmental degradation were the two major impacts of concessionaire capitalism in the Zambezi teak woodland.

Appendix 1. Usage of Gusu Commercial Species

| Name | Use |
|--|--|
| <i>Teak</i> | Corn bins, beehives, canoes, construction, rope, railway sleepers, flooring, panelling, cabinets |
| <i>Mtshibi</i> | Guide blocks, truck frames, joinery, coaches |
| <i>Mukwa</i> | Doors, windows, panels, joinery, packing cases, crates, boxes, furniture, mine “lagging.” |
| <i>Mugongo</i> | Cases, furniture, insulation, floats, toys, drawing and dart boards, pattern making and boxes |
| <i>Minyelenyele</i> | Soap, candles |
| <i>Sweet thorn</i> | Needles, tanning, adhesive |
| <i>Baabab</i> | Paper, fibre |
| <i>Marula</i> | “Box shooks”, oil, candles |
| <i>Mnonya</i> | Guide blocks and machine bearings |
| <i>Ebony</i> | Tannery, boxes, brush backs, chess men |
| <i>Indaba</i> | Yokes, industrial oil |
| <i>Iminyela</i> | Spokes |
| <i>Cape Chestnut, umpetanbale, ulugaku</i> | Tools and tool handles |
| <i>Mniti, swartzja, wild syringe, mnondo</i> | Charcoal |
| <i>Mopani, muonya, msasa, umtundulu</i> | Mining timber |