

Izitimela zakoBulawayo: Railways and African women's search for a better life in the 'city of kings', circa 1920-1950.

By

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree

MAGISTER HEREDITATIS CULTURAEQUE SCIENTIAE (HISTORY)

In the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

SUPERVISOR: Dr G. Paleker

December 2019

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support that I constantly received throughout my Master's degree. I am indebted to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, which funded my research as part of a Mellon Scholarship. Without this funding I would have not been able to pursue a postgraduate degree and I am grateful for the opportunity to have done so. In January 2019, I had the utmost pleasure of visiting the University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu, for a three-month exchange program. This was funded by the Southern African-Nordic Centre under the Brian O'Connell Scholarship. I would like to show my appreciation for being granted this scholarship as the exchange program was a once in a life time experience that had profound implications on my academic and personal growth.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies for providing constant guidance and supervision as I worked on my dissertation. A heartfelt thank you to my supervisor Dr G. Paleker who encouraged me to pursue a Master's degree and provided me with more than just excellent academic supervision, but supported me in many areas of my life as I went through this phase of my academic journey. Without her invaluable assistance, I would have not been able to complete this research. I am also indebted to the wonderful staff in the department, particularly Professor Karen Harris, Professor Alois Mlambo and Dr Glen Ncube, who gave me solid advice and criticism which impacted my overall approach to the research positively. I would also like to extend a thank you to the archival staff at the National Railways of Zimbabwe Museum Archives, National Archives of Zimbabwe, the National Archives in Pretoria, the Transnet Heritage Library in Johannesburg and the Pretoria campus of the National Library of South Africa.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to my friends and family who believed in me and supported me throughout my entire degree. I dedicate this thesis to my family. A special thank you to my father, who encourages me each day to chase after my dreams; to my mother, who always fights for her children, even when situations get difficult, to ensure that they develop into people they can be proud of; to my brothers, Kennedy, Tatenda and Tawanda who have never stopped believing in me and finally to my sister Natalie, who went through this entire journey with me and provided me with invaluable support.

Lastly, I would like to give all the glory to God. You have done it yet again Yahweh!

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Abstract

The railway histories of colonial Zimbabwe are a fascinating area of research that has received relatively widespread scholarly attention. Studies of the connection between railway development and the African labour force have been engaged with quite substantially, however, there is a historiographical gap concerning African female experiences with railway infrastructure in the colonial setting. As such, this research challenges the androcentrism of the colonial archive of Zimbabwe by using Bulawayo, the city of kings, as a case study to probe into African female experiences with not only the train but the railway compounds, Rhodesia Railways and the British colonial government. African women made use of the train, as both dependent and independent migrants to enter into urban Bulawayo in search of a better life and once there, they constructed new and interesting identities of themselves. One way that this is evident is in their economic ventures within the compounds, both legal and illicit. Their presence in the railway compounds ultimately played a very significant role in African railwaymen choosing to go to strike in 1945. Yet, there has been an almost complete erasure of their stories from the colonial archive, suggesting that they were not important in the unravelling of their own histories. In light of this, this research reads against the grain of the colonial archive to tell some of the stories of these women who were in actuality, a force to be reckoned with.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

The genesis of the Railway Age in the early nineteenth century was a vital turn in history that signified the start of a new era, which shaped the economic, social, cultural, and political make-up of the world at large. There is general agreement amongst scholars that without this Railway Age, the industrial powerhouses of the twentieth century and their respective colonies would not have developed in the manner that they did.¹ From a Eurocentric point of view, words that are most commonly associated with the advent of the railways are progress, development and modernity. As both a product and driver of the industrial revolution, railways were central in transforming societies from a position of 'primitiveness', where time was unregimented, distance acted as a barrier to both economic growth and the widening of physical and metaphorical horizons, and delays were the norm, into a condition of increased mobility that encouraged the modernisation of not only space but the inhabitants of those spaces.² A study of railway development reveals that railway infrastructure introduced a new dynamic into societies. One of the most important results of this is what Marian Aguiar calls "railway time [and] railway consciousness."³ Time became more rigidly regulated and was no longer determined by the movement of the sun, but rather by schedules of industrial labour, opening and closing of factories and the arrival and departures of trains which all facilitated rapid economic growth. Societies had to transform to fit into the scheduled arrivals and departures of the trains. In the same way that ideas of time were reformulated, ideas of space changed too, with a wider array of spaces becoming more accessible to those whose physical and metaphorical horizons were limited. The ability to move from one place to another embodied modernity at a more fundamental level and created the binary of the outside/inside and the necessity of a continuous crossing and negotiating of this boundary.⁴

1. P. Ibbotson, "Urbanization in Southern Rhodesia", *Journal of the International African Institute* 16(2), 1946, p.77.

2. P. Ibbotson. "Urbanization in Southern Rhodesia", p.76.

3. M. Aguiar, "Making Modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway", *Cultural Critique* 68, 2008.

4. S.S. Friedman, "Definitional excursions: The meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism", *Modernism/Modernity* 8(3), 2001, p.506.

The impetus for the development of the railways in Africa was Cecil John Rhodes' dream of building a railway line that ran from the Cape to Cairo. Although that dream was never fully realised, significant inroads were made on the backs of African labour resulting in the establishment of a railroad network running from the Cape in Southern Africa into the Congo. In the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, which is contemporary Zimbabwe, railway development was a central agent in the development of not only a profitable but also habitable empire for settler-colonists. The train acted as a tool for the efficient exploitation of African assets, both labour and natural resources and effectively opened up difficult and unknown terrains for imperial ventures. As in all colonial spaces, the train actively inscribed ideas of Euromodernity and unsuccessfully attempted to negate African epistemologies and ways of existence, which were in themselves, African modernities. For indigenous African populations, the implications of railway development were always binary because, on the one hand, it fostered a new kind of mobility, a much faster and further-reaching one than what had been the norm. African experiences on the train in many ways facilitated the broadening of their literal and metaphorical horizons. On the other hand, however, the train stood as a symbol of colonial oppression and played a very important part in the restructuring and impoverishment of African communities.

Bulawayo, the city of kings, today stands in stark contrast to its vibrant historical past. Once the throne of the great African king Lobengula, many of the oral histories passed down through generations about the grandeur of the Ndebele kingdom emanated from this city. During the colonial era, Bulawayo became the apple of Britain's eye in Southern Rhodesia as it developed over time into the commercial capital and industrial hub of the country. It was home to the headquarters of the Rhodesia Railways and was the largest town standing to the north of the Kimberley diamond mine in South Africa, along with having railway connections with the most important cities in Southern and Central Africa which created an important network for the movement of ideas, goods and people.⁵ This is an important reason why the city evolved into a vibrant space with a cosmopolitan population made up of the Ndebele, African immigrants from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Nyasaland (Malawi), Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique), British settlers and indentured labour from all over the world. Yet

5. NRZ Museum Archives. *South African Railways and Harbours Magazine*. Bulletin no.17. Cape Town. 1 October 1925, pp. 8-9.

twenty-nine years after Zimbabwe's independence, Bulawayo's vibrancy has faded, its industries lie idle and its railway system is underutilised and dilapidated. A flicker of hope for the city's economic, social and cultural rejuvenation lies in current discussions surrounding the revitalisation of the railway systems of Zimbabwe.⁶

This research is a historical study of the role of the railways in the construction of a 'modern' African woman in search of economic survival and social and cultural autonomy in a transforming Bulawayo of the 1920s to the 1950s. The railways were crucial in shaping the economic fortunes and misfortunes of colonial spaces. Railways contributed to rapid industrialisation and the economic and spatial growth of many urban centres. At the same time, they played a role in the disintegration of established African societies by encouraging the growth of overpopulated African living areas in the urban locale such as the railway compounds. This was a consequence of the colonial wage economy and migrant labour system, which coerced both African men and women to leave their homes and enter the urban space in search of a better life. The colonial project targeted African men, who were mostly young and unmarried, to be a part of this migrant labour system but because of the exploitative nature of colonialism, which culminated in the decline of African living standards, both men and women of varying ages, moved in their numbers to urban Bulawayo. Even though it was primarily African men who were formally employed as cheap labour in the urban areas, there was a substantial female presence that was vehemently resisted to circumvent the permanent urbanisation of Africans. This resistance was emblemized by the minimal employment and housing opportunities available to women and it inspired them to take creative and many a times illegal steps to ensure the survival of not only themselves but also their families who had increasingly become dependent on their incomes. This study considers the structural forces that shaped African women's lives in the greater Bulawayo region in the period 1920 to 1950. These structural forces included amongst others, transport (such as the railways and the ease – or lack thereof – of access to the railways) and the political, economic and cultural factors, which shaped women's lives. As such, the study straddles multiple theoretical approaches, which include transport history, mobility, as well as gender studies.

6. N. Maravanyika, "Recapitalisation to breathe life into NRZ", *Newsday*, 9 August, 2017; V. Dube, "E.D. commends NRZ recapitalisation deal", *The Sunday News*, 21 February 2018.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is the investigation of the historical role of the railways in the economic and social empowerment, positioning and mobility of African women in Bulawayo in the period 1920 to 1950.

Primary research question

How and to what degree did the railways, which were central to the development and growth of Bulawayo, impact the lives of women and gender relations in the railway compounds and other African living areas; and to what degree did the railways facilitate women's mobility in their attempts to subvert the restrictions of space and time, as well as social constraints imposed on them?

Secondary research questions

What kind of opportunities, if any, did the coming of the railways to Bulawayo create for African female economic empowerment in the newly industrialized railway town during this period?

What role did the railways play in the development or underdevelopment, and consequent impoverishment, of African societies in general, and women in particular, in Bulawayo?

How and to what extent did the impoverishment of African spaces contribute to 'pushing' women out of these spaces and into more economically opportune spaces such as urban Bulawayo? To what extent did the railways facilitate this 'push' through access and opportunities for mobility?

In what ways can the relative archival silence concerning African women in the railway histories of Zimbabwe be challenged? How can this very archive be read against the grain to reinsert these silenced voices?

1.1 Rationale

This research finds its significance in scholarly discourses on European technological modernity and its encounter and engagement with African communities, as well as discourses on African economic development and underdevelopment within the colonial sphere of influence. While the nexus between the railways, African male

migrancy (primarily for labour purposes) and access to alternative means of livelihood has received some scholarly attention, there is a historiographical gap concerning women's migrancy, economic development and the railways. This research attempts to grapple with ideas, definitions and implications of colonial modernity for Bulawayo and illuminates, even more, the complex entanglements between transport, technological development, gendered mobility and sociocultural change. In spite of the numerous studies already exploring modernity, scholarly engagement with technological forms of European modernity continues to be relevant, particularly in an epistemic space marked by debates on decoloniality. In what Walter D. Mignolo calls the "rhetoric of Modernity"⁷, this study seeks to engage with both the rhetoric and materiality of European modernity inscribed into colonial spaces. Moreover, as Susan Friedman correctly puts it:

"The problematic of definitional history [of modernity] should not...result in its abandonment. Rather....The problem of periodization and its categories which are certainly in crisis today...seem to be indispensable as they are unsatisfactory for any kind of work in cultural study".⁸

In colonial Bulawayo, Euromodernity resulted in the disruption of indigenous sociocultural, economic and political systems while simultaneously allowing many African women a freedom they previously did not know could be theirs: An ambiguous and complex incidence that deserves further analysis.

Secondly, this research challenges the androcentrism of both the colonial archive in Zimbabwe and migration studies centred on Southern Africa. The field of mobility and migration studies has largely ignored women, even though they were active participants in the migrant labour system. There are several accounts of a large African female presence in colonial urban spaces in spite of ardent resistance by colonial authorities and African men who wanted to maintain strict controls over women's mobility and labour.⁹ There were several motivating factors that 'pushed' women out

7. W.D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of decoloniality", *Cultural Studies* 21(2), 2007, pp.449-514.

8. S.S. Friedman, "Definitional excursions", pp. 493-513.

9. For example, studies carried out by D.L. Hodgson & S. McCurdy. "Wayward wives, misfit mothers and disobedient daughters: "Wicked" women and the reconfiguration of gender in Africa", *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 30 (1), 1996, pp1-9.1; T. Barnes. "The fight for control of African women's mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939." *Signs* 17(3), 1992, pp.586-608, C. Cockerton. "Slipping through their fingers: Women's migration and Tswana patriarchy", *Botswana Notes and Records* 34, 2002, pp.37-53, and many other studies similar to these engage with the growing presence of African

of colonially designated African reserves into urban areas, some of which were only specific to women, but others were closely related to those of African men. One such similarity, which was arguably the most significant push factor, was the introduction of the capitalistic wage economy and the subsequent introduction of repressive colonial laws that had devastating implications on the African peasant economy whilst favouring European settlers. Teresa Barnes argues that African women were in themselves, migrant labourers, in spite of not being the targeted source of cheap labour.¹⁰ They too migrated, sometimes accompanying male migrants, but also many times independently, in response to structural changes to their societies. Whilst there has been substantial scholarly engagement with the male migrant labourer, the study of African women as more than just “passive participants in the migration process, moving either to accompany a male spouse or guardian or staying at home and receiving occasional remittances from male migrants”¹¹ still needs further exploration. By taking a gendered approach to the study of migration in colonial Zimbabwe between 1920 and 1950, this research aims to contribute to scholarly engagements that read women into their own histories as mobile beings, a place where they have been previously excluded.

As one of the main means of transporting Africans, both male and female, into different urban locales throughout the continent, the train’s importance in migration processes was profound. However, on a different level, the relationship between railway infrastructure and how it impacted the lives of Africans, particularly those Africans who had close ties with the railways such as employees and inhabitants of railway compounds, has largely been androcentric as well, a simple reflection of the androcentrism of the colonial archive. This brings to mind Rodney G.S Carter’s analysis of archival power, which “is, in part, the power to allow voices to be heard. It consists of highlighting certain narratives and of including certain types of records created by certain power groups”.¹² Therefore, although the archival records available that speak directly to the aims set out for the research are rather thin, one of the

women in the urban areas and the implications of their wilful defiance of colonial laws targeted at restricting their mobility.

10. T. Barnes. “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, p. 99.

11. C. Wanjiku Kihato., “Invisible lives, inaudible voices? The social conditions of migrant women in Johannesburg.” *African identities* 5(1), p. 90.

12. R. G. S. Carter. “Of things said and unsaid: Power, archival silences and power in silence.” *Space and Power* 61, 2006, p.216.

principal tasks of this research is to challenge the aforementioned archival power and to analyse the relative absence of women from the historical record as if they were not active participants in their own histories. With very few exceptions, studies that have dealt with the railways in colonial Zimbabwe have focused primarily on African railwaymen and their experiences with the Rhodesia Railways. Women have only featured as a backdrop and this lies primarily in the fact that the colonial archive actively silenced their stories through their relative exclusion. Yet, if there was a substantial number of African women within urban Bulawayo and more specifically within the railway compounds, which was enough to necessitate both colonial and Rhodesia Railway's policy shifts concerning African urbanisation, a reading against the grain of the colonial archive becomes integral. This is where "texts are examined for their omissions, lacunae are interrogated, and the representations of women's silence are interrogated."¹³

1.2 Literature review

On 4 November 1897, a special public holiday marked the official opening of the Bulawayo Line that connected Bulawayo to Mafikeng, and beyond that to the Cape.¹⁴ The Bulawayo Line was constructed by the Bechuanaland Railway Company, which in 1899 became known as Rhodesia Railways Ltd. The building of the Bulawayo Line was part of Cecil John Rhodes's dream of connecting the Cape to Cairo, with a swathe of African territory in between which would fall under British imperial control. The impetus for connecting the Cape to Bulawayo, then eventually to Cairo came not only from commercial concerns but also from what was perceived as 'the white man's burden' to bring civilisation to Africans in these areas.

Louis Bolze, author of the article in the *Rhodesiana* writes, "The iron horse, it was claimed, was a more potent civilising instrument than the Bible among native tribes. It was well known, it was said, that natives were particularly fond of travelling in trains and this would break up their clannish instincts, and leave them to seek their livelihoods in other parts of the country than those in which they were born."¹⁵ What is explicit here is the connection between the railways and 19th-century conceptions of

13. R. G. S. Carter. "Of things said and unsaid", p.224.

14. Bolze. L.W. "The railway comes to Bulawayo." *Rhodesiana* No. 18, 1968 <<https://rhodesians-worldwide.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/RhodesianaVol18.pdf#page=59>> Access: 15 March 2017, p.73.

15. L. W. Bolze, "The railway comes to Bulawayo", pp.73-74

modernity; modernity was simultaneously the acquisition of 'civilisation' and the ability to travel, thereby breaking out of 'clannishness' and expanding metaphorical horizons. The construction of railways is also linked to opening up employment opportunities for Africans as the same writer remarked a few lines later, that "The proposed line would 'tap one of the best labour supplies in South Africa, that of the Zambezi.'"¹⁶ What Bolze does not is how these 'employment opportunities' were linked directly to the dismantlement of African communities. This was done by establishing an exploitative migrant labour system that took away important sources of labour from African reserves, prompting early-onset African indigence.

Bolze's discussion of the correlation between native tribes travelling on trains and civilisation highlights just how important the railways were for the entire colonial project. For colonialism to become a truly profitable venture, indigenous populations within the colonies had to be subdued. One of the foremost ways in which this was done was through spreading what was supposed to be a hegemonic Euromodernity that would invalidate all other modernities. Kwame Gyekye's article 'Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience' and Susan Stanford Friedman's 'Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism' articulate the complexities surrounding this idea of modernity. Scholarly discourse on modernity has created what Friedman calls 'the binary' where Western nations present themselves as the progenitors of modernity and relegate non-Western societies to the position of un/premodern.¹⁷ This binary is characterised by Western societies which are "scientific, innovative, future-oriented, culturally dynamic, industrial and urbanized"¹⁸ evidenced by their ability to invent powerful machines such as the train, and the 'other' who is envisioned as stagnant, ahistorical, incapable of innovation and traditional. As a result, tradition has inaccurately become the marker of indigeneity and modernity a European phenomenon that is or should have been, the aspiration of all who fell outside of its bounds. Both Gyekye and Friedman challenge these ideas and demonstrate instead that the relationship between modernity and tradition is a much more complex one.

16. L. W. Bolze, "The railway comes to Bulawayo", 1968, p.74.

17. S.S. Friedman, "Definitional excursions", p.506.

18. K. Gyekye. 1997. *Tradition and modernity. Philosophical reflections on the African experience.* Oxford. Oxford University Press, p. 217.

Friedman's article engages with modernism/modernity/ [the] modern, terms she calls siblings because although they are sometimes used interchangeably, hold different meanings in different contexts.¹⁹ These different meanings have inevitably opened up debates amongst scholars. Friedman suggests two approaches "for definitional excursion", neither of which give the perfect or 'correct' definition but create avenues for its reconceptualization. She discusses the nominal mode, where "the words modern, modernity and modernism signify a specific context: a set of characteristics with particular material conditions and spatio-temporal locations".²⁰ For the purposes of this research, this literature review will not focus on this approach, but rather on what she calls, the 'relational approach' and this will be linked to Gyekye's discussion of the relationship between modernity and tradition. Whilst the nominal mode looks at the word modern as a noun, the relational approach looks at the word modern as an adjective. "Just as adjectives such as tall or big have meaning only in reference to other adjectives; the relational meaning for modernity, and its siblings, exists within a comparative binary in which the opposite is traditional".²¹ In this way of defining modernity, that antagonistic relationship between the past and the present is made clear. Here, the heart of modernity is a break from the past, which is essentially tradition and all that it represents.

Gyekye challenges the polarisation of tradition and modernity and argues that in actuality, every society is traditional "in that it maintains and cherishes values, practices, outlooks and institutions bequeathed to it by previous generations...which it takes pride in, boasts about and builds on."²² Societies that are influenced by the past through the maintenance of religious and cultural practices passed down from generation to generation, for example, are presented as capable of change, contrary to claims made of perpetual stagnation. Even Western societies retained important practices from their pasts. Gyekye demonstrates that precolonial societies were constantly changing, although this change was unique to and at a different pace than what was experienced in the West.²³ The tension between modernity and tradition lies

19. S.S. Friedman, "Definitional excursions", p.498.

20. S.S. Friedman, "Definitional excursions", p.500.

21. S.S. Friedman, "Definitional excursions", p.503.

22. K. Gyekye. 1997, *Tradition and modernity*, p. 217.

23. See Third World discussions of Modernization Theory: W. Rodney. 1973. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle L'Ouverture Publications, London; A. Frank. 2010. *Theory and Methodology of World Development the Writings of Andre Gunder Frank*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York and S. Amin. 1977. *Imperialism and Unequal Development*. Monthly Review Press, New York.

in the misconception that precolonial societies uncritically accepted culture as it was passed down generations. In fact, culture, which over time ossifies into tradition, went through processes of evaluation with each lineage. A new generation took culture, or specific elements of it, and put it under scrutiny, refining and analysing which elements needed adaption to suit their specific context. Only once this process had been carried out would a culture be adopted. Gyekye illustrates that it was only in rare cases, such as with colonialism, that precolonial communities would not subject cultures to intense scrutiny before adopting them. In the case of colonialism, although some voluntarily adopted and adapted to the new ways of existing, for most, it was a case of violent imposition.²⁴

The idea of modernity becomes complicated in the African context because it is rooted in Western tradition. Gyeyke shows that despite assertions that the modern is actually the modern in the Western sense, there is a lot of confusion surrounding for example, dates of when modernity actually occurred, if there truly was a break with antiquity and so forth.²⁵ There is also the fact that modernity appropriated non-Western cultural traditions and inventions that makes the claim that modernity is purely a European phenomenon void. The most interesting point Gyekye makes is “the fact that European based modernity thought it appropriate to take on and assimilate elements from non-European sources seems to suggest that non-European elements were themselves modern, or at least bore the tinge of modernity”.²⁶ It is then not possible for Euromodernity to claim superiority over other “cultural manifestations”²⁷, but in the early stages of colonial expansion in colonial Bulawayo and similarly in other colonial territories, it did and resulted in the large-scale reconstruction of indigenous ways of being.

Meg Samuelson’s ‘Yvonne Vera’s Bulawayo: Modernity, (Im) mobility, Music and Memory’²⁸ looks at some of the literary works of Yvonne Vera, a Zimbabwean novelist and her representation of colonial Bulawayo. In these novels, Vera engages with conceptions of modernity within the city and its associated complexities are

24. K. Gyekye. 1997, *Tradition and modernity*, p.224.

25. K. Gyekye. 1997, *Tradition and modernity*, p.269.

26. K. Gyekye. 1997, *Tradition and modernity*, p.269.

27. K. Gyekye. 1997, *Tradition and modernity*, p.270.

28. M. Samuelson, “Yvonne Vera’s Bulawayo: Modernity, (im) mobility, music and memory”, *Research in African Literatures* 38(2), 2007, pp. 22-35.

highlighted. These conceptions of modernity are articulated from the perspective of the colonised in the urban city space. Vera points to the existence of what she identifies as a 'fraudulent' kind of modernity in urban colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe where Africans were subjected to a 'geographical violence' that was rooted in ideas of racial segregation and which dictated that only certain races had access to particular spaces. In this case, urbanising and urbanised Africans were presented with the supposed benefits of this imposed modernity, some of which included civilisation, progress and development. Yet, these benefits were never fully attainable and in fact, were many times ambiguous. For example, the idea of civilisation is complex in that it takes no consideration of what Africans considered 'civilised' behaviours or practices. Additionally, the violence perpetrated through the geographical mapping of city spaces ensured that Africans only had access to specific areas whilst being legally barred from others. A prime example of this can be found in her literary engagements with colonial Bulawayo. As the industrial and commercial hub of Southern Rhodesia and home to the headquarters of the Rhodesia Railways, Bulawayo was an important city. Much like Salisbury, known today as Harare, Bulawayo was a vibrant and cosmopolitan city that represented the challenges of, and tensions between, modernisation and established African ways of existence. Although many Africans were granted access to this space, their encounter with it was strictly monitored, restricted and exploitative, evidenced by the kinds of employment opportunities that were available to them. This is a clear reflection of this geographical violence and fraudulence concerning the benefits of European modernity.

Whilst the rhetoric of modernity suggested that modernisation was ultimately for the benefit of everyone, even Africans, this was actually false. Catherine Wright's 'Gender awareness in Migration Theory: Synthesizing actor and structure in Southern Africa'²⁹, speaks directly to this as she illuminates on the tensions that existed in trying to demarcate European spaces as modern and African ones backward and un/premodern. Instead of adhering to this binary, both Samuelson and Wright demonstrate the wilful defiance of Africans to this strict categorisation of modern and un /premodern. In Samuelson's article, she discusses the usage of footpaths in urban Bulawayo, which could only be used by European settlers. Yet, many Africans took

29. C, Wright. "Gender awareness in Migration Theory: Synthesizing actor and structure in Southern Africa" *Development and Change* 26(4), 1995, pp. 771-791.

chances and made use of them, a protest against their supposed lack of civility. Wright discusses the migration of African women into urban spaces, even when it was illegal, as another form of resistance to this distinction between the modern and un/premodern. For those women who entered the urban locale, a condition of double consciousness arose and as du Bois puts it, there emerged “two warring ideals in one dark body”.³⁰ African women grappled with disconnected identities because of the socioeconomic and political colonial environment. Their engagements with urban spaces, with themselves and with the people around them, were characterised by the conflicting identities that developed as a consequence of how they were perceived by not only European but African men as well. What they had understood to be an African woman before the institution of settler colonialism evolved drastically in response to this new climate and the result was this clash between two identities.

The significance of such an in-depth engagement with the ideas of modernity and tradition lie in the literal and symbolic power ascribed to technological development such as the train. In Marian Aguiar’s *Making Modernity: Inside the Technological Space of the Railway*,³¹ a connection is made between Euromodernity, imperialism and the train in the Indian context. Using South Asia’s partition as a case study, Aguiar argues that the railways were central in formulating the rhetoric of modernity. Modernity had two implications for the colonised; it became either a source of liberation or a way to reinforce the differences between the colonizers and colonised. The train emblemized this phenomenon. Whilst it had the ability to broaden the physical and metaphorical horizons of the colonised by facilitating faster and far reaching mobility, it also represented oppressive colonial rule. This idea is reinforced by the words of Karl Marx who believed, “England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating- the annihilation of Asian society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia”.³² Collateral damage in the form of the ‘annihilation of Asian society’ was inconsequential in the greater scheme of a modernisation project and as a result, the experience of the colonised with such technology was largely negative.

30. W.E.B. Du Bois. 1903. *The souls of Black folk*. New York. Dover Publishers, p. 2.

31. M. Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, *Cultural Critique* 68, 2008.

32. M. Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, p. 70.

The train facilitated “a shifting set of social relations and changing constructions of space and time”³³ within India, as was the case in other colonies. Building on these ideas, an article titled, ‘End of the line: Railways and society’³⁴ expands on how the train altered ideas of space and time and thereafter societies at large. European powers were of the opinion that precolonial communities were plagued by what the author calls “the barriers of time, distance and delay”. Without European innovation in the form of the train, precolonial communities were seen as ineffective, their daily lives determined by “natural time, the pattern of activities dictated by the sun’s progress through the heavens and the peasant’s age-old rhythm of life”.³⁵ Railways, the epitome of European superiority, were believed to be the key to restructuring supposedly ‘backward’ communities. Trains required punctuality through schedules of arrival and departure, which facilitated the transformation of African societies whose time and schedules had been structured differently to those introduced. With this standardisation of time, those who could not or would not adjust were immediately excluded from so-called modern practices. This was mainly characterised by an exclusion from processes of social exchange, an important feature of the train as it had the ability to expedite the movement of information, goods and people. It also meant that whilst some had the opportunity to experience new unexplored terrains, those who did not adapt to the new society introduced by the train could not have that same experience.

Aguiar suggests that since the railways were able to “reconstruct space and time through movement”³⁶; they were also a space in which new identities could be formed. Movement into new spaces fostered the development of a ‘new’ kind of person through an engagement with previously unexplored environments, essentially broadening one’s metaphorical horizons, which had the ability to alter perceptions of reality. On board a train, both male and female passengers of different classes and races were able to imagine lives beyond what they had ever imagined for themselves. It is clear that the train was not just an important mode of transportation but allowed passengers to experience the world in a unique way. Interestingly however, different people

33. M. Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, p. 72.

34. Anon., ‘End of the line. Railways and society’, www.pngbuai.com/300socialsciences/transport/railway-history/EOL-rail-history/EOL-PDF/EOLintro.pdf. Access: 26/03/2017, pp. 1-6.

35. Anon., “End of the line. Railways and society”, p. 1.

36. M. Aguiar, ‘Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway’ p. 73.

experienced the train in unique ways. For example, and this will be interrogated further in ensuing chapters, powerful technology such as the train was initially ascribed to be the domain of European men. As a powerful machine, always moving forward and never backwards, the meanings attached to the train spanned from progress to strength and virility. The train was a formidable force and this was equated with masculinity. These ideas were exported to colonial settings except that the relationship that colonised men had with the train were completely different. As cheap labour working for companies such as the Rhodesia Railways, the colonised man's encounter with the train was rooted in exploitation although he was granted more access to employment within railway enterprises than was the colonised woman. However, the train remained a gendered technology, this was another way in which women's encounters, experiences, and engagement with the train was rendered invisible.

Samuelson's representation of modern subjectivity through the recurring themes of trains and music in Vera's novels is of importance to this study. She argues "both travelling tropes, music and trains ... are rendered as figures through which movement across rural/urban and national boundaries" occurs.³⁷ Although there was movement between the two perimeters, it was strictly monitored and targeted at young unmarried men who were envisioned to become a reliable and stable migrant labour force. The strictest controls were undoubtedly placed on women, who were perceived to be legal minors under both colonial and customary law. There is however, a "fervent desire"³⁸ amongst Africans to move freely, to see beyond what they had always known and to break not only those physical, but metaphorical boundaries as well. As a result, many Africans, both male and female, and of varying ages, did move both voluntarily and involuntarily into urban Bulawayo from all over Southern Rhodesia and beyond. Frequently, migrants made use of the train to move into urban locales, with a significant number of African men finding employment as railwaymen of different grades. However, when they finally did enter the cities, Samuelson argues that Africans never really belonged, but were always in 'transit', that is passing through and never at fully at home.³⁹ This also particularly resonated with African women. Even as their numbers increased in urban Bulawayo, the city was always viewed as no 'place

37. M. Samuelson, "Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo", p.22.

38. M. Samuelson, "Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo", p.23.

39. M. Samuelson, "Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo", p.27.

for a woman' and both colonial and customary policies were structured in ways that attempted to control their daily activities.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the number of African women who migrated into urban Bulawayo increased steadily throughout the years, and reached an interesting peak in the 1930s and 1940s. This peak was a phenomenon throughout Southern Africa and was linked to the intensification of the migrant labour system, one of the lynchpins in the modernisation project in colonial Africa. The success of this migrant system was largely due to the railways that transported migrant labourers to newly established urban centres concentrated around industry and mining. These railways were central in the development of urban spaces whilst simultaneously contributing to the underdevelopment of African reserves.

The historiography of migration and in particular, the migrant labour system, has tended to ignore and obscure women's migration and mobility. Men have been at the centre of these topics because of their dominance over history and the androcentrism of colonial archives. This is reflected in not only the centrality of men in these studies, but the largely gender-neutral approach taken by many scholars. Caroline Wright addresses what she identifies as the "gender blindness"⁴¹ in migration theory. She discusses two models of migration theory that are categorized according to the theoretical model: the neo-classical and the structural model. The biggest difference between the two is the extent of "human agency in relation to that of social structure"⁴².

The neo-classical theory finds its roots in modernization theory, and the core of this theory is the male migrant labourer. In the rural, 'under-developed' areas, labourers found it difficult to find employment and provide for their families. This theory suggests that migration is the result of an individual rational response to economic challenges within the rural communities.⁴³ In contrast, the structural model is rooted in dependency theory, and as the name implies, places emphasis on structure, particularly capitalist structures and how these forced male labourers to migrate from the rural to urban areas. The intensification of labour migration in Southern Africa is understood to be a consequence of the institution of a capitalistic wage economy. As such, the structural model understands migration to not have been the choice of the migrant labourer but rather, a decision made in response to the foreign economy

40. M. Samuelson, "Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo", p.28.

41. C, Wright. "Gender awareness in Migration Theory", p.772.

42. C, Wright. "Gender awareness in Migration Theory", p.771.

43. C, Wright. "Gender awareness in Migration Theory", p.773.

instituted that was structured to see them fail.⁴⁴ According to Wright, both of these theories are flawed primarily because of their gender neutrality and blindness. Women have historically been studied as mobile beings mostly in relation to men and it was believed for a long time that the main motivator for migration into urban areas was to follow their husbands. However, Wright, along with other likeminded scholars, have demonstrated that many a times women were actually independent mobile beings whose movement was motivated by a plethora of reasons that can be easily differentiated from those of men. In light of these, she proposes the development of a theory that synthesises female and male actors with structural determinants of migration. Alienating women from migration theories suggests a trivialising of gender in the development of an African elite when in fact, gender was central.

The shift in scholarly focus that occurred in migration theory began in the late 20th century, and for the first time incorporated women into the analysis of migration labour patterns. The restriction of African female mobility and women's subsequent exclusion from history can be understood as emanating from both the efforts of both European and African men.

In the book 'Women in African Colonial Histories'⁴⁵, Teresa Barnes and Lynette Jackson engage with two different, but not mutually exclusive topics in Zimbabwean historiography. In their respective chapters, the authors engage with African female mobility and some of the experiences of African women in urban spaces that have been simply ignored, or researched only minimally. A reading of these two articles together, along with other similar histories of migration and urbanisation in Southern Africa, reveals that in order to understand the phenomenon that was African urbanisation, it is important to engage critically with the topic of migration. In, 'Virgin Territory? Travel and Migration by African Women in Twentieth-Century Southern Africa', Barnes begins to tell some of the untold stories of mobile women from all over Africa who were travelling within the Southern African region, paying particular attention to their movement between colonial South Africa and Zimbabwe. Much like Wright⁴⁶, Barnes critiques the androcentric approaches to migrant labour historiography within Southern Africa, but goes a step further and points to the

44. C. Wright. "Gender awareness in Migration Theory", p.774.

45. S. Geiger *et al* (eds). 2002. *Women in African Colonial Histories*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

46. C. Wright. "Gender awareness in Migration Theory."

perpetuation of male-centred labour histories in the former British colony as being caused by “revisionist Marxist scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s.”⁴⁷ She cites the work of Charles van Onselen⁴⁸ as an example of one such seminal historical engagement with Southern African labour migration, but whilst she acknowledges the value of the study, a critique is made on how it has acted as a model for other Historians who continue to ignore the issue of gender, or engage with it in passing, when researching migrant labour. A gender blind approach, or in the case of van Onselen, the mention of mobile African women without probing into their experiences, means that an important element of Southern African migrant labour has been written out of history.

However, research done by Teresa A. Barnes in, ‘The Fight for Control of African Women’s Mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939’ and Camilla Cockerton in, ‘Slipping through Their Fingers: Women’s Migration and Tswana Patriarchy’ are examples of the significance of unearthing those African female experiences with migration and settlement in urban spaces at a time when, as will be revealed, these were extremely contentious issues for not only African and European patriarchies but for European women and ‘respectable’ African women as well. Cockerton’s article is an engagement with the wide range of “strategies, policies, and punishments” that were put in place to immobilize African women in modern day Botswana.⁴⁹ She does this by identifying two phases in this fight to control African female mobility, the first occurring between 1850 and 1920 and the second between the 1920s and the 1940s. Similarly, Barnes engages with the ambiguities and contradictions in the approaches taken to try and control African female mobility in Botswana’s neighbour, Zimbabwe, and how this resulted in an “ambivalent coalition between black and white males” between 1900 and 1939.⁵⁰ Some of the ways in which these strategies, policies and punishments were expressed during the two phases identified by Cockerton are touched on in ensuing paragraphs, but it is important to note here that despite these efforts, African women still moved into urban spaces in their numbers.

47. T. Barnes. 2002. *Virgin Territory? Travel and Migration by African Women in Twentieth-Century Southern Africa*, in *Women in African Colonial Histories*. Eds S. Geiger et al. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.164.

48. C. van Onselen. 1976. *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1933*. London: Pluto.

49. C. Cockerton. “Slipping through their fingers”, p.37.

50. T. Barnes. “The fight for control of African women’s mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe”, p.595.

Both scholars begin their articles by emphasising just how important the control of African female mobility was in order to protect recently established colonial norms and values, but also customary norms and values that had been in existence for years. Several changes occurred in the colonial economy between 1850 and 1920 which coalesced to create 'push factors' that drove the majority of African men and women to move into urban areas.⁵¹ Some of these changes included the success of European agriculture, to the detriment of the African peasant economy, the low prices pegged on their cattle and grain, increases in taxes and the global post war recession, which necessitated stricter regulation of African economic ventures, by the colonial government.⁵²

The exploitative migrant labour system was established with the intent of enticing male migrant labourers to move temporarily into urban (white) spaces to earn a living in response to these changes, where before they had managed to live comfortably outside of the colonial wage economy. This preference towards men was very clear and was punctuated by the colonial administration's demands that migrant labourers were to maintain strong ties with their rural homesteads by visiting them as often as possible (where of course, it was not costly for colonial employers) and sending back regular cash remittances. The observation that, "in Ovamvoland in South West Africa, African women's migration was seen as highly threatening to the 'traditional' order, which highlights the fact that African women were designated not only as the bearers of agriculture but also as the bearers of culture",⁵³ illuminates just how important the presence of African women in rural reserves was for the survival of entire communities. A firm control over African female mobility was essential for the preservation of a rural labour force needed for African agriculture, especially since many men had already migrated to cities. Bride price payments were also something that chiefs in rural homesteads had come to depend on and permitting single women to move away essentially meant that they lost a vital source of income for the rural community. During these earlier phases of migration, legally married African women were also restricted from moving away from reserves by customary authorities as this ensured that another

51. T. Barnes. "The fight for control of African women's mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe", p.594.

52. C. Cockerton. "Slipping through their fingers"; T. Barnes. "The fight for control of African women's mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe"; E. Schmidt.1992. *Peasants, traders and wives. Shona women in the history of Zimbabwe. 1870-1939*. Heinemann: Harare, pp.3-10.

53. C. Cockerton. "Slipping through their fingers", p.43.

flow of income was retained, that is, the cash remittances that migrant husbands would send back to their wives. Whilst colonial sentiments regarding African migration in Southern Rhodesia (and similarly in other British colonies) changed over time, during these formative years of the migrant labour system, colonial authorities were predominantly in support of curtailing this movement to prevent the permanent settlement and urbanisation of Africans in spaces they considered to be their own. Additional 'moral' arguments provided by both African and European men for curtailing and controlling women's mobility were centred on the 'corrupting' influence of urban spaces. It was believed that women needed protection from potential moral contamination that was an inevitable consequence of unfettered freedom of movement. The articles by Cockerton and Barnes infer the use of the railways as the means of escape through references to the need to place headmen at railway stations to prevent their escape.⁵⁴

In 'Virgin Territory?' Barnes takes note that even though unfavourable economic climates in both colonial South Africa and Southern Rhodesia were influential motivators for African female mobility despite attempted restrictions, other factors were at play. As such, she differentiates between African female migrants, with the word 'migrant' denoting cohesion, and travellers who migrated voluntarily "[which evokes images of] sightseeing, danger, excitement, adventurousness, discovery, and touring,"⁵⁵ an image that was not usually prescribed to Africans. In the chapter by Jackson titled, "When in the White Man's Town': Zimbabwean Women Remember Chibeura",⁵⁶ the discussion of the compulsory venereal disease examinations that occurred in Southern Rhodesia from the early 1900s until the 1950s speaks directly to this point. Jackson illustrates that in Southern Rhodesia, African women had a relative freedom in which they could become either travellers or migrants,⁵⁷ because up until 1958, the word 'native' in colonial law did not encompass African women as they were technically legal minors. This meant that they were able to contravene the several pass laws that were instituted from as early on as 1901, giving them more freedom of movement than African men whose presence in urban locales was strictly controlled

54. C. Cockerton. "Slipping through their fingers", p.42.

55. T. Barnes. 2002. *Virgin Territory?* p.170.

56. L. Jackson. 2002. 'When in the White Man's Town': Zimbabwean Women Remember Chibeura, in *Women in African Colonial Histories*. eds S. Geiger et al. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

57. T. Barnes. 2002. *Virgin Territory?*

from the early 1900s by the pass laws. Formal efforts to control mobile African women were only instituted in 1936 in the Native Registration Act which made it necessary for African women to present proof of marriage, customary or legal under colonial law, as a prerequisite to entering urban spaces.⁵⁸ This made it possible for African women to be more than just migrants but travellers as well, who may have been mobile in response to desires for freedom from strict African patriarchal controls and an increase on their workload, or simply because of a curiosity that dictated that they venture beyond what they knew. However, even though there were no formalised laws to control the mobility of especially single women prior to 1926, Chibeura, or compulsory venereal disease examinations, became a pass in itself, which determined whether African women were allowed entry into urban spaces throughout Southern Rhodesia.

Jackson's article uses the case of chibeura in Southern Rhodesia to illustrate how certain histories, in this instance the histories of African who were subjected to intrusive and traumatizing medical inspections, can be completely lost. Whilst the perspectives of European women and men, along with those of African men regarding chibeura can be found in the historical record and medical histories of the former colony, the voices of victimized African women have been silenced. Probing into how African women experienced these examinations is pivotal as it adds value to studies that seek to uncover African female experiences in colonial urban spaces.

It was the belief of European settlers that African women were carriers of sexually transmitted diseases.⁵⁹ Much like the over exaggerated Black Peril, hyperbolic declarations of African women infested with disease were made. These sentiments were expressed predominantly by European settlers, both male and female. As such, it became integral to ensure that all African women who entered urban spaces, with particular attention paid to single women, were tested for venereal diseases. European women shared the same sentiments with their husbands and believed that African women were promiscuous and sort after urban life to become prostitutes. Inaccurate representations such as these are rampant in colonial records. African men and interestingly, respectable African women, that is, women who were legally married,

58. An important tenet if this Act was geared at dealing (or attempting to deal), with the problem of the increasing number of African women present in urban spaces.

59. L. Jackson. 2002. *'When in the White Man's Town'*.

encouraged the testing of single women as they believed they were a threat to the moral fibre and reproductive health of African communities.

Whilst legally married women could settle compounds and locations as early as the 1920s after a clean bill of health was presented in the form of a negative venereal disease examination, unattached women were not legally accommodated, despite testing. This is reflected in the fact that in the 1920s, African accommodation in urban areas was predominantly for single men, with very minimal homes for married couples. Even though these women were not formally accommodated, if they tested free of sexually transmitted diseases, they were permitted entrance into urban spaces where they engaged in both legal and illegal activities to ensure their survival. One of the most popular ways to secure accommodation and improve one's social standing in these urban areas was to engage in temporary relationships with African labourers, what became known as 'mapoto' marriages.⁶⁰ This was especially true of women without formal employment.

Overtime however, policies relating to the presence of African women in urban spaces evolved, making it more or less permissible to be in the urban locale, as long as they did not pose a threat to the health of not only African male labourers, but Europeans themselves. This laxity in policy, to the disappointment of customary officials and 'respectable' Africans residing in cities and towns, was perceived as necessary in response to the Black Peril, wherein African women could act as buffer against it. This created an opportunity for African women to engage in several activities that led to their socioeconomic empowerment, giving them a bargaining power they had never had before. Therefore, in spite of the aforementioned scholarly tendencies to focus only on African men within Southern African histories of migration and settlement in urban spaces, it is evident that, "African women's presence in colonial towns, mines, and farms was far from negligible and must therefore be historicized."⁶¹

1.3 Methodology

This is a literature-based research project that engages in qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary material and as such, textual and discourse analysis are essential. This method of inquiry produces interpretations of primary and secondary

60. T. Barnes. "The fight for control of African women's mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe"; C. Cockerton. "Slipping through their fingers".

61. T. Barnes. 2002. *Virgin Territory?* pp.166-167.

material on different modernities, gender differentiated migration and mobility facilitated by the Bulawayo railway line. The importance of language and contested meanings are also highlighted. Fairclough's⁶² discussion of discourse and textual analysis, but particularly of critical analysis, sheds light on the significance of this kind of methodology. Discourses can be identified as distinct perspectives of the world, for example the diverse representations of modernity that have been discussed earlier on. Fairclough argues that "discourse is constitutive and constituted"⁶³, meaning that phenomena occurring in society influence discourse, and vice versa. The purpose of discourse analysis would then be to interrogate the links between texts (in this case primary and secondary source material), discourses (around modernity, gender differentiated migration and mobility and colonial controls) and social structures in order to understand the ideological dominance of some discourses over others. By revealing these historical inequalities through textual and discourse analysis, Eurocentric conceptions of African societies, cultures and histories can be decentred.

The research engaged in extensive archival research in the National Archives of Zimbabwe, the regional archives in Bulawayo and the archives of the Headquarters of the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), the National Archives in Pretoria, the Transnet Heritage Library in Johannesburg and the Pretoria campus of the National Library of South Africa, among others.

Publications such as the *Rhodesiana*, *The Railway Gazette* and *South African Railways and Harbours Magazine* were utilised. The secondary material used included a wide selection of journal articles and books that are interdisciplinary, drawing on the use of sources from disciplines such as philosophy and anthropology.

1.4 Ethical considerations

Since this research did not engage in any oral interviews, there were no research participants to whom any form of harm could occur. As indicated, this is a literature-based study and all primary and secondary materials were available in the public domain.

62. N. Fairclough, 2003, *Analysing discourse. Textual analysis for social research*. London, Routledge.
63. N. Fairclough, 2003, *Analysing discourse*, p. 93.

1.5 Chapter outline

Chapter 2 begins by introducing colonial Zimbabwe and the Cape to Cairo railway, the brainchild of British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. Rhodes envisioned building a British-owned line of transport and communication that would open up the continent to colonial exploitation. Although the dream was only realized in part, railway development by the British South Africa Company in parts of Southern and Central Africa was significant. It is through this railway development that Bulawayo's positionality as one of the most important cities for the British colonial project is established. Following this is an engagement with the ideas of Euromodernity and how these were related to the train. The main goal here is to demonstrate that in spite of attempts to universalize Euromodernity and subsequently dictate how people should experience the train, encounters with the train were always specific to context.

Chapter 3 develops some of the ideas put forward in the previous chapter by addressing the literal and symbolic meanings attached to the train and how these meanings were intended to be gender specific. Euromodernity dictated that powerful technological innovation, such as the train, be equated with masculinity. As a result, European women's encounters were always regulated by their societies and even by themselves. However, in colonial settings, copy and pasting Eurocentered gendered relationships with railway infrastructure failed. African men and women had different experiences with the train and addressing these nuances is vital. This chapter also addresses migration from a gendered perspective and contributes to scholarly traditions that aim to correct inaccurate representations of African women as immobile beings. Finally, the chapter introduces Bulawayo more concretely by giving a brief mapping of the city.

In Chapter 4, the colonial archive in Zimbabwe is read against the grain with the goal of reinserting silenced voices of women living in the railway compounds into an important historical event, the Rhodesia Railways African Strike. Before making a gendered appraisal of the strike however, the tensions that existed between the Bulawayo Municipality and Rhodesia Railways, which was owned by the BSAC until 1947, is investigated. One of the main causes of conflict was the issue of the growing presence of African women within the compounds and their influence on African urbanization. Their presence and economic activities within this space destabilized

what was supposed to be a well-functioning migrant labour system, whilst at the same time, it altered African gendered relationships quite significantly. It was during this historical moment that African women acquired a bargaining power they had never had before and their influence within the compounds was so substantial that many of the grievances of striking railway men were centered on issues of social reproduction.

In the concluding chapter a summary and analysis of the research findings is given. It also addresses some of the limitations of the study and the possibility of further scholarly engagement with Zimbabwean railway histories from a gendered perspective.

Chapter 2: The train, Euromodernity and British colonial expansion in Southern Africa.

Modernity, an idea that has for centuries been, and continues to be a powerful shaper of societies and their experiences, has historically been solely associated with Europe and America. Former colonial territories, which were supposedly inferior in all regards, were perceived to be unmodern, stuck in an unchanging past and incapable of innovative transformation. European explorations of these territories allegedly revealed that without the assistance of ‘superior’ beings, i.e. European men, perpetual stagnation would be the story of Africa, India and other similarly ‘backward’ locales. The conceptualisation and universalisation of a Euromodernity, which was done primarily through the colonial project, attempted to propagate these inaccurate narratives of non-European societies. By universalising this Euromodernity, a deliberate negation of various modernities occurred based on their supposed ‘backwardness’, ‘savagery’ and ‘lack of civilisation’. This culminated in the drastic altering of the identities of the colonised. Today, universalised Eurocentric notions of modernity continue to find resonance as a consequence of globalisation.

Contrary to the aims of the colonial project however, the denial of the existence of indigenous modernities in colonised spaces all over the world did not result in the successful suppression of ideas and knowledge stemming from the colonised. Attempts to discredit indigenous knowledge systems resulted instead in the emergence of an unspoken negotiation between the colonised and the coloniser which culminated in the development of a modernity that thought and continues to think, “with and also.... against a Western modernity.”⁶⁴

As one of the most powerful representations of European modernity, the railways were of great symbolic value. Beyond this symbolism, railways (and the telegraph) were the key to opening up the heart of the continent to colonial ventures. The Bulawayo railway line became a small, but vital, piece in the puzzle that was to be the Cape to Cairo transcontinental line of communication. The main goal of building such a line was to open up the continent to British control, allowing for the exploitation of African resources and labour for the benefit of Britain. Although the Cape to Cairo remained

64. M, Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, p. 68.

in large part a dream unfulfilled, strident moves were made by Rhodes to see his dream come to life.⁶⁵

This chapter is structured into four sections; the first section is an introduction to colonial Bulawayo and more broadly, Southern Rhodesia and its initial encounter with colonialism and Euro modernity. Secondly, Cecil John Rhodes and his dream to develop a transcontinental railway line running from the Cape to Cairo is discussed, followed by a discussion of the connection between Euromodernity and the train. This section highlights the significance of technology, along with its various literal and symbolic meanings and how it contributed to the success of the colonial project. Finally, an engagement with counter narratives to this universalised modernity and non-European encounters with technology is made.

2.1 A brief history of the colonisation of Zimbabwe

Although the City of Kings “is currently experiencing saddening de-industrialisation and ostensible decline”⁶⁶, it boasts a vibrant history, one that is characterised by a complex relationship of dependence between what Terrence Ranger calls black and white Bulawayo.⁶⁷ Without black Bulawayo, white Bulawayo would not have developed in the manner that it did and vice versa. The repercussions of colonisation on Lobengula’s former city can still be felt today and are some of the reasons why it finds itself in this position of “ostensible decline”⁶⁸.

The colonial history of Zimbabwe began in the 1880s, when Cecil John Rhodes arrived with his jointly owned British South Africa Company (BSAC).⁶⁹ Rhodes was undeniably an enigmatic figure who found himself many a times in conflict with the British government over his intentions with colonial territories. In his article, ‘Rhodes, Rhodesia and the Rand’, Ian Phimister presents various scholarly perspectives on him, his ambitions and significance in the history of colonial Africa.⁷⁰ Phimister

65. L.A.C. Raphael. 1936. *The Cape to Cairo Dream: A study in British Imperialism* (Ph.D. dissertation). Faculty of Political Science. Columbia University, p.27.

66. G. Ncube. “Reviewed work[s]: Bulawayo Burning: The social history of a Southern African city, 1893-1960 by Terrence Ranger”, *Kronos* 37, p. 137.

67. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning. The Social History of a Southern African city. 1893-1960*. Harare: Weaver Press, p.25.

68. G. Ncube. “Reviewed work[s]: Bulawayo Burning”, p. 137.

69. B. Raftopoulos & A. Mlambo. 2009. *Becoming Zimbabwe. A history from the pre-colonial period to 2008*. Oxford: African Books Collective, p.40.

70. I. Phimister. “Rhodes, Rhodesia and the Rand”. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1(1), 1974, pp.74-90.

engages with scholars such as Lockhart and Woodhouse who suggest that Rhodes' aspirations in the colonies were always rooted in patriotism, that is, the enrichment of the British crown. Others, such as Galbraith, have argued that Rhodes' ambitions were primarily egotistical and focused on self-enrichment. These two contrasting images of Rhodes were the basis of conflict between himself and the British government. Nonetheless, Rhodes and the British government cooperated in numerous circumstances, when it best suited them.

A clear illustration of contention between the two is evident when considering the colonisation of the territory surrounding the Zambezi. Rhodes had long had interests in the territories north of the Cape, then known as Zambesia, where he hoped to discover gold. His interests and failed attempts at acquiring Matabeleland from Lobengula for years were finally realised when he sent John Moffat, the son of a missionary, to persuade Lobengula to sign a concession with the BSAC allowing them rights to mine in his territory.⁷¹ Unknown to the King, Moffat and his companions, including a Charles Rudd, did not reveal the true nature of the concession. False assurances had been made that only ten European men would be allowed access to the mines in Matabeleland. Unknowingly, Lobengula had signed a document that gave almost unlimited access of his territory to European men. Either this vital piece of information was deliberately excluded from the actual document Lobengula signed, or from translations of the document that he was given. This later became known as the Rudd concession.⁷² The concession posed considerable problems to the British Government, which attempted to nullify it to no avail. Having attained an upper hand, Rhodes forced the British Government to grant him a charter that allowed the BSAC to govern and make similar treaties in other territories on the continent. In later years, this translated into the expansion of British colonial rule in Africa.⁷³

With the use of the BSAC's British South Africa police, Rhodes was able to acquire control of the territories surrounding the Zambezi. In 1895, this entire region became Rhodesia and soon after in 1898, the southern section was named Southern Rhodesia and the north, Northern Rhodesia. As the following section will demonstrate, before his death in 1902, Rhodes was one of the principle pioneers of the British imperial

71. B. Raftopoulos & A. Mlambo. 2009. *Becoming Zimbabwe*, p.40.

72. B. Raftopoulos & A. Mlambo. 2009. *Becoming Zimbabwe*, p.41.

73. A. Mlambo. 2014. *A history of Zimbabwe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 50.

project that proved to be immensely lucrative for himself and for the British crown. This enrichment was to the detriment of African communities who were increasingly impoverished by European settler colonialism.⁷⁴ The extent of Rhodes' power is evident in simply looking at the naming of the territories mentioned above, which were dubbed the 'Rhodesias' in a meeting of early European settlers who revered him.

Early resistance to European settler colonialism by Africans in Matabeleland, the region in which Bulawayo is located, occurred first between 1893 and 1894 (the first Matabele War) and then between 1896 and 1897 (the second Matabele or first Chimurenga war).⁷⁵ Resistance was however, unsuccessful and Southern Rhodesia fell under the administration of the BSAC until 1923. During this time, there was increased European settlement on the continent and impressive technological and spatial development, which included railway expansion. These changes were accompanied by the early onset of large-scale African migration and indigence.⁷⁶

The reasoning behind why Bulawayo became the hub for both the BSAC and Rhodes was largely symbolic. Formerly the home of great Ndebele kings, the acquisition of this territory was supposedly emblematic of white superiority and its ability to tame the purportedly "savage native Ndebele".⁷⁷ Ironically, however, Terrence Ranger states that:

Royal towns of the Ndebele Kings were never meant to be permanent. There was movement when a King died or when their surrounding environment- grass, game, water- became exhausted. In many ways, it is misleading to call Lobengula's Bulawayo his capital.⁷⁸

Even though Bulawayo was of importance to the Ndebele, it did not hold as much symbolic value as had been initially thought. In spite of this, the BSAC procured Bulawayo with the hopes of discovering gold, as had occurred on the Rand in what had become known as the 'City of Gold', Johannesburg.⁷⁹ When aspirations for a gold rush in Bulawayo waned, the township, as it was known in the early years of colonisation, "became the town of the transport riders....Railhead!"⁸⁰ Prior to the

74. R. Williams. "The Cape to Cairo Railway", *Journal of the Royal African Society* 20(80), 1921, p.245.

75. A. Mlambo. 2014. *A history of Zimbabwe*, p.45.

76. P. Ibbotson. "Urbanization in Southern Rhodesia", p. 78.

77. Anon. "The opening address by the President of Rhodesia, the honourable C.W. DuPont." Rhodesia before 1920. Bulawayo. 1975, p.37.

78. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p.15.

79. E.S. Grogan & A.R. Sharp. 1900. *From the Cape to Cairo. The first traverse from north to south*. T. Nelson & Sons Ltd, produced by Al Haines (2014) p. clxxiv.

80. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p.23.

coming of the railways, wagons popularised the city and from this point, the first signs of it becoming the commercial capital of Southern Rhodesia could be seen. In his eulogy to the development of Bulawayo between 1897 and 1904, Stanley Portal Hyatt, a British explorer, stated that, “practically the whole country was supplied from there [Bulawayo]. Scores of wagons left the town every day, loaded with stores of every conceivable kind...the town was flourishing as it had never done before”.⁸¹ With the arrival of the railway to Bulawayo in 1897, the city’s transformation was accelerated. In the end, the initial hopes of having another ‘city of gold’ or prospects for the rise of a pioneer or “transport rider town”⁸² popularised by wagons never came to fruition. Instead, the city became a town “whose business was commerce and the railway.”⁸³

2.2 Rhodes, the Cape to Cairo dream and railway development in Bulawayo

We reckon, ‘Africa is a wasteland; India is a garden and India will remain a garden, and Africa will remain a waste’. The day is not far distant when Africa will pour out her wealth of cattle, grain, minerals, rubber, cotton, sugar, copra, spices and a thousand other products to a grateful world.⁸⁴

These words by E. S. Grogan, another English explorer, who travelled the route from the Cape to Cairo, are taken from a document he produced with the assistance of a fellow English explorer, A. H. Sharp, which glorified the imperial ambitions of Rhodes in Africa. Titled, ‘From Cape to Cairo. The first traverse from north to south’, the article addresses the kind of economic benefits that could be attained by both the British Empire and the BSAC and demonstrate how practical such a venture would be in the long run. Africa would soon be viewed as equally or even more important than India, which had thus far proved invaluable to Britain.⁸⁵ Rhodes’ ambitions were to paint the African continent red, the colour used to depict Britain in maps, from North to South.

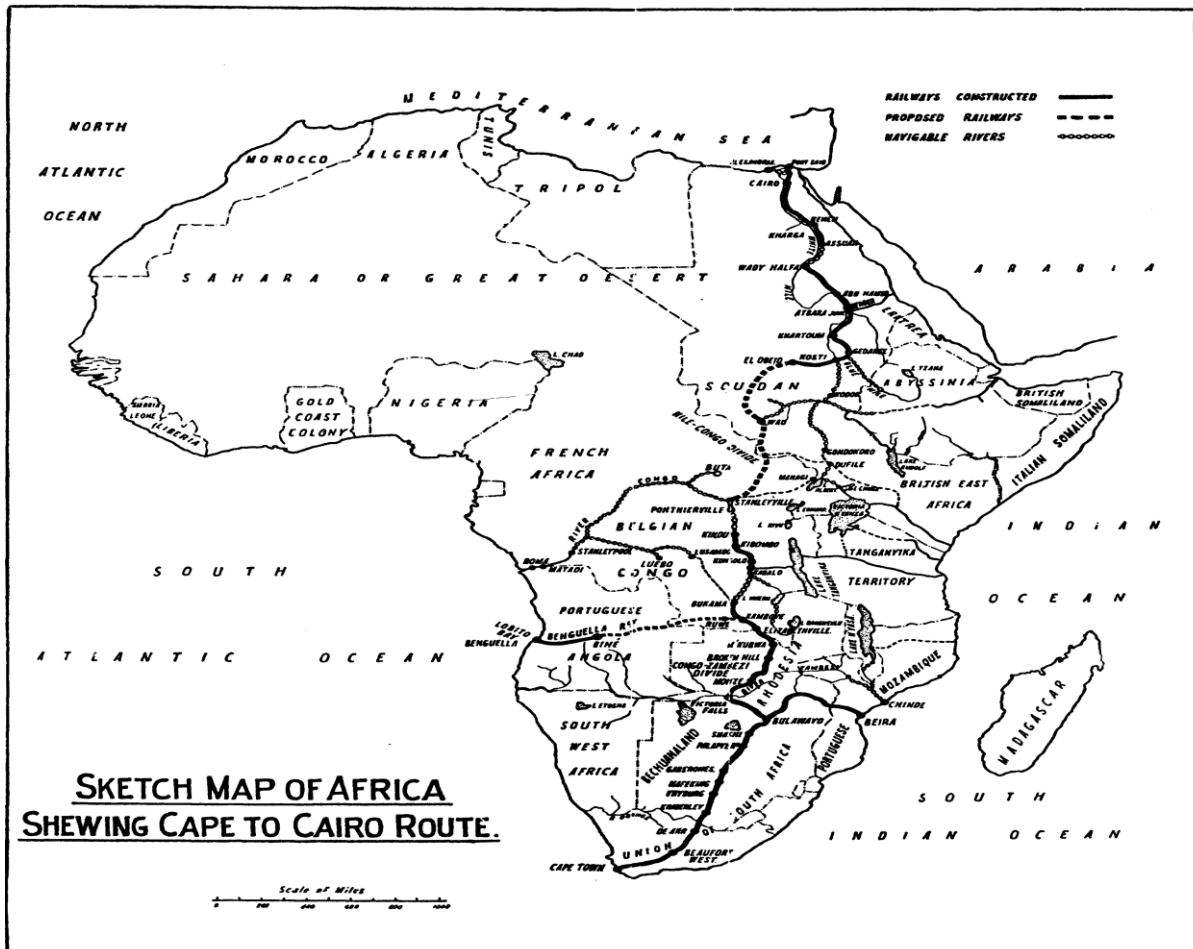
81. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p.23.

82. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p.24.

83. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p.24.

84. E.S. Grogan & A.R. Sharp. 1900. *From the Cape to Cairo*, p. clxxv.

85. G. Clarsen. “Machines as the measure of women. Colonial irony in a Cape to Cairo journey.” *The Cultural Turn*, 1930, p.49.



Map 1⁸⁶

He believed that establishing a line of transport and communication that would stretch from the Cape of Good Hope all the way to the Northern African region, was the key to spreading not only British influence, Euromodernity and physical control of the colony, but also it would serve as a mechanism to secure a trade monopoly of the continent. The route of the line (running from south to north), was of utmost importance:

Its chief importance lies... in its strategic position. The lakes feed all the water systems of Africa. The Congo and White Nile rivers rise here, while Lake Nyasa issues the Shire, an important tributary to the Zambezi River. So important are the Nile, the Congo and the Zambezi for the life and commerce of the rest of Africa that it is hardly an exaggeration to say whoever secured this Lake District held the key to the Dark Continent.⁸⁷

86. L.A.C. Raphael.1936. *The Cape to Cairo Dream*.

87. S.P. Vernon., "The Cape to Cairo Railway." *Liberia Bulletin* 15, 1899, pp.30-40.

The envisaged Cape to Cairo line was to follow the route that would give Britain and the BSAC access to fertile soils and minerals surrounding these lakes. Although during the 1900s, Rhodes had gained popularity within and outside of the colony, when he initially proposed his imperial plans, they were dismissed as impractical by not only Britain, but by other colonial powers. As the value of Africa became clearer however, other colonial powers began to take an interest in securing territories on the continent. A British monopoly of trade and access to diamond and gold deposits scattered in and around this route could therefore not be allowed.⁸⁸

Cecil John Rhodes was an ambitious man. As a white supremacist, he believed in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and the need to ensure its constant positioning as the superior race. Key to maintaining this superiority was the exploitation of what he considered inferior races and this could be effectively achieved by acquiring control of their means of production. By opening up the continent to exploitation through a line of communication that ran from top to bottom, British control of the vast lands and its' people would be established. Consequently, African communities would be destroyed through the imposition of racist European rule that was established through fraudulent treaties and agreements with former African nobility throughout the continent. A pragmatist, Rhodes believed that "what was attempted by Alexander, Cambyses and Napoleon, we practical people are going to finish,"⁸⁹ referring to the expansionist ambitions of those 'great' European men who came before him. He understood that the resistance and ridicule he received from a section of Britons concerning his ambitions in Africa were in the early stages influenced by the ignorance of the untapped potential of the continent. Before 1884, Britain did not have much competition in the African colonies, therefore there was no urgency in implementing such a project that required large amounts of financing; money Britain could not spare.⁹⁰ However, this lack of support did not assuage him. What was completed of the Cape to Cairo dream was funded largely from BSAC and Rhodes' personal coffers. With those funds, significant strides were made which allowed Rhodes to see part of his dream come to life before his death and burial at Matopos Hill in Bulawayo.⁹¹

88. NRZ Museum Archives. "The Cape to Cairo Railway." *African Review*. Volume 23. April/June 1900, p. 24.

89. L.A.C. Raphael.1936. *The Cape to Cairo Dream: A study in British Imperialism*.

90. L.A.C. Raphael.1936. *The Cape to Cairo Dream: A study in British Imperialism*, p.22.

91. NRZ Museum Archives. "The Cape to Cairo Railway", p. 24.

Initially, the Cape to Cairo was envisioned to be an eight thousand and forty-six-kilometre line of communication and commerce that would include a railway line and telegraph.⁹² This envisioned expanse of the line was later modified however, as a consequence of increased competition for colonies in Africa after 1884. The treaty signed by Britain and Germany in 1890, the Anglo-German treaty, and other similar treaties, were some of the principal reasons for this modification. The annexation of what became known as German East Africa and the Belgian Congo essentially blocked off the route to the Horn of Africa.⁹³ Under such circumstances, a BSAC and British monopoly of African labour and mineral resources diminished and the Cape to Cairo evolved into simply a British built and funded railway and telegraph line of transport and communication. Although Britain did not gain a complete hegemony over the continent, it was successful in establishing a lucrative commercial network.

Another reason why there was a significant modification of the initial scope and perceived influence of the Cape to Cairo was that Rhodes' dream was dismissed as "wild cat"⁹⁴; an unrealistic dream that would require large sums of British capital investment. Africa was not yet seen as a lucrative venture; in comparison to the "garden", that was India. After 1884 however, the destabilisation and impoverishment of African communities in Southern Africa was well under way, spearheaded in large part by Rhodes and the BSAC. As this occurred the potential benefits of exploiting the continent became more evident and what was once "wild cat" became the key to solving many of Britain's social and economic problems. These problems were a result of the Industrial Revolution that had sparked large-scale innovation and economic development in the metropole, but at the same time caused overpopulation and overcrowding in urban spaces, unsanitary living conditions, low wages and food shortages. Africa had natural resources, cheap labour and land that could be exploited and would solve many of these problems.⁹⁵ Railway development was key to tapping into these ample resources and creating a network of trade that would significantly reduce, and eventually diminish for a few years, Britain's financial woes. In the words of Grogan & Sharp, "there is a saying that 'trade follows the flag' but I think it would be

92. R. Williams., "The Cape to Cairo Railway." *Journal of the Royal African Society* 20(80), 1921, p. 249.

93. S.P. Vernon., "The Cape to Cairo Railway", p.41.

94. E.S. Grogan & A.R. Sharp. 1900. *From the Cape to Cairo*. p.vi.

95. G. Clarsen. "Machines as the measure of women", p. 48.

more correct to say that ‘the flag reluctantly follows trade’, and I know that ‘trade hurries along in front of the railway’.⁹⁶

In such a context, the train became the “vanguard of imperialism”⁹⁷, furthering the economic aspirations of colonial empires. Without this technology, administering colonial spaces, which were terrifyingly unique both socially and environmentally, from the West, would have almost been impossible. The speed of the train allowed for the easy transportation of manufactured goods and raw materials and facilitated the movement of ideas and information, which all “helped the colony appear more proximate”.⁹⁸ By encouraging increased mobility of people and tangible and intangible goods such as information from other colonies, railways became an integral part of the colonial project. On another level, railway enterprises became an important source of employment in both the metropole and colonies and fostered mass production, one of the most important hallmarks of Euromodernity.⁹⁹ In summation, the train facilitated the transition from agrarianism to an industrial society in the colonies, allowing extraction and exploitation of resources in the colonies to be more efficient.

2.3 Euromodernity and the train

Whilst economic motivators for developing the Cape to Cairo were of great significance, the symbolic value attached to railway development and the train were equally as important. Euro or Western modernity, which has historically been equated with technological development, rationalism and nationalism, was one of the most powerful tools at the disposal of Western nations as they embarked on the colonial project. D. V. Kumar identifies three ways in which this phenomenon has been understood in the West: as a philosophical idea, as a structuring of society and as an experience.¹⁰⁰

Firstly, Euromodernity as an idea breaks away with the past; this was one of the most important tenets of Enlightenment thinking. A radical rupture with the past is argued to

96. E.S. Grogan & A.R. Sharp. 1900. *From the Cape to Cairo*, p. clxxiv.

97. J. Lunn. 1997. *Capital and labour in the Rhodesian Railway System, 1888-1947*, London: Macmillan Press, p.1.

98. M. Aguiar. 2011. *Tracking modernity. India’s railway and the culture of mobility*. London: University of Minnesota Press, pp. xiii-xv; J. Lunn. 1997. *Capital and labour*, pp.118-119.

99. M. Beaumont & M. Freeman. 2007. *The railway and modernity. Time, space and the machine ensemble*. Oxford: Peter Lang Ltd, p.18.

100. D.V. Kumar. “Engaging with modernity: Need for a critical negotiation”, *Sociological Bulletin* 57(2), 2008, pp.240-254.

signify the beginning of “progress, science, optimism and universalism”.¹⁰¹ What this break from the past entailed was the placing of reason over what were deemed as oppressive structures and institutions in society such as religion, tradition and anything associated with superstition. It is argued that with this shift, the development of societies would occur at a rapid pace, uninterrupted by the purportedly ‘repressive’ and ‘backward’ mentalities of the past. In the most utopian way, the world would be rid of hunger, nescience and the primitive ideologies of superstition.¹⁰² By breaking away from a supposedly static past and making a clear differentiation between that past and the constantly evolving present, what Susan Friedman coins as the binary, is created.¹⁰³ The binary that she identifies, which comes about as a consequence of her ‘definitional excursions’, is a phenomenon whereby there is a “process of inclusion and exclusion....Depending on who does the defining, certain phenomena belong to the category of modern, modernity or modernism. Other phenomena do not.”¹⁰⁴

Essentially, this binary demarcates tradition and modernity and in the Western context, it is simply practices that are deemed superstitious and anti-rational that are excluded from the realm of the modern. Matters become significantly more complicated when this binary is applied to contexts outside of the West. In this scenario, it is not simply the practices from the past that are excluded from the ‘modern’ realm, but all unfamiliar ways of existing that are not acceptable to Euromodernity become identifiable as tradition and un or pre-modern. This can be seen clearly through the rejection and negation of African knowledge systems in colonial Bulawayo for example, where Ndebele, Shona, Nyasa and other African cultural practices relating to marriage, familial structures and even burial practices were dismissed as ungodly and unchristian.¹⁰⁵ Western scholars such as Habermas, along with other likeminded writers, propagated Euromodernity as the saviour of those societies that they perceived to be uncivilised. As such, during the colonial era, the idea of the ‘white’s man’s burden’, which was rooted in racist ideology and beliefs in white supremacy, became a dominant narrative. With reference to colonial Bulawayo, and as will be seen in greater depth in the following chapter, the civilisation project, that is, the

101. D.V. Kumar. “Engaging with modernity: Need for a critical negotiation”, p.241.

102. D.V. Kumar. “Engaging with modernity: Need for a critical negotiation”, p.241.

103. S.S. Friedman, “Definitional excursions”, p.506.

104. S.S. Friedman, “Definitional excursions”, pp.506-507.

105. T. Ranger. “Dignifying death: The politics of burial in Bulawayo.” *Journal of religion in Africa* 34(1-2), 2004, pp. 110-144.

manifestation of the white man's burden, was not only 'successful' because of colonial education and similar policies, but also through technological, more specifically, railway development.

As a form of social organising, modernity puts in place very specific political, economic and social institutions that differentiate it from those societies that fall outside of modernity. On an economic level, the importance placed on agriculture wanes with the advent of industrial development and increased mechanisation. Technological and mechanised industrialisation, along with the urban spaces that are created as a result of increased migration and spatial development, fall under the category of the modern.¹⁰⁶ Rural spaces that remain predominantly dependent on agriculture for their economic livelihoods are not conceptualised as modern and fall into the pre or unmodern categories. The differentiation between the urban and rural spaces with one being modern and the other pre or unmodern, is rooted in the idea that technological and mechanised industrialisation was the only way to develop at an acceptable pace. This kind of development was believed to be the key to alleviating poverty. By holding on to agrarian practices, it was believed that societies would, as in the case of modernity as an idea, be in a constant state of economic stagnation.

From a political perspective, the philosophical ideas of rationalism filter directly into the manner in which modern societies are structured. Democracy is the rational alternative to the 'old order', that is, feudalism. Modernity resulted in decentralisation and increased participation of people in politics. In order to illustrate just how well a modern society operates, Emmanuel Kant discusses the two realms in which people engage with the politics of a state.¹⁰⁷ Kant argues that the public realm is the space in which people have freedom of speech and the ability to think as they wish, without any external control or restrictions. On the other hand, the private realm requires the exact opposite: a limited and regulated access and practice of one's freedom, ideas and speech.¹⁰⁸ What this essentially means is that there is an unlimited potential to engage with the politics of the state within a modern society. It is, however, clear that such a society has never existed. Access to and usage of knowledge and power is hegemonic

106. A. Giddens. 1990. *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge, Polity Press, p.23.

107. I. Kant. 1499/1788. *What is orientation thinking? In critique of practical reason and other writings and moral philosophy*, (Trans L.W. Beck), Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

108. I. Kant. 1499/1788. *What is orientation thinking? In critique of practical reason and other writings and moral philosophy*, p. 76.

and limited to specific groups of people in society, usually framed as the social, economic and political elite.¹⁰⁹ In reality, there is limited access to knowledge and the producers of this knowledge are a select few. Although there is participatory politics, the participation itself is regulated, a clear contradiction of what this modernity posits. Speech in the public realm is not wholly unregulated. In many ways, modernity in actuality acts with repressive agency in both the public and the private sphere when it comes to politics.

Kumar discusses another integral part of Western modernity, which is the shift away from essentialism, and the 'premodern' notions of living in isolation. Modernity encourages a move away from societal seclusion towards universalism. This then results in increased globalisation, which is believed to facilitate political, economic and social development. Along with this, individualism replaces community-orientation, which is seen as a prehistoric practice that was only evident in precolonial spaces.¹¹⁰

Finally, this modernity is an experience. Here the internal contradictions of Euromodernity can be seen most clearly. Euromodernity argues that separation from and even rejection of religion, superstition and any other elements identified as traditional, results in the creation of an ideal world. The rhetoric surrounding this modernity promises numerous things but in reality, it seeks to disrupt the structure and functioning of societies that are identified as falling outside of the bounds of what it categorises as modern, a clear demonstration of the binary.¹¹¹ Internal contradictions such as these play a significant role in why there has been continued resistance to the imposition of a universalised Eurocentric modernity. Proponents of this modernity claim that it developed uniquely in the West although it borrowed very minor aspects that it deemed 'worthy' from other societies outside of European borders.¹¹² Inscribing Western modernity into societies that fell outside the realm of the modern was believed to be a moral obligation, the 'white man's burden' that has been discussed above. This moral obligation acts as one of the most important justifications for the colonial project in spaces that were perceived to be less superior. *The British South African Annual*, for example, in an article titled 'Taming a savage land: How Rhodesia was developed.

109. P. Chatterjee. "Our modernity." *South-South Exchange Programme for Research for the History of Development (SEPHIS)*. 1997, pp.11-12.

110. D.V. Kumar. "Engaging with modernity: Need for a critical negotiation", p.241.

111. D.V. Kumar. "Engaging with modernity: Need for a critical negotiation", p.243.

112. W.D.Mignolo. "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity", p. 265.

Railways and their civilising influence', published in 1923, describes Bulawayo as being "developed from a raw, undeveloped land, inhabited by one of the most warlike and courageous of South African native tribes, the Matabele..."¹¹³ The key to 'taming' this unknown terrain was the train, which had the ability to "defy the landscape, elevated on stills at one moment, tunnelling through hills at another."¹¹⁴

As an intangible phenomenon, Euromodernity was concretized by technology, and an important technological development in this regard was the train. The train became the embodiment of Euromodernity and carried with it its' philosophies, forms of society and experiences as discussed by Kumar. The previous discussion of the alleged impact that the railways had on "taming the savage land"¹¹⁵, illustrates how in Bulawayo, the train had attached to it British principles, practices and ultimately, British financial goals. The train and railway enterprise in its entirety was presented almost as the epitome of British superiority in the colony in 1924 when the article was published. Rhodes' "genius and foresight"¹¹⁶ in dreaming of such large scale railway development was the key to unlocking the most effective way to exploit the colony to its fullest extent. Additionally, the railways were equipped with machinery that was all "modern and up-to-date", which the editor of this bulletin contrasts to what he claims to have been a "savage...raw [and] undeveloped" land, devoid of any innovation comparable to that of European settlers.¹¹⁷

On a philosophical level, the train's constant forward motion symbolised progress and the "emancipatory promise of capitalist modernity".¹¹⁸ This is why from as early as 1900, and even more so from the 1920s onwards, Africans from all over Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Portuguese East Africa left the homes and became migrant labourers for the railways. The establishment of the Native Labour Bureau in 1906, whose headquarters were in Bulawayo, put measures in place to attract African labour to Southern Rhodesia and subsequently to the Rhodesia

113. NRZ Museum Archives. Colonel C.F. Birney. "Taming a savage land: How Rhodesia was developed". *British South Africa Annual*, 1923-1924, p.138.

114. M. Beaumont & M. Freeman. 2007. *The railway and modernity. Time, space and the machine ensemble*, p.20.

115. NRZ Museum Archives. Colonel C.F. Birney. "Taming a savage land: How Rhodesia was developed". *British South Africa Annual*, 1923-1924.

116. NRZ Museum Archives. Colonel C.F. Birney. "Taming a savage land: How Rhodesia was developed", p.138.

117. NRZ Museum Archives. Colonel C.F. Birney. "Taming a savage land: How Rhodesia was developed", p.138.

118. M. Beaumont & M. Freeman. 2007. *The railway and modernity*, p.14.

Railways. As will be evidenced in greater depth in the ensuing chapter, changes in the colonial economy to the detriment of the African population meant that employment offered by the railways became more lucrative and a way for Africans, especially African men, to prevent their complete indigence. However, and as will also become evident progressively, the “emancipatory promise of capitalist modernity”¹¹⁹ was a lie. Railwaymen, their families and single women residing in railway compounds were not ‘saved’ from poverty, instead they were subjected perpetually low wages which were incapable of keeping with inflation between 1920 and 1950, inadequate and at times completely inedible food rations and insufficient and unsanitary accommodation, to name only a few issues.

Another philosophical dimension to how the train was perceived was in regards to its size and speed, which supposedly represented not only the superiority of Europe, particularly in the colonies, but how it also stood as an emblem of the success in breaking away with the past and embracing innovative forward thinking, mirrored by the machine’s forward motion. Since there was no technological development emanating from indigenous colonised societies comparable to the train at the onset of railway development in Africa, arguments of European cognitive primacy were presented and used as justification for the colonial project.¹²⁰ This very same mentality is what influenced the need to preserve European ways of existing and being within the railways in Southern Rhodesia, both at work and in the railway living areas. Chapter three details how at work, the industrial colour bar ensured that only white railwaymen were employed as skilled labour. Additionally, the significantly lower wages of African railwaymen, in comparison to European counterparts, and the draconian staff rules and regulations that conditioned African railwaymen to ‘acceptable and unacceptable’ behaviour at the workplace were all part of an initiative to entrench African inferiority. Poor housing policies and deplorable food rations for African railwaymen (and their wives) were also indicative of a European settler policy of profit maximisation in the railways that cared very little about how African communities were impacted.

119. M. Beaumont & M. Freeman. 2007. *The railway and modernity*, p.14.

120. M, Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, p.71; M. Beaumont & M. Freeman. 2007. *The railway and modernity*, p.14.

On a social level, railway infrastructure, that is, the actual train and the entire railway enterprise, was used as a tool for inscribing the ideals of Euromodernity which would result in a positive change for those who encountered it. On board the train, carriages were structured in a way that reflected the outside or the “national space”.¹²¹ Thus, carriages were intended to divide passengers in ways that upheld strict divisions of class, gender and race in a manner that upheld “bourgeois notions of civility”,¹²² however, over time these divisions became more fluid. Ideas of European respectability, which entailed upholding European class, gendered and racial practices along with ‘civilised’ and sophisticated mannerisms, were fostered whilst on the train. Passengers on board these ‘machines of progress’ and people in railway stations were expected to behave accordingly and were constantly reminded to preserve decorum in all their encounters with railway infrastructure. For the Rhodesia Railways, European ideas of decorum and civility amongst employees were instilled and maintained by the Staff Regulations. These carefully constructed and detailed documents, revised and published regularly, put down in writing how both African and European employees were to conduct themselves at work and in living areas. For African railwaymen who prior to their employment had been members of the African peasant economy, the issue of instilling discipline was always at the fore. In 1924 for example, the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways magazine points to a positive change in the behaviour of Africans after spending some time as employees of the railways.¹²³ It appears as though the railways believed that employment and the various rules attached to that employment, were responsible for the onset of civilisation, in comparison to alleged barbarism, of African labourers.

European respectability was fostered in European living areas that housed railway workers and at the workplace. This was done firstly, through the enforcement of very strict geographical boundaries that separated European railway workers and their families from other races who were also associated with the railways. In these European living areas, just like in the train carriage, people were expected to behave in a decorous manner. Christian principles were upheld and these dictated that

121. M, Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, p.74.

122. C. Divali. “Civilising velocity. Masculinity and the marketing of Britain’s passenger trains, 1921-39.” *The Journal of Transport History* 32(2), 2012, p. 164.

123. NRZ Museum Archives. “Native Labour: B&M&R Railways”. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*, Bulletin No.12. 1 July 1924.

households follow the breadwinner model with mostly subservient wives. In cases where wives were employed, their incomes were strictly regulated. Children were also expected to behave accordingly and received an education that would allow them to guard European respectability, particularly in the colonial setting. Secondly, ideas of racial superiority were constantly emphasised by ensuring that European railway workers had the most access to skilled positions and higher wages. In Southern Rhodesia, European women were also employed by the Rhodesia Railways, as is evidenced by the Staff Regulations for salaried staff that refers to expected European female behaviours as employees of the railways.¹²⁴ This is in contrast to African women, who appear to not have had many employment opportunities available to them at the Rhodesia Railways. European women appear to have been employed at the railways as early as 1914 as many European railwaymen were conscripted to go and fight during the Great War.¹²⁵ The initiative that resulted in the entrance of European women into formal employment at the railways at this time became a part of a broader mission in Southern Rhodesia to preserve European respectability at a time when the finances of the colony were in dire straits. This gave European women access to an 'honourable' and 'respectable' way to earn a living at a time when European families in the colony were vulnerable since most male breadwinners had gone to war.

Using the Indian context as an example, Laura Gbah Bear illustrates even further, how this respectability was cultivated.¹²⁶ Railway colonies, very similarly to European railway living areas in Southern Rhodesia, were envisioned to be "artificial European enclaves designed to protect their residents".¹²⁷ One way in which this respectability was maintained in the context of Southern Rhodesia was through the maintenance of respectable living standards for European railwaymen and their families. An analysis of the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways Bulletins from 1921-1926 reveals a very well thought out scheme for both housing and feeding of European

124. NRZ Museum Archives. "Staff regulations. Applicable to members of the salaried staff employed by the Rhodesia Railways Limited." Bulawayo. January 1935.

125. NRZ Museum Archives. E. Lee. "The Trade Union Movement in Rhodesia, 1910-1924." *The Rhodesian Journal of Economics. [The Quarterly Journal of the Rhodesian Economic Society]* Volume 8, no.4, December 1974.

126. L. G. Bear. "Miscegenations of Modernity: constructing European respectability and race in the Indian railway colony, 1857-1931." *Women's History Review* 3(20), 1994, pp. 531-548.

127. L. Gbah Bear. "Miscegenations of modernity", p.531.

railwaymen with the specific goal of upholding “European standards”.¹²⁸ European housing and feeding schemes were structured in ways that catered for the presence of wives and children. Raylton, which was the main living area for European railwaymen and their families in colonial Bulawayo, also provided leisure and entertainment facilities such as movie houses, bars with reasonably priced beer and outlets that were suitable for European women to frequent.¹²⁹ Conversely, the African railway compounds were in a sustained state of dilapidation between 1920 and 1950, despite the several ‘improvements’ made in this space, as seen in later chapters. They also had very little to no affordable entertainment facilities, a situation which African female beer-brewers took advantage of by brewing and selling an illegal beer in compounds or even setting up shebeens.¹³⁰ Compounded with this, low wages that were only adjusted minimally in response to inflation, make it clear that ‘respectability’ in the form of acceptable accommodation, adequate food supplies and reasonable salaries, was something the state and the railways truly ascribed to only Europeans.

As an experience, European and non-European passengers, workers and residents of railway living areas encountered a significant altering of how they understood and engaged with space and time. This resulted in the development of a railway consciousness that influenced their everyday lives. Speaking of the Raylton suburb Burnette *et al*¹³¹ notes that, “residents [of Raylton] could easily walk to work, being reminded of the time by regular sirens which, while the residential suburb has gone, still remind Bulawayo of the daily call to work.”¹³² Sirens in Raylton served many functions, for instance, signalling different shifts for employees working in the workshops or training facilities and indicating the arrival and departure of trains. The residents and employees of Raylton all became accustomed to this, resulting in a railway consciousness in this community. This consciousness is argued to still impact those who still encounter Raylton today.

128. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletins No.1, 5, 8, 12, &17. Bulawayo. September 1921-October 1926.

129. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletins No.1, 5, 8, 12, &17. Bulawayo. September 1921-October 1926.

130. M. West. “Joint drinking’ and the politics of sexual control in colonial Zimbabwe, 1920s-1950s.” *Journal of Social History* 30(3), 1997, pp. 645-667.

131. Burnette. R. *et al*. 2016. *Our Railway Heritage. Historical locomotives, coaches and other relics of the National Railways of Zimbabwe Museum, Bulawayo*. Directory Publishers. Bulawayo.

132. Burnette. R. *et al*. 2016. *Our Railway Heritage*, p.43.

There was a symbolic connection made between Euro (and American) modernity, mobility and the train because of the train's ability to penetrate into territories that had previously been impenetrable. Passengers on board trains and bystanders who watched from the outside were mesmerized by the machine's momentum and experiencing it over time "across...rolling plains, it became akin to a natural agent".¹³³ The train was an agent of transformation both on a personal and societal level. Ideas of space changed as the train moved, with the utmost ease, from one difficult terrain to the next, exposing passengers to unexplored locales that broadened their perceptions of the world. Whilst in the train carriages, Beaumont posits that travellers experienced forms of "optical creation and de-creation"¹³⁴ as they experienced new landscapes either for the first time or in a new light. Their geographical realities altered dramatically on board the train resulting in these creations and de-creations of what they saw. Not only did the train alter people's perceptions of space, but of time as well, as railway timetables instituted new meanings of temporalities. An example of this is how sounds made by the train, at very specific times, signified that it was a particular time of day that necessitated particular activities to be done. Consequently, "the passing trains foster a collective identity,"¹³⁵ that is, a railway consciousness amongst people who lived and worked close to railway stations but also in people who frequently made use of the train. All of these things filtered into, and influenced the lives of people living in close proximity to and working for the railways.

In the colonial context however, indigenous encounters with both Euromodernity and the train were specific to cultural contexts and what the train meant to Africans in colonial Bulawayo "derives from an amalgamation of representations and functions"¹³⁶ which were specific to the Southern Rhodesian context.

2.4 Counter narratives to Euromodernity and a colonial experience with the train

A Eurocentric understanding of modernity has resulted in not only the deliberate marginalisation and epistemic and philosophical erasure of those who fall outside of the sphere of the modern, but also their subsequent exploitation within these spaces. The homogenisation of modernity negates the existence of other modernities that

133. M. Beaumont & M. Freeman. 2007. *The railway and modernity*, p. 18.

134. M. Beaumont & M. Freeman. 2007. *The railway and modernity*, p.22.

135. M, Aguiar. "Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway", p.75.

136. M, Aguiar. "Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway", p.72.

were, and continue to be in existence today. This negation is what facilitated the hegemonic quality of Western modernity and its ability to be a successful tool for colonial expansionism. The successful imprinting of colonial modernity into these spaces became possible through the demonization of all that did not fall into the bounds of science and reason.

If we begin to move away from an understanding of modernity as uniquely Western, spreading to 'archaic' and backward territories that were in such desperate need of its emancipatory qualities, and rather begin to understand that modernity existed and continues to exist in various contexts, appears in different forms and evolves at different paces, a new understanding of colonial histories and implications thereof can be deduced. This section probes into scholarly debate surrounding notions of alternative modernities, with a key focus on demonstrating the nuances that exist between Western and the other modernities, in spite of deliberate moves to push the agenda of a Western modernity to the detriment of the other.

Of great importance for this research is Partha Chatterjee's understanding of an Indian modernity that "thinks with and also against a Western modernity".¹³⁷ He reads modernity as being formed by the nation and notions of nationalism. If modernity is understood as constructed by the nation and if the industrial revolution is seen as the basis for the formation of the nation, then societies that were not a part of this are immediately perceived as falling outside of the category 'nation' and immediately are classified premodern. Such conceptualisations of what it is to be a nation are problematic as they assume that "third-world nationalism as a discourse [is] derivative of a Western form".¹³⁸ What such discussions do is play into facilitating the creation of the binary that Friedman discusses.¹³⁹ Again, there are those that fall into the sphere of nations (and these are subsequently the modern societies), and then there are those that fall outside of the bounds of what it is to be a nation. Colonial territories were made to understand that nationhood, based on a European model and the resultant modernity were the epitome of civilisation and they were consistently pushed to fight to reach this status. In the postcolonial context too, these very same states received the same pressures through rules and regulations set out by institutions such

137. P. Chatterjee. 1986. *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: A derivative discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 78.

138. M. Aguiar. "Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway", p. 68.

139. S.S. Friedman, "Definitional excursions", 2001, p. 507-509.

as the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, for example. Yet, as Aguiar puts it, “these places will be doomed to trying to do so; furthermore, the meaning of national subjectivity will always be “given” and never actively made”.¹⁴⁰

It is necessary to interrogate why such a universalised notion of modernity took prevalence. As already discussed, the Enlightenment claimed to have emancipatory qualities and this emancipation was mainly from tradition, the ‘ancien regime’ or the old order. In colonial spaces, the so-called modern countries saw territories that were still burdened by linkages to the past that needed to be broken if they too were to modernise. The main assumption was, and continues to be, that tradition and modernity are diametrically opposed. Gyekye’s discussion of this, which has been touched on earlier, is an interesting one. He looks at the linkages between the two and in so doing refutes the claim that modernity emanated from the global North.¹⁴¹ By arguing for a reconceptualization of what tradition is, Gyekye speaks to this idea of modernities working with and against each other, discussed by Chatterjee earlier.¹⁴² Western scholars who studied the African continent and other third world spaces put forward decontextualized and dehistoricised understandings of what tradition is. For them, and possibly based on a Western understanding of what forms tradition, traditional societies were those that merely accepted, without interrogation and modification, structures and institutions of the past.¹⁴³ Almost as if stuck in historical limbo, these societies were understood to be incapable of transformation and ultimately, would never attain any form of modernity and therefore stood outside of history, hence the claim that African history started with the arrival of Africans. Aguiar speaks of the narratives surrounding modernity being formed in the context of domination with those in power determining what it was to be ‘modern’ and ‘premodern’.¹⁴⁴ It is therefore not surprising that such an engagement with what tradition is, and the immediate association with stagnation has prevailed for so long.

A critical appraisal of tradition reveals a process that occurs, from generation to generation, and results in reconfiguration, sifting and either an acceptance or denial

140. M. Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, p. 68.

141. K. Gyekye. 1997, *Tradition and modernity*, p. 217.

142. P. Chatterjee. 1986. *Nationalist thought and the colonial world*, p. 78.

143. K. Gyekye. 1997, *Tradition and modernity*, p. 220.

144. M. Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, p. 69; K. Gyekye. 1997. *Tradition and modernity*, p. 221.

of aspects of a culture that are passed down from past generations.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, there is amalgamation of aspects of other cultures that are seen as relevant for that particular generation to form a new tradition that is relevant to them. Thus, as Gyekye puts it, “no human culture is absolutely unchanging, totally refusing to take advantage of possible benefits that often accompany encounters between cultures. Absolute changelessness is therefore impossible.”¹⁴⁶ With this understanding of tradition, is it then not possible to concede the existence of modernities in spaces that were inaccurately viewed as premodern?

Therefore, although the actual term was first coined in the West, if one makes critical use of the very principles of rationality and reason, modernity can be applied to differing cultural and historical contexts, completely disassociated from the West itself. In his article, ‘Our Modernity’, Chatterjee, again building on the idea of a modernity that works with and against that which is imposed from the West states that:

If there is any universally acceptable definition of modernity, it is this: that by teaching us to employ the methods of reason, universal modernity enables us to identify the forms of our own modernity.¹⁴⁷

By taking such an approach, that is, making use of those tools that have facilitated oppression and applying them to contexts that have been viewed in a very particular way, one can begin to read into the existence of modernities in precolonial spaces that have been argued to be stagnant and therefore not modern. Bulawayo thus became a prime example of this. As was typical in the perception of precolonial territories, Bulawayo was viewed from a very specific viewpoint. An article published in 1923 by the British South Africa Annual titled *Taming a savage land. How Rhodesia was developed. Railways and their civilising influence*, described the city as follows:

The development of Bulawayo from a raw, undeveloped land inhabited by one of the most warlike and courageous of South African native tribes, the Matabele, an offshoot of the great Zulu nation, is one of the most fascinating pages of Southern African history.¹⁴⁸

However, if we are to take Gyekye’s interpretation of modernity and tradition as not being polar opposites and begin to think of modernities as existing in different cultural

145. K.Gyekye. 1997. *Tradition and modernity*, p. 217-218.

146. P. Chatterjee. “Our modernity”, p. 9.

147. P. Chatterjee. “Our modernity”, p. 9.

148. NRZ Museum Archives. Colonel C.F. Birney. “Taming a savage land”, p. 138.

contexts and evolving at different paces, one can attempt to paint the contours of the existence of precolonial modernities in the Matabele region prior to colonialism. When Chatterjee's definition is added to this, one is able to discern the contours of a distinctly African modernity operating in precolonial Bulawayo.

Under the rule of Mzilikazi and then Lobengula, the Ndebele state cannot just be identifiable through its purported "bloodthirsty savagery, martial spirit and splendid despotism"¹⁴⁹. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, in his article titled, 'Who ruled by the spear? Rethinking the form of governance in the Ndebele State',¹⁵⁰ interrogates the misconceptions surrounding the structure and functioning of the Ndebele State. This skewed interpretation was very deliberate as it played into the colonial justification narrative or rather, the moral rationalization for colonial expansion into Southern Rhodesia. Eurocentric interpretations of many African institutions were flawed by generalisations and an inability to realise the diversity of different communities, also including the colonial fallacy of the ability of these institutions, structures and practices to evolve over time. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's discussion of the Ndebele reveals a well thought out political system, linked very closely to the economic and social pillars of Ndebele society, in other words the 'rationality' of a complex set of inter-related institutions that constituted the pre-colonial Ndebele state. Ndlovu-Gatsheni begins by making a distinction between the two phases of Ndebele history, something that Western writers of the past (who have dominated the discussion historically) have failed to do. He states:

The first phase of Ndebele history running from 1820-1849 was dominated by migration and violence and covers the turbulent years of the 'mfecane'. The second phase of Ndebele history running from 1841-1893 saw the Ndebele transforming themselves from a life of migration and violence to a new full-fledged settled heterogeneous nation on the Zimbabwean plateau.¹⁵¹

Here there is a clear appreciation of the transformative qualities of the Ndebele state, based on requirements of the time. This shift from being a migrant community, to becoming a nation or state in 1839 when the Ndebele settled in modern day Zimbabwe, disproves colonial narratives of a stagnant society that was incapable of

149. B. Lindgren. 2002. *The politics of Ndebele ethnicity: Origins, Nationality and Gender in Southern Zimbabwe*. (PhD dissertation). Uppsala University.

150. S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. "Who ruled by the spear? Rethinking the form of governance in the Ndebele state." *African Studies Quarterly* 10(2&3), 2008, pp. 71-94.

151. S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. "Who ruled by the spear?" p. 74.

change. The shift from being a migratory group to a settled community resulted in less occurrences of violence and raids. Raids and violence in the first phase of Ndebele history were necessitated by the kind of lifestyle the group lived. Having fled from the Zulu nation, Mzilikazi and his people became dependent on cattle raids for survival. After they became a settled community, the need for such raids and violence decreased and the economy of the Ndebele evolved to suit their position as an established and settled state.¹⁵² Missionaries such as Robert Moffat claimed that these transformations in Ndebele society on the Zimbabwe plateau can only be attributed to the “interventions of a Christian God”¹⁵³, however if one engages with Ndebele history more thoroughly, it can be deduced a move away from raiding and violence was a rational response to the changing circumstances and environment of the group, particularly the change from being nomads.

Some of the other changes that occurred during this period just before European colonisation included the lifting of restrictions on men who had been part of the army. For the first time in Ndebele history, these men could marry and start families, again as a result of a shift in the socio-political makeup of the group, which previously was a warring group constantly on the move in fear of an attack from the Zulu. The position of the King transformed too. He became more than just a powerful military leader, but a spiritual one as well, who kept a council of the most reputable men as his *Indunas*. There were measures put in place to ensure accountability of not only the King, but of the chiefs that ruled under him. Under this new dispensation, those who had been captured during the earlier raids and wars integrated into Ndebele society and formed a vibrant community of different Nguni and non-Nguni groups. Some of these captives even assumed positions of power and respect under the King himself.¹⁵⁴ As Ndlovu-Gatsheni states, “democratic spaces opened up in line with new social and political realities. The Ndebele society became more tolerant, [and] accommodative...”¹⁵⁵ The heterogeneous African population that emerged and grew in the 1920s to the 1950s in Bulawayo developed from a community that was in itself diverse already, as a result

152. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p. 155.

153. J. P. R. Wallis (ed.). 1945. *The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat. 1829-1869*. London: Chatto and Windus, p. 11-12.

154. S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. “Who ruled by the spear?” p.75.

155. S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. “Who ruled by the spear?” p.75.

of this amalgamation of captives and refugees into Ndebele society during the mid-1800s.

The position of women during this phase in Ndebele history is of particular interest as this research aims to trace the transformation that occurred in African women's lives as a result of Western modernity, more specifically through the development of the railways. The Ndebele state was a patriarchy, as were many states in Southern Africa. Women were identified as 'abesintwana' or in the same category as children.¹⁵⁶ They were viewed neither as active nor independent individuals in society capable of living lives separate from their male guardians. This is why during the 1920s to the 1950s there is an outcry by African men, spearheaded by the chiefs, to curb the increased independence and mobility of African women in Matabeleland. Their positioning in Ndebele society was to be determined by first their fathers and then upon marriage, by their husbands. The majority of the time, the voice of the woman in Ndebele society could be heard only through a man. This is not to say there were no exceptions. The placement of women in Ndebele society was also determined by their respective class or social category. This meant that the higher up in the social strata, the more 'power' these women were allotted. Privileges that were enjoyed by such women included the ability to affect public policy or the manner in which conflict was handled. They also had the ability to choose whom to marry and usually they chose the wealthier and more influential suitors, allowing them more of a voice in the public realm.¹⁵⁷ Alliances between the Ndebele state and other kingdoms were also usually solidified through the marriage of such women. A prime example of such an influential woman is Lokizeyi Dlodlo, Lobengula's Queen and second wife. She was well known for her insubordination and frankness, especially concerning the issue of European settlers.¹⁵⁸ It is clear however, that in spite of this, Ndebele women in Southern Rhodesia were not accustomed to the freedoms that African women enjoy with the inscribing of Western modernity. Their movements were strictly regulated and their impact in the public sphere was always dependent on men.

156. S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. "Who ruled by the spear?" p.75.

157. B. Mahamba. 1996. *Women in the history of the Ndebele*. (MA dissertation). University of Zimbabwe.

158. Clarke, M. & P. Nyathi. 2010. *Lozikeyi Dlodlo, Queen of the Ndebele: A very dangerous and intriguing woman*. Oxford: African Books Collective.

In her engagement with the Indian experience with the train and British modernity, Aguiar argues that “colonial rhetoric promoted the train as a means of freeing Indians from tradition through increased mobility.”¹⁵⁹ This highlights the overall colonial experience with technological development, as it was a belief that indigenous and native people were immobile prior to colonialism, a reflection of their supposed static nature. By making mobility uniquely Western, Euromodernity used technological development as justification for colonialism. Contrary to this however, precolonial communities in Africa and India alike, engaged in extensive migration in and around their regions. Many African tribes, like the Ndebele, were semi-Nomadic and animals were domesticated that facilitated the transportation of both people and goods.¹⁶⁰ In spite of claims that there was no innovation relating to transport on the continent, there is historical evidence of significant development of water-based transportation, along with road and street development to accommodate animal and pedestrian traffic. As early as 1602 for example, British explorers made note of unpaved but nonetheless impressive roads in Benin, roads in the Ashanti Empire and Caravan Routes that connected Niger to Timbuctoo.¹⁶¹ Although these developments were undeniably at a much smaller scale than that of railway development, these innovations prior to a western presence on the continent disprove notions of African staticity, lack of innovation and technological progress. People, goods, information and ideas were always on the move.¹⁶²

As will become evident in ensuing chapters, technological development, instead of being the desired tool for civilising ‘backward’ communities, stood as symbols of colonialism and oppression. Powerful machines such as the train, whilst acting as agents of positive transformation for the colonised, through the broadening of literal and metaphorical horizons, also fostered their indigence. African labour was exploited as mostly men, but also some women, worked as unskilled, low paid wage labour and this cheap labour was essential for the success of the colonial venture. This success was also due to railway development as “the movement of ideas, information,

159. M. Aguiar. 2011. *Tracking modernity. India’s railway and the culture of mobility*, p. xv.

160. A. J. Njoh. “Implications of Africa’s transportation systems for development in the era of globalisation.” *Rev Black Polit Econ* 35, 2008, p. 147.

161. A. J. Njoh. “Implications of Africa’s transportation systems for development in the era of globalisation.” *Rev Black Polit Econ* 35, 2008, p. 149.

162. A. J. Njoh. “Implications of Africa’s transportation systems for development in the era of globalisation”, pp. 147-148.

manufactured construction parts and goods helped make the colony appear proximate”.¹⁶³ Without an effective communication and transport system, administering the colony would have been almost impossible. It will become clear, however, that the British colonial administration in Southern Africa had no interest in encouraging an unfettered freedom of movement for Africans via the train. In fact, strict controls were implemented to ensure that Africans would not pose a threat to, or disrupt, settler advancement in the colony. Allowing Africans complete liberty of movement would do so.¹⁶⁴ In spite of this, Africans did make use of the train and moved into the urban setting. Within these new spaces, Africans were able to construct new identities; identities that were “extracted from the complexities of the location”.¹⁶⁵

163. M. Aguiar. 2011. *Tracking modernity. India's railway and the culture of mobility*, p. xiii.

164. M. Aguiar. 2011. *Tracking modernity. India's railway and the culture of mobility*, p. xvi.

165. M. Aguiar. “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, p. 73.

Chapter 3: Railways as the measure of men, challenging androcentric histories and gendered migration into urban Bulawayo

Having acknowledged that modernity is a complex and multifaceted social project that is not only unique to the West but rather, exists in different cultural contexts and at different historical moments, it becomes clear that a reconceptualised modernity can be used to engage the colonial archive in a new light. The act of making space for epistemologies that fall outside of Eurocentric ways of being and reinserting silenced voices into the historical record contributes towards decolonial initiatives targeted at the colonial archive, which is partial in its representation of historical events. An important part of this is challenging androcentric colonial histories.

One area in Zimbabwean history where this is still very prevalent are the railway histories of Zimbabwe. As an important literal and symbolic representation of Euromodernity, the train impacted the lives of both African men and women in Bulawayo significantly. As was the case with all industrial ventures within the former colony, the success of the Rhodesia Railways was dependent on the constant supply of a cheap African labour force. The changes that occurred within the Southern Rhodesian political economy from 1905 onwards, primarily the disruption of the agrarian society in favour of European capitalistic ventures, resulted in the large-scale migration of Africans out of their homesteads into urban centres to become a part of the colonial wage economy. The train was integral in these processes as it acted as a means to transport, en masse, Africans away from their homes into urban Bulawayo where they became unskilled and under paid labourers for the Rhodesia Railways. The implications of this on the overall livelihoods of Africans was largely negative. Whilst the colonial archive acknowledges these events, although from a racially skewed perspective, it also narrates them from a gender-blind stance. This suggests that African women were not a part of these movements, or that their mobility during this period was insignificant.¹⁶⁶ Yet, there can be no complete history of Zimbabwe that deals with technology, transport and migration that excludes women who have a very valid story to be told.

The androcentrism in the railway histories of Zimbabwe is rooted in the conceptualisation of the train as being a male domain. From this point onwards in this

166. T. Barnes. 2002. *Virgin Territory?*

research however, there will be an attempt to address the changes in urban Bulawayo fostered by the train along gendered lines. In light of this, this chapter will engage with Bulawayo's ascendancy as a 'little England' which paved the way for its positioning as one of the most important cities in the history of not only Southern Rhodesia, but Southern Africa as a whole. The city's centrality in this research is based on this positioning, along with its dynamic socioeconomic and political environment that underwent several changes between 1920 and the late 1950s. By the time it attained its city status in 1946, Bulawayo was a well-established colonial cosmopolitan city and this cosmopolitanism was largely influenced by its demography. It was predominantly populated by African bodies; the Ndebele, immigrants from Mashonaland and Manicaland, Northern Rhodesia (modern day Zambia), Nyasaland (Malawi) and Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). At the core of this city's transformation was the migration of both men and women into the city space.

3.1 The Bulawayo railway line and Rhodesia Railways

Bulawayo is uniquely positioned in the railway history of colonial Zimbabwe. It was in Bulawayo that the first train entered Southern Rhodesia in 1897. Railway construction in the country had begun much earlier in 1892 with the building of a railway line connecting Umtali, modern day Mutare, to Fontesvilla, known today as Nhamatanda in Mozambique. In 1893, the construction of the line between Vryburg, located in the Cape Colony and Bulawayo began and was finally completed in 1897.

The completion of this section of the Cape to Cairo was commemorated by a historic celebration, welcoming the railway to Bulawayo.¹⁶⁷ The significance of this line for the realisation of the Cape to Cairo dream cannot be underestimated because it became one of the foremost steps into opening up the heart of the continent and creating a path to the North. Bulawayo and the administrative capital of the colony, Salisbury, were connected via a railway line in October 1902. In 1903, construction from Bulawayo occurred linking Northern and Southern Rhodesia, an integral link which facilitated labour migration from the North into the South of Rhodesia.¹⁶⁸

167. L. W. Bolze, "The railway comes to Bulawayo."

168. J. Lunn. 1997. *Capital and labour in the Rhodesian Railway System*, p .2.



Map 2¹⁶⁹

Map 2 illustrates the extent of railway development in Southern Rhodesia and its connections into several parts of Southern Africa in 1908. Railway construction up until 1927 was managed by the Mashonaland Railway Company, also known as the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesian Railways. From 1927 however, control of the railways in Rhodesia was assumed by Rhodesia Railways, under the full control of the BSAC.¹⁷⁰ Rhodesia Railways was thus a wholly-owned BSAC subsidiary which further meant that Rhodes had unfettered control over railway development. In 1947 when the Rhodesian Government acquired control of the railways, the British South Africa Company lost control them. However, a sizable amount of railway development that occurred between the late 1800s to the mid-1940s can be attributed to the BSAC and Rhodes.

169. Cape Government Railways map. *Cape of Good Hope (Colony)*. Cape Government Railways. 1908, Published by the University of Cape Town Libraries, South Africa.

170. *NRZ Museum Archives*. Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways Bulletin No.31. General Manager's Office. Bulawayo. 1929.

Prior to 1911, the Rhodesia Railways Headquarters were located in Umtali but in 1911, its location changed to Bulawayo.¹⁷¹ Once this occurred, the development of Bulawayo into the commercial capital of the colony became almost inevitable. The city was strategically situated between, and connected by the railway, with some of the most sought over territories in the continent. To the south of its borders, Bulawayo was connected to the ports of the Cape, Durban and Port Elizabeth through the Vryburg-Bulawayo line. To the north-east, it was connected to Salisbury and Umtali, which were linked to the ports at Beira in Portuguese East Africa. To the North-West, the city was connected to Wankie and Victoria Falls. Tracks to the North-East connected Bulawayo, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which were essential sources of African cheap labour. Much further north into the heart of the continent, railway linkages were made which opened up the Belgian Congo and the copper mines in Katanga.¹⁷²

It is important to remember that in Bulawayo, a significant percentage of trains entering and exiting the space consisted of cargo trains transporting goods and minerals, pointing to the prioritisation of commercial over passenger traffic.¹⁷³ The city's positioning allowed Rhodesia Railways to expand trade connections with parts of the continent, solidifying Bulawayo's position as the commercial and industrial hub of Southern Rhodesia. It also made the city a paramount space that had the potential to determine many of the successes and failures of the railways within the region. Any disruptions in traffic on the Bulawayo line would have significant economic implications on the entire region.¹⁷⁴

In spite of this emphasis of commercial traffic, the passenger trains of Bulawayo were also active. European settlers in the colony and tourists from abroad made extensive uses of the train. Africans also made use of the trains, although many could not afford to use it frequently. As such, although it is possible that African women made use of the train to either flee rural reserves, travel to the urban areas with the approval of chiefs or to follow their migrant husbands, their relative absence from the colonial

171. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletin No.1. General Manager's Office. Bulawayo. 1921, p. 2.

172. J. Lunn. 1997. *Capital and labour in the Rhodesian Railway System*, p.2.

173. In 1923, the General Manager of the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways in Bulawayo stated that, "on the railway systems of this country, passenger traffic is remarkably light to goods traffic", a sentiment shared in later publications of the magazines until the 1950s. See NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletins No.8. Bulawayo. 2 July 1923.

174. NRZ Museum Archives. *South African Railways and Harbours Magazine*. Bulletin No. 2. Cape Town, 25 June 1921.

archive makes it difficult to ascertain to what extent they used trains. The two main sources of primary material on anything related to Rhodesia Railways used in this research were the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare and the National Railways of Zimbabwe Museum in Bulawayo. The records found here, ranging from passenger logs to various documents concerning the different railway strikes that occurred between the years 1920 and 1950, to name only a few, are silent or speak rather vaguely of African women.¹⁷⁵ This androcentrism and assertion of archival power has resulted in the almost complete erasure of women from their own histories. The railway passenger logs of Rhodesia Railways, which were perused in the hopes of determining more concretely the migrational patterns of African women, do not differentiate between African (or Coloured and Asian) male and female passengers and yet at times there was a differentiation made in the European context. This makes it particularly challenging for Historians and other scholars to assess African female experiences with the train within such a fascinating context. The colonial archive along with historical and fictional literature in Zimbabwe does not actively engage with the interaction between technological development (in this case the railways) and African women.¹⁷⁶ Faced with such challenges, a gendered analysis of African mobility patterns, technological advancements and the implications thereof of on rural and urban societies becomes a daunting task. Nonetheless, it is possible to begin reinserting African women from rural Bulawayo, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and from Portuguese East Africa (modern day Mozambique) into the colonial history of urban Bulawayo and its related peri-urban and rural areas by reading against the archival grain.¹⁷⁷

3.2 Powerful machines are for men: Female respectability and the train

Before engaging with African female experiences with railway infrastructure in Bulawayo and how it impacted their socioeconomic livelihoods, probing further into the

175. For example: NAZ ZBI 2/1/1. "Report of the Howman Committee to investigate the economic, social and health conditions of Africans in urban areas." Bulawayo, 7th October 1943; NRZ Museum Archives. *Rhodesia Railways Ltd.* "Staff regulations (discipline): African employees. Applicable to African employees of the Rhodesia Railways." May 1953;

176. With regards to fictional literature, novels such as 'Butterfly Burning' are an exception in some sense as they deal with symbolic representations and meanings on African societies in Bulawayo and how this impacts gendered relations.

177. Migration of Africans from Portuguese East Africa moving into Bulawayo increased from the 1940s onwards. Prior to this, the numbers coming into Bulawayo from this region were not substantial. See P. Scott. "Migrant labour in Southern Rhodesia." *Geographical Review* 44(1), 1954, pp. 29-48.

train itself is essential. As discussed in the previous chapter, the train carried with it various meanings, influenced by different contexts. In colonial and colonising states alike, railway carriages were structured in ways that were intended to reflect a supposedly civilised society, one in which the people prescribed to a Eurocentred understanding of respectability.¹⁷⁸ Overtime, the train was understood as a microcosm of this kind of society, a key example of this being the separation of different races, classes and genders in train carriages. Carriages were organised in ways that highlighted racial differences, that is, European and African passengers could not ride in the same space in the same way that they could not live in the same areas. Similarly, aristocratic European classes had separate compartments from lower classes and at times there were gender specific carriages that divided men and women which was intended to safeguard female travellers. Although over time these strict divisions became more fluid, train carriages were designed in ways that maintained societal norms of racial exclusivity and acceptable gendered practices of the time. Of importance here is the relationship between the railways and gender and how this relationship was shaped by the aforesaid social regulations. Powerful machines such as the train were associated with masculinity and a female “public domesticity”¹⁷⁹ on the train was cultivated. This association of the train and overall railway infrastructure with masculinity was reinforced in European and American societies during their railway ages and there was a concerted attempt to export these ideas as is to the colonial context.

According to Oreyonke Oyewumi¹⁸⁰ biology is of great importance in European societies. The identities of people within these spaces have historically been determined by science and what is known as the “prism of heritability”¹⁸¹. This is the theory that posits “diseases as well as money runs in families”.¹⁸² This idea, along with

178. M. Beaumont & M. Freeman. 2007. *The railway and modernity*, pp.18-20; M. Aguiar, “Making modernity: Inside the technological space of the railway”, pp.73-75.

179. A.G. Richter. 2005. *Home on the rails: Women, the railroad and the rise of public domesticity*. The University of North Carolina Press. London.

180. O. Oyewumi., “Conceptualising gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of feminist concepts and the challenge of African epistemologies”, *Jenda. A Journal of Culture and African Women’s Studies* 2(1), 2002, pp.1-5.

181. O. Oyewumi. 2005. *Visualising the body: Western theories and African subjects*, in: *African gender studies: A reader*, edited by Oyeronke Oyewumi, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 7.

182. O. Oyewumi. 2005. *Visualising the body*, p. 7.

ideas of Social Darwinism, heterosexuality and the nuclear family, position the European man as superior in all regards. Euromodernity, and the European and American worlds place emphasis on the physical body and 'body-reasoning'. This kind of reasoning places emphasis not only on the physical body, which encompasses the colour of a person's skin and their sex, but also on what can be seen. By doing so, what is unseen, such as ancestral worship, is immediately discredited as unscientific and therefore outside of the realm of Euromodernity. Christian faith is the only kind of 'unseen' that is permissible. Placing emphasis on the physical body and sight in these spaces has meant that "society is seen as an accurate reflection of genetic endowment-those with a superior biology inevitably are those in superior social positions. No difference is elaborated without bodies that are positioned hierarchically".¹⁸³ People of European descent, in this regard, are perceived to have this superior biology.

Within the context of railway infrastructure in colonial Zimbabwe, European railwaymen, in much the same way as European labourers in other industries, believed in the preservation of white superiority in the workplace, based on these aforementioned principles. As a result, prior to the changes that occurred in employment practices in Southern Rhodesia concerning African labour in the late 1950s, the terms skilled and semi-skilled labour were [almost completely] synonymous with European labour.¹⁸⁴ European railwaymen expressed their fervent belief in the need to preserve their positions as "fitters, brass-finishers, iron and steel turners, coppersmiths, welders, plumbers, tinsmiths, boilermakers, springsmiths, blacksmiths, electricians, pattern makers, moulders, coach builders, carpenters, trimmers, painters, wood machinists and riveters, [and semi-skilled positions of] handymen, machinists, drillers, crane drivers, metallers, lead burners, second-grade riveters, linesmen,

183. O. Oyewumi. 2005. *Visualising the body*, p. 7.

184. An example of the change in perspectives with regards to African labour and the willingness to improve their socioeconomic standing in Southern Rhodesian society is evidenced in the Report of Native Production and Trade Commission(1944) which states, "it is essential for the preservation of the European civilisation that the African should be advanced. No country can prosper with its masses living in ignorance and poverty." This statement is in reference to the policy of parallel development which is discussed in later sections. Whilst this policy was implemented with the intention of making relative improvements to the status of African labourers, by for example, offering some positions as skilled and semi-skilled labour, the preservation of the European race was always the prime focus. See: NRZ Museum Archives. "Report of the Native Production and Trade Commission". 1944 C.S.R. Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. 1945.

battery hands, shift enginemen, core makers, machine moulders and truck fitters”¹⁸⁵ and the need to maintain the status quo of “unskilled manual labour performed by natives”.¹⁸⁶

In the article, ‘The Trade Union Movement in Rhodesia, 1910-1924’,¹⁸⁷ Elaine Lee notes that racial segregation and demands for an industrial colour bar that would ensure the superiority of all European railwaymen (and all other European labourers), in the workplace were “on accession the actual cause of the strikes.”¹⁸⁸ Racist sentiments were influential in the formation of the Rhodesia Railways Worker’s Union (RRWU), a trade union that represented railway workers in the colony and was at the forefront of the European railway strikes, with the first one starting immediately after the union’s conception during the first World War in 1917, followed by others in February 1919, March 1920 and arguably the most notable one, the European railway strike of 1929. Several factors were at play during this period which led to calls to strike by European railwaymen, for example, low wages that were not adjusted in response to the global post war recession, sick days and paid leave which had increasingly become contentious issues and what they considered inappropriate food rations for an important section of the European population in the colony.¹⁸⁹ The issue of race and ensuring the preservation of the European status quo was always at the centre of all of these grievances. This can be seen, for example, in the court of inquiry set up in 1927, a few years before the outbreak of the strike of strike of 1929, to investigate the situation of European railway workers who had been in a condition of perpetual unrest and discontent since the end of the First World War.¹⁹⁰ A European railwayman’s testimony in this court of inquiry noted that “the rate of wages on these railways is not

185. NRZ Museum Archives. “The railway mechanical workshops at Bulawayo.” *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletin no.31. April 1929.

186. NRZ Museum Archives. “Native Labour.” *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletin no.12. July 1924.

187. NRZ Museum Archives. E. Lee. “The Trade Union Movement in Rhodesia, 1910-1924.” *The Rhodesian Journal of Economics*. [*The Quarterly Journal of the Rhodesian Economic Society*] Volume 8, no.4, December 1974.

188. NRZ Museum Archives. E. Lee. “The Trade Union Movement in Rhodesia,” p. 216.

189. Nuances can be drawn between the grievances of European and African railway strikers during the 1920s. African railway workers and the Rhodesia Railways African Employees’ Union (RRAEU) also went to strike following the strike of 1917 and “despite the fact that the RRWU was openly racist in its objectives, and opposed the use of skilled non-white labour”, African railwaymen were inspired by the strike action taken by European railwaymen whose grievances were very similar to theirs. See NRZ Museum Archives. E. Lee. “The Trade Union Movement in Rhodesia,” pp. 224-226.

190. NRZ Archives Museum. “Rhodesia Railway Workers Union.” *Court of enquiry*. Bulawayo 1927.

sufficient to enable a white man to keep up a civilised standard of living,”¹⁹¹ highlighting how important wage increases, along with other improvements at the workplace were for the preservation of white superiority within the colony. The RRWU also brought to the fore the issue of food, particularly the distribution of “the despised mealie-meal” to white railwaymen, which was a staple for Africans. The union claimed that it was impossible to maintain bourgeois notions of civility when European railwaymen, and in most cases their families, were subjected to a similar diet as Africans, not taking into account of course, that the quality and quantity of food distributed to African railwaymen was poor and significantly less.¹⁹² The connection that European railwaymen made between ‘civility’ and eating the right kind of food, that is, food not eaten by Africans, along with the need to preserve skilled positions in the workplace strictly for white individuals, illustrates just how powerful the aforementioned ideas of body-reasoning and the prism of heritability were in colonial Bulawayo amongst European railwaymen.

Sex and more specifically gender, from a European perspective, has, at times, been understood as a determinant for a person’s social position. Biological determinism positions European men as superior beings who, in spite of placing emphasis on embodying everything, are without bodies. European men have been presented as the philosophical “man of reason”.¹⁹³ In stark contrast to this is the European “woman of the body” who is viewed as biologically inferior and requires not only the protection of the “man of reason”, but is also dependant on his guidance and providence. From this understanding of the nature of men and women arises European gender roles with women being classified as home makers whose primary purpose in life is sexual reproduction. Viewed as physically weak, the public realm was conceived as too dangerous for women and the private realm, more specifically, the home, was believed to be a safe space suited to their physicality. In this ideal European setting, women had very little to no productive power and remained wholly economically dependent on their male counterparts for the rest of their lives. Men were even expected to

191. NRZ Archives Museum. “Rhodesia Railway Workers Union.” *Court of enquiry*. Bulawayo 1927.

192. At the time of the inquiry, African railway workers had already staged at least one strike (although it was not well organised and not very successful), that put forward the issue of food rations, with specific reference to their inadequacy and poor quality. See NAZ N 9/1/22. “Annual Report of the Superintendent of Natives.” Bulawayo. 1919.

193. O. Oyewumi. 2005. *Visualising the body*, p. 7.

provide for the weaker population; i.e. women and children, in death, by leaving them with an inheritance that they spent most of their lives saving up for.

This conceptualisation of gender filtered into the different experiences that men and women had with technology. As Richter points out, for European passengers, the railways became an extension of the domestic and social realms. A Eurocentric understanding of the family dictated that men were the strong ones, always on the move, actively taking care of their dependents. Men were comfortable in the public realm with no or very little threat to their safety or wellbeing and were mobile beings, whose priorities were centred on providing and protecting their families. The image of women was in contrast to this. Women were first and foremost mothers and wives. As a home maker, the entry of a woman into the public domain was expected to only be in relation to her duties in the home. Speaking directly to this, Margaret Walsh points out that (women in early nineteenth century England), “instead of attempting to free themselves from their domestic roles and responsibilities, many nineteenth century women travelled in order to meet the demands of the private sphere.”¹⁹⁴ Women in this scenario did not immediately challenge their specifically defined domestic roles and extended them even to train travel by utilising it in ways that allowed them to perform their mandated duties. As such, men and women’s experiences with the train were ordered accordingly. On board the train, men were in their element and its speed and forward motion supposedly mirrored their lives, fast paced and always in forward motion in order to meet the demands of being a breadwinner. Since the train was characterised by rapid movement, strength and its role as an agent of mobility, it was equated with masculinity and virility.¹⁹⁵ Women on the other hand did not belong in such a fast-paced world, riddled with imminent dangers at every turn and this in essence meant that they had to utilise the train cautiously and practically to meet the demands of being homemakers. Euromodernity and the idea of the nuclear family dictated that women remain immobile and, in the home, where they were ‘safe’ and catered for. Their societal roles revolved around child bearing and catering for their husbands and as such, technological innovations such as the iron and sewing machine were equated with femininity.¹⁹⁶

194. A. G. Richter. 2005. *Home on the rails*, p.35.

195. F. Bray. “Gender and technology.” *Anthropol* 36, 2007, pp. 37-53.

196. F. Bray. “Gender and technology.” *Anthropol* 36, 2007, pp. 37-53.

Within Southern Rhodesia, the way in which gender impacted railway infrastructure manifests itself in several ways. For instance, the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways, later known as the Rhodesia Railways, perpetuated the very ideas discussed in previous paragraphs in their employment practices. During the period under study, the Rhodesia Railways was predominantly a male space and this is true for both Europeans and Africans. For Africans, both Vickery and Barnes, who have studied the railway histories of Zimbabwe, attest to the fact that there is barely any record of African women employed by the railways between 1920 and 1950.¹⁹⁷ Archival work done for this research also attests to this. Documents published by the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways between 1920 and 1927 for example, all speak to the recruitment of native boys and men as contract labourers, with not a single mention of recruitment of native women.¹⁹⁸ In 1929, the same publisher, when discussing specifically the issue of employment in the railway mechanical workshops of Bulawayo, details the presence of “four hundred skilled and semi-skilled artisans and six hundred native labourers”,¹⁹⁹ none of which reference the employment of women, African or European.²⁰⁰

Unlike their African counterparts however, European women were employed in other sectors of the railways. Their experiences as employees of the railways was nonetheless strictly regulated because they were women. An example of the ways in which this control was exerted can be found in the Staff Regulations issued by the Rhodesia Railways from 1930. In these thick booklets that detail acceptable and unacceptable behaviours of railway employees, along with punishments for contravening these rules, emphasis was always placed on the issue of European women, particularly the matter of marital status and employability. A case in point are the Staff Regulations published in 1933 which note that “all appointments in the service are subject to ratification by the General Manager. The sanction of the General Manager is obtained before...the appointment of married women”²⁰¹, a ratification of

197. T. Barnes. “So that a labourer could live with his family “; K.P. Vickery. “The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II”.

198. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletins No.1-22. Bulawayo. August 1920- October 1926.

199. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletin No.31. Bulawayo. July 1929.

200. L. Jackson. ‘*When in the White Man’s Town*’.

201. NRZ Museum Archives. *The Rhodesia Railways Limited*. Staff Regulations. *Applicable to the members of Wages Staff employed on the lines operated by the Rhodesia Railways Limited*. July 1933.

the 1930 regulation which stated that once a female employee was married they had to resign. As such, and even though such a conceptualisation of European working women changed over time, white women at this time were seen fundamentally as domestic beings whose status as a wife was more important than her position as an employee of the railways.

Within and beyond the borders of the colony, it is evident that with the passage of time, women could not be wholly excluded from experiencing this ‘civilising’ machine, since the train symbolised progress in its constant forward motion.²⁰² Gradually, women had to be granted access to train travel either for touristic or work-related purposes. Once on-board trains, it was expected that ‘proper’, Christian and Eurocentric gender norms be maintained. This is where the idea of public domesticity and female respectability on board trains arises. European women were expected to preserve what was perceived to be integral notions of bourgeois domesticity.²⁰³ This essentially meant that women’s engagement with trains and railway infrastructure had to, at all times, be cognisant of the fact that the realm of powerful machines was the domain of men. Female passengers had to be accompanied by male travellers, a reflection of the supposed imminent danger to the weaker sex. If they were not accompanied by male counterparts, railway officials acted as their guardians who supervised and regulated their behaviour. This is partly why many people began to see “the railroad and contemporary life as reflections of each other”²⁰⁴ European women would be in the train carriage but would essentially behave as if they were in the home. To make the experience on board trains more suitable for a growing new female clientele, advertising for train rides was modified to entice more female travellers by emphasising measures that were put in place to ensure their safety and to promote this public domesticity. For example, many British and American railway companies reiterated the availability of gender specific carriages and attentive railway personnel in their advertisements. Train carriages for middle class women were also upgraded with more feminine décor such through the use of softer and lighter colours and decorative furnishings.²⁰⁵ In contrast, male carriages and the overall male experience

202. B. Muellner. “The deviance of respectability. Nineteenth century transport from a woman’s perspective.” *The Journal of Transport History* 23(1), p.37.

203. L. Gbah Bear. “Miscegenations of modernity”, p.533.

204. A .G. Richter. 2005. *Home on the rails*, p. 15.

205. M. Walsh. “Gender in the history of transportation services: A historiographical perspective.” *Business History Review* 81(3), 2007, p.551.

on board the train was meant to reflect a certain level of machismo by limiting their regulation and supervision and grouping likeminded men of proportionate calibre together, but also through masculine décor, which comprised of dark and muted colours. However, carriages for lower classes were not as refined and did not carry with them such strong demands for public domesticity. In the colonial context of Southern Rhodesia, European women were given more opportunities to work for the railways, however, as already mentioned, once married, their employment would be terminated.

Having been exposed to mostly the domestic realm, train travel and the opportunities that it offered for the broadening of physical and metaphorical horizons, was not always seen in a positive light by European female travellers. Outside of the home, these women faced both very real and sometimes imagined threats to their safety. Cases of theft, rape and murder whilst on the train terrified women who as a result, preferred to travel with men who could provide them with protection.²⁰⁶ Where women travelled alone, many preferred to make use of the gender specific carriages, where they were in the company of other women, but still protected by railway officials from unscrupulous male travellers. This undoubtedly changed over time, and it would be inaccurate to generalise this to be how every single European woman engaged with the train, but studies, such as those quoted in this section, agree that the empirical data available demonstrates that an initial European female encounter with the railways in the early 1800s, was one that did not initially seek to disrupt these bourgeois notions of being male and female. Richter argues that by straddling both the public and private realm in this way, European women were actually part of an important process of social transformation in Europe and America that slowly began to reconceptualise the train as more than just the measure of men.²⁰⁷

The connection between the train and masculinity was concretized even further by the fact that it was mostly men who worked for railway companies. Because of this, railwaymen developed a very specific brand of masculinity that was cultivated by railway enterprises and the Eurocentric bread winner and nuclear family models. The nuclear family is a social construct where a man is positioned as the head of the

206. B. Muellner. "The deviance of respectability", pp.37-40; R.J. Barrow. "Rape on the railway. Women, safety, and moral panic in Victorian newspapers." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20(1), 2015, pp.341-356.
207. A.G. Richter. 2005. *Home on the rails*.

household and as a consequence of biological determinism, a woman is positioned under him in total subservience with little to no productive power. Her sole purpose is for sexual reproduction. Breadwinners, emanating from this nuclear family model, provide the main source of income within the home and as a result carry “masculine privileges within the home”.²⁰⁸ At work, European railwaymen’s racial superiority was preserved by the colour bar and at home, railway officials emphasised that women’s domestic habits and morality be preserved at all costs.

This relationship between gender and technology was exported into the colonial context. European settlers were expected to uphold these bourgeois notions of respectability on board the train, at work and in the home. At work, both African and European railwaymen needed to uphold certain standards, with an emphasis placed on discipline when it came to African railwaymen, whereas for Europeans, emphasis was placed on protecting their civility at all costs.²⁰⁹ Revisiting the previously mentioned Staff Regulations is important here. In the publications of 1933, 1935 and 1953, the issue of ‘discipline’ amongst both African and European railwaymen is rooted in a specific Eurocentred ideal of what it is to be an acceptable employee of the railways.²¹⁰ By setting down rules related to acceptable and unacceptable practices in not only the workplace but in railway owned spaces such recreational areas and compounds, along with stipulating guidelines pertaining to pay, criteria for employment and how Europeans in charge of African railwaymen were to conduct themselves, the railways hoped to preserve European principles and practices of civility. For example, by stating that European railway officials who worked with Africans “must see that a native suffering from infectious disease is immediately isolated and full particulars of the case sent to the Railway Medical Officer whose duty is to notify the proper authorities without delay,”²¹¹ the railways highlight the all-important matter of protecting the European settler population from the supposedly

208. M. Walsh. “Gender in the history of transportation services: A historiographical perspective.” *Business History Review* 81(3), 2007, p.549.

209. NRZ Archives Museum. *The Rhodesia Railways Limited*. July 1933.

210. NRZ Museum Archives. *The Rhodesia Railways Limited*. July 1933; NRZ Museum Archives. *Staff regulations. Applicable to members of the salaried staff employed by the Rhodesia Railways Limited*. Bulawayo. January 1935; NRZ Museum Archives. *Rhodesia Railways Ltd*. “Staff regulations (discipline): African employees. Applicable to African employees of the Rhodesia Railways” May 1953.

211. NRZ Museum Archives. *Rhodesia Railways Ltd*. “Staff regulations. Applicable to members of the salaried staff employed by the Rhodesia Railways Limited. Bulawayo.” January 1935, p. 19.

'diseased' African. A 'proper' European was one free from diseases, therefore, guarding against disease was of utmost importance.

Although colonised people were not expected to uphold the same notions of civility as Europeans on-board trains, especially since compartments for non-European races were not designed or regulated in ways that perpetuated bourgeois respectability, the experience of Africans with railway infrastructure as the measure of men is quite interesting. Colonised people were seen not as human beings but as animals, savage and untamed.²¹² Only Europeans were completely human and "hermaphrodites, sodomites, viragos and the colonized were all understood to be aberrations of male (European) perfection".²¹³ Consequently, African men, even the emergent African male elite of the 1930s, were not held in high esteem by European men and as such, although the train was a male domain, it was not the domain of African men. European men were modern and 'belonged' with the powerful machine whilst African men were traditional and best utilised as cheap manual labour for railway companies. A case in point is found in the protests organised by the racist RRWU from 1917. These protests presented as one of their most important grievances, the issue of maintaining what later became known as the Industrial Colour Bar, in order to ensure that skilled and semi-skilled positions remained the domain of whiteness.

Nonetheless, many African railwaymen in Bulawayo, similarly to other African industrial labourers throughout the colony, had ambitions to become a part of the urban elite, despite resistance. By embracing elements of European culture, such as structuring families along the nuclear-family and male breadwinner models,²¹⁴ African railwaymen demonstrated that they could be a steady and reliable workforce for white monopoly capital, should they be allowed to become permanent inhabitants of urban spaces. As will be discussed in greater depth in the ensuing section, changes in the socioeconomic colonial climate caused this drastic shift in the mentality of African migrants who now saw urban spaces as their only means of survival, forcing them to cut ties with their rural homesteads. Unable to stretch their meagre salaries to support

212. M. Lugones. "Toward a decolonial Feminism" *Hypatia* 25(4); 2010, p. 744

213. M. Lugones. "Toward a decolonial Feminism", p.743.

214. O. Oyewumi. "Conceptualising gender", pp.1-5; T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p. 65-75. Even though Africans did this, they never wholly disassociated from their own cultural practices. This resulted in an interesting amalgamation of African and European modernities that impacted the ways in which African railway families functioned.

entire communities back home, African men began to focus on their livelihoods in urban areas, sending word for their wives and one or two children to join them in their new homes- the urban areas. Those who were not married were able find wives, temporary or permanent, in urban spaces with relative ease.²¹⁵

As these changes occurred, railway compounds were increasingly saturated by women, who in some instances posed a threat to the images that African men in urban spaces wanted to construct for themselves. African women's entry into these spaces also caused an accommodation and health crisis that was to be a perpetual point of conflict between the Rhodesia Railways and the colonial administration until 1947. In 1924 the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways stated that "in order to better the housing of natives, very heavy expenditure had been incurred, amounting to about thirty thousand pounds in the last five years,"²¹⁶ a mere fraction of what was spent on European housing during the same period. The attention paid to the issue of African housing at this time however, was connected to changes in the urban African demography. Evidence of one such important change can be found in the Bulawayo railway compound reports of 1923 to 1925 which highlight a substantial increase in the number of women and children within this space. During this period, the compounds had several "brick compartment buildings for single men,"²¹⁷ and insufficient married quarters. The rising numbers of Africans in compounds led to overcrowding and serious health concerns and there were some instances where entire families, comprising of a husband, wife and one or two children, lived in single room with several other African railwaymen.²¹⁸ Living in such circumstances was, in the year preceding the first organised African Railway Strike of 1945, noted as a threat to African family dynamics. African men were argued to be incapable of performing their function as 'the head of the household' in such living conditions.²¹⁹

However, whilst the colonial administration had come to slowly acknowledge the inevitability of African urbanisation and the need for urban spaces to develop appropriately, profit maximisation continued to be the priority of the Rhodesia

215. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*

216. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletin No.12. Bulawayo. 1924.

217. NAZ 5256/430. "Reports on Railway Compounds". *Rhodesia Railways Ltd*. Bulawayo. July 1925.

218. NAZ 5256/430. "Reports on Railway Compounds". *Rhodesia Railways Ltd*. Bulawayo. 1923-1924.

219. NAZ ZBI 2/1/1. "Report of the Howman Committee."

Railways. The migrant labour system had been the most profitable situation for the railways and other industries in Southern Rhodesia because expenses incurred in maintaining the African labour force were low. The entry of African women and children into railway compounds altered this dynamic and placed a financial weight on the railways that it was not willing to bear.²²⁰ One way in which the resistance to African urbanisation by the railways is evident is in the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways publications that mention the issue of African housing between 1924 and 1928. Whilst budgets are put aside for the improvement of existing housing and development of new married quarters, as evidenced in the previously mentioned publication of 1924, later publications note the “difficulty in making improvements to African housing in the railway compounds because of financial restrictions which are a consequence of the global recession,”²²¹ and other similar reasons. Unsurprisingly, overcrowding, health and sanitation in the compounds worsened overtime and resulted in an urgent move in 1928, to build temporary and portable married quarters.²²² The financial implications of this and other related matters pertaining to the African labour force and their families led to the railways becoming ardent supporters of the initiatives by European and African patriarchies to control the mobility of African women who were blamed for both the impoverishment of the rural homesteads and the squalor of urban spaces.

3.3 Migration of labour into urban Bulawayo: A gendered analysis

Southern Rhodesia in 1920 had substantial railway development and Bulawayo’s position as one of the most dynamic cities in Southern Rhodesia was becoming more evident. The development of the railways had thus far been financed by the BSAC and supporters of the deceased Rhodes. One of the aims that Rhodes had when he envisaged the development of a transcontinental railway line was that it would tap into cheap African labour supplies, a necessity for profit maximisation.²²³ However, during

220. K.:P. Vickery. “The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II: Cause, consequence, significance.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25(1), 1999, pp. 49-71.

221. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletins No.6-27. Bulawayo. 1924-1928.

222. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletins No.27. Bulawayo. 1928.

223. L.A.C. Raphael.1936. *The Cape to Cairo Dream*, p.22.

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European-owned industries within Bulawayo, including the Rhodesia Railways, did not have an adequate supply of cheap, unskilled labour.²²⁴ This was influenced significantly by the success of African agriculture, which occurred between 1898 and 1905, that allowed Africans to position themselves outside of the colonial wage economy. Early onset African impoverishment as a consequence of an exploitative wage economy whose success was dependent on a constant and reliable source of cheap labour had not yet occurred. During the period that many Historians have identified as a time of African agricultural productivity and profitability, migration out of the arid rural reserves into urban spaces was limited to voluntary, small and irregular movements.²²⁵ However, the implementation of the migrant labour system and changes in the colonial socioeconomic climate had dire consequences on African communities and resulted in the mass migration of both men and women out of rural homesteads and into urban areas.

Prior to this large-scale African migration into urban Bulawayo, the productivity and profitability of African agriculture and how this affected the all-important supply of cheap labour needs to be interrogated. This relative agricultural success was determined by the intricate division of labour between African men and women which positioned women as the primary agricultural producers.²²⁶ According to Anibal Quijano's interpretation of what he terms the coloniality of power, human interactions have historically been and continue to be determined by exploitation, domination (rooted in ideas of biological determinism) and the antagonism over the control of sex, labour, collective authority and subjectivity/intersubjectivity. This coloniality of power is reflected in two ways. On an economic level, the triumph of African agriculture posed many challenges to the colonial government, European farmers and industrialists. A booming African peasantry posed a threat to European farmers who were incapable of tapping into the African market, which was a key source of income.²²⁷ For industrialists, profit maximisation was the goal. A steady supply of cheap African workers who would become the prized unskilled manual labour became integral.

224. M. Gelfand. "Migration in of African labourers in Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1890-1914)." *The Central African Journal of Medicine* 7(8), 1961, p. 295; NRZ Museum Archives. "Native Labour: B&M&R Railways". *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*, Bulletin No.12. 1 July 1924.

225. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p. 12.

226. E. Schmidt. 1992. *Peasants, traders and wives*, pp.92-93.

227. T. Barnes. "The fight for control of African women's mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe", p.592.

However, the ability of Africans to maintain somewhat of an independent and flourishing agricultural sector exacerbated industrial labour shortages. Consequently, the acquisition of local African labour from Southern Africa became so difficult in the early 1920s that the Railways had to put in place measures to attract and recruit this labour force from other colonies. As early as 1899, recruiting companies for African labour were established in Matabeleland.²²⁸ Bulletin number twelve of the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways Magazine published in July 1924 also speaks to the ways in which labour recruitment for the railways was conducted, at a time when it was proving difficult to do so in the colony.²²⁹ It was claimed that “in Southern Rhodesia... the indigenous native seems less inclined to work and is content generally to pursue the normal native life at his kraal,”²³⁰ which necessitated the recruitment of labour from Portuguese East Africa, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia where there was supposedly an abundance of African labour. This resulted in the formation of the Native Labour Bureau which managed the recruiting of African labour inside and outside the borders of the colony.

On a more symbolic level, the relative success and prosperity of Africans threatened to blur the racial lines of superiority which European settlers resisted vehemently. European colonial society as a whole, including but not limited to its industrialists, farmers, labourers in the railways and mines, along with their families, fought adamantly for the implementation of policies such as a colour bar in the workplace and racial segregation.²³¹ Also, a successful peasant economy that was dominated by African women threatened Eurocentric gender norms of the male breadwinner and domesticated, dependent female. Disrupting the African peasant economy and subsequently fostering African indigence became integral to the entire colonial project in Southern Rhodesia.

From the early 1920s onwards, the livelihoods of Africans who had previously been able to maintain fairly economically sound rural homesteads were threatened. This period has been identified as “the era of the political triumph of white agriculture”.²³²

228. M. Gelfand. “Migration of African labourers in Rhodesia and Nyasaland”, p.295.

229. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletin No.12. Bulawayo. 1924

230. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletin No.12. Bulawayo. 1924, p. 8.

231. NRZ Museum Archives. E. Lee. “The Trade Union Movement in Rhodesia, 1910-1924.”

232. M. Samuelson. “The city beyond the border”, p. 251

Migration into the “city proper”²³³ of Bulawayo was necessitated by dramatic socioeconomic transformations in the colony which were made possible by the implementation of racist policies aimed at disrupting the African peasantry along with the implications of the Great Depression of 1929 on the global market. Another consequence of this global economic downturn was that more European farmers settled in the colony and to ensure their success over that of the African peasant economy, the Land Apportionment Act was implemented in 1930; the Maize Control Act in 1931 and the Cattle Levy Act in 1934.²³⁴ The Land Apportionment Act was put in place to give legal credence to a process that had been in place since the start of BSAC administration in 1889, which was the increased allocation of fertile land in the colony to European settlers and the subsequent pushing out of Africans into arid rural reserves. Under the Land Apportionment Act, forty-nine million acres of land was given to European settlers and a further seventeen million acres of land was left untitled (to be used by Europeans), with the least fertile of these lands assigned to Africans. This intensified the already harsh consequences of the Great Depression on African communities. Without much consideration for these communities, the Maize Control Act was put in place to deal with the decline in maize prices that occurred globally. The aim of the Act was to preserve European maize farming from ruin. A state-run board was established which began to sell maize in the colony at an artificially high price in order to cover the losses from selling it abroad.²³⁵ All sales of maize were now managed by the state-run board, which would buy maize from African farmers at very low prices.

Exacerbating the situation even more, the Cattle Levy Act favoured European settlers by putting export subsidies in place which required the payment of levies for cattle. Most cattle were still owned by Africans; thus, it became their burden to pay the levies. Butchers began to offer very low prices for cattle being sold, making cattle rearing a non-lucrative venture for Africans.²³⁶ The worsening economic climate for Africans proved profitable for European settlers. African agriculture crumbled and African reserves had to come to grips with a new reality. In such an environment, many young

233. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p.26.

234. NRZ Museum Archive. “Report of Native Productive and Trade Commission”. C.S.R. 2-1945. Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. 1944, pp.9-12.

235. E. Schmidt.1992. *Peasants, traders and wives*, pp.75-76.

236. E. Schmidt.1992. *Peasants, traders and wives*, pp.77.

men and women were coerced into migrating into the urban centre to become a source of cheap labour in an attempt to alleviate some of their homestead's economic misfortune. The coercion discussed here is the negative change in the socioeconomic climate of the colony.

As an important facilitator of this migration, the train acted as tool of African impoverishment. It did this by transporting African labour, both men and women, from all over Southern Africa, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Portuguese East Africa into urban Bulawayo as cheap labour. By doing so, it took away important sources of peasant labour from African reserves, particularly that of women, who were the main agricultural producers in most of these African territories, but certainly in Southern Rhodesia.²³⁷ One way that it did this was by facilitating their migration out of rural homesteads through what became known as the 'Ulere' migration route.²³⁸ This route was a Free Migrant Labour Transport Service operated by the government of Southern Rhodesia that expedited the recruitment of African labour. According to a report on migrant labour in Southern Rhodesia by Peter Scott, a renowned colonial scholar, published in 1954, "Africans proceeding to work in Southern Rhodesia, together with their wives and children... [were] transported, fed, and accommodated along the labour route free of charge...and a survey at one depot in 1950 showed that seventy percent migrants now possess sufficient funds to travel the final stage of the journey by bus or train,"²³⁹ highlighting the relative success (for industrialists and the colonial administration) of a labour recruitment machine several decades after its inception.

Historically, there have been three theories of migration that have dominated scholarship. The neo-classical model, which is rooted in modernisation theory, attributes migration to an individual and rational response to economic changes. The structuralist theory however, which finds its grounding in dependency theories, puts emphasis on capitalistic structures and how these forced male labourers to migrate from the rural to the urban spaces. Lastly the structuration theory combines ideas emanating from these two theories.²⁴⁰ However, these theories have failed to account for the undeniable link between gender and migration. Caroline Wright argues that

237. E. Schmidt.1992. *Peasants, traders and wives. Shona women in the history of Zimbabwe. 1870-1939*. Heinemann: Harare, pp.3-10.

238. P. Scott. "Migrant labour in Southern Rhodesia", p. 36.

239. P. Scott. "Migrant labour in Southern Rhodesia", p. 36.

240. C. Wright. "Gender Awareness and Migration Theory", pp.771-775.

gendered relations and migration are almost inseparable.²⁴¹ In colonial Bulawayo, increased male migration out of the reserves meant that farming could not have continued as usual. As previously mentioned, agricultural tasks were divided between men and women. Once men became migrant labourers and over time, permanent urban dwellers, cash remittances to the homestead, and not agriculture, sustained rural homesteads.²⁴² Women were left as guardians of the land and were not allowed to perform certain agricultural tasks without the approval of men. This stemmed from a deep distrust of women and what they would do if they were to attain some form of economic independence. For chiefs, as long as wives were forced to remain in the homestead, remittances from migrants would still come in, allowing rural homesteads to stay afloat.²⁴³ If women followed their husbands into the urban space, remittances to the rural homesteads would cease. Heavier restrictions were placed on single African women who from the late 1920s became the principal lifeline of rural homesteads. This is after more women began to move into the urban space and *lobola* or bride price of unmarried women changed from being a sign of appreciation to being a financial lifeline for rural homesteads.²⁴⁴

When discussing migrant labour from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the situation is very similar. Jane L. Parpart's study of gendered relations on the Zambian Copperbelt between 1924 and 1945 tackles, briefly, the issue of gendered migration, out of the rural spaces of Northern Rhodesia and into urban spaces.²⁴⁵ Here, women were also migrating to the urban centres with husbands and at times their children but also as widows, divorcees and single young women in search of a better life. When wages proved to be substantially higher in Southern Rhodesia, an increasing number of these labourers migrated there. Railways were central in all of these movements. Migrants were transported by recruiting companies into Bulawayo by train and women would flee rural homesteads sometimes by foot but also by train. In Bechuanaland, where many women fled rural areas to go to Southern Rhodesia and South Africa,

241. C. Wright. "Gender Awareness and Migration Theory", p783.

242. E. Francis. "Gender, migration and urban livelihoods", p.172

243. E. Francis. "Gender, migration and urban livelihoods", p.172

244. "The Lobolo question in Southern Rhodesia and the High Commission territories 1892-1974." South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR). Collection Number: AD1715. <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv_pdfo/AD1715/AD1715-3-3-2-001-jpeg.pdf> Access: 2 April 2018.

245. J.L. Parpart. "Where is your mother? Gender, urban marriage and colonial discourse on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1924-1945." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27(2), 1994, pp.241-271.

headmen were placed at railway stations to stop African women from running away. Also, “the South African Railways (SAR) wanted to extend a road motor service from the Transvaal into the Kgatla Reserve in 1930 but the chief would only agree if the SAR employed his own men as bus conductors. This ensured that women did not use the service for escaping from home.”²⁴⁶

In the Zimbabwean colonial context, Lynette Jackson and argues that, “Historical sites of national pain have been presented as exclusively masculine outrages,”²⁴⁷ and cites the Black Peril and *chibaro*, or migrant contract labour, as examples. However, one cannot fully appreciate the impact of these phenomena on not only African societies, but on the entire colony, without addressing issues of gender. On the subject of contract labour, large scale African migration and the changes that ensued meant that household power relations altered drastically and most importantly, rural homesteads were slowly, but steadily impoverished as a result of ‘push factors’ discussed earlier, that encouraged vital sources of peasant labour to move into urban areas.²⁴⁸ Many studies of this migrant labour system (and migration histories in general) have tended to address African female mobility only in relation, or in response to, the migration of African men.²⁴⁹ However, whilst many married African women did move away from rural reserves to join husbands in urban areas, there were several unattached women; single, widowed or divorced, who migrated independently. Whichever way mobile African women moved, they were in essence migrants themselves because they too, like African men, had to move away from their homes in the reserves and settle, legally or illegally, in urban areas with the hopes of attaining a better life for themselves and their families.²⁵⁰

In July 1925 for example, the railway compound number two recorded that it housed a total number of five hundred and ninety-one Africans living in six brick compartment buildings with ten rooms each and another three brick compartment buildings with six rooms each. Of these five hundred and ninety-one Africans who occupied these

246. C. Cockerton. “Slipping through their fingers: women’s migration and Tswana patriarchy”, p.42.

247. L. Jackson. *When in the White Man’s Town*, p. 194.

248. N. Van Hear. “Theories of migration and social change.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(10), 2010, pp. 1531-1536.

249. Teresa Barnes and Caroline Wanjiku Kahito are amongst those scholars that critique the conceptualisation of African women as only dependent agents in the migration process. See, T. Barnes. 2002. *Virgin Territory?* ; C. Wanjiku Kihato., “Invisible lives, inaudible voices?”

250. T. Barnes. 2002. *Virgin Territory?* pp.166-170.

lodgings, fifty were women and sixty-two were children.²⁵¹ Whether or not all of these women were legally married or *mapoto* (temporary) wives is not detailed here. In July 1931 however, a letter by the secretary to the premier from Bulawayo notes that the number of African women and children had almost trebled since 1925 leading to the “railway administration [incurring] considerable expenditure in affecting improvements to the compounds... particularly in the matter of housing and sanitation.”²⁵² This illustrates just how active African women were in the flow of migrant labour in the colony. What is interesting about the compound report of 1925 is that it states that out of the five hundred and ninety one Africans living in the compound, five-hundred and fifty were employed and thirty were cooks.²⁵³ Although the compound report does not answer questions such as how many out of these five-hundred and fifty employed Africans were women and children, or whether the ‘cooks’ comprised of any women or children; it does highlight the fact that some African women living in railway compounds were formally employed. This is something important to note as it negates the European conceptualisation of all African women as illegal or immoral, engaging mostly in illicit activities when in the urban areas.

In colonial Zimbabwe, up until 1958, the term ‘native’ did not formally include African women and as such, several laws did not technically apply to them.²⁵⁴ The Pass Laws of the colony prior to 1958 are a case in point. African women, did not need to carry *situpas*, or passes, which gave African men access to urban spaces; resulting in African women having relatively more freedom of movement during this period. However, they could only legally reside in urban spaces if they could prove they were married. Nonetheless, single, widowed and divorced African women managed to enter and settle within these spaces illegally. In the Bulawayo Location of Makokoba, African women were the primary homeowners at the outbreak of the First World War, illustrating just how much of an influential presence African women were in urban areas very early on.²⁵⁵ As can be imagined, resistance to the mobility of particularly

251. NAZ 5256/430. “Reports on railway compounds”. *Rhodesia Railways Ltd.* Bulawayo. June 1925.

252. NAZ. S1561 Southern Rhodesia Miscellaneous Reports (1927-1932; 1935-1942). A letter by the secretary to the premier *The Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulawayo. Premier’s office. Salisbury. 23 July 1931.

253. NAZ 5256/430. “Reports on railway compounds”. *Rhodesia Railways Ltd.* Bulawayo. June 1925.

254. L. Jackson. 2002. ‘*When in the White Man’s Town*’, pp. 191-192.

255. L. Jackson. 2002. ‘*When in the White Man’s Town*’, pp. 192-194

single, widowed and divorced women was vehement amongst African men, 'respectable' married African men and the European settler society.

In the early twentieth century, customary laws were put in place by the colonial government in an attempt to appease African chiefs who demanded that strict measures to regulate the activities and incomes of male migrant labourers in urban areas be put in place, ensuring that they maintained financial ties to the rural homesteads. Most importantly, customary laws were put in place to control African women's mobility and reproductive powers.²⁵⁶ These laws were essentially reconfigured traditions or simply new creations, a good example of this being the laws surrounding lobola, which will be discussed later.²⁵⁷ After the war, the coalition between African and European patriarchies shifted from the African chiefs to the newly established male urban elite. This male elite also desired that African women's socioeconomic activities and mobility be controlled. New 'laws' and 'traditional customs' were created that protected African patriarchy. The invention of specific laws, including but not limited to the Lobolo Laws, the Land Husbandry Act and the various pass laws, further entrenched African female subordination. According to Akyeampong & Fofack:

African chiefs and elders, unsettled by the changing dispensation under colonial rule, and a colonial migrant economy that privileged young men, used the codification of customary law to cement as tradition their ideal resolution to what was a contested situation. They reified African patriarchy, highlighted their control over women and juniors, and converted marriage transactions into cash to benefit from the new income of young migrant men. In Muslim areas, scholars have noted how under colonial rule Shari'a, a concept historically understood to be a moral and ethical code regulating private and public domains of Muslim life...was increasingly designated as a positive "Islamic Law". Just as in African customary law, colonial officials were interested in a codified, usable body of Islamic law for administrative purposes.²⁵⁸

This unlikely coalition between African and European patriarchies was based strictly on what proved to be most beneficial for colonial interests at that specific time. It is also important to note that "white capital wanted the regulation, not prohibition of

256. E. Schmidt. "Negotiated spaces and contested terrain: men, women and the law in colonial Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16(4), 1990, pp.622-648.

257. South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR). "The Lobolo question in Southern Rhodesia and the High Commission territories 1892-1974."

258. E. Akyeampong & H. Fofack. "The contribution of African women to economic growth and development in the precolonial and colonial periods: Historical perspectives and policy implications", *Economic History of Developing Countries* 29(1), 2014, p.61.

African women, whereas African men wanted the complete abolishment of unattached mobile women”²⁵⁹ from urban spaces. European men believed that African women provided an essential buffer between European women and African men. Claims of a Black Peril and an allegedly unbridled African male sexual desire necessitated a relatively lax European approach to the issue of African unattached women. They were argued to provide important domestic favours for especially single African men whose sexual frustrations purportedly led them to rape European women. Many ‘respectable’ African men however, from both the rural reserves and urban areas, made calls for more stringent measures to control the perpetual influx and illegal settlement of single, divorced and widowed women in urban areas. For married men living in urban areas, the mobility of wives was deemed acceptable, even necessary. In Bulawayo, two prominent African societies, the Matabele Home Society and the Loyal Matabele Society, actively protested the presence of unattached African women in town and demanded that “the gates into the Town Location and compounds...be shut by regularly inspecting the marriage certificates of African women.”²⁶⁰

It was believed that African women were the root of moral degradation in the urban space and as such, most single, divorced and widowed were either stereotyped as prostitutes, beer-brewers and of low moral character. It is also likely that such vehement resistance to their presence in urban Bulawayo was rooted in how economically independent and relatively successful unattached African women became once in these spaces, whether or not they engaged in illicit activities. African men would have probably resented the fact that African women had been the primary homeowners in the Location at the start of the First World War and even had the capacity to rent out homes to earn more of money.²⁶¹ In order to correct what African men felt to be an inappropriate amount of power in the hands of African women, their access to urban areas had to be curtailed. Additionally, both African and European patriarchies blamed African women for the impoverishment of the rural homesteads.

259. L. Jackson. 2002. *When in the White Man's Town*, p.193.

260. L. Jackson. 2002. *When in the White Man's Town*, p.193.

261. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp 99-120; L. Jackson. 2002. *When in the White Man's Town*, p.192.

It was argued that had African women remained where ‘they belonged’, African urbanisation could have been avoided.²⁶²

Resistance to the mobility of African women, especially those who were single, divorced and widowed came not only from men, but from ‘respectable’ African women, who were legally permitted to migrate and settle with their husbands in urban areas. Resistance also came from European women. For these women, this hostility was rooted in the fact that whilst there was constant reiteration of the dangers posed by African men to European women, concretized in the Natives Adultery Law of 1916 and its various amendments in ensuing years; sexual relationships between African women and European men were not criminalized.²⁶³ Along with stereotyping African women as immoral and delinquents, European settlers in Southern Rhodesia also viewed women as carriers of disease, more specifically, sexually transmitted diseases. European women therefore felt that it was imperative to restrict the entry of African women into urban areas since a substantial number of European men were engaging in sexual relations with them, posing a threat of miscegenation and venereal disease in European settler society. European women’s attempts to criminalize sexual relationships between African women and European men failed however, evidenced in the fact that ratifications to the Native Adultery Law continued to exclude these relationships as legally punishable offenses.²⁶⁴ ‘Respectable’ African women targeted unattached African women as being the root of this misconception of all African women as carriers of disease and placed the blame on the promiscuity of unmarried women. It was claimed that only unmarried women would dare sleep with European men. Additionally, fearing that they themselves could contract sexually transmitted diseases from their husband’s unscrupulous sexual relations with unmarried women, ‘respectable’ African women subscribed to demands made for the restriction of their mobility.

According to Jackson, “the outcome of unattached and mobile women, and the lack of sympathy for these women among African respectables was the compulsory venereal

262. NRZ Museum Archives. “The Lobolo question in Southern Rhodesia and the High Commission territories 1892-1974”; NAZ No. Y. 20143/1693/N. “The secretary to the Premier (Native Affairs). Conference of the I.C.U Bulawayo”. 4 May 1931.

263. L. Jackson. 2002. *When in the White Man’s Town*, p.194.

264. L. Jackson. 2002. *When in the White Man’s Town*, pp. 194-197; C. Cockerton. “Slipping through their fingers”, pp. 42- 46.

disease exam.”²⁶⁵ Perceptions of African women as carriers of sexually transmitted diseases among Europeans, along with the disgruntlement of the African ‘respectable’ population, resulted in all African women, not just those who were single, divorced or widowed, being subjected to compulsory venereal disease examinations. The exclusion of African women from policies targeted at controlling the mobility of Africans proved challenging as the number of African women increased far beyond what had been anticipated. *Chibeura* thus became a way to control the movements of African women. Without a clean bill of health, African women could not enter urban spaces. In 1922, the Southern Rhodesian government, with the support of white monopoly capital, made testing compulsory for all African men and women seeking employment within urban areas and after access was granted, a medical examination was mandatory every three months. Even though both men and women were subjected to medical examinations, women’s examinations were intrusive and traumatizing. They comprised of a dehumanizing probing of their genitalia by European doctors and African nurses, whereas the examinations conducted on African men were intended to “determine their suitability for hard labour.”²⁶⁶ Worsening an already atrocious situation, the Health Act of 1925 gave medical officers the permission to perform random examinations and detain anyone they believed to be of suspect health. This meant that *chibeura* evolved from only being targeted at African women seeking employment, to encompassing any African woman entering the urban space. In the same year, the first medical examination centre, or lazaretto, opened in the Bulawayo Location, with the hopes of discouraging African women from entering black Bulawayo.²⁶⁷

African resistance to these brutal examinations did occur; it was not accepted without resistance. For example in the 1920s, Martha Ngano, an immigrant from South Africa who was a teacher and missionary living in Bulawayo and also an active member in the Bantu Voters Association Women’s League, spoke passionately against what African women were subjected to regularly. Jackson argues however, that Africans “protested insofar as they were outrages committed against respectable women.”²⁶⁸ The classification of all African women as carriers of disease, even older married

265. L. Jackson. 2002. ‘*When in the White Man’s Town*’, p. 192.

266. L. Jackson. 2002. ‘*When in the White Man’s Town*’, p. 193.

267. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp 99-120.

268. L. Jackson. 2002. ‘*When in the White Man’s Town*’, p. 208.

women, was outrageous to 'respectable' African women who believed that the actual problem was unattached women. 'Respectable' women were not completely against *chibeura*, in fact, some believed they were necessary to protect themselves from the problematic single, divorced and widowed woman, who was accused of threatening the health and well-being of their 'respectable' families.

Irregardless of how they were perceived and the attempts to control their mobility and entry into urban areas, African women, both married and single, continued to flood into these spaces in search for a better life. Evidence can be seen in the fact that despite the imminent threat of being probed and poked before being granted entrance into urban areas, and knowing full well that this would have to occur on a relatively regular basis, "in 1931, one hundred and thirty-five single women and girls arrived in the Bulawayo Location, an estimate by the Superintendent of the Bulawayo Native Location."²⁶⁹ All throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s this was the case; which illustrates the resilience and determination of African women to weather the storm in order to safeguard their futures and the futures of their families in a society that was structured to see them fail.

3.4 A brief mapping of urban Bulawayo from the 1920s.

Isolation has gone and segregation has fallenA revolutionary change is taking place among the Native peoples of Africa through the movement from the country to the towns- the movement from the old reserves in the Native areas to the big European centres of population. Segregation tried to stop it. It has however, not stopped it in the least. The process has been accelerated. You might as well to sweep the ocean back with a broom. It is going on all the time.²⁷⁰

According to Percy Ibbotson, the Bulawayo-based secretary of the Federation of Native Welfare Societies, attempts at implementing segregation and preventing African urbanisation had failed. The socioeconomic transformations that occurred from the 1920s onwards had led to increased migration of Africans into the urban centre of Bulawayo and once there, Africans became increasingly urbanised. In an attempt to fight this urbanisation, the Land Apportionment Act of 1931 had been implemented. Both in the urban and rural contexts, the racialisation of colonial Bulawayo from this point became clearer and colonial law dictated that "Africans [were] to be encouraged

269. L. Jackson. 2002. *When in the White Man's Town*, p.201.

270. P. Ibbotson. "Urbanisation in Southern Africa", pp.75.

to progress as far as they [were] able”²⁷¹, without disrupting, in any way, European interests. This meant that Africans were allocated specific areas to live in, far-removed from Europeans and also other races. The transformations that occurred as Africans flocked into the urban centre in response to the changing economic environment shaped the development of urban Bulawayo from this point onwards.

“Black Bulawayo,”²⁷² in the urban centre, was made up of the Ndebele and other groups from Matabeleland, Shona people and immigrants from north of the borders of Southern Rhodesia. The Ndebele in Bulawayo formed the biggest rival in numbers to Europeans who had settled in the Southern African city. The unique cosmopolitan nature of Bulawayo was due to the presence of immigrants, mainly from Matabeleland, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Portuguese East Africa. Many early African migrants, who were mostly made up of migrants from outside of the borders of Southern Rhodesia, saw themselves as pioneers and felt a strong sense of belonging to the African space in colonial Bulawayo. This feeling of belonging in such an environment is reflective of the changing nature of African spaces not only in Bulawayo, but throughout Africa.

However, and as is well known, sentiments of a somewhat unified African population and a sense of belonging was never achieved, evidenced by constant struggles between ethnicities exemplified by the different ‘faction fights’ that occurred in Bulawayo in 1920.²⁷³ Phimister and Van Onselen argue that these faction fights were rooted in class struggle. They posit that changes in the socioeconomic climate of the colony, discussed earlier, resulted in the saturation of the African labour market in Bulawayo. Shona labourers had migrated in their numbers from Mashonaland, where the implications of the financial downturn had been felt most in the colony, and moved to Bulawayo, where relatively higher paying jobs were available.²⁷⁴ Similar circumstances also influenced the migration of labour from outside of the borders of Southern Rhodesia. The Rhodesia Railways in Bulawayo was an attractive destination for African migrant labourers to seek employment because, and according to the

271. P. Ibbotson. “Urbanisation in Southern Africa”, pp.75.

272. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.25-26.

273. I.R. Phimister & C. Van. Onselen. “The political economy of tribal animosity. A case study of the 1929 Bulawayo Location Faction Fight.” *University of Witwatersrand African Studies Seminar*, 17 August 1978.

274 I.R. Phimister & C. Van. Onselen. “The political economy of tribal animosity.”

testimony of a Mr Morgan for the Howman Report of 1943, “natives in Bulawayo are paid more than any other natives in other parts of Rhodesia. The differences in pay in Bulawayo dates back to early days. For some reason the rates of pay have always been higher. I think it has been in part due to local industries.”²⁷⁵ This created more competition for jobs in a market that had a “more than adequate”²⁷⁶ supply of cheap labour. This meant that many Shona migrants, who van Onselen and Phimister claim to have been amongst the last of African migrants to enter Bulawayo, were given jobs of lower rank and consequently, lower wages if they were able to find jobs at all. On a national scale, one of the implications of a constantly evolving African labour force was the formation of three classes; the African petty-bourgeoisie, the working class and the under-class. Taking a class based approach reveals that taking a class based approach is indicative of the fact that violence did not erupt simply as a consequence of tribal animosity, but because of the combined impact of tribal and class based tensions.

Msindo²⁷⁷ critiques the approach of Phimister and Van Onselen and in doing so, enhances the way in which this phenomenon has been previously engaged with. He argues that ethnicity and not class, was in actuality, at the root of the conflict and that “the 1929 violence was part of the effort to regain lost Ndebele moral authority to Bulawayo.”²⁷⁸ This encompassed issues relating to competition for jobs amongst the Shona and Ndebele, who “did not mind help from any other ethnic group that had a bone to pick with insolent Shona.”²⁷⁹ An example of one such ‘bone to pick’ the Ndebele had with Shona migrants was centred on the issue of women. Large-scale African labour migration into Bulawayo had fostered an increase in the number of inter-ethnic relationships between Matebele women and ‘alien’ African men. Msindo ponders on whether the decision by especially Shona migrants, to have relationships with Ndebele women was intended as a direct attack on the masculinity of Ndebele men who had been a thorn in their side since their entrance into urban Bulawayo. In addition and in response to this, he considers whether the violent response by the

275. NAZ ZBI 2/1/1. Report of the Howman Committee to investigate the economic, social and health conditions of Africans in urban areas, p. 27.

276. E. Msindo. “Ethnicity not class? The 1929 Bulawayo Faction Fights Reconsidered.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32(3), 2006, p. 433.

277. E. Msindo. “Ethnicity not class? The 1929 Bulawayo Faction Fights Reconsidered”, pp. 429-447.

278. E. Msindo. “Ethnicity not class? The 1929 Bulawayo Faction Fights Reconsidered.” p. 433.

279. E. Msindo. “Ethnicity not class? The 1929 Bulawayo Faction Fights Reconsidered.” p. 433.

Ndebele in 1929 was in retaliation to this “assault on their masculinity.”²⁸⁰ Whatever the myriad possibilities, these tensions had a significant impact on the manner in which the African urban space evolved.

The aforementioned faction fights serve to illuminate the existing tensions amongst Africans within black urban Bulawayo at the eve of 1930. Notwithstanding, Africans had to negotiate amongst themselves and with colonial modernity, facilitating the creation of a vibrant African space and a unique modernity made up of various African and European elements. The use of Lapalapa, which was a language used by African labours in Bulawayo and a combination of different languages including English, is an example of how different these modernities worked together to enhance communication within the cosmopolitan community.²⁸¹ However, whilst an amalgamation of certain practices from different cultures did occur, there was a protection of cultural practices that were deemed almost sacred. For instance, there was an attachment by the Ndebele to many aspects of their precolonial past, for example; Ndebele burial rites, ceremonies and celebrations, which all filtered into urban black Bulawayo. This, and also other similarly important elements of different African ways of existing, could be felt strongly within cosmopolitan black Bulawayo. This helped Africans maintain somewhat of a sense of normalcy in a constantly evolving colonial society.

The global economic recession of the late 1920s and early 1930s hit both urban and rural black Bulawayo, similarly to other African colonial spaces, the worst.²⁸² In spite of this, these very same years were a time of important spatial development in colonial Bulawayo. Momentous architectural expansion occurred as several key buildings in central Bulawayo were built, a prime example being the city hall.²⁸³ In order to successfully engage in such urban development during such economically trying times, the African as a source of cheap, disposable labour became ever more important. In the railways, mines and other colonial commercial enterprises, profit maximisation through low wages and poor living standards for Africans, along with

280. E. Msindo. “Ethnicity not class? The 1929 Bulawayo Faction Fights Reconsidered.” p. 436.

281. E. Msindo. “Ethnicity not class? The 1929 Bulawayo Faction Fights Reconsidered.” p. 433.

282. D. Rothermund. 2003. *The global impact of the Great Depression*. New York. Routledge; S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. “The entrapment of Africa within the global matrices of power: Eurocentrism, coloniality, and deimperialization in the twenty-first century.” *Journal of Developing Societies* 29 (4), pp. 331-353.

283. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.45-60.

severe taxation systems and attempts at curtailing African entrepreneurial ventures, persisted. The funds made from these initiatives allowed for the spatial development of urban Bulawayo along black and white lines, with black Bulawayo standing in stark contrast to the aesthetic beauty and ‘modernity’ of white Bulawayo.

Mostly vacant and maintained in its natural form whilst at the same time being reserved strictly for European usage, the Commonage was the land that encompassed white suburbs and was perceived in an affectionate manner by European settlers. The railway sidings and a few other commercial sites, along with some European farms, were positioned in strategic areas of the Commonage to not disturb the natural appeal of the space. As the city developed, urban aesthetics for white spaces remained a focal point for town planners and architects. A focus on beautifying the African landscape along Eurocentered lines was intended to offer “suburban (white) customers.... a comfortable bourgeois idea of beauty”²⁸⁴. Thus, in these early years, the Commonage acted as a ‘get away’ from the hustle and bustle of the modern white city space and over time, it became symbolic of European success at taming the ‘wild’ African landscape.²⁸⁵ As the demographic makeup of urban Bulawayo changed however, there was considerable augmentation of the Commonage which demarcated more clearly the realms of the urban, peri-urban and the rural.

From the late 1930s onwards, white Bulawayo, in this case the Commonage, was increasingly ‘invaded’ by not only Africans, but by Coloureds and Asians who sought to establish their businesses in densely populated African areas. Africans migrated into the Commonage and African villages sprouted close to the urban centre in the hopes of gaining more access to the money made by young men who were employed there.²⁸⁶ Many of these villages still maintained close ties to the rural homesteads as is evidenced by the numerous legal cases referred to customary courts and there was constant movement of people from the rural and the peri-urban African spaces. Unable to drive out Africans out of this land again, as had been done in the early years of European settlement, the Land Apportionment Act designated the most arid and unattractive lands in the very outskirts of the Commonage as African living areas. At roughly the same time, a Coloured community was also established in an area in the

284. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p. 57.

285. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p. 55.

286. J. Lunn. 1997. *Capital and labour in the Rhodesian Railway System*, p.255.

Commonage far removed from both black and white Bulawayo. Thus, although there had been hopes of keeping people of colour, and particularly Africans, beyond the bounds of the Commonage, these hopes were unsuccessful. As the Commonage became increasingly populated by different races, which was viewed as an invasion of European space, there was still an attempt to preserve the Commonage's position as an important place of retreat for Europeans. This was done by conserving portions of it in its natural state. This 'wild' section of Bulawayo terrain, possibly one of the few undisturbed remnants of Lobengula's Bulawayo, was disassociated in all ways possible, from Africans and being an African space.²⁸⁷

Development of urban Bulawayo from this point onwards occurred as follows. To the east of the Commonage, European living areas were created. In the outer most parts of the east are where European farms could be found. It is interesting to note that the areas in the Commonage that were inhabited by European farmers were not identified as rural, but rather as peri-urban, because Euromodernity identified 'being rural' with the condition of Africans and tradition.²⁸⁸ European suburbs, including Municipal and privately-owned housing areas for European labourers such as Raylton, evolved in a manner that was meant to symbolize the superiority of its inhabitants. The architectural designing of white Bulawayo was at a par with the fashion of the times in Europe. The need for aesthetic appeal was constantly reiterated and these white suburbs were positioned away from the polluting winds of the industrial cities but where in close proximity to the railway tracks. White Bulawayo, much like its black counterpart, functioned along the parameters of "railway time and consciousness".²⁸⁹ The idea of the train as a trope for Euromodernity was reiterated and inhabitants of white Bulawayo structured their lives in an attempt to mimic its efficiency.

To the west of the Commonage stood the Location, African railway compounds and on the outskirts of the Commonage in the same direction, the newly sprouted African villages. When comparing black and white Bulawayo in regard to architectural and spatial design, it is clear two contradictory policies were at play. Whilst aesthetics were a priority in white spaces, black urban spaces were constructed in a 'cost-effective' way, essentially referencing the fact that the least amount of funds were

287. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.50-65.

288. P. Ibbotson. "Urbanization in Southern Rhodesia", pp.76-80.

289. M. Aguiar. "Making Modernity", p. 70.

invested into their development.²⁹⁰ There was no particular consideration of beauty in black Bulawayo and the nature of African housing overtime became representative of the fact that Africans were not welcome in the white city space. The issue of African housing in Southern Rhodesia from the 1930s became a highly contested topic, particularly between the Rhodesian Government and Rhodesia Railways. African living areas in both the railway compounds and Location were characterised by rampant over population, as more women and children migrated into the urban centre. The African housing policies of the Rhodesia Railways, in line with profit maximisation and cost efficiency, had been primarily focused on accommodating young single men and was resistant to calls for improvement of railway compounds. The Rhodesia Railways, with the support of European residents of Raylton, insisted that African accommodation should not be improved or upgraded for anything other than safety and health requirements, (of which, such improvements were always of a subpar standard). For the residents of Raylton, fears of miscegenation of the European culture and space by this invasive African presence, resonated.²⁹¹

The spatial planning of urban Bulawayo was also influenced by what was known as the sanitation syndrome.²⁹² This was a colonial obsession with issues of health and the supposed imminent threat of diseases from non-Europeans. Africans were perceived to be the most dangerous, especially since there was a large presence of women in African living areas who were believed to be carriers of sexually transmitted diseases. As a result, Coloured and Indian living areas were positioned in between African and European living areas, acting as a buffer of protection. Railway tracks created also borders between the Raylton and Mpopoma, the address of some African railway compounds, the Location and other African living areas. Whilst indeed these railway tracks created borders separating African and European living areas, they also connected the two railway communities. The railway line from Raylton station for example, runs all the way through Mpopoma into the Mziligazi African village. Although some African railwaymen and female employees of the Rhodesia Railways worked at the Mpopoma Marshalling Yards, which were situated close to Mpopoma itself, Nguboyenja and Mzilikazi African Villages and the Location, allowing them to walk a

290. NRZ Museum Archives. "New Rhodesia"

291. L. Gbah Bear. "Miscegenations of modernity", pp. 531-546.

292. L. Beeckmans. "Editing the African city: reading colonial planning in Africa from a comparative perspective." *Planning Perspectives* 28(4), 2013, p.617.

short distance to work, others worked in Raylton at the main station. As a consequence of their low wages, many Africans could not afford to make daily use of the passenger trains to work and as such many of them had to walk long distances each day.

In spite of this, railway compounds, much like the Location during the late 1930s, developed into largely neglected spaces. The colonial record reflects this quite clearly. As previously discussed, the reports on Railway Compounds taken between 1923 and 1925 highlight areas that in the compounds that serious attention and need improvement, although at this stage they were cleaned regularly and not yet overpopulated.²⁹³ This is in stark contrast to European railway lodgings which required constant maintenance and upgrades to ensure that white men were able to keep a “civilised standard of living”.²⁹⁴

In order to illustrate further the differential housing policies taken in black and white Bulawayo, Moses Chikowero uses the electrification programmes of the Rhodesian Government as a tool of analysis.²⁹⁵ Electricity, much like the train, was an important symbol of the supposed superiority of the European race. Through racially discriminatory electrification policies, European suburbs like Raylton had constant access to and cheaper rates for electricity usage. These policies, along with the aforementioned housing policies, were formulated in a manner that re-emphasised that Africans did not belong in the urban setting. It becomes clear that electrification patterns, housing policies and access to not only jobs opportunities at the railways but also racially restricted access to train travel were important in creating “socially engineered boundaries of consumption between settlers in white suburbs and Africans in Makokoba (and other African spaces in the city).²⁹⁶ This also contributed to the creation of slums. Without improvements in African housing to accommodate families and the increasing numbers of unattached women, Africans had to contend with living in overcrowded single male lodgings for example, until the late 1940s. As a result, “the Location was now an urban landscape of the most basic kind. The only buildings with

293. NAZ 5256/430. ‘Reports on railway compounds’. *Rhodesia Railways Ltd*. Bulawayo. 1923-1925.
294. NAZ. Call number unknown. “Rhodesia Railway Workers Union. Court of enquiry.” Bulawayo 1932.
295. M. Chikowero. “Subalterning electrification and power politics in Bulawayo, colonial Zimbabwe. 1984-1939.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33(2), 2007, pp. 287-306.
296. M. Chikowero. “Subalterning electrification and power politics in Bulawayo”, p. 295.

pretensions to grandeur, and even then, of the simplest sort, were the mission churches which bordered the Location”.²⁹⁷

A bit of clarity must very briefly, be given on the notion of ‘belonging’ in urban spaces. African cultures and more specifically African families, were believed to be ontologically different, but most importantly inferior to European ones. Euromodernity and the idea of the nuclear family were perceived to be superior to the ‘traditional’ familial structures of Africans which were characterised by such practices as polygamy. This differentiation between African and European families is one of the reasons that legitimised the need to separate African families for periods at a time through the migrant labour system. This was also used as justification for the need to maintain the condition of urban African poverty and the implementation of repressive laws to curb the entrepreneurial initiatives of African women who were in many cases, expected to supplant their household incomes. This economic disempowerment was exacerbated even further by making it illegal for African workers to have any grazing or cultivation lands within the urban areas.

Therefore, narratives associated with the African urban space can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the ‘aesthetic atrocities’ that were the actual buildings where Africans were housed and the overall perception of African spaces, were, in line with Eurocentered thinking, meant to reflect the fact that Africans did not belong in the urban setting.²⁹⁸ On the other, once in this urban space, and partly as a consequence of negotiating European and African modernities, Africans were able to restructure these neglected, dilapidated and impoverished areas into vibrant spaces with rich, cosmopolitan African cultures. This evidenced in not only the activities of African women, but in the popularity of African music and soccer for instance, and also the rise of what later became a powerful urban elite.

297. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, p.75.

298. P. Ibbotson. “Urbanization in Southern Rhodesia”, pp.76-80; NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland Railways*. No. 17. General Managers Office. Bulawayo. 1 October 1935; The Rhodesian Annual. 1929. *The Railways of Rhodesia*; G. L. Guy. “The trees of old Bulawayo.” *Rhodesiana* No. 18. July 1968; R. C. Howland. “Buildings of historic interest.” *Rhodesiana* No.19. December 1968.

Chapter 4: The search for a better life. African women in the railway compounds

With the implementation and success of a colonial wage economy that was dependent on the capitalisation of a cheap labour force, the economic, social and political standing of Africans within Bulawayo deteriorated drastically. The Rhodesia Railways was an important player in the underdevelopment of African communities throughout Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and even as far off as Portuguese East Africa. Located strategically in Southern Africa, Bulawayo's importance in the entire railway fabric of Southern Rhodesia cannot be downplayed. As a result, it was of paramount importance that the railway enterprise in its totality, functioned with the utmost efficiency.

However, changes that occurred within the political economy of the colony as a consequence of the World Wars and the several economic recessions that followed, had extremely adverse effects on Rhodesia Railways. Seeing as it was already dealing with disgruntled European railwaymen, as evidenced by the strikes of 1920 and 1929, the large-scale migration of African women into urban Bulawayo and more specifically, into the railway compounds made the situation worse for Rhodesia Railways and threatened to destabilise what had become a very lucrative business. Up until 1947, when the Rhodesian government assumed its ownership, Rhodesia Railways was privately owned. Prior to this change in ownership, the large-scale migration of African women and the implications this had on the housing, salaries and food rations of African railwaymen became a point of serious conflict between Rhodesia Railways and the Bulawayo Municipality. The permanent urbanisation of Africans that had hoped to be avoided, was occurring at a rapid pace and Rhodesia Railways was slow in its response to the new situation. In spite of warnings from the colonial government, Rhodesia Railways maintained its housing policies and largely ignored the overpopulated and unsanitary state of its compounds, along with its meagre food rations and low wages that were insufficient to sustain the families, 'mapoto'²⁹⁹ wives and girlfriends of African railwaymen.

299. Loosely translated, 'mapoto' marriages denoted temporary relationships where sexual and domestic favours were exchanged for housing and gifts, most likely in the form of money. See T. Barnes. "So that a labourer could live with his family", pp. 95-113.

Exposed to a unique urban environment which was riddled with an already existing complex gender and race relationship, African women had to construct sometimes new, but always dynamic identities of themselves. The spatial and demographic changes that occurred in Bulawayo from the 1920s onwards, as discussed in the previous chapter, impacted African gendered relations significantly. Faced with an economic climate that was structured unfavourably for Africans, low wages, meagre food rations and a housing situation in the compounds that did not favour a female presence, African women developed into active actors, both socially and economically, within the railway compounds to ensure their own, and their families' survival.

With this situation in mind, this final chapter engages critically with the search for a better life by African women in the railway compounds of Bulawayo. The first section highlights the conflict that occurred between the Bulawayo Municipality and Rhodesia Railways centred on the issues of housing, wages and food rations within the compounds. These three areas were some of the main causes of the Rhodesia Railway African Strike of 1945 that were directly influenced by the presence of African women within these spaces. Secondly, there is an interrogation of the 'new' and dynamic identities of African women within the railway compounds. Once in the urban locale, African women fell into three distinguishable categories, which were the respectable wives, single, usually young runaway girls, or girls who were given permission to leave the rural homesteads and finally, the much older divorcees, or 'wayward wives' and widows. All three categories of women engaged in economic activities, sometimes illicit, that fostered their economic and social empowerment, but also posed numerous challenges to not only the gendered ideals of Euromodernity, but to the finances of both the Municipality and Rhodesia Railways. Lastly, the Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945 is discussed from a gendered perspective. The aim here is to demonstrate how, in spite of the androcentrism of the colonial archive, by 1945, the train was not simply the measure of men, but so intricately intertwined into the lives and livelihoods of both men and women living in the railway compounds.

4.1 The Bulawayo Municipality versus Rhodesia Railways. The case of the railway compounds

Between September 1939 and 1945 European allied and axis powers fought in the financially crippling and socially devastating Second World War. The presence of a powerful Allied and Axis influence on the continent in the form of colonial powers essentially extended this European, and later American war into Africa. On the one hand, competing colonial interests and rivalries prompted actual fighting on the continent, a prime example of this being the North African Campaign, which comprised of several battles fought between the years 1940 to 1943.³⁰⁰ On the other, Africa was an important source of both African and European soldiers and without the mineral and food supplies from colonial territories, keeping up with the war effort would have proved challenging. During these years, the importance of the train, more than ever, became evident. In Southern Africa, Rhodesia Railways was a vital cog in the wheel of the British war effort. An efficient transport system was necessary to transport soldiers and resources to their required terrains and as such, there was increased pressure on both African and European railway workers to meet these demands.

The consequences of this war on the economy and societies of Southern Rhodesia, as in other colonial spaces, were dire. This is particularly true of the African population. As discussed in the previous chapter, the change from an agrarian society in which African communities had flourished, to a capitalist wage economy, had begun the process of African underdevelopment. Repressive land acquisition policies, coupled with similarly aggressive farming and labour laws targeted at Africans made this situation even worse and consequently, there was large scale migration of Africans into the urban space. By the time the Second World War started in 1939, the process of African urbanisation was well underway, contrary to the plans of both the colonial government and companies such as the Rhodesia Railways.³⁰¹ Their experiences whilst in the urban space were however, far from ideal and for African railway workers, their wives, girlfriends, children and entrepreneurial women who lived in the railway compounds, an already difficult life became even worse at the start of the war.

300. D. Killingray & R.J.A.R. Rathone. (eds).1986. *African and the Second World War*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

301. P. Ibbotson. "Urbanization in Southern Rhodesia", pp. 73-82.; T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp. 70-90; K.P. Vickery. "The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II: Cause, consequence, significance." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25(1), 1999, p.52.

Table 1³⁰²

Grade	Year	Inside Bulawayo p/m	Outside Bulawayo p/m
Juvenile grade	Commencing rate	12s.6d	10s.
	2 nd year	15s.	12s.6d
	3 rd year	17s.6d	15s.
Grade 1, unskilled	Commencing rate	20s.	20s.
	2 nd 6 months	22s.6d	22s.6d
	2 rd year	25s.	25s.
	3 rd year	27s.6d	27s.6d
	4 th year	30s. max	30s. max
	5 th year	32.6 max	N/A
Transport department	Commencing rate	25s.	N/A
	2 rd year	27s.6d	N/A
	3 rd year	30 s.	N/A
	4 th year	32s.6d	N/A
Grade 2	Commencing rate	30s.	27s.6d
	2 rd year	32s.6d	30s.
	3 rd year	35s.	32s.6d
	4 th year	40s.	35s.
	5 th year	42.6d	N/A
Grade 3	Commencing rate	45s.	32s.6d
	2 rd year	47s.6d	35s.
	3 rd year	50s.	37s.6d
	4 th year	N/A	40s. max
Grade 4/Boss boys/ Boys of the capitau class	Commencing rate	52s.6d	37.6d
	2 rd year	55s.	40s.
	3 rd year	57s.6d	42s.6d
	4 th year	60s	45s.

302. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Southern Rhodesia rates of pay. Native labour. Rhodesia Railways". In NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Howman Report"; NAZ. RH/16/2/2." Southern Rhodesia. Comparative Statement showing the average rates of pay for Natives".

Table 2³⁰³

Examples of overcrowding: People living in one room, Bulawayo Railway compound No.2, 1938-1939

1. Two men and their wives and three bachelors
2. One man and his wife and eleven bachelors
3. Three men and their wives and nine bachelors
4. Two men and their wives and four bachelors

Table 3³⁰⁴

<i>Food</i>	<i>Scales of ration</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
<i>Mealie meal</i>	2 lbs/0.907kg	Per day
<i>Meat</i>	2 lbs/0.907kg	Per week
<i>Vegetables</i>	2 lbs/0.907kg	Per week
<i>Monkey nuts</i>	4 lbs/1.814 kg	Per month
<i>Beans</i>	8 lbs/ 3.629 kg	Per month
<i>Salt</i>	21 lbs/ 9.525 kg	Per month

*Wives of natives employed in all track labour gangs at gangers' cottages receive 1.5 lbs of mealie meal per day

Table 4³⁰⁵

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>1936</i>	<i>3 849</i>	<i>1 237</i>	<i>991</i>	<i>6 077</i>
<i>1944</i>	<i>6 816</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2 178</i>	<i>11 006</i>
<i>Increase since 1936</i>	<i>2 967</i>	<i>775</i>	<i>1 187</i>	<i>4 929</i>

303. T. Barnes. "So that a labourer could live with his family ", p. 101.

304. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1 "Scale of rations. Southern Rhodesia (all departments) ".In NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Howman Report."

305. P. Ibbotson. "Urbanization in Southern Rhodesia", p. 74. This table reflects population figures in the Bulawayo Municipal Location in 1936 and 1944. These numbers are not inclusive of the number of Africans in the African villages and railway compounds, but are intended to serve as an example of the increasing African female presence within urban Bulawayo.

As a “consumer of labour,” evidenced by it employing the largest number of labour within Southern Africa, the Rhodesia Railways policy on Africans within the compounds was focused primarily on profit maximisation. The information above, although only presenting snapshot data from 1936 to 1944, is intended to give an indication of the socioeconomic situation in the railway compounds in the years preceding the Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945. Table one illustrates the salaries of African railwaymen, who were divided into four grades, plus an additional juvenile grade (the lowest ranking) and boss boys (the highest ranking). There were no records within both the National Archives of Zimbabwe and the National Railways of Zimbabwe Museum that I found that referred to any of these pay scales in reference to African women. According to Theresa Barnes, “colony-wide in 1941 and 1946 there were only twelve and four African women, respectively, employed in the railways”.³⁰⁶ Whilst the table is indicative of higher salaries for railway workers in Bulawayo, which explains why Africans throughout Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Portuguese East Africa were so attracted to migrating to Bulawayo, Kenneth Vickery points out that, “there is overwhelming evidence that the buying power of these wages, minimal even before the war, declined drastically during the war”.³⁰⁷ Additionally, these meagre salaries could not keep up with inflation. This had a direct impact on the ability of African railwaymen maintaining strong ties with their rural homesteads and being the migrant labourers that the colonial government and the Rhodesia Railways had intended them to be. With such low salaries, exemplified by the fact that European railwaymen earned “from ten to thirty times as much,”³⁰⁸ and inflation that was exacerbated by the war, African railwaymen could no longer afford to send regular cash remittances home. Rhodesia Railways argued that low salaries had to be maintained in light of the war.³⁰⁹

As such, and reflected in table 4, more and more African women and children moved into the urban space. Wages that were barely enough to sustain railwaymen were stretched to cater to the needs of newly established urbanized African families. Compounded on this crisis of wages was the issue of African accommodation. The housing policy of the Rhodesia Railways within the compounds, which had initially

306. Footnote in T. Barnes. “So that a labourer could live with his family “, p. 101.

307. K.P. Vickery. “The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II”, p.53.

308. K.P. Vickery. “The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II”, p.53.

309. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. “Howman Report.”

been designed to cater to single, temporary male migrant labourers, did not adapt efficiently to changes in the African urban demography that occurred at a more rapid rate in the 1930s. As seen in the previous chapter, the Railways argued that the global economic recessions had stifled their ability to make the recommended additions and improvements in railway compounds.³¹⁰ This culminated in overcrowding, as evidenced by table 2 and consequently, unhygienic and unsanitary living conditions. The health of Africans within the compounds became a severe problem that was exacerbated by large scale malnutrition because of inadequate food supplies. The food rations given by the Rhodesia Railways, similar to their housing policies for Africans, had also been initially scaled to accommodate a single person. The figures in table 3 highlight the meagre quantities given to African railwaymen which were barely enough to sustain just the railwayman but now had to be stretched to feed women and children.

In this section I only briefly highlight the issues of wages, housing and food rations within the railway compounds because these were the three issues directly connected to issues of social reproduction.³¹¹ A further assessment of these issues will be done in the last section of the chapter. Important to note now is that prior to the outbreak of the Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, the colonial government was at qualms with the company over their 'native policies' at work within the compounds. The deteriorating standard of living within these compounds, which was linked directly to the issues of low wages, inadequate housing and food rations, necessitated the government to commission investigations into the economic, social and health conditions of Africans within the urban space.

A few seminal texts came about as a consequence of these investigations, most notably, the *Report of the Howman Committee to investigate the economic, social and health conditions of Africans in urban areas*, published in 1943 and the *Report on a Survey of Urban African Conditions in Southern Rhodesia* by Percy Ibbotson, also published in 1943 and quoted extensively in the Howman Committee Report. These documents concluded that in order to deal with the condition of African urban misery, African female 'impropriety' and the overall decline in African wellbeing, companies

310. NRZ Museum Archives. *Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulletin No.12. Bulawayo. 1924; NAZ 5256/430. 'Reports on Railway Compounds'. *Rhodesia Railways Ltd*. Bulawayo. 1923-1925.

211. T. Barnes. "So that a labourer could live with his family ", pp. 95-113.

such as the Rhodesia Railways needed to rethink salaries, lessening the gaps between the different grades and acknowledging their need to cater for more than just the man, but his family in the urban area. The Howman Report and Ibbotson's Survey of African conditions also insisted that a change in the food rations be implemented, both in quality and quantity. Similarly, the housing crisis needed to be addressed, particularly in the railway compounds where the railway compound no.2 was referenced as a prime example of the atrocious housing situation. Control of women and their activities within these spaces was also highlighted as needing serious attention from the Rhodesia Railways.³¹²

The conflict between the two parties emanated from the fact that Rhodesia Railways believed that many of the 'improvements' necessary within the compounds and in relation to the African railwaymen were a shared responsibility between the company itself, but also, the Municipality.³¹³ Aside from the issues of low wages (and associated issues such as overtime pay and benefits), which were credited to the difficult post-war economy, Rhodesia Railways blamed the Bulawayo Municipality for the housing crisis and inadequate food rations. It argued that had the colonial government successfully controlled the mobility of African women and children, overcrowding and the subsequent unhealthy living environment would not have sprouted. It is in this context that African women living in the railway compounds constructed 'new' and dynamic identities of themselves, all in search for a better life.

4.2 African female respectability and impropriety. Women in the compounds

Although the colonial archives pertaining to the railway histories of Zimbabwe do not actively engage with African women, from the late 1930s, a discussion of African women begins to feature within the records of the railway compounds and broader urban Bulawayo Municipality. Their inclusion within such records is not directly linked to train travel, nor does it address, perspicuously, the kinds of formal job opportunities available to them, if any, within the railway enterprise of the Rhodesia Railways. Such an inclusion would have created the opportunity for a quantitative appraisal of African female mobility patterns in and around Matabeleland that would greatly enhance any interrogation of the relationship between railway development and African female

312. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Howman Report."

313. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.77-89.

socioeconomic empowerment and disempowerment. However, primarily at the onset of the war, African women were more actively recorded in municipal records and featured quite significantly in reports such as those of the Howman Committee and in studies undertaken by influential government officials such as Percy Ibbotson.

Table 4 highlights the population increase of Africans with the Location, a pointer to the overall trends within urban Bulawayo. This rise in the number of African women (and children) who left the rural homesteads, taking with them an important source of labour and cash away from the rural homesteads, has been argued to have been an important facilitator for the creation of a permanent African urban population.³¹⁴ As this process of African urbanisation occurred almost unabated, Rhodesia Railways argued that the creation of slum conditions within their main compounds, the notorious no.2, no.3 and no. 4, was because of this increase in the numbers of African women, instead of attributing the dilapidated state of African living areas to their own laxity. African women were also blamed for the increased impoverishment of rural black Bulawayo and for the “absence of morality” in the urban space.

According to the Howman Report, seven hundred ‘girls’ were employed in Bulawayo,³¹⁵ however, the document does not specify the kinds of employment opportunities available to them. Ranger notes that such young girls found themselves in urban areas either after having run away, or after being granted permission to leave home by male authorities.³¹⁶ Granting permission to young women who wanted to migrate into urban areas was a drastic move that many African chiefs had to contend with in order to ensure the survival of entire communities. Whilst many male migrants cut off ties with rural areas in order to establish themselves in urban areas, Ranger argues that African women, especially young women, sent regular cash remittances and gifts home.³¹⁷ Of these seven hundred girls, none are mentioned to be employees of the Rhodesia Railways. Both Theresa Barnes and Kenneth Vickery attest to the silence of the archive in relation to Rhodesia Railways and African women’s

314. NAZ. 5256/430. “Reports on railway compounds.” Bulawayo. 1923-1925; 1930-1933; 1935-1938; 1938-1942; 1942-1945; NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. “Howman Report.”; NAZ. S1561 Southern Rhodesia Miscellaneous Reports (1927-1932; 1935-1942). A letter by the secretary to the premier *The Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways*. Bulawayo. Premier’s office. Salisbury. 23 July 1931.

315. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. “Howman Report.”

316. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.85-92.

317. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.85-92.

employment.³¹⁸ And yet, the railway compound inspectors reports from the mid-1920s up until the late 1940s, along with reports of the Federation of Native Welfare Societies, reveal that the numbers of African women were constantly rising in the Location and railway compounds, even at times surpassing those of men.³¹⁹

The Howman Report illuminates on the stereotyping of African women, especially unmarried young women who were living in urban areas as engaging in primarily two activities to survive, that is, prostitution and entering into temporary *mapoto* marriages. In 1943 for example, it was suggested that many of these ‘young girls’ entered the urban space after having received some education and with:

The perfectly innocent intention of seeking honourable work. They experience difficulties. One of the first difficulties is accommodation. You can usually get accommodation in the location but parental authority and control simply does not exist. This coming to urban by these womenfolk looking for work very often has dire consequences. They become prostitutes and so on. They have very lax relationships with men even when they regard themselves as married.³²⁰

European settlers assumed that prostitution and *mapoto* marriages were usually engaged in with lower ranking railwaymen of the juvenile grade, grade 1 and grade 2. As one of the most lucrative illegal activities for young African women in the compounds, prostitution was a very complicated issue for both Rhodesia Railways and the Bulawayo Municipality and the policies toward it were always ambivalent. On the one hand, prostitution went against everything that Euromodernity tried to inscribe, most importantly, Christian ideals of morality. On the other, the presence of single African women who would exchange money for sexual favours was a welcomed solution to the over exaggerated ‘black peril’, a condition where African men’s alleged ‘rampart sexuality’ posed a threat to European women.³²¹ African female prostitutes were argued to act as both buffer and protection from the possible ‘miscegenation’ of the European race by Africans through rape of its women. Seeing as the migrant labour system targeted primarily single young men, the availability of young women to provide sexual favours in exchange for money was perceived to also be a possible mechanism to stabilise the African railway labour force and ensure that they did not

318. T. Barnes. “So that a labourer could live with his family “, p.95.

319. NAZ. 5256/430. “Reports on railway compounds”; K.P. Vickery. “The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II”, p.54.

320. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. “Howman Report.” Testimony by Mr Carnegie, p. 7.

321. J. Pape. “Black and white: the ‘perils of sex’ in colonial Zimbabwe”, pp. 699-720.

hastily return to their rural homesteads. Whatever the different colonial policies at the time, African women who engaged in this prostitution, or even temporary alliances found a way for not only their own survival, but also their dependents, at a time of hyperinflation.³²² According to both Barnes and Ranger, within Bulawayo Location, situated not too far from the railway compounds, there were African women who were landladies and who many have rented out rooms to prostitutes since it was difficult for them to get accommodation elsewhere.³²³ Considering this proximity to the railway compounds, it can be assumed that these prostitutes also worked there because there was a large number of single, especially foreign men. However whilst some African women did engage in prostitution, it was not a universal case. Stereotypes of African women as prostitutes and diseased heavily influenced such sentiments. In her engagement with *Chibeura*, Jackson notes that in Bulawayo, compulsory examinations were done either by a European male doctor or a young African nurse.³²⁴ Similarly, Ranger notes that there were African women, of varying ages, employed as house girls, teachers in African schools and shop tellers.³²⁵

The direct rival of sorts, but certainly the complete opposite to the young single girl, was the 'respectable' African woman. These were the legal wives of the higher-ranking railwaymen, grade 3 and the boss boys, the highest rank. Many of these high-ranking railwaymen were Ndebele, for example, Joshua Nkomo, 'father of the nation', who later became the vice president of Zimbabwe after the country's independence. Many of the men who spearheaded the African Strike of 1945 also came from this rank.³²⁶ The wives of these men held a superior socioeconomic standing within the compounds in comparison to the other women. Ndebele railwaymen considered themselves as modern men and their ambitions to rise in the social ranks necessitated a shift from

322. Kenneth Vickery in his article on the Rhodesia Railways African Strike notes the inflation on prices of goods in 1944, just before the outbreak of the war, that Africans normally bought: "Khaki, up 167%; blueprint, up 150%; shorts, up 150%; vests, up 100-150%; shoes, up 150%; enamelware, up 300%, bicycles, up 100%; (and in Northern Rhodesia), trousers, up 193%, shirts, up 150-260%; blankets, up 333%; dresses, up 165%; enamelware up 300%". K.P. Vickery. "The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II", p.53.

323. T. Barnes. "The fight for control of African women's mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe", pp.598-599; T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*.

324. L. Jackson. *When in the White Man's Town*.

325. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.85-92.

326. K.P. Vickery. "The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II", pp. 49-71; T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp. 53-80.

their 'traditional' lifestyles, to a more 'civilised' and westernised one. As such, many converted to Christianity and upheld the ideals of the nuclear family and male breadwinner. They however, never wholly rejected their Ndebele traditions and practices and instead amalgamated those with their new identities in the urban locale.

Their position as male breadwinners was always reiterated not only to their wives, or sometimes temporary wives, but to their employees as well, in an attempt to be acknowledged as part of the 'civilised' and gain some bargaining power in times of conflict.³²⁷ The wives of these railwaymen supported the adoption of this male breadwinner model as it "gave them greater flexibility to use their own earnings, perhaps to pay for their children's education, or because they had no family or business connections when they had to relocate to distant parts of the country."³²⁸ Also, by being married to the most influential African railwaymen, respectable African women themselves became the most influential women in the railway compounds. They too were Christian and many of them are recorded as having received an education, mostly in home economics, but sometimes received training as nurses and teachers.³²⁹

Although the aforementioned breadwinner and nuclear family models dictated that women remain in the domestic realm whilst men engage with the public, the lived realities of Africans in urban Bulawayo did not allow for a neat separation of the two. Whilst the economic activities of these 'respectable' African railway women are not sufficiently recorded in colonial archives, making comparisons with similar African railway communities, it creates an opportunity for some inferences to be made. Firstly, even though many African women acknowledged the 'breadwinner' status of their husbands, the perpetual economic misfortune of Africans resulted in a number of women seeking employment to supplement their household incomes.³³⁰ Like the market women in Nigeria, the wives of African railwaymen could have been market traders, which was perceived as a respectable occupation in the Nigerian context.³³¹ It is also possible that they were merchants on board the train, as in the Indian context,

327. L.A. Lindsay. "Domesticity and difference", pp.783-812.

328. M. Walsh. "Gender in the history of transportation services", p.557.

329. NRZ Museum Archives. "Report of the Native Production and Trade Commission". 1944 C.S.R. Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. 1945.

330. L.A. Lindsay. "Domesticity and difference", pp.783-812.;

331. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Howman Report"; T. Ranger. 2010. Bulawayo Burning.

however again, there is no official documentation of this. It is more likely that they became teachers, nurses and sometimes even cashiers, owing to the kind of respectability they tried to foster in the context of Bulawayo, that is, one very similar or even identical to European respectability.

'Respectable' wives grappled with several competing, but constantly negotiating identities. Using Ndebele women as an example, on the one hand, they maintained strong ties with Ndebele culture and ways of being reputable Ndebele mothers and wives. One way that these strong ties were maintained was through Lobengula's wives, who built homes for themselves in the Location. Lobengula's queens and other members of the royalty formed an intriguing section of African society and Terrence Ranger comments that "many [of these] Ndebele men and women provided a traditional and modernising leadership"³³² The 'traditional' element that Ranger is referring to here are the ties to the old Ndebele Kingdom. This class of Ndebele royalty provided a link to the practices of the old kingdom that were almost completely destroyed by the inscription of Euromodernity.

On the other hand and interestingly however, many members of this royal family were the first to become Christians, which is how they formed a "modernising leadership."³³³ This kind of merging of identities, where Africans negotiated their beliefs and the ideals of Euromodernity, demonstrates vividly the modernity as discussed by Chatterjee, which thought both with and against Euromodernity.³³⁴ On the one hand, the work of Christian missionaries encouraging the move away from practices that were deemed barbaric and unchristian, found favour with the Ndebele and many Ndebele women converted into 'respectable' Christian mothers and wives.³³⁵ On the other hand, this very same group of Africans maintained cultural practices, such as burial rites, that had been practiced by their ancestors for centuries.

Similarly, African women from outside of the borders of not only Matabeleland but also of Southern Rhodesia, who travelled with their husbands and settled in the compounds and Location became a part of this respectable group of women, although within the railway compounds they were not at the same socioeconomic standing as many

332. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.25-26.

333. D.L. Hodgson & S. McCurdy. "Wayward wives, misfit mothers and disobedient daughters", p.1.

334. P. Chatterjee. 1986. *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: A derivative discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 78.

335. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp.25-26.

Ndebele respectable women. This is because, as the faction fights of 1929 had revealed, Ndebele men, who believed they were the ‘true’ custodians of the land, sought after higher ranking positions at work.³³⁶ In spite of this, both Ndebele and foreign respectable women were displeased with the growing presence of young single women, wayward wives, widows and divorcees who engaged in unchristian and illegal activities.³³⁷

The situation of *mapoto* or temporary marriages and even prostitution was not only the purview of young girls, but also of wayward wives, widows and divorcees.³³⁸ These women, like the single young girls, left the rural homesteads in response to an increase in their agricultural workload and commodification of lobola. An important means of upward social mobility for ‘defiant’ African women, more specifically for divorced and widowed (older) women was becoming a part of the infamous skokiaan queens. These queens were essentially beer brewers who in spite of their illegal activities garnered a certain level of respect within the railway compounds for their entrepreneurial skills. The beer that these women brewed was a more potent kind than the one sold in Municipal beer halls and as a result, the product became a direct competitor to colonial beer at a time when the colonial state was in dire need of income coming from African beer sales. Legal measures implemented from the 1940s onwards after a collusion by African and European patriarchy to limit these women’s economic activities were not as successful as hoped. Instead, shebeens developed into spaces where African men and women could freely drink and mingle without the restrictions of gendered separation, as in the case of Municipal beerhalls, and they were characterised by African tunes that were emblematic of African township culture in Southern Africa.³³⁹ As a result many lower ranking African railwaymen preferred to spend their time in shebeens instead of Municipal beerhalls, meaning that beer brewing became a very lucrative venture for skokiaan queens. This allowed many of them to buy stands and even cars, become land ladies and generally develop into a powerful force to be reckoned with in black Bulawayo.

336. E. Msindo. “Ethnicity not class? The 1929 Bulawayo Faction Fights Reconsidered.” p. 436.

237. D.L. Hodgson & S. McCurdy. “Wayward wives, misfit mothers and disobedient daughters”, pp. 201-224.

238. D.L. Hodgson & S. McCurdy. “Wayward wives, misfit mothers and disobedient daughters”, pp. 201-224.

239. E. Francis. “Gender, migration and urban livelihoods”, pp.167-190; J.L. Parpart. “Where is your mother?” pp.241-271.

In such a setting, Eurocentred ideals of the nuclear family and the breadwinner model were threatened. From the late 1940s, the number of divorces that were recorded within the African population increased exponentially.³⁴⁰ An important determinant for this increase was the inability of African railwaymen to provide sufficiently for their wives. The connection between this inability to provide and increase in the number of divorces has been argued to have been an important motivator for the African railwaymen to strike in 1945. A substantial number of 'respectable' women who looked at the activities of 'defiant' women, had begun to question their own prudence to a system that was not in their favour. If some African women were indeed engaging in prostitution, beer brewing and *mapoto* marriages, they acquired what Ikeya identifies as a 'bargaining power'³⁴¹ amongst Burmese women who engaged in similar activities to earn a living. In colonial Zimbabwe, the bargaining power of 'defiant' African women was expressed most clearly not only by their illegal presence within the railway compounds and Location, but also by verbal assertions to their temporary husbands that if their economic demands were not met, they would easily look for another partner within these African living areas in dire need of their services.³⁴²

4.3 The Rhodesia Railway African strike from a gendered perspective

According to Teresa Barnes:

One of the disabilities under which the historiography of African labour and society in colonial Zimbabwe has suffered has been the language used (or not used) to refer to African women. An obvious offender in this regard is the word 'married'. At the risk of banality, we may set the record straight and proclaim, 'wherever there is a married man there is a woman'. Yet too often the use of the term 'married' has simply served to indicate the off-stage existence of anonymous dependents-of inconsequential age and gender-who can safely be ignored.³⁴³

The case of African women in the Bulawayo railway compounds and their significance in the African Strike of 1945 requires such an approach. It must be remembered however that although the keyword 'married' is used, not all railwaymen were legally married, as illustrated in the preceding section. None the less, all the different grades of railwaymen went on strike and some of their primary grievances were directly

340. T. Barnes. "The fight for control of African women's mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe", pp.586-608; M. West. "Joint drinking' and the politics of sexual control in colonial Zimbabwe", pp. 645-667.

341. C. Ikeya. 2006. *Gender, history and modernity: Representing women in twentieth century colonial Burma*. (PhD dissertation at Cornell University), p.19.

342. M. West. "Joint drinking' and the politics of sexual control in colonial Zimbabwe", pp. 645-667.

343. T. Barnes. "So that a labourer could live with his family ", p. 95.

related to issues of social reproduction.³⁴⁴ Theresa Barnes explains ‘social reproduction’ as the complex web of relationships between households and the economy, in addition to how people within households relate to each other in response to the relationship that the household has with the economy.³⁴⁵ So, when in 1945 African railwaymen went on strike and put forward their complaints centred on low wages, inadequate and poor quality of food rations and insufficient and largely inhabitable housing, they were in fact highlighting how their relationship with the wage economy was affecting their ability to run their households efficiently.³⁴⁶ Other very important grievances that railway workers had included the issues of sick and leave pay and “inadequate communication with bosses”. These issues will not be engaged with in this study.

There have been a substantial number of scholarly engagements with this African railway strike in Southern Rhodesia, therefore the aim of this section is not to delve into an in-depth analysis of the strike.³⁴⁷ Rather, the aim is to illustrate further how railway infrastructure, which had been designed and designated as a strictly male domain was so intricately intertwined with the lives of women. In an environment where more African women were taking new and innovative measures to survive, African railwaymen, particularly those of the higher grades, became more than ever, disgruntled with both the living conditions and ‘morality’ of railway compounds. Their respectable wives echoed these very sentiments and desired to live in a space that was not riddled with prostitutes and poverty. To do so, the demands for higher wages, food rations and better homes had to be met. Lower ranking railwaymen also had strong motivations for going on strike that revealed that issues of social reproduction were of the utmost importance. These men had financial responsibilities to not only their concubines, but to their families back home. It is also very important to note that there was a large presence of children in the compounds. Many women moved with

344. T. Barnes. “So that a labourer could live with his family “, p. 95.

345. T. Barnes. “So that a labourer could live with his family “, p.98.

346. NAZ. ZBQ/3/1/2. “Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to investigate the grievances which gave rise to the strike amongst the African employees of the Rhodesia Railways and certain other matters affecting Africans employed in industry.” 27 October 1945.

346. For example, K.P. Vickery. “The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part 1: A narrative account.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24(3), 1998, pp. 49-71; M.J. Maodzwa. 1984. *African labour in the Rhodesia Railways 1934-1953: A study in the evolution and aspects of workers’ consciousness in Transport Industry*. (Dissertation: Hillside Teacher’s College). Bulawayo; I. Phimister. “Towards a History of Zimbabwe’s railways.” *Zimbabwean History* 12, 1981, pp.71-115.

one or two of their children into the compounds but other children were left behind in the rural homesteads. As such, even though railwaymen could not afford to send regular cash remittances to the homesteads, they had to. For legally married couples, it became integral for African women to augment the meagre salaries of their husbands through formal and informal employment. For those in temporary alliances, the need for women to augment household incomes was sometimes also a reality.

An important document produced at the end of the strike was the *Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to investigate the grievances which gave rise to the strike amongst the African employees of the Rhodesia Railways and certain other matters affecting Africans employed in industry* of 1945. Much like the *Report of the Howman Commission of 1943*, this investigation emphasised the need to reform the situation in the compounds in response to the increased migration and settlement of Africans, particularly women, in the urban space.³⁴⁸ This report also highlights quite extensively, how the issues of wages, housing and food rations were directly related to the growing presence of African women in the compounds.

The issues surrounding low wages, as mentioned in section 4.1 and illustrated in table 1, were undoubtedly a cause of conflict between African men and women in the compounds. The salaries offered to African railwaymen could not keep up with the inflation, a consequence of the World Wars. For 'respectable' railway families, the imminent threat of disgruntled wives being lured into 'wayward' ways was a cause of serious concern for men. For single men with *mapoto* wives, the same threat was true as their temporary wives were just that, temporary, and could easily leave the relationship if their financial needs were not met. This gave African women a certain level of power they had never possessed before, similar to the bargaining power attained by 'defiant' in Burma.³⁴⁹ Ergo, railwaymen put forward the argument that their low wages exacerbated the destruction of African familial structures in the urban space. Higher wages, along with sick and leave pay, were advocated as being integral to stabilising African families within the compounds. African women within the

348. NAZ. ZBQ/3/1/2. "Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to investigate the grievances which gave rise to the strike amongst the African employees of the Rhodesia Railways and certain other matters affecting Africans employed in industry." 27 October 1945.

349. C. Ikeya. 2006. *Gender, history and modernity*, p.19.

compounds were certainly searching for financial security and as such, would have supported the railwaymen's call to strike.

The second grievance of the striking workers, directly influenced by this African female presence was the all-important housing crisis. Male strikers argued that they could not establish stable (and for the higher-ranking railwaymen, modern) families without proper homes.³⁵⁰ Overcrowding in the compounds meant that women and children were exposed to living in small rooms with more than 6 men at a time for example. One of the most severe consequences of this had to do with issues of health. Railway compounds became a haven for disease, made worse by malnutrition. The Strike Commission notes that, "of particular concern were sanitation facilities, described as 'foul and insanitary', In one compound, 225 women and children had use of a total of four 'bucket closets'; in another 'excreta is piled a foot high'.³⁵¹ Such a situation could not be ignored and was a cause of serious distress for the inhabitants of the compounds.

Still dealing with the issues surrounding housing, some 'respectable' women especially those who later became a part of the African urban elite, desired a separation from the immorality that characterised the railway compounds in 1945. Their husbands, higher ranking railwaymen, expressed a fear that their wives would be corrupted by skokiaan queens, concubines and prostitutes. As part of the demands made, they called for either the strict policing of unattached women, in order to restore 'morality' into the African urban space. Alternatively, and reiterated by Percy Ibbotson, the government, municipality and railway administration were urged to develop new African living areas, particularly areas in which the rising African elite could reside.³⁵² With regards to the lower ranking railwaymen, demands were made for more married housing to be developed which would allow them to live comfortably with their families in the urban areas. They argued that by providing them with proper homes, they would be able to establish more stable relationships.³⁵³

350. NAZ. S482/49/40. "Strike of Railway Native Employees." CID Report. 24 October 1945.

351. NAZ. ZBQ/3/1/2. "Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to investigate the grievances which gave rise to the strike amongst the African employees of the Rhodesia Railways and certain other matters affecting Africans employed in industry."

352. T. Ranger. 2010. *Bulawayo Burning*, pp. 45-88.

353. NAZ. ZBQ/3/1/2. "Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to investigate the grievances which gave rise to the strike amongst the African employees of the Rhodesia Railways and certain other matters affecting Africans employed in industry."

Finally, the issue of food rations highlights how issues of social reproduction significantly impacted the outbreak of this strike. Table 3, which illustrates the scant food rations given to African railwaymen, was formulated from documents that revealed that many of the food rations given to African railwaymen were, many a times, inedible.³⁵⁴ According to Rhodesia Railway records, African railwaymen, in spite of ranking, received two pounds (a little under one kilogram) of mealie meal a day; two pounds of meat and vegetables a week, four pounds of monkey nuts per month; eight pounds of beans per month and twenty one pounds of salt per month.³⁵⁵ In testimony for the Howman commission on food rations, Mr Nash says:

Have you any idea of how much they spend out their wages on additional foodstuffs such as oranges, coffee, tea etc.? - The more sophisticated natives in Bulawayo claim to spend a lot. I have not investigated it properly. They share their accounts and food and so on and it is very complicated. They work on the system of sharing their money at the end of the month.³⁵⁶

Supplementing food rations became a norm for African families. This statement suggests that higher ranking workers, such as the boss boys, may have been able to afford to buy a few luxuries such as tea and coffee. However, the majority of railwaymen and their wives, concubines and children could not.³⁵⁷ The extent of their impoverishment is demonstrated by the matter of mealie meal, what became a staple food in the diet of Africans throughout the colony. Before the war, African railwaymen were given what was known as no.1 mealie meal, which was a refined form of the food. However, during and the till the end of the war, railway officials cried wartime expenses and as a way to curtail many of their financial obligations distributed what was known as no.2 mealie meal which was unrefined and mostly inedible in the form that it was distributed. African women had to come up with innovative ways to make the mealie meal palatable. Similarly, Africans who testified for the Howman Report noted that the meat they were given as part of their rations was often times rotten.³⁵⁸ For the lower ranking railwaymen who had very little to no opportunity to even consider buying luxury goods, stretching their already low wages to buy extra food to replace the subpar one that they were given was a challenge. It is noted in Rhodesia Railways

354. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Howman Report."

355. "Rhodesia Railways. Native labour, Southern Rhodesia, scales of rations (all departments)." *in* NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Howman Report."

356. NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Howman Report." Testimony by Mr Nash.

357. NAZ. S482/49/40. "Strike of Railway Native Employees." CID Report. 24 October 1945.

358. K.P. Vickery. "The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part 1", p. 554; NAZ. ZBI 2/1/1. "Howman Report."

Compound Reports that African women were allowed to grow vegetables on small pieces of land.³⁵⁹ This augmented the food supply of families only minimally. It is not surprising then that malnutrition was rife in the railway compounds.

All three of these grievances highlight clearly that African women had since the 1920s, evolved into relatively influential socioeconomic actors and most certainly impacted quite significantly, the railwaymen's decision to strike. Their needs, along with those of their children, were some of the primary concerns of strikers. The presence of these different women within the compounds necessitated a reevaluation of the labour related policies by the Rhodesia Railways and the colonial government. Although they were not actively involved in the actual strike, respectable and wayward wives, prostitutes, *mapoto* wives and beer-brewers alike, stood to benefit from the changes that would be implemented within the compounds, minimal as they were.

Notwithstanding that the African strike did not result in a complete standstill of the entire railway network, it did have significant consequences for both the colonial government and Rhodesia Railways. European volunteers and convicts were used to fill in the gap that was created by African strikers and new technologies were introduced which also served to ensure that the missing African labour force would not cause a complete disruption of both passenger and cargo traffic.³⁶⁰ In spite of taking these steps to ensure that traffic continued to run as usual, the strike without a doubt had very important negative implications. For example, goods whose final destination were either Bulawayo or were in transit to other parts of Southern and Central Africa from South Africa could not be moved effectively. Similarly, the transportation of coal from the Wankie Colliery Fields was disrupted which had adverse implications on electricity supplies within Southern Rhodesia. Several stakeholders consequently petitioned the Railways and the colonial government to deal promptly with the disruptions. After some negotiations and the promise of an investigation into the striker's grievances, which culminated in the previously mentioned *Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to investigate the grievances which gave rise to the strike amongst the African employees of the Rhodesia Railways*

359. NAZ. 5256/430. Reports on railway compounds (1923-1925).

360. K.P. Vickery. "The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part 1", pp.553-554.

*and certain other matters affecting Africans employed in industry,*³⁶¹ the strikers agreed to go back to work.

From 1945 onwards, the Rhodesian government began to focus its attention on stabilising the African labour force, which comprised of implementing a set of policies to rectify the problem that had become Africans in the urban space. As part of this, deals between the BSAC and the Rhodesian government were underway for the purchasing of the Rhodesia Railways. Finalized in 1947, this transfer of ownership of the railways was intended to be one of the primary mechanisms to ensure that African railwaymen and their families would become a much more reliable source of cheap labour through the implementation of wage increases, higher food rations, better housing and more opportunities for social mobility. Care must be taken not to over exaggerate the changes in living standards implemented by the parastatal railways of 1947, however, these improvements were slightly better than those implemented by the BSAC owned railways at the end of the strike.

The overall resolution of the strike was disappointing for Africans within the railway compounds, none the less, there were some concessions made. One of the main concessions made in response to the strike was a policy that allowed more African railwaymen, a total of about seventy-five percent, to live legally with women in the compounds.³⁶² *Mapoto* wives were from this point onwards allocated the same benefits as legally married wives with regards to both housing and food rations, which must have altered the relationship between the different categories of African women considerably. Whilst 'respectable' wives remained at the top of the compound food chain, so to speak, the newly found legality of temporary wives and concubines undoubtedly gave them a lot more bargaining power and earned them some form of respect.

As such, *mapoto* wives and concubines were considered when new allocations for family housing was made. The report of 1945 recommended that the railways make improvements to what had become a housing and health crisis in the compounds. The railways therefore made minor improvements to their accommodation, including

361. NAZ. ZBQ/3/1/2. "Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to investigate the grievances which gave rise to the strike amongst the African employees of the Rhodesia Railways and certain other matters affecting Africans employed in industry." 27 October 1945

362. T. Barnes. "So that a labourer could live with his family ", pp.95-113.

building more houses that had kitchen and toilet facilities.³⁶³ Preference was given to higher-ranking railwaymen and this policy was extended further after 1947 when the government took the initiative to build houses for these higher ranks and their families outside of the railway compounds. 'Respectable' African families, who were an important part of the African urban elite, had successfully petitioned the need to for their separation from the 'moral laxity' of the compound.

With regards to wages, moderate wage increases were instituted. However, the higher grades of African railwaymen received larger pay increases because it was believed that it was of "extreme importance... [in] encouraging the African to advance himself and increase his efficiency."³⁶⁴ As such, although quite modest, there was a relative improvement in the standard of living of living for the 'respectable' railway families which allowed them to supplement their household incomes. This was even more so after the transfer of ownership from the BSAC and was intended to be a labour stabilisation mechanism. By acknowledging the existence of an African urban elite in the compounds, the Rhodesian government hoped to suppress any form of dissent that would arise from this important section of the African population. By instituting larger pay increases and other favourable minor improvements for the higher-ranking railwaymen, their 'respectable' wives gained an even higher social status within the compounds. However, for the lower ranking railwaymen and their wives or concubines, the miniscule pay increases did very little to improve their situation.

The issue of food rations was also dealt with unsatisfactorily, but unlike the grievances surrounding wages and housing, there was no preferential treatment shown towards higher ranking railwaymen. Strikers had called for an end to the ration system, insisting that money be given instead. However, the Rhodesia Railways declined this request and instead increased the rations of meat, also making concessions for women to receive meat weekly.³⁶⁵ Irrespective of this, the railway strike became a motivation for other African workers to strike against unacceptable living and working conditions. Vickery points out that the strike in 1945 stands out as relatively more 'successful' and unique because in response to other strikes within the colony, "the employees and the state responded in far more draconian fashion than in the rail strike, a difference which

363. T. Barnes. "So that a labourer could live with his family ", pp. 95-113.

364. K.P. Vickery. "The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II", p.65.

365. K.P. Vickery. "The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II", p.65.

reflected both the delicate strategic position of the railway system and the effective organisation of the railwaymen.”³⁶⁶

Although the overall resolution of the African railway strike of 1945 proved to be disconcerting for African railwaymen, it serves to illuminate just how important African women and their needs had become. Whilst there are several other key contributing factors that led to the outbreak of the strike, the three issues of wages, housing and food rations are indicative of how, in spite of colonial initiatives to structure the railways as strictly a male terrain by encouraging the settlement of only the male migrant labourer, African women penetrated into a space they were not welcome and fought to achieve a better life for themselves and their families.

366. K.P. Vickery. “The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II”, p.67.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

*Izitimela zakoBulawayo*³⁶⁷ had a profound impact on the way the city evolved between the years 1920 and 1950. Although African women and men in Bulawayo (and greater Zimbabwe) shared similar negative experiences wherein their societies and peasant economies were dismantled for the benefit of the colonial wage economy and the Rhodesia Railways Ltd, technological development in the form of railway infrastructure afforded African women a bargaining power that they had never had before. Such a complex and contradictory experience with the railway enterprise in essence fostered a fair degree of African female socioeconomic empowerment.

The objective of this Master's research was to investigate the role and impact of the railways on facilitating African women's mobility (and consequent social, economic and cultural empowerment) into urban Bulawayo in the period 1920 to 1950. This objective has been somewhat thwarted by archival power which has rendered the colonial archives of greater Zimbabwe, Bulawayo and Rhodesia Railways as virtually useless in terms of the specific objective of this research. However, arising from this archival limitation, the MA evolved into a search for the presence of women in the colonial archives pertaining to the introduction and evolution of the railways and the subsequent development of urban Bulawayo. One strategy that was adopted during the course of this research was to look for traces of African women's archival presence in seemingly innocuous words and phrases in an attempt to reinsert women into the archives. This strategy of reading against the archival grain yielded a measure of success but needed time beyond the scope of an MA.

Constructing a counter-archive is potentially another strategy that could address archival power and silence, however, again due to the time limitations of an MA, this could also not be effectively addressed. What has emerged therefore is research that has incorporated archival silences as evidence of erasure, of African women's experiences in particular, and the privileging of a power continuum with colonial authority and settler society on the one end and African men on the other. This archival architecture reflects the social, cultural, political and economic dynamic which shaped colonial society and attempted to keep African women subordinate and silenced. It also attempted to circumscribe and shape African women's experiences

367. Ndebele phrase meaning the trains of Bulawayo.

of technological modernity in the shape of the train. This is evident in the collusion between chiefs and colonial authorities to place guards at train stations in an attempt to capture African women attempting to use trains to leave rural areas.

Chapter one introduced the train as more than just an efficient system of transport and engaged with the literal and symbolic power attached to this machine. The train acted as a symbol of progress, Euromodernity and the supposed superiority of the European race. It was believed that technological development in the form of the train was emblematic of Europe's ability to be innovative, allegedly in contrast to the stasis of precolonial spaces. M. Aguiar's analysis of the connection between European modernity and the train illuminated the complexities associated with this 'machine of progress'. Railways were understood to be the key to the development of colonized territories that were seen as being stuck in an unchanging historical moment. The train, with its perpetual forward motion, symbolized progress. It inscribed a new way of existing by instituting a different understanding of, and engagement with both time and space. Time was restructured to suit the arrival and departures of the train whilst new, difficult terrains were explored for the first time, opening up the heart of colonial terrains to exploitation. Yet, even though imperialists made bold claims regarding the civilizing capabilities of the train, the benefits of railway development were not intended for indigenous peoples. Railway development and any form of modernization that occurred within colonial spaces were intended to improve the lives of colonists, as is evidenced by the brutal utilisation of cheap indigenous labour to ensure the profitability of railway enterprises. As such, within these colonial spaces, the train was encountered by the colonized in two contradictory ways, both as a symbol of colonial oppression and as a source of liberation.

By critically engaging with the idea of a universalized Euromodernity Chapter two began to touch on the question of what role the railways in Bulawayo played in the development or underdevelopment and consequent impoverishment of African societies in general, and women in particular. The idea of Euromodernity was integral to the entire British colonial project and had inextricable links with technological development. D.V. Kumar's interrogation of this hegemonic modernity revealed that it was a project that encapsulated Western philosophies, encouraged the development of a specific kind of society and fostered its development into an entire lived

experience.³⁶⁸ ‘Modern’ societies were characterized by a shift away from communalism and agrarianism to a more nuclear society whose economy was capitalist in nature. Reason and scientific rationalism replaced superstition and there was an act of breaking away with the past in every sphere of life. Chapter two argued that this Euromodernity and one of its most powerful physical manifestations (the train) were at the center of the reorganization and restructuring of African societies in colonial Bulawayo and the early stages of African indigence. The imposition of a foreign way of existence resulted in the dismantling of many Ndebele sociocultural, economic and political practices that had been in existence for many years. For example, the institution of the colonial wage economy had devastating implications on the African peasant economy which had been relatively successful. Additionally, the introduction of the train in the early colonial years was intended to combat the supposed immobility of Africans, along with encouraging civilization and innovation and yet, what it did instead was set into motion the institution of a migrant labour system that would prove to be catastrophic to African rural reserves.

By exporting Euromodernity into colonial territories, imperialists intended to negate different African ways of existence which were in themselves modernities. This negation was designed to preserve the position of Euromodernity as the apotheosis of rationality. However, Chatterjee’s conceptualization of modernities ‘thinking with and against’ each other assisted this research in formulating and substantiating a Ndebele modernity that coexisted with Euromodernity. By illustrating that other modernities existed prior to Euromodernity, then coexisted with colonial expressions thereof, it is possible to assert that Africans had a unique experience with this technology and its surroundings in contrast to what was expected by imperialists. Instead of simply being a reliable source of cheap labour for the railways, Africans engaged with railway infrastructure in ways that challenged ideals of Euromodernity. The most suitable example here is the case of African women, who knowingly defied colonial and customary laws and made use of trains to migrate from rural reserves all over Southern Africa and into urban Bulawayo.

As an intangible phenomenon, Euromodernity needed powerful physical representations to validate the ideals it propagated. One such representation was the

368. D.V. Kumar. “Engaging with modernity”, pp.240-254.

train and as such, technological development in the form of the railways was part and parcel of the process of African indigence. Railways were seen as the key to ‘taming savage lands’, an idea framed by the modernity paradigm. By taming the African terrain, the train was able to open up the continent to imperialists, giving them the ability to effectively tap into its vast riches, primarily natural resources and cheap labour. Cecil John Rhodes was a prominent figure in the history of railway development in Zimbabwe and whilst his efforts in these processes have been celebrated by some, for many, if not most Africans, railway development became an ominous symbol.

It has been challenging to ascertain concretely to what extent the railways contributed to creating access and opportunity for African female mobility and consequently, the degree to which women’s mobility was impacted in their attempts to subvert the restrictions of space and time as well as the social constraints imposed on them. This is primarily because of what Rodney Carter³⁶⁹ has called archival power, which manifests in areas such as the androcentrism of migration studies in many Southern African histories as highlighted by Catherine Wright³⁷⁰. This power is that which determines which voices are heard and not heard within historical records. The power of the archive in Zimbabwe’s railway histories has meant that the voices of subalterns, in this case African women, are silenced, which results in an almost complete erasure from their own histories. Several archival materials were perused in the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare, National Railways of Zimbabwe Museum Archives in Bulawayo, the National Archives in Pretoria, the Transnet Heritage Library in Johannesburg and the Pretoria campus of the National Library of South Africa and yet at first glance there were very little to no traces of African women in relation to the Bulawayo railway line and the trains that moved in around that region. There is however, a substantial amount of information on African railway men and other African men who made use of the Ulere trains for example, to enter into urban Bulawayo. As a consequence of this, it became essential to read against the grain of these very archives. This research was guided by T. Barnes’s approach of looking at certain keywords that could highlight the subaltern (African women) presence in the historical

369. R. G. S. Carter. “Of things said and unsaid”, pp. 215-233.

370. C. Wright. “Gender awareness in Migration Theory”, pp. 771-791.

record. In the case of this study the keyword ‘married’ was one clue to unlocking the colonial archive in relation to African women.³⁷¹ The presence of African women in the colonial archives is subsumed into the category of married African men but reading against the archival grain brings this muted presence to the forefront. Other techniques of reading against the archival grain included challenging the conceptualization of the train as a male domain which is evident in the colonial archive in the emphasis placed on European and African men within railway records. In the case of challenging the androcentric nature of migration studies, careful comparisons and connections with similar territories and applying those to the context of colonial Bulawayo were made. For example, J. Parpart’s discussion of gendered migration on the Zambian Copperbelt created an opportunity to draw comparisons with the context of Bulawayo as there were more detailed recordings of African female movement on the Copperbelt.³⁷² This comparative approach enabled the extrapolation of information that could be applied to a comparable context such as Bulawayo. Zambia and Zimbabwe as British colonies shared similar colonial experiences.

On the question of migration, more specifically, African women’s access to train travel as a means to escape the rural homesteads, Chapter three illustrated that the equation of masculinity with the train under Euromodernity has resulted in an inaccurate and unbalanced focus on the male migrant labourer. This equation of masculinity and technology came about as a result of ideas of biological determinism which articulated men as strong, virile beings whilst women were nurturers, weak and primarily caregivers. From this understanding, the characterization of the train as powerful and in constant forward motion, which was intended to symbolize progress, was likened to the nature of men. By propagating the train and the entire railway fabric as gendered spaces in favour of men, women’s encounters, experiences and engagement with them remained largely invisible.

Many a times, archival power is what determines the androcentric nature of migration studies in colonial contexts. If the colonial archive places men at the center of its records, it is not surprising that studies that engage with these archives fall into the trap of placing men at the center of analysis and women simply as dependents. In the

371. T. Barnes. “So that a labourer could live with his family “, 1995, p. 99.

372. J.L. Parpart. “Where is your mother?” pp.241-271.

case of this study, the absence of African women in records of Rhodesia Railways such as the railway passenger logs inhibited any avenues for a quantitative appraisal of not only African female mobility patterns, but their economic activities within the compounds as well. Catherine Wright illustrates how integral it is to incorporate gender into any engagement with migration studies and Teresa Barnes supports this in the context of Southern Rhodesia by pointing out that African women were in actual fact migrant labourers in their own right.³⁷³ As such, their stories deserve to be told. By delineating the train (and the entire railway enterprise) as so much more than a masculine space, Chapter three was able to deduce that African women did in fact make use of the train to enter urban Bulawayo. There were a growing number of African women not only in the railway compounds but in urban Bulawayo in its entirety from the 1920s onwards. Seeing that Bulawayo was well connected internally and externally by rail to Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Portuguese East Africa, which were the largest sources of African cheap labour from outside the country for the Rhodesia Railways, it is very likely that women did make use of trains to move into the urban locale, in spite of there not being a clear archival record that details this. Also, Chapter three illustrated that there were cases where chiefs in rural homesteads all throughout Southern Africa complained of women running away into the urban areas by train which necessitated placing guards at railway stations to ensure that they did not leave without permission. Such occurrences aid in reading against the archival grain and illustrated that the train did in actual fact increase African female mobility in and around the Bulawayo region.

Finally, Chapter four addressed, more concretely, the questions of how and to what degree the railways impacted the lives of women and gender relations in urban black Bulawayo and if the coming of the railways to this colonial city created an opportunity for African female socioeconomic empowerment. This chapter critically engaged with urban Bulawayo, particularly the railway compounds, to illustrate just how much influence African woman had garnered by the outbreak of the Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945. In spite of their relative absence from the colonial archive, this chapter read against its grain by looking in documents such as the *Howman Committee Report* of 1943, that recorded the presence of a large group of African women within urban Bulawayo and the *Report of the Commission appointed by His*

373. T. Barnes., "The fight for control of African women's mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe", p.595.

Excellency the Governor to investigate the grievances which gave rise to the strike amongst the African employees of the Rhodesia Railways and certain other matters affecting Africans employed in industry of 1945 that was engaged from a critical gendered perspective and from that was able to highlight the importance of issues of social reproduction and how these had contributed to the outbreak of the African Railway Strike of 1945. For these two documents and other similar documents used in the chapter, the keyword 'married' was used to determine more concretely, just how influential the African female presence in the compounds was.

African women who migrated into the railway compounds as respectable mothers and wives or as women fleeing either the poverty of the rural reserves or patriarchal oppression, discovered that African railway men were living in a very difficult environment. Their salaries, although substantially more for higher grades, were barely sufficient to sustain just themselves, let alone their wives and children. Similarly, the food rations provided by the Rhodesia Railways were inadequate and many a times inedible and the housing crisis within the Bulawayo railway compounds was one that received national attention as a possible cause for future African dissent. It is in this context that African women had to construct sometimes new, but always creative identities for themselves in order to ensure not only their own survival, but the survival of their entire families.

One such constructed identity was that of the 'respectable' wife who was married to higher-ranking African railway men. Like the other women, they too were initially illegal migrants into the urban locale, yet over time, they acquired the favour of both the colonial and railway authorities. Constantly asserting their 'respectability', these women grappled with being Christian whilst still holding on to important elements of Ndebele culture. The amalgamation of Christianity and Ndebele culture allowed 'respectable' women and their families to formulate a modernity that was looked at favourably by the colonial and railway authorities. These women's entry into the urban locale opened up new economic opportunities for them in areas that were considered 'respectable' and suitable for the kind of life they and their families envisaged, that is, one away from the squalor and impropriety of the compounds. At the end of the African railway strike in 1945, 'respectable' women's position as part of the African urban elite was secured and highlighted by the preferential treatment their husbands received from the colonial government.

The antithesis to this image of respectability were the young unattached girls, wayward wives and widows who flocked into the urban space in their numbers and were viewed as morally unsound. The economic activities of these women ranged from prostitution to beer brewing, although there were possibly many other legal avenues for them to earn a living to augment their household incomes. For example, and this is also applicable to 'respectable' mothers and wives, many women grew vegetables within the compounds, which added to the meagre food rations supplied by Rhodesia Railways. Whilst growing vegetables to add to the household food supplies was not looked at in a negative light by railway and colonial authorities and also by the African railway men, activities such as beer brewing that threatened the finances of the colonial government and positioning of the African man as the head of the household proved challenging. It was in such scenarios that the alliance between African and European patriarchies were cemented. Yet, in spite of all the efforts to unsettle the newly attained socioeconomic bargaining power of African women, these efforts failed. Chapter four demonstrated clearly that the more African women attained these bargaining powers, the more African gendered relations evolved in favour of women.

The extent to which African women impacted the railway compounds and a demonstration of just how influential their presence and activities in the compounds were can be seen in the gendered appraisal of the African strike of 1945. The three main grievances of African strikers, which were low wages, insufficient food rations and inadequate housing all reflected issues that directly impacted and were influenced by women. African railway men believed that in order to curtail the growing influence of some of these women, solid African family structures had to be established within the compounds and this is what they petitioned for. This means that an African female presence and influence was felt so strongly in these compounds that it necessitated a response from African men and a shift in policies by the Rhodesia Railways and ultimately the Rhodesian government. As a result, the search for a better life by these women did in fact result in varying forms of socioeconomic empowerment.

The railways as symbols of technological progress and Euromodernity acted in two ways for the colonized. On the one hand, the train was an emblem of exploitation and oppression. Chapters three and four detail in great depth the extent of this exploitation and oppression. Whilst the Rhodesia Railways was the largest employer in both Northern and Southern Rhodesia during this period, it can be argued that it was one

of the most paramount causes of large-scale African poverty within the region. Chapter four illustrated the inhumane conditions that African railway men and their families were subjected to. Within the compounds, Africans lived on the bare minimum and this situation inevitably filtered into the rural homesteads that they had been forced to leave at the institution of the migrant labour system. On the other hand, the train opened up a 'new' world for many Africans by introducing a different kind of mobility, one that was at a faster rate and that could facilitate the broadening of their physical and metaphorical horizons. African women in particular were able to make use of this somewhat positive consequence of railway development to their benefit. For example, as has been evidenced throughout the entire thesis, it is possible that many African women fled patriarchal servitude in the rural homesteads and entered urban Bulawayo on board trains. This is also a clear demonstration of African female defiance of Eurocentric norms with regards to the train and how it should have been used by different races and genders.

In spite of the very concrete efforts to address all of the research objectives thoroughly, there are some obvious limitations and these are linked to the issue of the archive. Although this is in itself a limitation, it can be highlighted as a lacuna in the railway histories of Zimbabwe that require further scholarly attention. There is very little written about the African female migrant labourer as espoused by Teresa Barnes, nor is there much work done on the activities of African women in railway compounds or in relation to train travel. This goes back to the absence of African women from the historical record in relation to the railways, which makes it difficult to make them the centre of analysis in a history that they appear to be almost completely written out of.

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