

Urban Violence and the Colonial Experience: Bulawayo, Rhodesia, 1893 to 1960

Introduction

When I was still a historian of Britain and Europe in the 1960s - while at the same time beginning to turn myself into an Africanist - European urban history was at an exciting stage. It was the heyday of 'the crowd'. The 'faceless mob' was being given a face, or rather many faces. Urban disorder was being given a new rationality. I bought and treasured and still possess the series of studies by George Rude – *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, 1959; *The Crowd in History*, 1964; *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century*, 1970.¹ At that stage, however, there was in effect no African urban history – or at least no southern African urban history. In the 1950s and 1960s Southern African cities were the territory of the sociologist.

Things are very different today. I take a no doubt unfair characterisation of contemporary European urban studies from a review in *The Literary Review* for June 2004. (Jan Ridley reviewing Tristan Hunt, *Building Jerusalem. The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City*, p.38):

Recent urban history is mind-dumbingly dull – at best sterile, technical works on housing policy or local government, at worst post-modernist discourse on gobbledook topics such as 'spatial aneurism'.

But if studies of British and European cities have left riot and protest far behind this has not been so for Southern African urban studies. In South Africa, in particular, black nationalist militancy found its expression through youths making the townships ungovernable. Historians have studied these upheavals, punctuated as they were by terrible moments of police repression and so-called 'black-on-black

¹ Studies of the crowd continued to be published after 1970, of course, the best known being E.P.Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present*, 50, 1971.. Iain Edwards in his stimulating 'Cato Manor, June 1959. Men, Women, Crowds, Violence, Politics and History', in *The People's City. African Life in Twentieth Century Durban*, eds., Paul Maylam and Iain Edwards, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1996, refers to a number of works which have inspired him. These include S.Moscovici, *The Age of the Crowd*, Cambridge, 1985; T.Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II*, Cambridge, 1987; J.S.McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob from Plato to Canetti*, London, 1989; T.I.Uldricks, 'The "Crowd" in the Russian Revolution: Towards Reassessing the Nature of Revolutionary Leadership', *Politics and Society*, 16,1, March 1988. An early attempt to apply the literature on crowds to Africa was F.Furedi, 'The African Crowd in Nairobi: Popular Movements and Elite Politics', *Journal of African History*, 14,2,1973.

violence'. The South African Justice and Truth Commission has collected a mass of evidence about this urban violence.

Further to the north, admittedly, the liberation war was fought much more in the rural areas. Nevertheless, settler states designed colonial towns so as to achieve the maximum separation between rulers and ruled, white and black, 'rich space' and 'poor space'. Any urban upheaval in such circumstances was bound to appear 'anti-systemic' and to be interpreted as part of the struggle against colonial rule or colonial capitalism. Hence the black urban 'crowd' has become the hero of a new historiography; faces have emerged from within it; reason has been pre-eminently restored to it. One might well expect a book to be published called *The Crowd in Southern African History*.

Much of this new history has been stimulated by the struggles and eventual triumph of African nationalism. Hence the urban crowd in Southern Africa has been often seen as acting primarily politically. Iain Edwards, in his study of the Durban Beer-Hall riots of June 1959 – riots in which the crowd was mainly female – describes two contrasting political interpretations. One was the interpretation of the apartheid state; the other was the interpretation of the African nationalist movement. As Edwards remarks, 'remembering the late 1950s was crucial to both'.

The state 'stressed riotous, drunken anti-social violence. The riot legitimated repressive measures against violent insurrectionary crowds and their political leaders.' For the African National Congress:

the riot was proof that militant grass-roots political struggles summoned up support for and radicalised the ANC during its organised mass campaigns of the period. Cato Manor's women's struggles were heroic; their violent actions justified, and the riot proof of a united ANC.²

In the end, of course, the ANC triumphed. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission explored urban violence it took it for granted that the narratives of the apartheid state were merely ideological justifications for its crimes. It also took for granted the ANC's notion that urban crowds were acting politically and that urban violence was part of a national protest history. Hugo van der Merwe in his 'National Narrative versus Local Truths' emphasises that the TRC was primarily concerned with 'national unity'. 'The TRC's formula for uncovering the truth and

² Iain Edwards, p.102.

making sense of a victim's experience was to contextualise the abuse within the national political conflict.³

Phil Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, analysing the TRC's handling of violence in Kathorus in the East Rand in the 1990s – violence which included taxi-wars, clashes between squatters and hostel dwellers, students and youth gangs, the ANC and Inkatha – stress that the Commission ignored 'any human rights violations that could not be termed political'.⁴ Nevertheless, this allowed a wide range of violence to be included since 'struggles simply needed to have taken place within the wider context of political conflict to qualify as political.'

All these authors, and many others, are critical of such an overly political approach. Iain Edwards believes that it 'misrepresents the nature of the [1959] riot' in Durban; that it is based on a 'simplistic view of crowds' and 'simplistic notions of relations between political party leaders and the masses'. In his view, crowds are constantly changing; 'major struggles are being waged within the crowd'; participants have multiple social, economic and cultural motives. 'The politicising histories under which men and women have lived so long need to be re-examined'.⁵

van der Merwe argues that the TRC's emphasis on 'the national political conflict' failed to make sense of or to reconcile people to what were primarily local experiences. The TRC needed 'a much more involved, long-term engagement with the dynamics of local conflict'.⁶ Bonner and Nieftagodien insist that 'adequate social explanations' require a recognition that violence was 'socio-political in character'; that one needs to examine 'social and economic processes as well as political processes'. Violence, they say, 'was only secondarily party political'. And if interpreters insist on a party analysis they reduce participants to 'faceless and increasingly dehumanised' puppets 'driven by unconstrained visceral passions'. Bonner and Nieftagodien wish instead to 'insert faces and motives'.

However, nationalist interpretations have not been the only way of capturing Southern African urban violence in the interests of a Grand

³ van der Merwe in Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, eds., *Commissioning the Past. Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Wits UP, 2002, pp.204-215.

⁴ Bonner and Nieftagodien, 'The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Pursuit of "Social Truth": The Case of Kathorus', in Posel and Simpson, p.175. For a fuller account see P.L.Bonner and N.Nieftagodien, *Kathorus. A History*, Longman, 2001.

⁵ Edwards, pp.102, 106, 136.

⁶ van der Merwe, p.204.

Narrative. As powerful as the Grand Narrative of nationalism has been the Grand Narrative of class. In Southern Africa urban violence has often been explained as the result of the uneven and contradictory processes of proletarianisation. In so far as it has been anti-systemic it has been seen as anti-capitalist. Frederick Cooper's seminal collection, *Struggle for the City*, bears the sub-title, *Migrant Labor, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa*.⁷ In his introduction, 'Urban Space, Industrial Time and Wage Labor in Africa', Cooper describes a particular 'radical position' in urban scholarship:

The growth of a working class in the African city shapes its structure and the conflicts that occur within it. This process has been seen in rather linear terms: African workers became concentrated in key mining and commercial centers; their experience in the workplace led them to a greater sense of collective identity and class consciousness; and they organized to challenge capital and the state.⁸

Such a narrative has been applied particularly to ports and to railheads, where a large work force lives actually in the town rather than in mining compounds outside it and where workers in one town have a ready means of communication with those in another.⁹

Clearly some part of what Bonner and Nieftagodien are saying about the overly-political reading of urban violence by the TRC is that the nationalist and the class narratives ought at least to be combined. But that is only part of what they are saying. Taxi wars, urban gangs, 'ethnic' conflict relate to other dimensions of the Southern African urban experience which cannot be reduced either to the story of the growth of national consciousness or to the story of the growth of proletarian consciousness. In 1983 Cooper noted the need for urban historians to explore the way in which African townspeople drew upon pre-urban traditions of association. He also noted the need to explore the struggle over 'ideologically charged' urban space.

⁷ Sage Series of African Modernization and Development, Volume 8, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1983.

⁸ Cooper, p.15. He cites P.C.W.Gutkind, R.Cohen and J.Copans. eds., *African Labour History*, Sage, Beverly Hills, 1978; R.Sandbrook and R.Cohen, eds., *The Development of an African Working Class*, London, Longman, 1975, as examples of this narrative.

⁹ Durban is a particularly good Southern Africa example. See David Hemson, 'Dock Workers, Labour Circulation and Class Struggles in Durban, 1940-1959', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4,1; 'In the Eye of the Storm. Dock-Workers in Durban' in Paul Maylam and Iain Edwards, eds., *The People's City, African Life in Twentieth-Century Durban*, University of Natal, 1996.

In the twenty years since *Struggle for the City* points have been emphasised and others added. As Paul Maylam writes in his introduction to *The People's City*: 'almost all the essays in this collection implicitly consider the organisation and occupation of urban space – living space, cultural space, political space and space for pursuing material ends.'¹⁰ As he also notes, the essays show 'a convergence of rural "traditionalism" and urban popular protest'. Iain Edwards' chapter on the Cato Manor riots of 1959, from which I have already quoted, insists on the importance of a gendered approach to urban violence.¹¹ Paul La Hausse's chapter portrays 'marginalised peasant, lumpen elements who formed themselves into amalaita gangs, prostitutes ... traders in dagga, animal skins and herbs ... and most importantly beer-brewers'. He emphasises that whites feared 'possible violent outbreaks on the part of these newly urbanised people'.¹² But urban crime and gangs were not only a product of recent urbanisation. They remained a characteristic feature of the African township and a key element in much urban violence.¹³

Paul La Hausse notes at the beginning of his chapter that it clearly 'betrays its origins' in the work of E.P.Thompson and George Rude and of the South African urban historians who drew on them. But 'in its concern with the question of culture – a rather unpopular field for a number of revisionist urban social historians in South Africa – this essay represents a bridge ... between earlier historical work and more recent literature preoccupied with questions of culture and identity.'¹⁴ Veit Erlmann's chapter on black popular music in Durban has crossed that bridge.¹⁵ So too has work on black urban clothes and fashion.¹⁶ In short, there has developed a Southern African urban cultural history which is not only about cultural nationalism or proletarian 'culture as resource' but also about urban style. Struggles over who sets urban style have also been a cause of violence.¹⁷

¹⁰ Maylam, p.2. The Introduction is entitled 'The Struggle for Space in Twentieth Century Durban'.

¹¹ See also Debby Bonnin, 'Claiming Spaces, Changing Places: Political Violence and Women's Protests in Kwazulu-Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26,2, June 2000.

¹² La Hausse, 'The Struggle for the City. Alcohol, the Ematsheni and Popular Culture in Durban, 1902-1936', p. 40.

¹³ Clive Glasser, 'We must infiltrate the tsotsis: School Politics and Youth Gangs in Soweto, 1968-1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24,2, June 1998; *Ba-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976*, Heinemann, 2000.

¹⁴ p.32.

¹⁵ Veit Erlmann, 'But Hope Does Not Kill. Black Popular Music in Durban, 1913-1939'.

¹⁶ A recent very stimulating essay is Luise White's 'Work, Clothes and Talk in Eastern Africa: An Essay about Masculinity and Migrancy', in E.S.Atieno Odhiambo, ed., *African Historians and African Voices*, Schlettwein, Basel, 2001. See also Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville*, CUP, 1995; Timothy Burke, *Lifeboy Men, Lux Women*, Duke UP, 1996.

¹⁷ Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, eds., *Senses of Culture: South African Cultural Studies*, OUP, 2000.

Urban Violence in Bulawayo

I have been mainly quoting South African work on urban history. Until recently there has been little work available to quote on Zimbabwe. I commented myself in 1992 that 'there is no study published on urban violence in Zimbabwe nor is any currently being carried out'.¹⁸ In their valuable survey of the whole field, Hilary Sapire and Jo Beall wrote in 1995 that 'the urban history of Zimbabwe is in its early phases'.¹⁹ Yet this was to some extent an illusion, created by the fact that important doctoral studies remained unpublished. The gap was partly filled by Brian Raftopoulos and Tsuneo Yoshikuni's edited collection, *Sites of Struggle. Essays in Zimbabwe's Urban History*, Weaver, Harare, 1999' which contained key extracts from many of these studies.

Recently I have myself come to work on Zimbabwean urban history for the first time. My intention is to write a social history of Zimbabwe's second city, Bulawayo.²⁰ In fact Bulawayo's history is far from unexplored. Several important sociological surveys were carried out in Bulawayo in the 1950s. Historical research began twenty-five years ago when Stephen Thornton carried out his pioneering work on Bulawayo's African workers for an unfortunately uncompleted doctorate.²¹ An extract from Thornton's work is published in *Sites of Struggle*.²² In 1989 Ossie Stuart completed a very differently nuanced doctorate on African social change in Bulawayo.²³ This too remains unpublished and

¹⁸ Terence Ranger, 'Afterword: War, Violence and Healing in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 3, September 1992.

¹⁹ Hilary Sapire and Jo Beall, 'Urban Change and Urban Studies in Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21,1, March 1995.

²⁰ During my Visiting Professorship at the University of Zimbabwe between 1998 and 2001 I carried out research on Bulawayo and gave a series of seminar papers on its history, several on outbreaks of violence which are footnoted later in this paper. The only article so far published is Terence Ranger 'Dignifying Death: The Politics of Burial in Bulawayo', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34,1-2,2004. On page 136 of this article I summarise rapidly the violent upheavals of 1929 and 1960 and my argument that 'debates over black urban culture and who should dominate it were at stake'. I also draw on the concept of cultural struggle in Bulawayo in my closing 'Commentary' in Jonathan.A.Draper, ed., *Orality, Literacy and Colonialism in Southern Africa*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2003. The South African cultural theorist, Sarah Nuttall, has commented on the notions of urban culture and struggle in her discussion of Yvonne Vera's novel about Bulawayo, *Butterfly Burning*, Baobab, Harare, 1998, which is one of the inspirations for my current book, *Bulawayo Burning*. Sarah Nuttall, 'Inside the City: Urban Topographies in Yvonne Vera's Fiction' in Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac, eds., *Versions of Zimbabwe: Literature, History and Politics*, Weaver, Harare, 2005.

²¹ Stephen Thornton, 'A History of the African Population of Bulawayo', draft dissertation, University of Manchester.

²² Stephen Thornton, 'The struggle for profit and participation by an emerging petty-bourgeoisie in Bulawayo, 1893-1993'.

²³ Ossie Stuart, 'Good Boys, Footballers and Strikers: African Social Change in Bulawayo, 1933-1953', doctoral thesis, University of London, 1989.

there is no extract from it in *Sites of Struggle*.²⁴ In 1990 Michael West completed a thesis on 'African Middle-Class Formation in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1965' which made extensive reference to Bulawayo.²⁵ Fortunately this has recently been published.²⁶

There is much ongoing work on Bulawayo's history. Busani Mpfu, having completed a History Honours thesis at the University of Zimbabwe on transitions in local government between 1960 and 1980, is now working for an MA thesis on the Asian population of the city. Koni Benson is working on the history of Bulawayo African women.²⁷ Jane Parpart is working on African class formation in Bulawayo. My own work, therefore, does not aim to produce the first narrative of Bulawayo's history so much as to explore specifically social and cultural themes within it.

In addition to these studies focussed on Bulawayo as a whole, there have been others exploring the many episodes of urban violence and collective working class action which have distinguished the city's history. Until the 1950s Bulawayo was the largest town in Southern Rhodesia and the most industrialised. It was the railhead. It was the centre of African trade union and political history. It was the 'capital' of Matabeleland which had a political and cultural history distinct from that of the rest of the country. More than in any other Rhodesian city there have been a series of violent outbreaks and strikes in Bulawayo. In December 1929 there broke out the so-called 'faction fights' between groups of African workers and residents which convulsed the township and locations and spilled over into the European town. In 1946 there took place the African railway strike. In April 1948 the so-called General Strike – which did not include the railway workers or the municipal workers – began in Bulawayo and spread to most other Rhodesian towns. In July 1960 occurred the days of violent riot and arson which are known as the zhi riots. After Zimbabwean independence in November 1980 and February 1981 there took place two armed clashes at the Bulawayo suburb of Entumbane, in which fighting between Zanla and Zipra ex-combatants spilled over into faction violence in many of the townships. Since 2000 there has been endemic conflict in the Bulawayo townships

²⁴ However a chapter in *Sites of Struggle* by Jon Lunn discusses both Thornton's and Stuart's work, contrasting their approaches to urban violence. Jon Lunn, 'The Meaning of the 1948 General Strike in colonial Zimbabwe'.

²⁵ Doctoral thesis, Harvard, 1990.

²⁶ Michael West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898-1965*, Indiana UP, 2002.

²⁷ Koni Benson and Joyce Chadya, 'Ukubhinya: Gender and Sexual Violence in Bulawayo, Colonial Zimbabwe, 1946-1956', *Zambezia*, 30,i,2003.

between supporters of the opposition and of the Mugabe regime. Robert Mugabe, instructing his party Youth Congress earlier this year to re-capture the cities for ZANU/PF told them: 'Bulawayo is called the City of the Kings. But who is King in Bulawayo?' Mugabe's is a good question to guide historians of urban violence in Bulawayo. In these episodes of upheaval who were competing to be 'King'? And 'King' of what?

The comments which have been made about these violent moments in the history of Bulawayo have sought to capture them either for a nationalist or for a workerist narrative. The 1929 faction-fighting has been seen as worker on worker violence caused by the contradictions of capitalism. The 1946 and 1948 strikes have been variously seen as the largest mass anti-colonial protests since the 1896 uprising or as the coming of age of proletarian power. The 1960 riots have been seen as the beginning of the policy of nationalist 'confrontation'. The early post-independence violence has been seen a clash between two rival representatives of nationalism. The more recent violence has been interpreted as clashes between the nationalist and the trade union tradition in Bulawayo African politics.

In short, the South African patterns of interpretation have been mirrored in the literature on Bulawayo urban violence. Twenty-five years ago the 1929 faction fighting was the subject of what has become a classic analysis of the contradictions of class under early colonial capitalism, Charles van Onselen and Ian Phimister's 'The Political Economy of Tribal Animosity'.²⁸ Michael West has written of the 1946 rail strike as 'the single most important African-initiated event in the history of Southern Rhodesia since the bloody uprisings of the 1960s' and of the 1948 general strike as 'the acid test of the national moment'. In his view the events of 1948 represented 'working class betrayal by the elite leadership'.²⁹

Andre Astrow writes that 'in the late 1940s the struggle against economic exploitation precipitated a series of strikes. This militant action was seen by the white working class as a threat to its privileged position'. He speaks of 'the emergence of an African working class in the post-war period showing considerable militancy [which] posed a direct threat to the entire white community.' Astrow believes that 'the one force capable of and with an interest in directly challenging imperialism in Zimbabwe' was 'the African working class'. Its 'industrial militancy reached a high

²⁸ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6, 19979.

²⁹ Michael West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898-1965*, Indiana UP, 2002, pp.160, 170, 174.

point in the General Strike of 1948, beginning in Bulawayo' which was 'only put down by the use of force'. However, 'the leadership actively tried to restrict the militancy of the African working class'. As a result 'the negative experience of the General Strike, largely due to betrayal by the union leadership, necessarily played an important role in dampening the widespread militancy of the African working class in the years that followed.'³⁰ Zimbabwe's brief moment of proletarian revolutionary potential was over. Petty bourgeois nationalism now took over.

David Johnson writes of the 1940s as the time of the 'revolt of the working people'. He devotes a chapter to the 'emergent embryonic African working class'. focussing particularly on the 1945 and 1948 strikes. 'The strike wave of the 1940s', he concludes, 'marked a turning point in the history of the working people of colonial Zimbabwe'. In 1948 there appeared 'on the historical stage an African working class movement that acted independently of 'responsible' leaders'.³¹

Contemporary African intellectuals proclaimed the transforming importance of the strikes in the same sort of way:

The Railway strike [declared Jasper Savanhu] has proved that Africans have been born ... We have found ourselves faced by a ruthless foe – exploitation and legalised oppression by the white man for his and his children's luxury. The days when a white man could exploit us at will are gone and gone forever.

Lawrence Vambe described the 1948 strike which 'started in Bulawayo; as was always the case most strikes started in Bulawayo' as 'the first strike which threatened the white man'.³²

These estimates mingle an anti-colonial with an anti-capitalist narrative. Nevertheless, there has been an overwhelming feeling within the Zimbabwean Labour movement and among its historians that the nationalist narrative has pre-empted the workerist one. As Morgan Tsvangirai wrote in his Preface to a history of the Labour movement:

³⁰ Andre Aatrow, *Zimbabwe: A Revolution that that Lost its Way?* London, Zed, 1983, pp.9,10, 20,21.

³¹ David Johnson, *World War 11 and the Struggle for Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1939-1948*, Harare, UZP, 2000, chapter 6. Johnson quotes Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins: 'The recent outbreak was the black proletariat putting out its head.' p.162

³² I take both quotes from Brian Raftopolous and Ian Phimister,eds., *Keep On Knocking. A History of the Labour Movement in Zimbabwe, 1900-97*, Harare. Baobab, 1997, pp. 53, 68.

In Zimbabwe, though the labour movement and its leaders have often been acknowledged in the anti-colonial struggle, the complex relationship of the movement to the growth of nationalist parties and nationalist ideology has frequently been simplified to suit the triumphalist views of nationalist history.'

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Certainly the 1960 zhii riots in Bulawayo have not been invoked as an example of trade union or worker action. The debate about zhii is whether or not the riots can be seen as a decisive moment in nationalist history. Michael West thinks they can. He writes of 'clashes between the police and thousands of the party's (NDP's) supporters. [They were] a political and psychological turning point, marking as they did the first time since the uprisings of the 1890s that blood had been shed in open confrontations between the security forces and the colonized people'.³⁴ It is not surprising that nationalist intellectuals have claimed zhii. Thus the late Eddison Zvogbo produced a historical account of the nationalist movement from petty bourgeois timidity to radical confrontation. Zvogbo argued that the young leaders of the National Democratic Party were determined to break with the lukewarm strategies of Joshua Nkomo. In his view the zhii riots had been secretly organised by the NDP's two main leaders, Michael Mawema and Sketchley Samkange.³⁵ With the riots, claimed Zvogbo, the era of confrontation had begun. In a very recent manuscript Muchaparara Musemwa writes that the NDP 'successfully organised the urban riots in Bulawayo and Salisbury in 1960, threatening white security'.³⁶

No analysis of the Entumbane fighting of November 1980 and February 1981 has ever been published. Two Commissions of Inquiry were appointed and both reported but their reports have never been issued. The report on the Matabeleland disturbances compiled by the CCJP and the Legal Resources Foundation focussed almost entirely on the rural areas and said little about Bulawayo.³⁷ There have been many calls for a Zimbabwean Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate these and other post-colonial violences. But if one were ever

³³ *Keep on Knocking*, p.xi.

³⁴ West, p.223.

³⁵ I have discussed and criticised this view in Terence Ranger, *Are We Not Also Men? The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe, 1920-64*, London, James Currey, 1995, pp. 186-189.

³⁶ Musemwa Muchaparara, 'Disciplining a "Dissident" City: Hydropolitics in the City of Bulwayi, Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 1980-1992', ms., 2004.

³⁷ *Breaking the Silence. Building True Peace*, Harare, 1997. There is a brief narrative of the Entumbane violence on page 32 and a reference to the suppression of the Dumbutshena Report.

appointed we can be almost sure that its readings of urban violence would be just as political as its South African predecessor.

Bringing Culture In

Can there be interpretations of these outbreaks of violence in Bulawayo which add or provide additional insights to proletarian and nationalist readings? Fortunately for this already long paper there have recently been detailed revisionist accounts of the 1945 railway strike by Kenneth Vickery and of the 1948 general strike by Ian Phimister and Brian Raftopoulos.³⁸ This leaves me here to consider the two outbreaks which begin and end my forthcoming book on Bulawayo – the 1929 faction fights and the 1960 zhii riots.

But first let me briefly summarise the findings of Vickery, Phimister and Raftopolous. Vickery reminds us that the 1945 rail strike was regional – 'a pan African event, transcending colonialism's arbitrary boundaries'. (p,70) For this reason, and because 70% of the striking railwaymen in Bulawayo were from Northern Rhodesia , Nyasaland and Mozambique, it is hard to see the 1945 strike as a land mark in a specifically Southern Rhodesian nationalism.

Vickery finds that:

the level of solidarity and discipline was extraordinary, given the geographical range of the system, the divisions in the work force (ethnic, occupational, long-term urban vs short-term migrant etc) and the lack of trade union experience.

Yet the strike did not lay the foundations for long-term industrial militancy. Reluctantly satisfied with the findings of a Labour Board railway workers did not join in the 1948 strike.

And if we cannot simply hail the strike as a triumph of national or proletarian consciousness, how far can we regard it as an event specific to Bulawayo? The strikers did not live in the Bulawayo Location but in the separate railway compound; many of them planned to return to their homes in the neighbouring territories. Vickery finds nevertheless that the strike was in essence a desperate attempt to achieve a more dignified

³⁸ Kenneth Vickery, 'The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part 1 and Part 11', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24,3, 1998 and 25,1, 1999; Ian Phimister and Brian Raftopoulos, 'Kana soro ratswa ngaritswa: African Nationalists and Black Workers – The 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe', *The Journal of Historical Sociology*, 13,3.

urban existence; to achieve 'some semblance of normality in domestic arrangements'; to meet school fees and to buy clothes and enamelware for their families. 50% of the strikers had wives with them in the Bulawayo railway compound.³⁹

Vickery concludes:

Events like the railway strike symbolized, it is true, the rejection of the colonial order. Yet they reflected as well the recognition of a permanently altered world ... It was a world which offered, in addition to nightmares, occasional glimpses of hope. The strikers looked forward not back. They had aspirations for something better, in terms which seem almost quaint in the disillusioned late twentieth century – terms like 'progress' and 'development'. Such things seemed possible, even imminent, to the generation following the war. (p.70)

This is the railway strike as we have not seen it before.

Phimister and Raftopoulos do much the same with the 1948 strike. Nationalist and labour historians, they say, dispute the credit for this 'radical' and potentially revolutionary event. But the contest is an illusory one. The 1948 strikers were in no sense radical or revolutionary. They wanted what the 1945 railwaymen wanted – a more dignified urban existence. In the end they settled for the same as the railwaymen – a Labour Board. In this case the strikers were largely residents of the Location. The railway and municipal compound residents did not join in. The 1948 strike was very much about township culture.⁴⁰

³⁹ Vickery quotes from Teresa Barnes' important article, 'So that a Labourer could live with his Family. Overlooked Factors in Social and Economic Strife in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe, 1945-1952', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21,1,1995.

⁴⁰ I have myself offered a revisionist treatment of the 1948 strike, arguing that it could easily have been avoided and that it was brought about by extraordinary blindness on the part of the Bulawayo Municipality and employers., and by too great reluctance on the part of the government to over-rule them. Terence Ranger, 'Who Was to Blame for the 1948 Strike?' The strike is not often seen as a violent event but there is evidence of violence on both sides. Olga Bungu's 1996 BA History Honours thesis, 'Police and Army Co-operation in Suppressing the Strikes of 1948'. provides oral data on striker deaths at the hands of the authorities. On 2 July 1960 the *Bantu Mirror* carried an interview with Grey Bango, the veteran trade unionist, recalling the 1948 strike: 'It was when Mr Bango was explaining to the people at a mass meeting in Stanley Hall the results of the negotiations for higher wages that the inevitable explosion which shook the whole country and brought troops to Bulawayo flared up. Before the meeting was half way through the leaders had to flee for their lives from a missile of stones hurled at them. Bulawayo was tense. Police were too small for the situation. Troops were called in the following morning. Gangs of workers and township people carried out ruthless pickets on those Africans who were going to work. Hell was let loose and no leader would dare to walk the streets'..

So what can we say about the two explosions of violence which bracket the strikes – the faction fights of December 1929 and the zhii riots of July 1960? Here we seem to be back again to the 'mob'. Can we discern faces in the crowd and find rationality in its actions? Sense has, indeed, been made of both episodes. The 1929 fighting has been captured for a triumphant demonstration of the power of political economy; the 1960 riots have been captured for radical nationalist historiography. But can either be given an alternative reading as a struggle over the character and direction of urban culture? Can we discern from this perspective who was fighting whom to be King of black Bulawayo?

1929

Charles van Onselen and Ian Phimister, in their classic 1979 article, wanted to make sense of what had up to then been treated merely as 'the Matabele and Mashona in combat'. Their article 'attempted to situate the specific economic grievances of differentially incorporated groups in the context of Southern Rhodesia's political economy' and to repudiate 'any suggestions that "faction-fights" were and are manifestations of mindless irrational "tribal" violence'. Men did not fight each other, they insisted, merely because they belonged to different ethnic groups. They fought each other because they had different and competitive economic interests.⁴¹

Van Onselen and Phimister detected two phases in the violence. Between Christmas Eve and December 27 1929 'it took the form of gang assaults and robbery' directed against 'respectable' long-term residents of the Location. But:

from the afternoon of 27 December the nature of the conflict changed radically. Whereas formerly it had been a case of 'Shona' gangs assaulting workers, it now became a case of workers attacking recent migrants ... [especially] the recent influx of Shona. The conflict was now fundamentally one between 'established workers' and 'new immigrants'.⁴²

It was the assumption of their article that most 'respectable' long term workers were 'Ndebele' and that most gangsters and recent incomers were 'Shona'.

⁴¹ 'The Political Economy of Tribal Animosity', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6,1, October 1979, pp.40-41.

⁴² pp.38-39.

In their view the gangsters were 'Shona' because they 'were the most recent migrants. Many of them would have occupied, at least temporarily, the lowest of Bulawayo's socio-economic rungs, including the ranks of the petty criminals and the unemployed'. In 1929 'the unemployed merged with the Location's lumpen-proletariat' to form gangs which terrified 'Ndebele' residents.⁴³

These new 'Shona' migrants, argued Van Onselen and Phimister, had flooded into Bulawayo because of the agricultural crisis of the late 1920s:

The unemployment crisis was felt most heavily in Mashonaland, where the tobacco farms were concentrated, and obliged work-seekers to look beyond that province's boundaries. To many Shona workers ... Bulawayo must have looked especially promising.⁴⁴

The desperate immigrants were ready to accept work at whatever wages were offered. They undercut 'Ndebele' workers. Van Onselen and Phimister sum up the predicament of the locals:

Ndebele labourers were now in the intolerable and novel position of being squeezed from both domestic and foreign labour markets. For the first time they were vulnerable to competition or even displacement from the labour market at precisely the same time the viability of their rural areas was being noticeably eroded ... The Ndebele faced an influx of Shona migrants which must have seemed especially ominous when Ndebele migration to South Africa was threatened with curtailment.

So when 'Shona' gangs began the Christmas 1929 violence 'Ndebele' workers retaliated by trying to drive out the 'Shona'.⁴⁵

In this interpretation the apparently random events of late 1929 marked a profound and purposive shift in the history of the African working-class in Bulawayo. And because historians prefer the purposeful to the random Van Onselen and Phimister's reading has remained dominant up to today. Yet it has long been clear that it does not fit the

⁴³ pp.36-37.

⁴⁴ p.17

⁴⁵ p.18

evidence. In 1979 when the article was published Stephen Thornton was carrying out archival and field research in Bulawayo; in the early 1980s he returned to Manchester and produced his draft thesis. It was resolutely still in the political economy mode. But Thornton found that Van Onselen and Phimister had failed in their 'attempt to establish an effective linkage between their theoretical explanations and the actual events of Christmas 1929-30'. They had failed to establish 'who the fighting was between, when and why'. In Thornton's view, they were too anxious to argue that the faction fights embodied new realities and thus they had to 'invent a somewhat contrived account' of a special labour crisis in 1929.

Thornton's own research found :

little evidence of any significant increase in the number of unemployed immigrants in Bulawayo in the period 1928-30 and less still for the assertion that such immigrants were predominantly Shona. In January 1928 it was reported that labour was in very short supply 'and very few natives [were] looking for work'. By 1930 the situation had changed little. The Manager of the plumbing firm Dupleis, for example, in March 1930 described his 'labour problem' as 'very acute'. Similarly, the Council itself noted that it was experiencing difficulties in 1930 in securing labour for the night soil service (a job regularly abandoned by migrants in time of labour scarcity),

In any case Thornton found that 'Shona made up only a small proportion of recent migrants'. He offers the example of the workers recruited in 1930 for the new sewerage scheme – an abundant source of new jobs. As many as 1,540 men were employed. 825 were described as 'northern natives'; 232 as 'Portuguese'; only 483 were 'indigenous' and of these 300 were Ndebele locals who 'leave for their kraals to plough in November'. Only 183 were 'Shona'.⁴⁶

In Thornton's view there was no desperate Shona influx in 1929 and no new crisis for the Ndebele working class. Since Thornton also held that all significant events in black Bulawayo were triggered by class crises he believed that the 1929 riots were not a significant event. For him the faction fight was merely 'part of a wider pattern of faction fighting'

⁴⁶ Stephen Thornton, 'The African Work Experience and the Patterning of Proletarian Consciousness, 1905-1935', chapter three of draft doctoral thesis, pp.44-45. He draws his examples from Municipal correspondence files in boxes 159 and 243 in the National Archives, Bulawayo and from Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo to Chief Native Commissioner, 23 September 1930, S 138/60, National Archives, Harare.

which had taken place regularly in early twentieth century Bulawayo. He instanced such violence in May 1907; January 1920; December 1923; January 1928 and January 1929. He cited the Location Superintendent, Vawdrey, writing in December 1928 that 'there is always a tendency towards unrest between the Mashonas, the Awemba and the Matabeles and these fights generally revive at Christmas' It could be dealt with, thought Vawdrey, by making 'the usual raid on Christmas Eve [to] remove any dangerous weapons'.⁴⁷ Thornton concludes that the December 1929 fight 'was only different in its intensity and in the depth of reporting in the European press'.⁴⁸

It seems to me that Thornton's evidence, and other data which I shall cite, disposes of Van Onselen and Phimister's argument. On the other hand I cannot agree with Thornton that nothing significant was going on in December 1929. Older township informants do not recall other faction fights but they vividly remember 1929. Younger township informants can recount the myths which have grown up to explain what happened in that year. The 1929 violence was regularly invoked by the African press in the 1940s and 1950s as a warning against 'tribalism'. There are three accounts by African writers, the latest being an essay published only last year.⁴⁹

Why then has 1929 been so intensely remembered? A political economy analysis does not seem to work. No-one has offered an anti-colonial or proto-nationalist interpretation. But perhaps one can explain the violence – or at least the part of it which did not spring from panic and confusion – in terms of struggle over urban culture; in terms of moral economy.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.44. Thornton's citation is Local Superintendent to Town Clerk, 12 December 1928, B23/3/5R. 6345, National Archives, Bulawayo. In fact despite Vawdrey's precautions a fight took place at Christmas 1928, starting at the Railway Compound and ending near the Location – a pattern similar to events in 1929.

⁴⁸ p.46. Thornton concludes that 'the lumpen/worker division was the not the most significant division within the social structure of Bulawayo. Instead it was the engendered ethnic division amongst workers themselves which generated expressions of ethnic violence'. Workers themselves combined with employers and with the Rhodesian state to 'imagine' urban ethnicities and to effectuate an ethnic division of labour.

⁴⁹ M.Hove, 'The Mangoromera Craze', *Confessions of a Wizard*, Mambo, Gweru, 1985, pp119-128; Stanlake Samkange, chapter 14, *The Mourned One*, HEB, 1975, pp.112-125; Pathisa Nyathi, 'The Boxing Day Clashes of 1929', in Jane Morris, ed., *Short Writings From Bulawayo*, 'amaBooks, Bulawayo, 2003, pp.82-87. Hove is the best source for the overall Matabeleland setting; Samkange the best source for the aspirations of young men; Nyathi offers a vivid picture of the squalid conditions in the Location.

Gangs, Bracelets, Suits and Style

We need to begin with gangs. Gangs in black Bulawayo in the late 1920s were not essentially criminal enterprises though they did unlawful things. (They did not trade in drugs or organise burglaries or carry guns). They were essentially competitive youth associations organised in the Location around a 'home-boy' nucleus and in the labour compounds on a territorial basis. Van Onselen and Phimister assume that most of the 1929 gangs were 'Shona'. But this is certainly not true.

In their article one particular criminal case from September 1930 is cited to demonstrate the doubtful proposition that 'at different times the Shona competed most successfully with the Ndebele in the labour market, but at other times constituted the unemployed, quasi-criminal under-class'. They summarise the evidence given in Rex versus Mthla as showing that Shona 'newcomers to Bulawayo, at first unemployed, were pulled into gangs, which they usually left once they had found work'. Yet in fact the 'gang' in Rex versus Mthala was made up of Kalanga youths from Plumtree in south-west Rhodesia. These 'Kalanga' certainly did not see themselves as 'Shona'. In fact they were equipping themselves to fight alongside the 'Matabele' against 'the Manyika'.

The fifteen year old Sitapi, arriving in Bulawayo in August 1930 from Plumtree, was taken to an eating house particularly patronised by Kalanga. As he testified:

There were a number of Kalanga natives all together on the verandah of the eating house, quite seperate from the natives of other tribes. The Kalanga natives were in one party, most of them wearing wristlets studded with brass ... Accused and I greeted one another. He suggested I should buy one of the wristlets ... adding that they were for hitting people. Accused suggested that if I did not buy one of the wristlets I should get a bicycle chain and keep it in my pocket for the purpose of striking people on the head. Accused said the wristlets or the bicycle chain were for use in hitting the Portuguese or Manyika natives at Christmas time. He said there was going to be a fight between the Matabeles and the Manyika and the Portuguese.

In this anticipated fight the 'Kalanga' intended to be very much on the 'Matabele' side, as part of a 'greater Ndebele' identity. Other gang members testified that they used the bracelets in boxing matches. They

also testified that they and other Kalanga marched through the Location, sometimes as many as twenty abreast, and that 'had a Manyika or a Portuguese native come between us when we were marching we should have hit him'.⁵⁰

So Rex versus Mthla really shows that there were youth gangs of most of the 'ethnicities' in the Bulawayo Location in 1929. Many of these 'gangsters' were 'Ndebele', particularly 'Ndebele' who had returned from migrant labour in Johannesburg.⁵¹ And although Sitapi himself left the gang as soon as he found a job, other witnesses in the case were already employed when they joined in gang activity. Youth violence, indeed, particularly involved young workers. Those who lived in the labour compounds joined in what were essentially large gangs during their holiday periods. Thus in December 1929 the first sign of violence came not from the depredations of 'Shona' gangs but from the largely 'Tonga' workers in the Municipal Compound which was situated on the edge of the Location. 'On the 25h of December in the afternoon', ran the Location Monthly Report, 'the Natives of the Bulawayo Municipal Compound were coming out in a fighting attitude and the Natives returning to the Location were afraid'.⁵² The next major threat on 27 December was a march of 'Northern' workers from the railway compound towards the Location 'shouting and waving sticks and generally behaving in an extremely bellicose manner'.⁵³

Thus, gangs and factions were a young man's activity rather than just an unemployed man's activity. In many ways 1929 was a generational conflict rather than a clash between different sorts of workers or between different ethnicities.⁵⁴

This generational conflict could take place within an 'ethnicity'. Hove describes how the mangoromera bracelets and the gang style associated with them became so much part of Ndebele youth culture in

⁵⁰ Evidence of Sitapi and Ndladhlambini, 20 September 1930, S 569 1930, National Archives, Harare.

⁵¹ Stanlake Samkange, who had witnessed the 1929 violence as a small boy, writes that: 'the streets were full of 'amalayita'. gangsters supposed to be from Johannesburg. They could be identified by the mouth organs they played, the belts with hobnails they wore around their wrists'. *The Mourned One*, p.122. There was a close connection between black Johannesburg and black Bulawayo. Few 'Shona' went to Johannesburg. In December 1929 Mangatshana, Head Messenger at the High Court in Bulawayo spoke of Johannesburg-influenced gangsters who 'wore short coatd and trousers wide enough for a man to get inside'.

⁵² Location Monthly Report, December 1929, Box 23/3/7R, National Archives, Bulawayo. The Superintendent emphasised that the armed 'Tonga' were particularly threatening 'Shona' residents of the Location.

⁵³ *Chronicle*, January 4 1930.

⁵⁴ Hove writes that the gang culture left 'many elders wondering whether the behaviour of their sons was not a prelude to the end of the earth and life on its face', p.121.

Bulawayo that it spread into the Matabeleland countryside, carried there by young migrant workers:

Most urban workers remained in employment for durations of a few months at a time and then returned to the rural areas. The Mangoromera craze, therefore, travelled quickly to the remotest villages. Men went back to the villages, wearing on their arms the spiked arm-band ... a status symbol of considerable importance ... The wayward, the stubborn, the disobedient and several other anti-social elements, used the Mangoromera craze as a backhand blow on established conventions, which their elders religiously adhered to without question. Faction fights, that had hitherto been confined to urban and industrial areas at weekends and on holidays, had moved to villages out in the rural areas. Many slight arguments and disputes quickly developed into duels or faction fights ... many people resorted to talking about their ability to box and the sharp sting of their boxing.⁵⁵

There is no doubt that in the Bulawayo Location too 'Ndebele' elders disapproved of the dress and behaviour of young 'Ndebele' gang members as much as they disapproved on the conduct of young 'Kalanga' or young 'Shona'. Between 1894 and the 1920s Bulawayo Location culture had been made by the interaction of Ndebele royals and aristocrats with 'progressive' Christian immigrants from South Africa and with a multi-ethnic group of women house-builders and land-ladies.⁵⁶ All these groups and their families lived in the Location and dominated the normal peaceful pattern of politics there. The landladies dominated the women's branch of the Bantu Voters League; mature Location house-owners dominated the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union. But from the 1920s onwards the Bulawayo Municipal Council increasingly intervened in the Location, demolishing the houses erected by the women and replacing them with accommodation for 'single' men. Whereas the 'elders' of the Location had hitherto been able to control youth as clients or tenants they now faced a new challenge from assertive young migrants.

This generational challenge would have been apparent even if the Bulawayo Location had been made up solely of 'Ndebele'. But there was admittedly an 'ethnic' dimension to it, though one very different from Van

⁵⁵ p.120-121.

⁵⁶ This is demonstrated in the opening chapters of my forthcoming book, *Bulawayo Burning*. It is briefly stated in Terence Ranger, 'Dignifying Death: The Politics of Burial in Bulawayo', *JRA*, 34.1.2, p.115.

Onselen and Phimister's propositions. Among all the young challengers to the control of the elders and among all the young claimants to be lords of Bulawayo urban culture, the most impertinent and assertive were the so-called 'Manyika'. It is striking that in the primary sources from 1929 whites speak of 'the Mashona', either as aggressors or victims, but blacks

speak of 'the Manyika'. It is striking that most township oral informants still talk of the Manyika today. What was implied by 'the Manyika' was certainly not a lumpen-proletariat, forced to take the worst jobs for the lowest wages. What was implied was rather the opposite. The 'Manyika' were thought of as better-educated, more fluent in English, smarter, smoother, more successful in job hunting and in romancing women, better at boxing wearing gloves – in short, the very model of modern young men.

I have written extensively about the creation of this image of the Manyika.⁵⁷ But here I prefer to cite a delightful if little known book which tells the story of a Cape Town 'coloured' girl and of her 'return' to the Manicaland home of her father and her husband. The story of Katie Hendricks Mandisodza brings out wonderfully well the way in which Manyika migrants were seen in the towns of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. In the 1910s Katie's father was a student at Old Umtali Episcopal Methodist Mission school, where he reached standard five, 'He smiled easily and indulgently as he proclaimed to his friends in his great trumpeting voice that he intended to seek fame and fortune, city life and good wages in Cape Town. He was an incurable boaster.' He went to Salisbury and obtained the prestigious job of head cook at a big hotel at the wage of £4.10 a month. He window-shopped in the city, feasting 'his delighted eyes on the clothes displayed in the shop windows, and then, with only a few pence in his pockets, he would walk up to the counter and ask to be shown the very best shirts and suits.'

In the 1920s he went to Cape Town, avoiding Johannesburg as 'the very sink of iniquity, plagued with trouble and unrest, strikes, police raids and fighting'. In Cape Town he 'wanted to try out everything in this wonderful city at once'. He gambled and drank in shebeens and went to the bioscope. He got a job as a cook in a Hout Bay hotel; was 'very dapper'; and had an affair with a 'pretty coloured girl with little dancing feet'. They had a daughter and a son. And despite all the discrimination she experienced from her mother's coloured family, his daughter Katie

⁵⁷ See particularly Terence Ranger, 'Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika: The Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe' in Leroy Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, James Currey, London, 1989.

found herself 'attracted to Manica boys'. In the 1940s she met 'an immaculately dressed' Manyika waiter: he was highly educated; she married him. With their excellent English and smart clothes Manyika migrants in Cape Town won many female hearts.⁵⁸

And so did they in 1920s Bulawayo too. Like Katie's father they fell upon the riches of 'the wonderful city' with gusto; like him they longed for, and sometimes achieved, 'the very best shirts and suits'; they displayed their English; they romanced the Ndebele girls. Stanlake Samkange recalls the most flamboyant of them from his childhood in Bulawayo. As well as the amalayita gangsters in their baggy trousers and mangoromera bracelets the weekend streets of Bulawayo Location were full of:

young men who went about very well dressed, overdressed in fact. They usually wore an expensive black suit; black hat, white-rimmed spectacles, white shirt, black tie, black waistcoat with a mirror on the tummy, black coat with a row of fountain pens in the top pocket, black trousers and black shoes ... In pairs or alone they strutted and pranced about the streets, saying: 'Kudada panyika! Kudada panyika!' (To be proud on earth. To be proud on earth). Or 'We are style Buruwayo, oh! Style Buruwayo!' ⁵⁹

And it was 'Style Bulawayo' that was at issue in 1929. The Manyika were confident that they could set it. As in Cape Town many of them got well paid and prestigious jobs.⁶⁰ As in Cape Town they were great ladies' men. Whether they are self-described Ndebele or Manyika old people in Makokoba township all agree. An Ndebele, Mali Nyathi, says that Shona men, and particularly Manyika, 'were the only group interested in girls because the Ndebele had wives outside the town'. He adds, however, that 'most of the ladies liked the Shona because they were generous with their money ... Ndebele were not liked because they were very stingy'.⁶¹ A Shona informant, Tanyanyiwa Kadungure, recalls that 'in those days Ndebele guys did not know how to entice girls. They were

⁵⁸ Katie Hendriks, *The Bend in the Road*, Timmins, Cape Town. n.d. Katue's story was ghost written by Maurice Goldman.

⁵⁹ *The Mourned One*, p.122.

⁶⁰ One informant, Mr Vundla, insisted in February 2000 that so far as jobs were concerned vital was how educated one was'. Workers from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland did the hard work on the railways, with Shona speakers employed as clerks. Hardly any local Ndebele or Kalanga worked on the railways. Dirty Municipal jobs were done by 'Zambesi boys'. The Ndebele and Kalanga, he says, were builders and ran grinding mills. But 'the Manyika from Mutare wanted clean jobs as they considered themselves to be very smart, wearing suits and ties, and thus they chose to work at hotels'.

⁶¹ Interview between Hloniphani Ndlovu and Mali Nyathi, Magwegwe, February 2000.

rough to ladies, they were stingy in most cases ... The direct opposite were the Shona, especially the Manyika. The Manyika knew very well how ladies should be treated. The township singers composed songs along those lines'.⁶² The resentment that this caused among Ndebele was sympathetically summarised right in the middle of the faction fight violence by a Manyika man interviewed by the *Bulawayo Chronicle*. If an Ndebele worker in Bulawayo wanted to marry a girl 'he asks her father for her and he pays the parents so much cattle, or so much money, and he pays the headman too and then all is well.' But when the Manyika wanted a wife 'they court her and spoil her and they do not pay lobolo ...they do not respect their wives' people'. He generously concluded that 'one must not blame the Matabele too much for the outbreaks as they are striking for what they consider to be their own rights'.⁶³

In the 1920s – so different from the 1950s – it was the male township dwellers, and especially the Manyika immigrants who dazzled by their dress, The young men were the peacocks of the town. Local township girls rarely wore shoes; they wore short skirts, not as fashionable minis but as an urban version of the traditional rural apron.⁶⁴ Female informants, on the other hand, admit to being swept off their feet by the smartness and politeness of their immigrant suitors, with their black suits and gloves and canes. The young Manyika wooed rural Ndebele girls by sending them photographs of themselves all decked out in their sartorial glory; the girls were photographed, if at all, only on their wedding day.⁶⁵ As well as clothing the Manyika prided themselves on their ownership of those other signs of modernity – bicycles.⁶⁶

It was the same in competitive township sport which in 1929 mainly consisted of boxing.⁶⁷ Boxing was an arena for direct clashes between the Manyika, the Ndebele and other groupings. But even here

⁶² Interview between Busani Mpofo and Kadungure, Makokoba, January 2000. Hove gives us the text of one of these songs: 'Then came a Shona man and smacked me with a green [note] and said Baby, you are smart'. p.123. A Northern Rhodesian informant, Mr Zulu, says that that 'Ndebele men would go home every weekend to see their families. They were very bitter about woman who came to Bulawayo'. Already by the late 1920s the generational tensions in the Matabeleland countryside included runaway daughters as well as gangster sons.

⁶³ *Chronicle*, 4 January 1930.

⁶⁴ One of my informants was immediately attracted to a girl because she wore tennis shoes.

⁶⁵ Terence Ranger, 'Pictures Must Prevail: Sex and the Social History of African Photography in Bulawayo, 1930-1960', *Kronos. Special Issue on Visual History*, November 2001, pp. 261-266.

⁶⁶ Terence Ranger, 'Bicycles and the Social History of Bulawayo', Janes Morris, ed., *Short Writings From Bulawayo*, 2003, pp. 76-81.

⁶⁷ Terence Ranger, 'Pugilism and Pathology: African boxing and the Black Urban Experience in Southern Rhodesia', in W.J.Baker and J.A.Mangan,eds., *Sport in Africa*, Africana, 1987. This early essay focusses on Salisbury in the late 1930s rather than on Bulawayo in the late 1920s.

there was a perceived cultural difference. Out of a mass of oral evidence I select one archetypal testimony from an Ndebele informant:

Trouble between the Ndebele and the Shona started from these boxing games pitting the Shona against the Ndebele. During the boxing competitions the Shona always put on gloves and the Ndebele refused to put on gloves. During the fights/games the Ndebele did not use their hands only – they resorted to head-butting their Shona opponents and also kicked them with their knees. Head-butting and kicking were not allowed in boxing games. As a result the whites who officiated in these games declared that the Ndebele were very unprofessional in boxing and declared that the Shona were superior ... The Shona then began to view themselves as 'Kings' and challenged the Ndebele to a fist fight. The ring leader was none other than James Mambara.⁶⁸

The Myth of James Mambara

All these factors - the mangoromera culture, the resentment felt by the Ndebele (and also by the Northerners of the railway compound and the Tonga of the municipal compound) against the boastful and 'superior' Manyika rather than against a Shona lumpen-proletariat, the sexual jealousy, the contest between 'primitive' and 'modern' boxing – came together in the myth of James Mambara. James was a real man. On December 28 1929 Colonel Carbutt, the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, addressed a meeting of over a thousand Location residents. He reported that:

all the speakers were very bitter against so-called Manyika. It was alleged that they were the aggressors, led by a man named Rusere, alias James Mabala, since arrested on charges of violence and possibly of murder.⁶⁹

But though James Mambara was a real – and ordinary man – he figured at the time, and has figured even more in Makokoba memory, as a

⁶⁸ Interview between Busani Mpofu and M.Mpofu, Makokoba, 25 January 2000.

⁶⁹ S/N/Bulawayo to CNC, 30 December 1929, S 138, National Archives, Harare. I have come across no records or reports of a trial on these charges. Van Onselen and Phimister say that Native Department reports in 1933 describe Rusere as travelling around selling mangoromera but I have not been able to locate these either. The reference they give – to file S 998 – now relates to a quite different subject.

mythic personification of Manyika cockiness.⁷⁰ Like Katie Hendricks' father he was an incurable boaster. And he seemed to have a lot to boast about. He is remembered as the hero of a violently competitive youth culture and at the same time as the supreme 'Manyika' achiever. He worked for Meikles, the wealthiest business in Bulawayo.⁷¹ He was 'very well educated and spoke English like a white man'.⁷² He dressed superbly. As Mike Hove sums up, on the basis of oral tradition, he was 'the man in town, especially among the Mashona ... their hero of heroes, the first and last man among men'. His mangoromera bracelet was the most powerful of all giving him magical powers of invisibility and flight. He was a master boxer who had defeated hundreds of men; he was 'able to run or cycle the longest journey'. All Manyika boasted of their expensive bicycles. In popular legend James Mambara went beyond all the rest – 'he could ride fast on a bicycle without wheels'.⁷³

Very old men in Makokoba, as the old location is now called, boast of boxing with Mambara when they were very young men. Diki Maphosa, who arrived in Bulawayo in 1928 aged sixteen. 'I was very active in those fights', he recalls. 'This James Mambara was a boxer. I had played boxing games with him before those factional fights. I suffered some personal injuries'.⁷⁴ Many other Ndebele suffered injuries at Mambara's gloved hands, either to their bodies or to their pride. Maphosa recalls that Mambara's 'Manyika' followers:

looked down on the Ndebeles. They under-rated the Ndebele in everything they did. They argued that they could never be defeated by the Ndebeles. We also heard that James Mambara went to the magistrates and asked permission to start a fight with the Ndebeles.

But, as all Makokoba informants say, while Mambara wanted a boxing match 'the Matabele' and their allies went into the bushes and prepared knobkerries. 'Its like James Mambara had called for a fist fight with the Ndebele but the Ndebele ended up using weapons to give the Shona a thorough beating'.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ In fact Rusere came from Fort Victoria province and was thus a 'Karanga' rather than a 'Manyika'. But this merely goes to show how much the category 'Manyika' described style rather than ethnicity.

⁷¹ Masotsha Ndlovu, leader of the Industrial Workers Union in Bulawayo, had also worked for Meikles.

⁷² Stanlake Samkange summarising Bulawayo oral memory in *The Mourned One*, HEB, 1975, p.128.

⁷³ M.Hove, *Confessions of a Wizard*, Mambo, Gweru, 1985, p.124.

⁷⁴ Interview between Busani Mpofu and Diki Maphosa, Makokoba, January 2000.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

It seems clear that 'Manyika' boasting – and resentment by other residents of their achievements - stimulated the rise of all sorts of rumours in the days immediately before the outbreak of fighting. It was believed that officials had 'sold' the 'Matabele' to the 'Manyika', who had licence to kill them.⁷⁶ It was rumoured that James Mambara had stabbed a young Kalanga to death in a gang affray and that he had killed a fellow worker at Meikles with whom he shared a room in the Location, 'because he was an Ndebele'.⁷⁷ The Northern workers in the railway compounds heard similar reports – a trial witness in January 1930 testified that he had 'heard two natives going about the compound among the members of the different tribes employed there, inciting them to arm themselves as the Mashonas were coming to attack them': the 'Manyika' had bribed officials to hand over members of other tribes so that they could be killed.⁷⁸ Tonga workers in the Municipal Compound believed the same stories.

The disappearing Shona/Manyika

Charles Mzingeli, leader of the ICU in Salisbury, told a meeting there that 'the trouble in Bulawayo' grouped 'the Northern and Matabelele Natives against the Mzezuru and the Manyika'.⁷⁹ He was right. But one of the mysteries of 1929 is where the fighting 'Manyika' or 'Shona' were. There is plenty of hard evidence for the arming and mobilisation of other groups. As we have seen the Tonga workers of the Municipal compound, which bordered the location, were the first to come out 'in fighting attitude' on 25 and 26 December. They terrified 'Shona/Manyika' residents returning to the location.⁸⁰ On the afternoon of 27 December three or four hundred Northern workers marched on the location 'shouting and waving sticks, and generally behaving in a very bellicose manner'.⁸¹ On 28 December Barotse and 'Zambezi' massed with 'assegais, fish-spears ... and other weapons, advancing on the location through the bush'.⁸²

But there is no evidence at all of massed and armed 'Shona' or 'Manyika'. Colonel Carbutt, the Superintendent of Natives, was told on December 27 that the Shona were gathering in large numbers at the Brickfields. He went there – but found only the fish-spear wielding Lozi.

⁷⁶ This rumour spread into the countryside around Bulawayo. *Chronicle*, 4 January 1930.

⁷⁷ Interviews with M.Mpofu and Mrs L.Mlotshwa, January 2000; Circular from S/N/Bulawayo to all Native Commissioners, January 1930, S 138, National Archives, Harare.

⁷⁸ *Chronicle*, 7 January 1930.

⁷⁹ Report on meeting of 5 January 1930, S84/A/300, N.A., Harare.

⁸⁰ Location Monthly Report, December 1929, Box 23/3/7R, 1930, National Archives, Bulawayo.

⁸¹ *Chronicle*, 4 January 1930.

⁸² S/N/Bulawayo to CNC, 30 December 1929, S.138.

That night it was rumoured that the Shona were assembling north of the location and planning 'a concerted attack'. In the location there was 'turmoil, natives rushing about and shouting in every direction'. But the attack never came. Many clashes were between Ndebele and Northerners, both mobilised by rumours of Manyika aggression, or among Ndebele themselves.

Driven by rumour as it was, the violence when it erupted was haphazard. No-one knew who was attacking whom; men were responding to phantom armies. Hove writes that 'the whole community was socially seriously ill':

As if by a harsh, sudden and devastating hail storm, people were taken by shocking surprise, unable to comprehend the events, their cause, their meaning ... three days hell for the black residents of Bulawayo. In the absence of a foolproof distinguishing mark, each side frequently attacked members of its own side, because one had to hit, or kill, first, or be hit or killed.⁸³

'All in the Location was confusion', said Masotsha Ndlovu, 'and no-one knew who had hit him except those who had been attacked in their houses'.⁸⁴

Burning Bicycles and Clothes

But if there were no Shona/Manyika armies to be found it was possible to find individual 'Shona' or 'Manyika' living in the labour compounds or in the location. These were attacked 'in their houses' and, very significantly, the hated and envied symbols of their boasted 'style' were destroyed.

The *Chronicle* carried a dramatic report of events at the railway location on the night of December 27:

urgent messages were received at the ... police headquarters that the railway location was being burned down. A rosy glow of flame in the southern sky lent colour to this report, and all available forces, with the exception of a number of troopers left on guard at the Bulawayo Location, went as quickly as possible to Raylton. As the railway compound neared ... flames could be

⁸³ Hove, pp.122,125.

⁸⁴ Notes of a Meeting in the Bulawayo Location, 4 January 1930, S 138.

seen everywhere. On arriving at the [compound] it was found that all the clothing, bicycles and other belongings of some 300 to 400 Manicaland natives living in the [compound] had been seized by the Matabele [really Northerners], placed in nine or ten huge piles and set alight.

Carbutt reported that the 'Manyika' had lost 'bedding, clothes, sewing machines'; one man had lost £21 in notes.⁸⁵

There were similar, if more dispersed, scenes in the Location. In particular 'Manyika' men who had married Ndebele women were the objects of attack:

I did not think of trouble [said one self-identified Manyika, Richard Malila]. I have a Matabele wife and I went to her kraal. I did not think of being assaulted. I came to Bulawayo on Friday, 27th ... I found that my windows were broken in and bricks inside my house. My crockery was broken. I thought thieves had been there. I went to the woman in the next cottage and asked her what had happened. She told me that had I been there I would have been killed.⁸⁶

Oral informants say that all the clothes and other goods from these mixed Manyika-Ndebele houses were piled up outside the houses and set on fire. 'Some of the Ndebele wives who had remained behind [when their Manyika husbands fled from the city]', says Mrs Mlotshwa, 'were ordered by the Ndebele to remove all the clothes of their husbands and pile them in front of their houses. The Ndebele men poured paraffin on these clothes and set them alight'.⁸⁷ What was happening was not looting but a symbolic elimination of Manyika high fashion.

The 1929 fighting was chaotic and confused. But there was a rationale. Jobs were being contested though not in the way Van Onselen and Phimister described. There was even some anti--colonialism in the belief that the authorities were prepared to sell people's lives. But above all the claims of clever and smart young migrant men to define the 'style' of Bulawayo were being violently repudiated. And after the fighting was over and armed white police were marching through the location and the trials were taking place, the old generation took the opportunity to put all youth in its place. The house-owning women and the trade unionists who

⁸⁵ *Chronicle*, 5 January 1930; S/N/Byo to CNC, 30 December 1929, S 138.

⁸⁶ Notes of speeches in Location, 4 January 1930, S 138.

⁸⁷ Interview between Hloniphani Ndlovu and Mrs L.Mlotshwa, Makokoba, January 2000.

played such an important role in the 'normal' politics of black Bulawayo once again took up their dominating place. It was not to be for another thirty years that youth gangs again took over. When they did – in the zhii riots of 1960 – ethnicity was not the issue. Nor even was generation. The issue was class.

Zhii

In these thirty years, of course, very many changes had taken place. In 1929 the majority of Bulawayo Africans had not lived in the location. Apart from the railway and municipal compounds, Africans lived in dozens of outbuildings or cantonments at hotels and businesses in the city and as domestic servants in its suburbs. Thousands of black workers lived as rent-paying tenants on white-owned farms ten miles or more out, bordering the city commonage. This had meant that the 'faction-fighting' had spread onto the city pavements and miles out into the countryside. In 1960 segregation had at last been achieved. Bulawayo was implementing the Native Urban Areas Accommodation and Registration Act; all black tenants had been removed from the white farms and from cantonments in the city. The old location, now known as Makokoba township, was merely one of a widely spreading cluster of townships to the west and north-west of the city. In 1960 all the violence took place within this huge 'native urban area'.

Social and economic differentiation in the 'native urban area' had greatly increased. In 1929 there were a dozen black craftsmen in the Location.⁸⁸ But in that year every trader and eating house owner was an Asian and some Asian families lived in Makokoba. Some of the African tenants on the surrounding white owned land farmed on quite a scale and there were even a handful of African landowners. By 1960 these two last groups had been displaced as the result of the belated implementation of segregation. So too had the Asian traders whom the Bulawayo Council had at last been able to expel from the townships. In 1960 every variety of African education, qualification and opportunity was represented in the townships rather than outside them. There were a growing number of black butchers, eating house owners and general traders. Shopekeepers and bus-owners, teachers and nurses, newspaper editors and journalists, auctioneers and builders all lived in the townships.

⁸⁸ Stephen Thornton, 'The struggle for profit and participation by an emerging petty-bourgeoisie in Bulawayo, 1893-1933', in Raftopoulos and Yoshikuni, eds., *Sites of Struggle*, 1999, pp.19 – 52.. Thornton writes that by 1927 there were three shoemakers, three wood-sellers, four carpenters, one cycle repairer, one painter and one laundryman operating in the location'.

They did not live entirely mixed together, however. Under the influence of Hugh Ashton, Bulawayo's Director of Native Administration, the new townships had developed to offer a range of different accommodation and tenurial possibilities. The old Location, Makokoba, remained much as it had always been – by 1960 unequivocally described as a slum, even though its proud long-term residents tried to remind everyone of its historic and pioneering role in the making and definition of African urban life. All accommodation in Makokoba belonged to the municipality. But other townships grew up where householders possessed leases; the longer the leases the more aspirantly elite the township. There were site-and-service self building schemes. There was by no means a total separation of poor space and rich space in the township spread – some of the Mpopoma lease-holders, for instance, had to take in lodgers to afford their payments so that their township became a by-word for the activities of irresponsible young men. Nevertheless, by 1960 the Bulawayo 'native urban area' possessed its own well-known class geography.

There were two further significant differences between 1929 and 1960. One was that in 1960 mass unemployment really was a factor. In association-mad black Bulawayo there was even an Unemployed Association, with an articulate chairman and secretary, who lobbied hard for bans to be imposed on foreign migrant labour.⁸⁹

The other was the African organisations were much more highly developed than they had been in 1929. However much the 1946 railway strike and the 1948 general strike might have been a false dawn of hopes for proletarian power, nevertheless they had left a strong legacy of trade union organisation. As is well known, Joshua Nkomo established himself first in Bulawayo politics by working for the African railway union. But nationalism itself was also much stronger. In 1929 there was no territory-wide African movement. By 1960 the second in a series of mass nationalist movements, the National Democratic Party, had been founded.

⁸⁹ This looks like Van Onselen and Phimister thirty years later. But the dynamics were different. The Unemployed Association defended the interests of all 'indigenous' Southern Rhodesians whether Ndebele or Shona speaking. They wanted, for instance, Mozambicans excluded from the labour market. They would have liked to exclude Northern Rhodesians and Nyasas too but this was impossible while Southern Rhodesia was part of the Federation. 'Africans from the neighbouring territories ... have thrown the indigenous Africans out of everything, especially employment ... The Government is prepared to see the indigenous African a tramp'. *Chronicle*, 2 June 1960

In Bulawayo the mass nationalist movements brought together in what proved to be an unstable coalition the aspirant urban elites and the unemployed youth of the townships. The division which had been so apparent during the 1929 faction fighting between mature elders and arrogant youth was now supposedly bridged; the Youth League worked under the 'maternal' guidance of what was called 'the Mother Body' of older men. In Bulawayo in the late 1950s articulate nationalists demanded freehold tenure, urban citizenship, a municipal vote and hence rapid control of the City Council by a small minority of African property-holders.⁹⁰ At the same time they demanded jobs for unemployed youth.

All these were differences between 1929 and 1960. But those who could remember the earlier disturbances thought that there also some dangerous similarities. One was that youth gangs not only survived but thrived in the townships. In Mpopoma, for example, where lease-holders rented rooms in their houses to young lodgers, 'cut-throats and hoodlums thrive at a let-me-alone pace [just] as bugs breed themselves at an ad infinitum rate in Makokoba.' Indeed, after a tour of Mpopoma's 'booze dumps' and 'jazz dives' in April 1960 a journalist found that 'Mpopoma is a dump that makes Makokoba look like the original garden of Eden!'.⁹¹ In December 1959 Mpopoma gangs posted notices on trees and fences in the township warning people that anyone found on the streets after 7 pm would only escape with their lives by paying a fine - £5 if they were Ndebele and £15 if they were not!

As this suggests the basis of the 1960 gangs was different from the ethnic and sub-ethnic competitive dressing and boxing groups of 1929. (Football had replaced boxing as the dominant competitive sport in black Bulawayo). The 1960 gangs were more linked with a criminal world of shebeen and gambling dens and extortion. The most famous of the gangs was 'Section 17', 'an all-African unit composed of youngsters, all 17 years or below'. Section 17 was non-ethnic; it has first emerged during the 1948 strike and had constantly renewed itself ever since. A leader of the gang told the *Daily News*: 'Ours is gangsterism. We shall continue looting, stoning and burning'.⁹² Those who remembered the events of 1929 constantly warned against the dangers of a collapse of discipline which might give these gangs their head and offer them a chance of serious looting and burning.

⁹⁰ For an excellent discussion of the demand for security of urban tenure see Michael West, *The Rise of the African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898-1965*, Indiana, 2002, chapter four.

⁹¹ Daniel Dhlamanzi, *Parade*, April 1960.

⁹² *Daily News*, 26 and 27 July, 3 August 1960.

One of those who keenly recalled the 1929 events was the remarkable Charlton Ncgbetsha, veteran footballer, stationery and book-shop owner, editor of the townships journal, the *Bulawayo Home News* and Chairman of the Combined Advisory Boards of the Bulawayo Townships. In 1929 Ncgbetsha had been a school-teacher living on one of the farms outside Bulawayo. In 1960 he lived in Mzikazi township adjacent to Makokoba. Ncgebetsha held a variety of strong opinions – he wanted the historical primacy of the old townships to be recognised; he wanted the long tradition of female political activity to be continued; he wanted youth to be kept in its place; he hoped for the emergence of a responsible African commercial elite. He was an ambivalent sympathiser with African nationalism, doubting its capacity to represent all these interests.

Above all, Ncgbetsha, though himself a 'Fingo' immigrant from South Africa, had become an Ndebele patriot. In the 1930s he had strongly supported the use of Sindebele in schools and churches rather than Zulu. He had played in the football team founded by Rhodes Lobengula, which was to become Bulawayo Highlanders. He was a long-term supporter of the Matabeleland Home Movement. He demanded that every new township be given an Ndebele name. He took the view that Bulawayo was naturally and historically the home of the Ndebele and that its urban culture should be Ndebele just as Shona interests naturally prevailed in Salisbury.

In 1959 and early 1960 Ncgbetsha's normal solidarity with African entrepreneurship was tempered by his belief that too many trading licences were being given to Shona speakers; that these businessmen were 'buying' support in Advisory Board elections and seeking to dominate black politics in Bulawayo. Just as in 1929, warned Ncgbetsha, Shona self-conceit had reached dangerously high levels.⁹³ At Christmas 1959 the *Home News* reported that the authorities were having 'sleepless nights' over the 'recrudescence of tribalism' and expecting a clash between Ndebele and Shona. Large forces of police had been sent to Barbourfields stadium because there had been rumours of a 'tribal' fight after a football game. The 1929 echoes were all too clear.⁹⁴

⁹³ He gave many instances of what he saw as Shona 'aggression' against the norms of Bulawayo urban culture. The relatives of a dead Shona husband came to Bulawayo to claim his property and children from his Ndebele widow; Shona members of the Njube township Advisory Board wanted their clinic to be named after the Shona political leader, Burombo, rather than after a famous Ndebele.

⁹⁴ *Home News*, 2 January 1960.

In January 1960 the *Home News* recorded 'complaints by the Matabele people of Bulawayo that they were not getting a square deal in the matter of businesses. The last straw was the giving of a number of African shops in various parts of the townships to Mashonas and the Matabeles only got one. Like a prairie fire that kind of talk spread to many Matabeles of Bulawayo. They then decided that the time had come for them to assert their rights' – though Ngcibetsha asserted 'there was no plan at all by the Matabele to use violence'.⁹⁵

In the following months, though, his rhetoric became more extreme. The Shona were conspiring to take over all the Advisory Boards as they had already taken over that bastion of urban culture the Bulawayo Football Association. They were 'power hungry, sly foxes', seeking to provoke the Ndebele into conflict. Let them beware:

We write mainly on this subject because we were here in Bulawayo in 1929 when there was a tribal flare-up between the Matabeles and the Mashonas, fomented, so it was believed, by some few irresponsibles among the Bulawayo Mashonas. They did then what the present Mashonas are doing in Bulawayo to the considerable annoyance of the Matabeles concerned. They wanted to take charge of practically all important things in Bulawayo. Naturally, the Matabele people of those days, as now, opposed and resented that until time came when they could no longer put up with it.

1929 might come again.⁹⁶

And then between July 24 and July 27 the whole vast townships area was convulsed by violence and writing; looting and stoning and burning prevailed; 12 Africans were killed. Had 1929 come again?

Explanations of Zhii

In some senses it had. Just as in 1929 the violence came as a disruption of the normal and on-going patterns of black Bulawayo's urban life. Women were once again swept aside; none of the well-known male leaders had any influence over events. Loosely organised youth made the running. The ongoing claims and demands of township spokesmen were for a moment swept away to reveal deeper tensions in urban society. But in other ways it was the differences rather than the similarities with 1929

⁹⁵ *HN*, 2 January 1960.

⁹⁶ *Home News*, 6 February 1960.

which marked the violence of 1960. Unlike 1929 – and despite Ncgbetsha's forebodings – ethnicity was not the discourse of the 1960 violence. When it was over there were no allegations, even from Ncgbetsha, that anyone had been attacked or killed because they were 'Ndebele' or 'Shona' or 'foreign'. The experience of combination in the trade union and nationalist movements had produced feelings of Bulawayan, Southern Rhodesian and pan-African solidarity.⁹⁷ Looking back on 1960 a Northern Rhodesia migrant, married to an Ndebele woman and living in Mzilikazi township, insisted that:

at these political rallies I did not look at myself as a Zambian but as part of the Southern Rhodesian people ... I considered myself part of the Southern Rhodesian povo who supported the political leaders.⁹⁸

Maybe then the nationalist appropriation of the zhii riots is justified after all. There is no doubt that they began because of the Rhodesian government's arrest in Salisbury of the three main leaders of the National Democratic Party on 19 July 1960. There were no arrests in Bulawayo but the houses of the NDP chairman, Z.K.Sihwa, a Pelendaba carpenter; of the Secretary, J.R.Mzimela, a cycle-repair man, and of a leading committee member, J.Z.Moyo, a Makokoba brick-layer, were searched and papers taken. In Salisbury the arrests had provoked the famous protest march from Highfields to Harare; police use of teargas; a withdrawal of African labour and widespread riots. Troops were moved into the Salisbury African townships.

Bulwayo, meanwhile, was quiet. Local NDP leaders announced that there would be a protest meeting at Stanley Hall in Makokoba at 8 a.m on Sunday, July 24. The Director of Native Administration, Hugh Ashton, and the local police commanders were confident that trouble would not spread to Bulawayo and they agreed that the NDP meeting

⁹⁷ The only study so far published on zhii is a Ruskin thesis by the Bulawayo trade union leader, Francis Nehwati. A version of this was published in *African Affairs*, 69, 276, July 1970 as 'The Social and Communal background to "Zhii". The African Riots in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, in 1960'. Nehwati insists that in 1960 the Bulawayo townships, taken as a whole, constituted a community. During the violence 'except for the women everybody came out to fight No distinctions were made as to tribe or country of origin. All were united as Bulawayans'. Black Bulawayo showed 'great cultural diversity'. But 'conglomeration in diversity ... leadsto conglomeration in unity'.

⁹⁸ Interview between Hloniphani Ndlovu and Mr Zulu, Mzilikazi, February 2000. Eric Stanley Gargett, an officer in Ashton's administration, wrote a London doctoral thesis during the 1960s on 'Welfare Services in an African Urban Area'. Gargett cites research by the city's Department of Housing and Amenities to the effect that some 50% of the African population of Bulawayo regarded itself as Ndebele and only 25% as Shona. 'Among Rhodesians there was no strong indication of preferential association by tribes'. Half the men who shared double flats roomed with someone of a different tribe..

should go ahead. NDP leaders were informed and undertook that the meeting should be non-violent. But they were over-ruled by the Whitehead government in Salisbury which ordained late on the Saturday night that all meetings in and around Bulawayo were banned for a month. It was only early on the Sunday morning that the NDP leaders were told and they discreetly stayed away 'for fear of being arrested'. But the five hundred followers who had turned up for the meeting at 8 am found the hall locked and the meeting banned.

'The crowd decided to choose new leaders'.⁹⁹ They elected three young members of the NDP – Jafta Nhliziyo, Charles Pasispanodya and Aaron Ndlovu. A fourth, Willie Ncube, was not even a member of the party.¹⁰⁰ A prominent NDP youth activist, Dumiso Dabengwa, was also present.¹⁰¹ Aaron Ndlovu suggested that 'they march to the City Hall and the crowd followed him ... The procession stopped on a number of occasions while the four [leaders] stood on dustbins and urged the crowd not to be violent'. An African detective later testified that Pasispanodya was so moved by his appeals that he saw 'tears streaming down his face'. When the crowd- by now 5000 strong - reached Lobengula Street, the western edge of white Bulawayo, their way was blocked by 90 steel-helmeted police armed with tear gas. Ndlovu and Nhliziyo 'urged the people to disperse. The two men showed responsibility throughout and there was a genuine desire throughout on their part to prevent any trouble with the police. If they had not controlled the crowd it could have got out of hand'.¹⁰²

So far, then, this was a nationalist demonstration though unlike later more dramatic interpretations a remarkably non-violent one. The still-orderly procession turned back to Stanley Square followed by the police. But before they could hold an open air meeting stones were thrown and tear-gas was fired; all afternoon clashes continued; 'the Western Commonage hooligans got wind of the news that the police had failed to control the crowds in Makokoba. They rushed into Makokoba armed with sticks and iron bars'; the police withdrew; armed soldiers lined up along Lobengula Street to protect the white city; the townships were left to themselves. Three nights and days of rioting, looting and arson followed. The war-cry zhii was heard everywhere, that 'ominous

⁹⁹ *Parade*, September 1960.

¹⁰⁰ *Daily News*, 7 October 1960, reporting the sentencing of the four men for unlawful assembly.

¹⁰¹ Dabengwa's account of zhii can be found in Ole Gjerstad, ed., *The Organiser. Story of Temba Moyo. Life Histories from the Revolution*, ZAPU, LSM Press, Richmond, 1974.

¹⁰² *Chronicle*, 10 September 1960 reporting police testimony in court.

Zulu howl' wrote the *Daily News*, 'a relic of the terrible days of Chaka's reign'.¹⁰³

I have described the events which followed – and the deaths which ensued – in a long seminar paper.¹⁰⁴ Here, at the end of another long paper, I want only to discuss the phases of the violence. To do so I want to quote from the illustrated magazine *Parade*, whose Makokoba correspondent normally sent in lively stories of shebeens. But in its September issue *Parade* carried an account of the *zhii* riots by a sober Dhlamanzi of 'a vicious reign of terror, the like of which the country has never seen'. His account neatly breaks the events into phases. The first was the nationalist indignation outside the locked Stanley Hall. But then the procession, before heading off to the city, went to rally support in Makokoba 'that squalid township where complaints against living conditions would make one dumb.' Hundreds more joined the march and now 'the complaints were no longer political. They centred on low wages, poor living conditions and unemployment'.¹⁰⁵

A third stage followed after the stoning and tear-gassing when events were taken over by 'hooligans' and 'armed gangs'. Respectable men walked in fear, 'armed with sticks, knobkerries and hatchets as we saw some of our friends being attacked and brutally assaulted. The hooligan elements took charge of the township'. In this phase Dhlamanzi presents us with a senseless mob – certainly not a nationalist crowd or the united inhabitants of black Bulawayo up in arms. But even in his account patterns of purposeful action can be seen. All municipal property was burned and looted; 'at night rioters turned to shops in the townships. In the Western areas shops were set on fire and some Africans killed ... In Pelendaba [a lease-holder's suburb] prominent Africans were attacked in their houses'. In Luveve village settlement elite residents organised a Home Guard. It is clear that rioters did not attack just anybody. Even the 'gangs' turned out to be surprisingly well organised and purposeful. Section Seventeen hi-jacked cars and used them to carry the wounded to Mpilo hospital, flying bloody rags as a sign.

¹⁰³ *Daily News*, 8 August 1960.

¹⁰⁴ Terence Ranger 'The Meaning of Urban Violence: Zhii in Bulawayo, July 1960', University of Zimbabwe Economic History seminar, March 2002.

¹⁰⁵ The *Bantu Mirror* ran a series of articles on Makokoba in the months before the riots. 'Living conditions are deplorable', it reported on 30 April 1960. 'Here three to four families live in rooms no bigger than ten square feet. Children sleep under beds or amongst pots and pans on the floor ... there is absolutely no question of family privacy ... everywhere from Fourth Street to Eighth Street were bundles of human beings wrapped up in flimsy blankets sleeping outside in the biting weather'. Charlton Ncgbetsha described 'a large group of Africans packed like sardines, living, more or less, like wild animals with no sense of moral decency at all'. *Home News*, 27 February 1960.

Class and Conflict

After the riots were over different African groups blamed each other for them. 'Single' men living in the new 'all-bachelor' townships of Mabutweni and Iminyela were accused by married men and women of 'savage acts of vandalism'. One of them wrote to the *Bantu Mirror* to object:

Married women in the townships have even gone to far as insulting us by calling us such names as 'bulls'. Yet the trouble started at the Old Location. We at Mabutweni were forced out of our houses by people from the Old Location ... There are good and polite people in Mabutweni.¹⁰⁶

The unemployed were accused, but their spokesmen were able to point out that the majority of the men tried for riot after the disturbances had jobs.

The allegations which seemed the best founded were those of the aspirant African bourgeoisie. Charlton Ngebetsha abandoned his warnings to Shona business and instead wrote a threnody for the whole business class, whose shops had been destroyed regardless of ethnicity.¹⁰⁷ He totally rejected Edgar Whitehead's allegation that the NDP had been to blame as 'simply not true'. Many spokesmen and leaders of nationism had been attacked as 'practically all the African trading stores were destroyed and looted and in some cases set on fire.' Charlton was in no doubt of the underlying motivation of the rioters:

The wanton destruction in the African shops stemmed merely from jealousy for it is well known that Africans are jealous of the success of any of their people and will do anything to torpedo and destroy them. It is true that a well known African businessman who is also a leading member of the Western Commonage Advisory Board – to prove the jealousy of Africans- suffered the complete loss of his shop at the Western Commonage as well as his other shop at Luveve and that the destroyers of both shops were exactly the same single men her serves directly, and that before they went to Luveve to destroy

¹⁰⁶ *Bantu Mirror*, 27 August 1960.

¹⁰⁷ *Home News*, 6 August 1950. Ngebetsha provided a list of all the shops destroyed and their proprietors across the whole belt of the townships.

his shop they first went to his house at Pelendaba and ransacked it, looking for him but without success.¹⁰⁸

The Bulawayo *Sunday News* explored the causes of the riots on 7 August 1960. 'As investigators probe point by point', it reported, 'there emerges a possibility that a class consciousness is developing among the labouring type of African and, if this is true, it might offer a completely new line of thought'. When police and troops moved in they found that 'well kept and trim houses and gardens had been damaged and looted, Hovels and badly-kept houses were not damaged and many contained loot'.

Four of the men who died during the riots were killed by store keepers in defence of their property. And after the riots were over this cleavage within the black urban community – and within the nationalist movement – expressed itself clearly:

The owners of the stores where people had looted had reported to the police. The police then came house by house armed with baton sticks ready to brutalise and torture all those who had taken part in the looting ... This was the worst part of the zhii period. The police would turn one's houses upside down in search of looted mealie-meal and meat. Some people in fear of being tortured buried sacks of mealie-meal underground ... Neighbours turned out to be spies ... You could not trust anyone during that time. You could not even trust yourself.¹⁰⁹

Resentment of 'businessmen' grew. On their side the better-off, many of them nationalists and trade unionists, demanded the means to protect themselves. Jasper Savanhu, who after the 1946 railway strike had hailed the emergence of a 'reborn' African working class, now declared that the 'present situation is a struggle between the haves and the have-nots'. He demanded that African businessmen, teachers and professional men be allocated a suburb all of their own so that 'people with a stake in the country and something to defend' could form a Home Guard to protect themselves against the mob.¹¹⁰ Charlton Ncgbetsha, who was to end up as a restrictee with Joshua Nkomo in Gonakudzingwa, took the same view. R.M.Bango, General Secretary of the Transport Workers' Union, described how rioters had broken into his house in Pelendaba and how 'rather than have their houses wrecked and their

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Major Ndlovu, Entumbane, January 2000.

¹¹⁰ *Chronicle*, 2 August 1960.

families attacked, the men pretended to join, taking up sticks and bars and shouting the slogans of the rioters'. Bango demanded that Makokoba be demolished and that 'all single men be put into an area of their own'. One could hardly have had a more total repudiation of the historic roots of the urban culture of Bulawayo¹¹¹.

The Mpopoma Tenants Association had been in the forefront of nationalist demands for security of tenure and for domination of the Bulawayo City Council. Now the Mpopoma Advisory Board demanded that all householders should be issued with fire-arms to defend themselves, and that all single men should be removed from Iminyela and Mubutweni, which lay between Mpopoma and Pelendaba. In Pelendaba itself the Advisory Board resolved that it was essential to set up a Pelendaba Home Guard.

Great fissures had opened up in the black Bulawayo 'community'. It was left to 'Singleman' to write from Mabutweni:

These Board members are themselves comfortable in their own houses and would like to see some of us walk the streets without any place to put our head. They say we are a danger. They are a greater danger because they seem to have no feelings for others. They seem to regard us as animals.¹¹²

After July 1960 a great deal needed to be done to restore nationalist unity – and any sense of an overall Bulawayo style.

Conclusion

I have concentrated on the two occasions when the ongoing negotiation of a black urban culture in Bulawayo broke down. In 1929 the over-confident 'Manyika' received a violent rebuke; in 1960 it was the turn of the over-confident businessmen. Between these occasions – and around the strikes of 1946 and 1948 – the themes of class and gender and culture and anti-colonialism intertwined.

On September 25 2004 the *Guardian* published an essay by the South African novelist Achmat Dangor. As a young man Dangor himself

¹¹¹ *Chronicle*, 28 July 1960. Makokoba still stands today. There have been calls for its declaration as a heritage site.

¹¹² *Bantu Mirror*, 17 September 1960. The same issue reported that a meeting called by the Mpopoma Leaseholders Association in order to form a Home Guard was broken up 'by lodgers and young people from other townships'.

wrote 'poems and stories set in the city, in the dusty township, trying to find beauty in dimly lit streets and the hard echo of asphalt.' But the rest of the radical young writers wrote of 'the savannah, the idyllic peaceful village'; for them 'the city was transiently evil, a gigantic asphalt salt mine into which Africans had been thrust after imperial Europe had wrenched them from their rural innocence. Uhuru, freedom on African terms meant being able to leave the urban Sodom and return to the almost mythical rural refuge.' But now Dangor has:

observed with some relief how other African writers have taken to the streets, as it were. Yvonne Vera beautifully evokes Bulawayo ... African writers are starting to reclaim the African city from the colonialists who by their association with it had poisoned it as a centre of culture and 'dark, gleaming light'. African literature can only be enriched by this.

I hope that historians can show that the reclamation of the African city is not something that began only with the end of colonialism or which is reflected only in literature. The cultural struggle for the southern African city has been constant throughout its existence, sometimes taking the form of riot, sometimes taking the form of strike, most often taking the form of imagining and living an urban life. The struggle was being waged against all the constraints imposed by colonialism even if it often took the form of debates and sometimes violence among urban Africans themselves.

Terence Ranger