

Immigrant Black South Africans and the Emergence of Modernist African Politics in Zimbabwe, 1890-1940

Ncube G. T.

History Department
Midlands State University
Gweru, Zimbabwe

Abstract

*"I am afraid the whole experiment of importing them was a mistake".
(Sir Drummond Chaplin, Administrator of Rhodesia, 14 April 1919)*

What prompted Sir Drummond Chaplin to regret the immigration of the Mfengu to Matabeleland at the turn of the century is the subject of a long and chequered history of British-Mfengu relations that began in the Cape Colony in the 1830s, where they had been erstwhile allies of the British colonial government, before they were imported into Rhodesia by Cecil John Rhodes in the 1890s, where the historical conditions of the new colony quickly transformed the Mfengu into bitter and vocal opponents of the British South Africa Company administration. This paper delves into this intriguing history of Cecil John Rhodes's scheme to import a large group of 'loyal and progressive' black South Africans into Matabeleland as allies, in order to neutralize the 'incorrigible savagery' of the 'warlike' Ndebele people through the introduction of Christians from South Africa. This paper shows how this immigration experiment inadvertently sowed the seeds for the birth of modernist African politics in Zimbabwe, as the Mfengu became pioneers in the organization of African protest movements in the country, and later played prominent roles in the first black political movements that emerged in the first three decades of colonial rule. The settlement of the Mfengu in Matabeleland at the turn of the century, where the Ndebele were still smarting from the destruction of their state and dissatisfied with land distribution between Whites and Blacks, created opportunities for the Mfengu to offer their leadership and organizational skills to the Ndebele cause, leading to a fusion of Mfengu modernist politics, Ndebele monarchist politics, and an emerging Bulawayo township tradition that crystallized around rural and urban grievances of the Ndebele. This political cocktail laid the basis for the rise of the first African political organizations in Zimbabwe, such as the Rhodesia Bantu Voters Association, that threw a challenge to African political exclusion in the electoral politics of Rhodesia and was a forerunner, in the political genealogy of African political mobilization against settler rule, to mass nationalism that later emerged in the 1950s.

Introduction

The emergence of modernist African politics in Zimbabwe in the early twentieth century was characterized by a mixture of political traditions that included the modernist protest politics of a small emerging elite of immigrant Mfengu who

had migrated to Zimbabwe *en masse* from South Africa in the first decade of colonial rule; traditional Ndebele monarchist politics of the Matabele Home Movement; and an emerging Bulawayo township tradition that crystallized around rural and urban grievances of the Ndebele. The single largest group of black South African immigrants that pioneered the birth of modernist African politics in Zimbabwe were the Mfengu. Mfengu politics, that emerged in Zimbabwe in the crucial inter-war period, heralded the formative period for the development of middle-class political consciousness and organization in the country and were characterized by an elitist agenda that was championed by an emerging petty bourgeoisie that focused on their own class agenda without much reference to the interests of the rest of the colonized population. Stephen J. Thornton's study of the struggle for greater participation in the colonial economy by an emerging African petty-bourgeoisie in Bulawayo between 1893 and 1933 has shown how this struggle became more explicitly political as the emerging black petty-bourgeoisie found their demands frustrated and interpreted as a challenge to the system rather than merely facilitating their fuller participation in it (Thornton, 1999, 63). Thornton has also shown how the struggles of this nascent petty-bourgeoisie are important not only in terms of our understanding particular economic developments in early Rhodesia, but also because they initiated particular forms of political protest into which other very different groups were drawn. (Thornton, 1999, 63)

Michael Oliver West has shown that the first African protest movements in Southern Rhodesia were organized by black South Africans, a number of whom had assisted the White Pioneers who established the colony in 1890. Other black South Africans subsequently immigrated to Southern Rhodesia in search of land and other economic opportunities, which became increasingly scarce at home after the South African War of 1899-1902 and, especially, the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. In Southern Rhodesia, as in their land of origin, the black South African's quest for social mobility included, crucially, an emphasis on political organization of the protest variety (West, 2002, 121).

One of the most significant group movements from South Africa to Rhodesia in the first decade of colonial rule was the organized trek of 500 Mfengu families, labourers and farmers from the Cape to Bulawayo in 1899 and 1900, a large percentage of whom were already Christians at the time of migration. Bengt Sundkler & Christopher Steed have shown that this movement remains one of the most significant Christian movements in Africa to date. The Mfengu community was to a large extent Christianized by this time and followers of various denominations were well represented among them, including Wesleyans, Anglicans

and Presbyterians (Sundkler & Steed, 2000, 451-2). In the Cape the Mfengu were known for tight social cohesion, intense clan and family loyalty, educational ambition and, in many cases, outstanding personal Christian conviction. Left to themselves as a small emerging elite in a new country, these characteristics became even stronger in Southern Rhodesia than in the mother country (Sundkler & Steed, 2000, 452).

Although the Mfengu mass exodus to Rhodesia took place at the turn of the century in 1899 and 1900, it had been heralded in the early 1890s by individuals who had gone to search out the country. Some Mfengu entered Rhodesia as part of the 'Pioneer Column' of 1890 as personal servants in transport work, as interpreters and catechists among other things. Many of these so-called 'Cape Boys', like John Grootboom, came later and took part in the fighting against the Ndebele during the 1896-7 risings, and bore the brunt of the fighting in the Matobo area where it was fiercest, and also participated in the storming of Mkwati's stronghold at Ntabazikamambo on the 5th of July 1896 (Ranger, 1967, 213). Among the earliest arrivals was Gqweni Hlazo who had gone to Southern Rhodesia as a 'Pioneer', viz. he had arrived with the Pioneer Column of 1890. Moses Mfazi was another well-known Mfengu Methodist and early-comer who had started catechetical and school work near Bulawayo in the 1890s. Perhaps these early comers informed their friends back home in the Cape of the opportunities up north and an ambitious emigration programme was set in motion (Sundkler & Steed, 2000, 452).

The first group movement to Southern Rhodesia arrived in Bulawayo in 1899 and a second the following year. A third group was planned for 1902 but the intensification of the Anglo-Boer War made this impossible. Mfengu Christians of different congregations strengthened the ties between the Churches in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, and between the Cape Colony and Bulawayo region. Near Bulawayo, the Mfengu were given the Ntabazinduna area and a "Fingo Location" was established at Mbembesi, some miles distant. This was similar to the Cape, where Grahamstown had its "Fingo Location". Another colony of Thembu immigrants, also from the Cape Colony, settled at Gwayi River in north-western Zimbabwe. They quickly built their own chapel and a school and began to reach out to neighbouring villages and mines, Selukwe, Gwelo and others (Sundkler & Steed, 2000, 452). So far your argument is not clear at all. What new perspectives are you advancing in this article? What is the point of us knowing about the Mfengu involvement in the development of African nationalism in Southern Rhodesia? Engage cognate literature on the evolution of nationalist consciousness in Southern Rhodesia in order clearly show the interventions you are making in this paper.

In the Beginning: Mfengu as Allies of the British in the Cape Colony, South Africa

Although there is a general dearth of literature on the Mfengu in Zimbabwe, their origins and early history in South Africa are well-documented. The first Mfengu (widely referred to as Fingo in colonial literature) originated as refugees from the Mfecane/Difaqane wars that raged all over Natal in the 1820s and 1830s, accompanying the rise expansion of the Zulu kingdom in the 1820s. They were ejected from Natal, driven south and forced to seek refuge among the Gcaleka-Xhosa in the Transkei in the early 1830s. Many Mfengu were Zizi, Bhele and Hlubi who fled from areas conquered by the Zulu kingdom. Some were Ngwaneni and Hlubi led by Matiwane, who were defeated by the British in 1828 after crossing the Drakensberg from Lesotho into the Transkei area. The hybridity of the construction of the Mfengu identity is clearly reflected in the wide range of Mfengu family names that encapsulate a broad spectrum of ethnic autochthonous sources such as Khumalo (Zulu), Dlamini (Swazi) and Mpengesi, Majola (Xhosa). Because they were reduced to begging, the Mfengu became servants of the Gcaleka-Xhosa and neighbouring peoples (Parsons, 1982, 62). However, their short stay among the Xhosa was not a pleasant one as they were alienated and derogatively nicknamed "*amafengu*", a term that means 'beggars' or 'scavengers' in isiXhosa.

In 1836 the Mfengu were invited by the British to cross the border into the Cape Colony, where they would settle as friendly peasant farmers on conquered Xhosa land. 17,000 Mfengu with 22,000 cattle then crossed the Kei River (Parsons, 1982, 62). The history of the British and the Mfengu as allies dates back to this period in the late 1830s when the British had invited them to settle in the Cape Colony as refugees from the Zulu wars of the Mfecane. Alienated from their new Xhosa and other southern Nguni neighbours, the Mfengu actively sought to ally themselves with the British colonial government by rapidly converting to Christianity, adopting Western education and Western ways of costume and culture. The Mfengu established themselves as loyal allies to the British military, and offered themselves as troops in times of war. For example, when the Xhosa people of Ciskei rose against the British in the 8th Cape-Nguni war of 1850-53, after Harry Smith had deposed Sandile from his chieftainship, the British were joined by their old Mfengu allies in quashing this uprising. The war reached a climax when Mfengu troops under British command invaded Gcaleka-Xhosa country and set off a bitter civil war between Gcaleka and local Mfengu who had settled among them (Parsons, 1982, 116).

In the Cape Colony the Mfengu had also been critical to British labour, food and fuel supplies. In 1865, when the British had devised a scheme to divide the whole of Transkei into treaty-states and dependent chiefdoms in order to ensure the

peaceful supply of labour and peasant produce to the Cape Colony, they had created 'Fingoland'. Fingoland was settled with friendly Mfengu peasant farmers, adapted to Western customs and loyal to the British (Parsons, 1982, 139). In the 1870s Mfengu peasants were in forefront of supplying food and fuel to labour migrants in the Kimberley mines. Mfengu peasant farmers in Fingoland invested in ploughs and wagons to increase their yield and to transport their crops to the mines. They also invested in sheep to produce wool while the world prices were high. In 1873 Mfengu peasants in Fingoland exported 500 wagonfuls of sorghum and maize, and by 1875, the annual trade between Fingoland and the Cape Colony was worth 150,000 Pounds Sterling. Soon other African groups in the Transkei and Ciskei learnt from the Mfengu success and followed suit (Parsons, 1982, 139).

Prominent Zimbabwean oral historian, Phathisa Nyathi, has shown that there wasn't a single Mfengu migration into Zimbabwe, but that they immigrated separately and differently, over time. Nyathi has identified the names of the original Mfengu houses that migrated to Zimbabwe in the 1890s as Ndondo, Khona, Radebe, Nyilika, Dywili, Ndzombane, Ntuli, Khumalo, Mniki, Mpengesi, Majozi, Majola, and Gagisa (Nyathi, 2010). There was also a group of Xhosa who came to Zimbabwe as drivers of ox-wagons for Whites, plying the route between Zimbabwe and South Africa (Nyathi, 2005, 58-59). One such immigrant was John Grootboom, later widely renowned by BSA Company forces as a good scout. Grootboom entered Matabeleland in the 1880s as a wagon-driver for Charles Helm. During the 1893 Ndebele War he served as a scout for the BSAC forces. At the end of the war he carried a message from L.S. Jameson to the fleeing Lobengula asking for the latter's surrender. During the 1896-1897 Uprisings, he was the best-known African scout working for the British. He helped to arrange the first 'indaba' in the Matopo hills, which he attended. Afterwards he accepted only a horse from Cecil John Rhodes as payment and then disappeared from the historical record (Rasmussen, 1979, 106).

In the 1890s, this alliance had been further cemented by Mfengu military assistance to the British conquest of Zimbabwe during the 1893 Ndebele war and the 1896-7 Risings. As noted above, many 'Cape Boys', like John Grootboom, fought on the side of BSA Company forces against the Ndebele during the 1896-7 risings, and bore the brunt of the fighting in the Matopo hills, where it was fiercest, and also played a key auxiliary role in the storming of Mkwati's stronghold at Ntabazikamambo on the 5th of July 1896 (Ranger, 1967, 213; Rasmussen, 1979, 106). It was this Mfengu loyalty to the British that inspired Cecil John Rhodes to import them into Southern Rhodesia in the 1899-1900, as useful African allies against the 'warlike' Ndebele, in return for promises of land in Matabeleland.

Rhodes's Scheme and Mfengu Immigration to South-Western Zimbabwe

Cecil John Rhodes's scheme to settle large numbers of loyal Mfengu immigrants from the Cape Colony, and loyal Tswana groups from Bechuanaland, into Matabeleland in the late 1890s was largely influenced by the experiences of the Ndebele-initiated uprisings of 1896-7 against BSA Company rule which had killed about 10% of the White settler population. Fearful of a similar uprising in future, Rhodes planned to create buffer zones of loyal African groups around the emerging White settlement of Bulawayo to cushion Europeans in the event of such an uprising (Michell, 1910, 244; Hist. Mss. HA 4/1/1, Hale, 1903-1905). Such a precautionary measure was deemed necessary because of settler perceptions of the Ndebele as incorrigible savages and 'warlike' people. These settler perceptions were largely derived from the image of the Ndebele that had been created by hostile European missionaries following their evangelizing failures in the Ndebele state. Despite thirty years of missionary labours among the Ndebele, the London Missionary Society, in particular, had failed to gain a single convert. Robert Moffat, William Sykes, T.M. Thomas, and Carnegie were largely responsible for creating the image of the incorrigible savagery of the Ndebele that formed the philosophical bedrock of settler attitudes towards the Ndebele (Carnegie, 1894; Thomas, 1872; Moffat, 1842; Wallis, 1945). The hostility to the Ndebele that missionaries so often revealed looked forward to the day when the power of the Ndebele state would be broken by British imperial intervention. As a result of their failure to evangelize the Ndebele, the missionaries relentlessly criticized Ndebele society and called for British conquest (Rasmussen, 1979, 159, 190).

Rhodes consequently viewed the Ndebele as a warlike people who needed to be neutralized through the introduction into Matabeleland of Christians from South Africa. In May 1898 Cecil John Rhodes put together a scheme to import 'loyal and progressive' Mfengu from the Cape. Rhodes planned a scheme for 'planting a settlement of loyal Fingoes in Rhodesia, with ten acres of land for every adult male', people he considered friendly to the colonial authorities (Michell, 1910, 244). He hoped these people would neutralize the Ndebele whom he perceived to be a warlike tribe (Hist. Mss. HA 4/1/1, Hale, 1903-1905). As a result, he facilitated the immigration of the Tswana chiefs Raditladi and Mphoeng and resettled them in the Mangwe district of South-western Zimbabwe. He also planned to bring in the Mfengu from the Transkei and to resettle them at three places in western Zimbabwe, i.e. Nyamandlovu, Matobo, and Mbembesi. By 1898 Rhodes's plan started rolling out. The first group of the Fingo left Transkei *en route* to Mbembesi. It turned out that this would be the last group to be brought out of Transkei as Rhodes died in 1902 and his plans were put on hold (Nyathi, 2010). Rhodes planned a "scheme for planting a settlement of loyal Fingoes in Rhodesia, with ten acres of

land for every adult male" (Michell, 1910, 244). In 1904 Reverend Hale noted that "The Fingoes are Cape Kaffirs, brought up as part of a scheme by Rhodes to form a cordon of loyal natives round Byo. to counteract any hostile movements of the Matabele. They are mostly Christians" (Hist. Mss. HA 4/1/1, Hale, 1903-1905). As had been the case in the Cape Colony, Cecil Rhodes thought the Mfengu would make useful African allies in Rhodesia. They were also meant to provide labour to the Europeans in any capacity that it was required, be it domestic or commercial (Moyo, 2006, 10; Nyathi, 2005, 58-59).

In 1898 Rhodes sent F. R. Thompson to the Transkei to recruit Mfengu settlers. Hundreds of Mfengu responded positively. The Mfengu immigration and settlement at Mbembesi in south-western Zimbabwe was predicated on a verbal offer that Rhodes made to the Mfengu at Butterworth in the Cape Colony in 1898, through F.R. Thompson. The key elements of the offer were that three 'reserves' would be created for the Mfengu in Matabeleland in the Matopo hills, Mbembesi and Nyamandhlovu, on which they could settle with the proviso that each man would work for three months each year. After 36 months of labour each one of them would be given an individual title to five morgen of land (Moyo, 2006, 10-11; Ranger, 1999). Though Rhodes's scheme did not materialize in the Matopo Hills, it did with regards to Mbembesi where the Mfengu were introduced. As noted in the introduction above, the first group into Southern Rhodesia arrived in Bulawayo in 1899 and a second the following year. They came by train via Mafikeng (Nyathi, 2005, 58-59). A third group was planned for 1902 but the intensification of the Anglo-Boer War made this impossible. Sundkler and Steed have put the estimate of the numbers involved in this group movement at 500 Mfengu families, comprising labourers and farmers, most of whom were converts to Christianity (Sundkler & Steed, 2000, 451).

In Zimbabwe, a special area was granted to the Mfengu immigrants who entered the country between 1898 and 1902 near the junction of the Mbembesi River and the present Bulawayo to Harare Highway, and designated as the Fingo Location. The name designated for this new settlement area in Mbembesi was drawn from a similar Mfengu settlement in the Cape Colony, near Grahamstown, which had had its own Fingo Location (Sundkler & Steed, 2000, 452). In the colonial era the Fingo Location was designated as a Native Purchase Area, allowing Africans freehold tenure over their land (Rasmussen, 1979, 92). According to Phathisa Nyathi the first group that went to settle at Mbembesi was under the chieftainship of Mveliswa Kona. After settling in Mbembesi, Kona undertook a return journey to Transkei to escort more Xhosa families that were coming to Southern Rhodesia, but he died there and that marked the end of his adventure in the service of the colonial master (Nyathi, 2010). Another colony of Tembu immigrants, also from the Cape Colony,

settled at Gwayi River in north-western Zimbabwe. They quickly built their own chapel and a school and began to reach out to neighbouring villages and mines, Selukwe, Gwelo and others (Sundkler & Steed, 2000, 452).

Following the Mfengu settlement in Mbembesi, the area became dotted with mission stations of various denominations to cater for their spiritual needs. By 1904 Reverend J.W. Leary had started the Mbembesi Mission in the Fingo Location (Hist. Mss. HA 4/1/1, Hale, 1903-1905).

The Seeds of Mfengu Political Opposition to the BSAC in colonial Zimbabwe

As shown above, Black South Africans first entered Southern Rhodesia as allies of the British between 1890 and 1893. However, in the first two decades of their settlement in Rhodesia, the African's eroded status in the new colonial conditions soon transformed them from erstwhile allies of the British to bitter and vocal opponents of the European colonialists. Their bitterness arose from two crucial historical factors that affected the colony in the early decades. One was the drastic decline in remuneration offered to the emerging African working class in the colony, especially after the formation of the Rhodesia Native labour Bureau and the consequent influx of cheap labour from the northern British territories. The other factor was the colonial administration's unfulfilled promises about land which had been made to the Mfengu at Butterworth. It was this grievance in particular which prompted the Mfengu to launch representative organizations to plead their case as far as England. They also linked up with the South African Native Congress which provided them with lawyers like Alfred Mangena (Kosmin, 1977, 40; Ranger, 1970, 49).

In the first decade of colonial rule immigrant Black South Africans (predominantly Mfengu) had provided the first African working class to the emerging colonial economy of Bulawayo. As the fledgling colony of Rhodesia settled down after the Risings of 1896-7, the Mfengu had provided the first railway porters, clerks, and shop assistants in the new town of Bulawayo. Furthermore, in these early days, immigrant Black South Africans, generally referred to as 'Colonial and Zulu boys', had been paid substantially more than the indigenous Africans for the same work. However, from this initial high-wage period, lasting from about 1893 to 1906, real money wages paid to Africans in the colony began to decline markedly, particularly in the period between 1906 and 1922, to the extent that by 1922 African wages were lower than in 1904. This development was related to the two historical factors.

The first was the huge influx of African labour migrants conscripted from British territories north of the Zambezi by the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau from 1903 onwards. It has been estimated that by 1922 labour migrants from the

north constituted 68% of the total African wage labour force in Rhodesia. The net effect of this increased labour supply was a decrease in wage rates in all sectors of the fledgling economy. The first notable effect of this development was a tapering off of Black immigration from South Africa. From 1903 to 1923 the size of the immigrant Black South African population declined markedly. This was further compounded by the relatively high European immigration of 1907-11, when the White population of Rhodesia rose by 68% (Kosmin, 1977, 38). Europeans soon took over most of the higher rung occupations previously held by the Mfengu, such as messengers, clerks, shop assistants and firemen, as these rapidly became White occupations. The net effect of these changes was that the African in the colony was no longer wanted for anything except unskilled labour. Africans were slowly forced out of skilled and well-paid jobs to make way for the new White immigrants. As a result many Black South Africans opted to return to the Union of South Africa, especially after 1912. The Mfengu, however, opted to remain in the country because they already made sizeable investments in cattle, buildings, rural homesteads, and had immigrated with large families (Kosmin, 1977, 39-40).

The Mfengu also became disillusioned by their eroded social status in Rhodesia where they came to be treated in the same way and were subjected to the same regulations as the recently defeated local African population. The Mfengu had expected equal treatment with Whites in line with promises made by Frank Thompson and Cecil John Rhodes at Butterworth in 1898. However, after Rhodes's death in 1902, the BSA Company administration reneged on his promise to the Mfengu, delivered on his behalf by Thompson at Butterworth on 4 March 1898, of 'equal rights for all civilized men' and 'open competition among yourselves and with the white men' (H. Moyo, 2006, 10-11). The Mfengu came to be subjected to the same discriminatory legislation and treatment that was meted out to all Africans.

One particular source of Mfengu bitterness was their denial of an equal opportunity with Whites to purchase land even if they were economically successful like Chief Garner Sojini. Another grievance was the compulsory regulation that they should carry Native Passes like all the other Africans, in line with the stipulation of the Pass Ordinance of 1901, even though the Mfengu were registered voters. In the town of Bulawayo they were subjected to strict municipal bye-laws that prevented Africans from using the pavements as part of a broader policy of social segregation, especially when White women were using the side-walks. Fears and security concerns of the Administration also came to regard the Mfengu as a danger to the security of the new colony because of their sophistication, leadership potential, and the risk of influencing the local Africans who bore many grievances against the BSA Company administration because of their stolen land (Kosmin, 1977, 40-41).

As a result of this fall-out with the British and disillusionment, the Mfengu capitalized on their educational advancement and relative sophistication to foment the first African political opposition to the white Administration. Although at first, the Mfengu had identified their interests with those of the BSAC government because they sought exemption from the discriminatory laws that were affecting Africans in colonial Zimbabwe (e.g. Pass Laws), their gradual disillusionment with the indifferent treatment they received from the Administration soon forced many leading Mfengu families such as the Hlazo and Sojini families, to ally themselves with local Africans, and they came to play leading roles in such Movements as the Matabele National Home Society and the Rhodesia Bantu Voters Association. The BSAC administration and White missionaries soon realized their mistake that they had unwittingly brought the Mfengu to Matabeleland, where the Ndebele were dissatisfied with the land distribution between whites and blacks, because the Mfengu soon provided the Ndebele with invaluable leadership and organizational skills. In the 1890s most of the Ndebele bitterly resented the cattle seizures, land alienation, forced labour recruitment, and other abuses that had been visited on them by the white settlers.

Ngwabi Bhebe notes that by the end of the 1890s white missionaries in Zimbabwe had also developed an aversion to recruiting South Africans as agents in their missions among the Ndebele because black South Africans by the 1890s were beginning to be involved in a nationalist protest movement. Even the BSA Company administration had as early as 1904 come to the conclusion that Africans from the South and Mfengu in particular constituted a dangerous element in the country. The Chief Native Commissioner was already urging that the Mfengu be prevented from contaminating the local Africans (Bhebe, 1978, 131). Most of this fall-out between the Mfengu and the British is recorded in the BSA Company's administrative correspondence of the period. On 14 April 1919 Sir Drummond Chaplin, the Administrator of the territory, wrote to Sir Lewis Michell, in Cape Town and mentioned the Fingo thus, "I do not think the Fingoes have any real cause of complaint. I went carefully into their alleged grievances with a native lawyer from Johannesburg who brought a deputation to see me last year. I am afraid the whole experiment of importing them was a mistake". (Hist. Mss. CH 8/2/2/12 folios 363-364). This conclusion underscored the rift that had developed between the former allies.

The Fusion of Mfengu Modernist Politics, Ndebele Monarchical Politics, and the Bulawayo Township Tradition

Upon their arrival in Zimbabwe, the Mfengu had expected to be treated differently from the defeated local Ndebele because of their long history as allies of the British,

and their more recent history as allies against the Ndebele during the risings. They had championed their narrow group interests for fuller participation in colonial economy, as the emerging African petty-bourgeoisie around Bulawayo. They had been able to purchase plots of land around Bulawayo from as early as 1898, largely from the inflated wages they had received for their role in the suppression of the 1896-7 Risings in the west of the country. Consequently, by 1925, all African land-owners around Bulawayo were Black immigrants from South Africa. The biggest Black land-owners around Bulawayo were M.D. Makgatho and David Mogale, who had bought an 89-acre plot at Riverside in 1904 from money earned during the risings (Thornton, 1999). Consequently, they were conscious of their relative prosperity and sophistication in comparison to the local Africans. They began to push further the exemption of immigrant Black South Africans from the discriminatory laws of the BSA Company that were applied to local Africans (e.g. Pass Laws) through the formation of a special interest organization, the Union Bantu Vigilance Association (UBVA).

Although in many ways the formation of the Rhodesia Bantu Voters Association in Bulawayo in 1923 represented a broadening of the struggle for enfranchisement to include the interests of indigenous African groups, the RBVA remained essentially an elitist organization dominated by the Mfengu and other immigrant African leaders from South Africa, and some Ndebele elite. Its president Garner Sojini, was a prosperous Mfengu farmer who had immigrated to Zimbabwe in 1899; its secretary was another black immigrant from South Africa, Thomas Mazinyane, a Sotho; while Martha Ngano, who was also an Mfengu, and perhaps the best educated African woman of her era in Zimbabwe, became secretary in 1924.

The elitism of the RBVA was betrayed by the presentations to the Land Commission of 1925 made by the organization's leaders, Thomas Mazinyane and Martha Ngano, where it became apparent that they were still prioritizing the narrow group economic and political interests of Black immigrants over those of local Africans. While championing the right to full participation of Africans in the economy and political life of the colony for those Africans who were able to compete with Europeans, the leaders of the RBVA also revealed the scorn with which they regarded the relative backwardness and ignorance of the local Ndebele on economic and political issues, when compared with more enlightened Mfengu. Appearing before the Land Commission of 1925, Martha Ngano remarked that;

"Natives should be allowed to buy land just where they like and white people should do the same [but] most of the natives in this country do not understand about the buying of land. They want to have the land which belonged to the King. They are merely like children and they do not know anything about it... The natives

here do not know anything about the land. It is only the people who come from other places who know about it." (Ngano to Commission, Byo Oral Evidence, 8)

Similar remarks were made to the Land Commission of 1925 by Thomas Mazinyane, the chairman of the Bulawayo branch of the RBVA and one of the earliest owners of land on the periphery of Bulawayo, when he said;

"The old Matabele Natives do not understand the position clearly. They think that they should be given the land, because they think the land belongs to God and the King." (Mazinyane to Commission, Byo Oral Evidence, 17-18). However, the new colonial reality soon dawned on the Mfengu as the BSA Company reneged on promises to allocate more land, and generally treated the Mfengu indifferently.

It soon became clear that, even the immigrant Black South Africans were not exempted from the nature of the colonial state because, from the outset, the degree of African political participation in the electoral politics of Rhodesia was proscribed and shaped by a colonial state that was bifurcated from its very conception, broadly dividing colonial society along racial lines into White 'citizens', who were deemed more human, and the broad masses of 'native' 'subjects', who were less human (Mamdani, 1996; O'Laughlin, 2000). From the outset, the electoral politics of Rhodesia were predicated on discriminatory franchise legislation that effectively alienated Africans from established politics, consequently providing no real meaningful opportunity for African progress. Consequently, the Mfengu realized that it would be logical and desirable also to work with Zimbabwe's indigenous African groups.

The indifference with which the colonial administration treated the Mfengu in the early colonial period forged the common ground for the fusion of the Mfengu struggle for enfranchisement and the Nyamanda movement for the restoration of the monarchy. The Mfengu came to provide prominent leadership in all the early socio-political movements that emerged in Zimbabwe in the first three decades of colonial rule, such as the Rhodesia Bantu Voters Association, the Matabele National Home Society, and the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, (ICU). This fusion of Mfengu modernist politics, Ndebele monarchical politics, and the Bulawayo Township tradition was significant in that it united all the different strands of anti-colonial sentiment and laid the foundations for the rise of nationalism. A good example of this political synthesis is provided by Martha Ngano, who although a Mfengu, was backed by two of Lobengula's sons, Nyamanda and Madholi because of the fusion of the Mfengu struggle for

enfranchisement and the Nyamanda movement for the restoration of the monarchy (Ranger, 2010, 27).

Mfengu political leadership became prominent in championing many protest movements, causes and organizations in rural and urban Matabeleland in the first three decades of the 20th century. One such movement was the Matabele Home Society which sought to restore the Ndebele monarchy (Rasmussen, 239). Although at first, Mfengu-Ndebele relations had been characterized by Ndebele resentment of the Mfengu immigration and settlement in the Ntabazinduna, an area from which the Ndebele had been evicted after the 1893 war, in the years following their fallout with the British, the Mfengu joined forces with the Ndebele and provided invaluable leadership to the cause of the Matabele National Home Movement. The reason for this alliance lay in the broadly similar treatment that was meted out to all Africans by the colonial administration, which unwittingly created closer identity between the colonized groups by virtue of circumstances. The subjection of the Mfengu to similar discriminatory policies as the Ndebele and the rest of the local African population had forged a broader 'African' identity that coalesced around a shared colonial experience.

Nevertheless, because the early African political movements, especially the RBVA, were dominated by Mfengu and other Black immigrants from South Africa, the colonial government dismissed these organizations as unrepresentative bodies that were dominated by foreigners who were bent on agitating local Africans. This sentiment was not new, from as early as 1904, the BSA Company administration had come to the conclusion that Africans from the South, and Mfengu in particular, constituted a dangerous element in the country that had to be prevented from contaminating the local Africans.

Although many other Mfengu families, such as the Hlazo and Sojini families, played leading roles in the RBVA, Martha Ngano emerged as one of the most outstanding of these leaders of the 1920s and 1930s (Kent Rasmussen, 1979, 182). She had been recruited into the RBVA as it was being formed in 1922-23. In 1924 she became Secretary of the organization, remaining its leading spokesperson through the 1920s. She pushed hard for increased government registration of African voters. She particularly criticized the government for making English literacy a voter qualification while teaching only vernacular languages in African schools, and she demanded that communally-held property be counted in voter-qualification requirements. A dynamic public speaker, Martha Ngano successfully established many rural branches of the RBVA throughout Matabeleland (Kent Rasmussen,

1979, 228). She remained the RBVA's leading spokesperson throughout the 1920s, and the organizer of female political protest in the Location.

The RBVA is now generally as the first association to focus African attention on the national political center. Its creation showed a realization that the franchise rights were the key to self determination. Although there were fewer than 30 Africans who were registered as voters in 1923, the RBVA committed itself to seeking a wider so as to demonstrate broader African support. Its belief that success depended upon the solidarity of all black organizations and ethnic groups was an important step forward (Ranger, 2010, 27). In 1929 Martha Ngano participated in a meeting with leaders of the ICU and other African organizations, but efforts to create a unified congress movement failed. Despite the RBVA's goal of becoming a territory-wide organization, its effective branches were limited to Matabeleland, and Mashonaland was never penetrated. However, all was not in vain, because five years later the Bantu Congress was formed which, although completely unrelated to the organizations of the 1920s, was nevertheless guided by the same vision (Kent Rasmussen, 1979, 271).

Conclusion

The Mfengu, who originally came from the Transkei area in South Africa in the 1890s and early 1900s and mainly settled in the south-west of Zimbabwe, played a prominent role in the first black socio-political movements that emerged in this country. Although at first, the Mfengu had identified their interests with those of the BSAC government because they sought exemption from the discriminatory laws that were affecting Africans in colonial Zimbabwe, they soon became disillusioned by the indifferent treatment they received from the colonial administration and their subjection to the same Native Regulations as the recently defeated local Ndebele population. Consequently, they allied themselves with local Africans, and offered the Ndebele their leadership and organizational skills. Because of the transformation that the Mfengu underwent in Zimbabwe from allies of the British in the Cape Colony, and during the suppression of the 1896-7 Ndebele rising, to bitter and vocal opponents of the European colonialists, the colonial administrators came to regret Cecil John Rhodes' scheme to 'import' the Mfengu to Matabeleland. The rise of local African social, religious and political organizations owed much to the political leadership provided by these Mfengu immigrants who came to work and live in this country. They spearheaded the early challenges delivered to the colonial order by workers in this country in a bid to safeguard and extend their rights and promote their interests. In particular, they challenged the ruling that Africans had to get passes before they could travel about the country.

They came to play leading roles in such movements as the Matabele National Home Society and the Rhodesia Bantu Voters Association, which was formed in Bulawayo in 1923. Out of this new direction then developed the Southern Rhodesia Native Association, which in time developed into the Southern Rhodesia African Congress (1934). In this way, the Mfengu laid the basis for the modernist African politics of the 1920s, '30s and '40s, that became a forerunner to the mass nationalism that later emerged in the 1950s.

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