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Development under the surface– unintended consequences of settler institutions in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-1962

Martin Andersson[1]

Erik Green[2]

Department of Economic History

Lund University

[1] Martin.Andersso@ekh.lu.se

[2] Erik.Green@ekh.lu.se

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For submissions, please contact:

Erik Green
Department of Economic History
Lund University
P. O. Box 7083
Sweden
Erik.Green@ekh.lu.se

Development under the surface– unintended consequences of settler institutions in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-1962[3]

Abstract: According to the debate on the long-term impact of colonialism, the central concern is the institutions the colonial powers imposed on the colonies. The main line of argument in this paradigm is that such institutions, once jelled, persisted and provide explanations to current-day development success or failure. While this 'from above' perspective might be natural and reflect the fact that colonial powers indeed are alien rulers declaring supremacy imposing a layer of arrangements for governing the society, the analysis is nevertheless often partial. What this debate misses is that institutions might create a multitude of social forces, some of them perhaps in opposing directions and development dynamics might come about in an unexpected manner. The aim of this paper is to take the case of Southern Rhodesia (c. 1900-1962) – a typical African settler economy - to further add to this discussion by shedding light on a largely discounted economic phenomenon taking place in the rural economy, namely the rise of commercially oriented Africans, in the study epitomized by the Native Purchase Area farmers, that expanded their market activities by intensified use of land and labour. We argue that the relative success of this group largely could be understood as an unintended consequence of settler-oriented colonial institutions.

INTRODUCTION

According to the debate on the long-term impact of colonialism, the central concern is the institutions the colonial powers imposed on the colonies. The main line of argument in this paradigm is that such institutions, once jelled, persisted and provide explanations to current-day development success or failure. While this 'from above' perspective might be natural and reflect the fact that colonial powers indeed are alien rulers declaring supremacy imposing a layer of arrangements for governing the society, the analysis is nevertheless often partial. What this debate misses is that institutions might create a multitude of social forces, some of them perhaps in opposing directions and development dynamics might come about in an unexpected manner. Development seldom proceeds as linear and neatly as suggested in the institutional debate. It is a process that twists and turns and the underlying dynamics are often overlooked. This goes not only for understanding history but also for designing policies in line with development processes generated from below.

While the traditional discussion on colonialism often emphasised that unequal institutions arrested development for the colonial population, much of the recent debate on colonial legacies

[3] This paper is part of the research project "Tracing the Institutional Roots of Economic Development – The Impact of Colonial Extraction" funded by the Swedish Research Council.

has taken its point of departure from Acemoglu et al.'s (2001) proposition that settler colonies have performed better as they set up relatively broad-based institutions that promoted and respected property rights, whereas non-settler colonies tended to generate extractive and elite-oriented institutions. In an African context, this conjecture has been criticised on the grounds that the supposed relation between settlers and long-term growth does not seem to be supported by the development paths of African colonies (Austin 2008, Bowden et al. 2008, Hopkins 2009). If anything, the relation seems to be the opposite – settler colonies were less growth prone than non-settler colonies, which is also acknowledged in a recent publication by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012). In settler colonies, in particular, indigenous development is taken to be repressed and what emerges is a consensus in previous and more recent works that Africans in settler colonies were marginalised, either directly through the implementation of extractive institutions or indirectly by lacking access to public investments (e.g. Arrigi 1966, Austen, 1987, Bowden et al. 2008, Gibbon 2011, Palmer and Parson 1977, Terreblanche 2002).

The aim of this paper is to take the case of Southern Rhodesia (c. 1900-1962)[4] – a typical African settler economy - to further add to this discussion by shedding light on a largely discounted economic phenomenon taking place in the rural economy, namely the rise of commercially oriented Africans that expanded their market activities by intensified use of land and labour. We argue that the relative success of this group largely could be understood as an unintended consequence of settler-oriented colonial institutions. By settler colony we refer to "colonisation of underdeveloped areas by European producers who became economically dependent on the indigenous population" (Mosley 1983: 237). A large body of scholarly work identifies the high levels of land-inequality and policies of institutional segregation key factors in explaining the growth of European, and correspondent decline of African, agriculture in Southern Rhodesia as it enabled the white farmers to access cheap labour while at the same time reducing competition from African farmers (e.g. Arrighi 1966, Good 1990, Rukuni 1994, Palmer, 1977, Phimister 1988). As a critical response to the theory of unlimited supplies of labours (see Barber 1960), these authors, with their divergent theoretical backgrounds, emphasise the role played by the state in creating the necessary conditions for white farmers to access cheap labour. Moving Africans to Reserves that soon became overpopulated increased African farmers' opportunity cost of engaging in commercial agriculture pushing them to seek employment on the white farms (see especially Arrighi 1966: 201-203).

[4] Zimbabwe did not gain international recognised sovereignty until 1980. However, the victory of the Rhodesian Front party in 1962 election, leading to the unilateral declaration of independence in 1965, marked a significant break in the history of the settler economy and we hence refer to the colonial period as up to 1960s.

Our aim is not to refute the general picture of colonial development in Southern Rhodesia painted above. Yet, we argue that it neglects important developments taking place under the quantifiable surface. Based on published and newly collected data we argue that the settler-oriented policies and institutions also, unintentionally, generated economic opportunities throughout the colonial period for the indigenous population. The growth process created dialectic forces that counteracted and challenged the settler economy. To be more precise, the settler economy, with its consistent and hard-headed orientation towards racial segregation gave rise to a small, but significant group of relatively well-to-do African commercial farmers most clearly illustrated by the farmers in the so-called Native Purchase Areas (NPA). This group increased over time in numbers but most substantially in its share of total output.

The native purchase farmers are commonly believed to have played a negligible role in the economic history of Southern Rhodesia (e.g. Arrighi 1966, Palmer 1977, Good 1990, Marks 1999) and it is often assumed that they invested in agriculture for political and social rather than economic reasons (e.g. Schutt 1997, 2000, West 2002). Thus, the existence of this group has not led scholars to challenge the general view of an expanding white farming sector and a large group of marginalised Africans. However, the output among these farmers was significantly above the average and it is estimated that they accounted for one third of the total markets produce of the indigenous population by the 1960s (Dunlop 1970, Cheater 1975, Massell and Johnson 1968). While the colonial authorities facilitated the initial development by establishing the NPA they clearly underestimated the indigenous development forces they had set in motion. The colonial authorities tried to re-gain control over the developments in the 1950s, but failed. The successful indigenous developments created tensions between the white settlers and the colonial authorities, which eventually led to the unilateral declaration of independence and the formation of an apartheid regime that reversed policies in order to secure the survival of the settler structures. That is, political institutions ended the economic processes that had evolved over the colonial period. The counterfactual question is: what Zimbabwe would have looked like today if these processes had not been halted by politics? The implications are that economic dynamics might exist under the surface even in the presence of unequal and unjust institutions primarily designed to provide advantages to the elites. A deeper understanding on such indigenous agency would be suggestive for current day development policies beyond "getting institutions right".

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: after introducing our analytical framework for approaching the indigenous development dynamics in the perspective of unintended consequences, we briefly sketch the major features of the settler economy in Southern Rhodesia. Next we discuss the development of the indigenous economy with special emphasis on access to land. This is followed by a section highlighting the reasons behind the expansion of the NPAs in the light of our framework, in particular the combined effect of population pressure in the Reserves and the possibilities for Africans to seize opportunities to take advantage of domestic demand. Before reaching the conclusions, we elaborate on the empirical support for the relative success of the NPAs.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND MAIN ARGUMENTS– UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF SEGREGATION

In this paper we argue that despite formally extractive institutions imposed by the colonial authorities oriented towards the wishes and demands of the settlers, and to attract more of them, the prospects for development among all Africans were not suffocated. This is an often overlooked aspect of colonialism in settler colonialism in Africa in general and settler colonialism Southern Rhodesia in particular since settler-induced policies and institutions were successively implemented to facilitate settler activities as well as obstructing Africans from gaining economic power. Formal institutions were indeed very much shaped to strengthen the dominance of the white elites. In world history elite oriented institutions have been the rule rather than the exception. It is hard to think that elites consciously would promote measures that would jeopardise their dominance. It therefore seems sensible that "history could be viewed as the process of men in general, and the ruling classes in particular, continually outsmarting themselves in their efforts to reproduce and maintain the existing order" (Hirschman 1971: 36). However, even in the context of elite-oriented institutions, the ruling classes cannot completely ascertain their continued dominance. The colonial history of Southern Rhodesia is a case in point. What intended to be efforts to pave the way for European agriculture by for instance capitalising on and marginalising the African population, other processes were also set in motion. While most Africans were put on marginal lands equipped with meagre resources unintended homegrown dynamics unfolded elsewhere, something the elites first were inattentive to and later found difficult to control. We see this phenomenon partly as an expression of the fact that "unintended change is of course far more difficult to detect and to block by the forces opposed to change." (Hirschman 1971: 37).

To analyse development under colonialism in terms of unintended consequences or "the unanticipated consequences of purposive action", to use Merton's (1936: 894) expression, requires that attention is directed to what is surprising mechanisms of processes rather than probable by design (cf. Hirschman 1971), which poses a major challenges for data collection. Any empirical treatment of the colonial economy necessarily has to draw on colonial reports and any researcher that has studied such accounts knows that for the colonial authorities very few developments were "unintended". If progress is not taking place despite policies designed to encourage it, colonial authorities are routinely blaming this on something, or somebody, else (typically bad weather or the natives). This cannot, however, be categorised as unintended or unexpected in the sense we are defining it but rather that outcome was short of expectations. Conversely, positive development is in colonial reports typically treated as anticipated outcome of purposive action since the entire colonial enterprise was moulded as a development project controlled and directed by the colonial powers. If progress was indeed taking place, the colonial administration would not regard it as accidental. We are interested in economic dynamics that unfolded without direct or purposeful encouragement and that was beyond design. This means the existence of some active agent of change taking advantage of some hidden possibilities. In Merton's scheme, there are three broad reasons for unintended consequences: ignorance, error and one-sided focus in one direction to the neglect of other aspects. All these are naturally intertwined in real life as Merton also acknowledges.

Analysing the development process in this way, the colonial policies and formal and informal institutions surely created unintended consequences due to ignorance as the colonial administration was not in possession of full knowledge of the workings of the Southern Rhodesian society. It was certainly also erroneous and mistaken in many of the measures taken that caused other results than initially intended. In this paper, however, we limit ourselves to the third type of unintended consequence that Merton labelled "imperious immediacy of interest". We will argue, in line with Merton's conceptual specification and supported by empirical data, that the segregationist policies enforced by the settlers are examples of situations where the "paramount concern with the foreseen immediate consequences excludes the consideration of further or other consequences of the same act" (Merton 1936: 901). Hence, we are not considering, for instance, whether policies aimed to improve agricultural standards in the Reserves actually delivered or not. Instead we are interested in the principle strategy in Southern Rhodesia to segregate the Africans and Europeans and the legislation and policies associated with this.

Over the course of the entire colonial period until independence, two parallel development dynamics co-existed; one official based on mining and largely export-oriented settler agriculture and the other evolving around domestic demand and the space left open by neglect of the official formal economy, in the study epitomised by the Native Purchase Areas. We argue that the dynamics under focus in this study, the indigenous below-the-surface, is directly related to the establishment and evolution of the Native Reserves and other measures taken in colonial Southern Rhodesia serving to further support European agriculture. In essence, settler-oriented institutions created on the one hand strong population pressure in the Reserves and on the other, market opportunities to be explored by a prolific segment of commercially oriented Africans. Together, these push and pull factors created conditions whereby wealthier African farmers abandoned the Reserves to buy land in the NPA. The process developed its own dynamics as less wealthy farmers moved to the NPA to rent land by the Native Purchase farmers in exchange of labour or cash. There is hardly any mentioning of the NPA in the colonial reports suggesting that the development in such areas was in any way encouraged by colonial policies. Yet, the development in these areas stood in sharp contrast to the development in the Reserves.

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND GROWTH OF THE SETTLER ECONOMY: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

The immediate reason for the British South Africa Company to expand further into the interior and eventually gain control over the area today known as Zimbabwe was the search for minerals, especially gold. Although the Chief Native Commissioner in 1901 reported that "the future of Rhodesia depends primarily on the development of the mining industry"[5], the directors of BSAC had already by 1893 become painfully aware that expected gold reefs did not exist at the amount initially hoped for and that the future of the colony could not be based on mineral wealth (Rubert 1998: 1). BSAC therefore began to encourage European settlers to open farms in the colony with the aim of transforming Southern Rhodesia into an agricultural based settler colony, although it would take until 1907 before the promotion of settler agriculture became an official policy (Rubert 1998: 1). The Department of Agriculture wrote in 1905 that "at last there appears to be a general awakening to the fact that the lasting prosperity of the country and its greatest and most pemanent (sic) source of wealth lie in its pastoral and agricultural industries".[6]

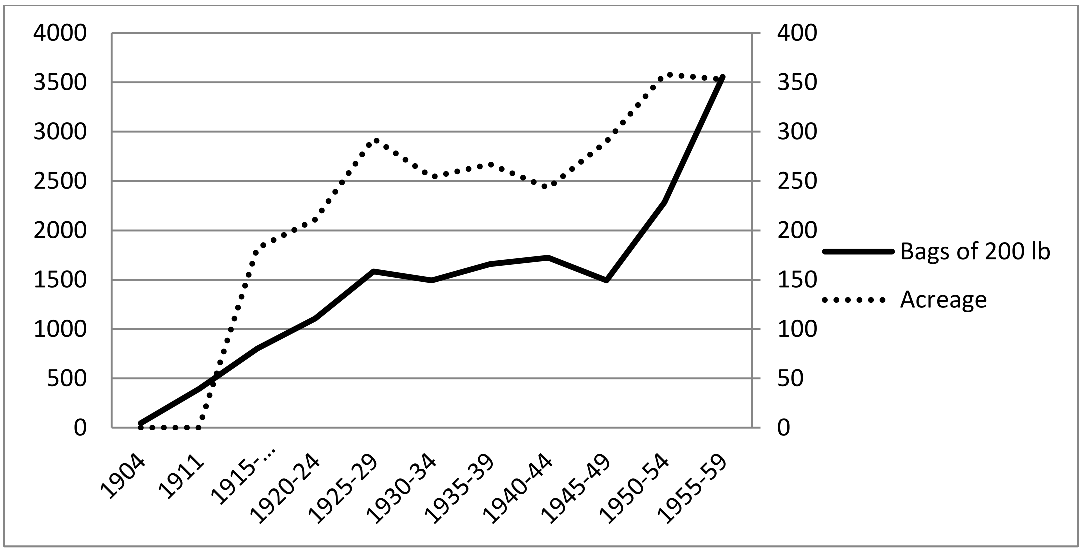
[5] Public Record Office (PRO) CO 603/2, Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, Mashonaland 1901
[6] PRO, CO 603/6 Report of the Department of Agriculture 1905

The growth of European agriculture was at an early stage closely associated with the formulation and implementation of colonial policies to guarantee white farmers' access to cheap African labour. Prior to the European's arrival the Shona lived in the north-east part of the Highveld while the Ndebele mainly lived in the south-west parts of the Highveld. Crop production was central for the Shona economy, while the majority of the Ndebele were pastoralists (Punt 1979: 14-16). The inflow of European agriculturalists to the Highveld created tension between the arrivals and the indigenous people, which in 1896 and 1897 after a drought year accompanied by a plague of locusts and rinderpests led to an open revolt against British South African Company and the European settlers (Phimister 1988: 12ff). The revolts were supressed by the British and accelerated the need to find a solution that would diminish future conflicts over land and natural resources, which eventually led the colonial government to assign Native Reserves throughout Southern Rhodesia.[7]

The first three decades of settler agriculture were marked by uncertainties and significant fluctuations in settler agricultural output (Rubert: 1-20). However, the sector soon began to expand quite rapidly in terms of output and acreage under cultivation (see fig. 1 and 2). According to Mosley's (1983) calculation, the total value of production on European farms increased from 1.7 million pounds in 1924 to 55.6 million pounds in 1961. The period of European settler agricultural growth was marked by structural shifts within the settler sector. Tobacco replaced maize as the major settler crop in the 1930s and the use of new technologies, most notable chemical fertilisers and tractors, increased significantly after the Second World War, with notable effects on both land and labour productivity (Haviland 1953: 368). Mosley has calculated that fifteen workers were needed to produce output equivalent to £ 1,000 in 1923. By 1955 less than half the number of workers could produce the same value (Mosley 1983: 184). By the end the 1950s Southern Rhodesia was the main producer of tobacco in Africa (Haviland 1953)

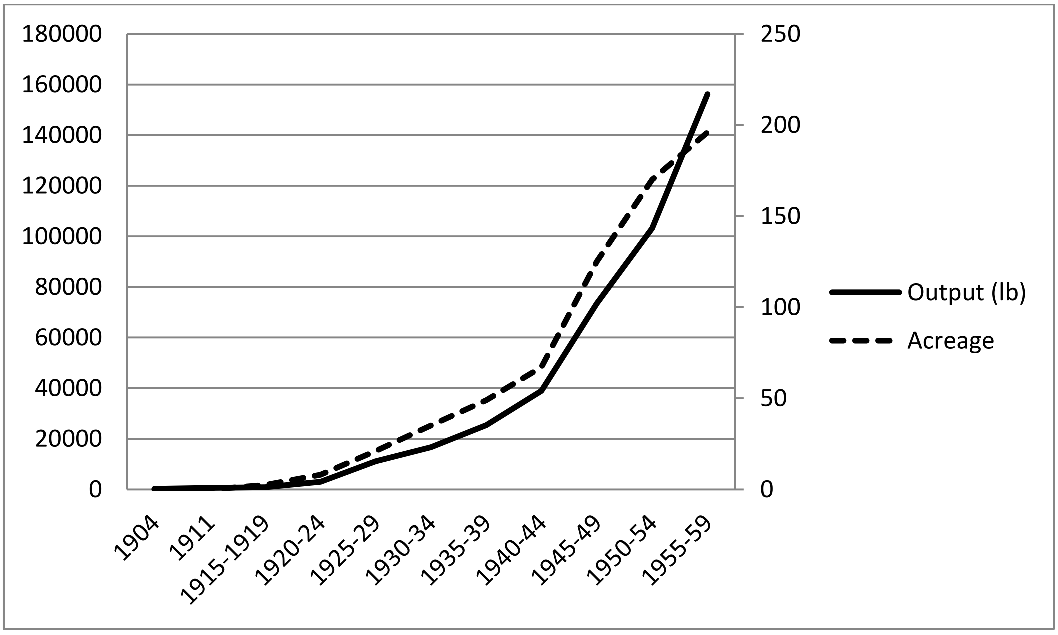
[7] A Land Commission had been set up already in 1894 with the aim of presenting a solution to the conflicting interests between the Europeans and Africans. In line with the recommendation of the Commission the first Native Reserves were established in the same year (Machingaidze, 1991: 558)

Figure 1. Average output and area of maize ('000) on European farms 1904-1959



Source: Phimister (1988: 61), year 1904-1919; Mosley (1983), 1920-1959

Figure 2. Average output and area of tobacco ('000) on European farms 1904-1959



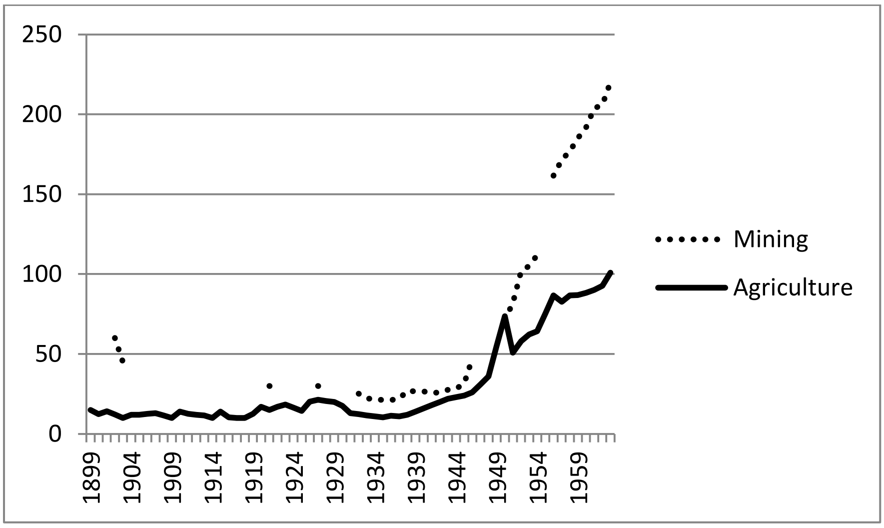
Source: Phimister (1988: 61), 1904-1919; Mosley (1983), 1920-1959

Initially, the official aim of creating Native Reserves was not to force Africans to move to the Reserves. It was rather a half-hearted attempt of the BSA to guarantee Africans areas of land that would not be expropriated by Europeans. However, policies changed by the turn of the century as the expanding European farming sector became increasingly depended upon supply of local African labour. Fewer Africans than expected moved to the Reserves and fewer Africans than expected offered their labour. Both the Shona and Ndebele preferred to engage in commercial agricultural production and/or cattle trade rather than work on the European farms in order to obtain incomes to pay for taxes (Punt 1979: 24). In order to curb competition from African farmers and, at the same time, ensure adequate supplies of local African farm labour the colonial administration introduced a land rent for all Africans residing on European land in 1909 with the intended effect that the inflow of Africans to the reserves began to increase steadily (Punt, 1979: 29).

It was first in the inter-war period that the major steps towards institutional segregation were taken. The Europeans was experiencing several overproduction crises in the 1920s. Avoiding competition from African farmers became more important than to physically tie the African labourers to the farm. Consequently, settler farmers imposed higher land rents and introduced grazing and dipping fees for the African tenants in the 1920s (Punt 1979: 41). This spurred the inflow of Africans to the Reserves even further. In 1926 the Chief Native Commissioner reported – for the first time - that the Reserves were overpopulated given the prevailing agricultural methods employed by the Africans.[8] By 1930 the already consolidated structure of institutional segregation, with Europeans controlling about 30 per cent of total land and Africans living in Reserves (23 per cent of total land) gained 'legal' status through the Land Apportionment Act, which divided the country into 96 million acres, 49 million to the estates and 29 million to the Africans (Machingaidze, 1991: 558). The policies of institutional segregation were, at least initially, successful as real wages for both mine workers and agricultural workers stagnated the first four decades of the 20th century (figure 3) and the estimated African grain production per capita declined (fig 4). Yet, the picture of a growing settler farming community operating side by side with a marginalised African community needs to be modified. There is enough evidence that indicates that the African farming sector also experienced structural shifts and went through major institutional changes,. The most notable change was the expansion of a group of relatively wealthy and commercially oriented African farmers investing in agriculture outside the Native Reserves by purchasing land.

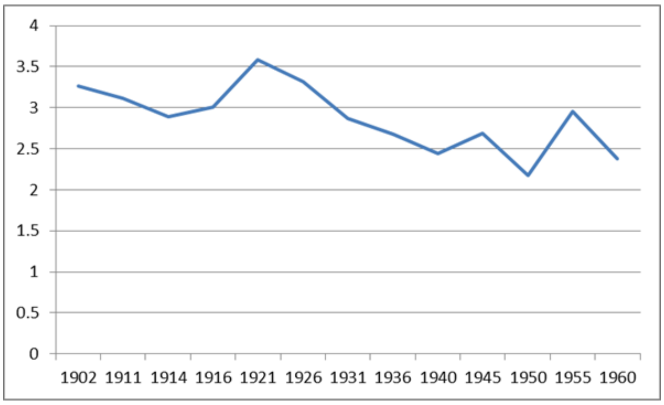
[8] PRO DO 64/3 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner 1926

Figure 3. Wages in mining and agriculture (excluding allowances) in Southern Rhodesia, 1899-1959



Source: Mosley (1983: 158-160)

Figure 4. Estimated grain production per head of the African population (200 lb bags), 1902-1960



Source: Mosley (1983: 72)

THE LAND QUESTION AND AFRICAN AGENCY

African commercial farming played a significant role in the very early days of Southern Rhodesia and continued to do so until the inter-war period. In 1897 it was reported in the Rhodesia Herald that African farmers in the Insiza district planted a variety of crops '[…] in considerable excess of their own requirements with the express intention of trading' (ibid: 24) and in 1898 the Native Commissioner of Chilimanzi district reaffirmed Africans engagement in commercial agriculture by reporting that African farmers' "[…] acreage under cultivation is increasing considerable every year and mealies are very much plentiful grown, this is due to trade'.[9] By 1904 Africans produced more than 90 per cent of the country's marketed output and hut taxes contributed 41 per cent of the total state revenues (Phimister, 1988: 66, 68). The engagement in production for a market most likely increased inequality in terms of access to productive resources within the African communities. In Shona the more successful farmers were known as *huruudza,* which meant large-scale agriculture enterprises that had by the turn of the century expanded production selling part of the surplus to white and Indian traders (Cheater 1990: 192). In 1906 the authorities was of the opinion that far too large tracts of land were designated to the Reserves and concerns were raised over the comprehension that Africans were earning too much working on their own lands, thereby not being available for waged work. Perhaps paradoxically, the administration regarded this as "retarding their progress".[10] In 1911, the Director of Agriculture expressed fear that if settlers had to compete for scarce labour, wages would increase so that settler agriculture would not be economically sustainable. Consequently, the colonial authorities were put under pressure to protect the European farmers by finding ways to squeeze purchasing power of Africans. In a quarrel 1911 about whether taxes imposed on the Africans should be raised or not, the Committee stated that although some Africans are extremely rich, most are not and therefore advised against higher direct taxes.[11]

During the Great War, Southern Rhodesia became more isolated as prices and costs of sea-freight increased. Wages did not follow the rising price of grain making it more favourable for Africans to stay on their land than selling their labour. Despite contracting markets and high prices, at least parts of the African population were doing relatively well, much to the surprise of the authorities. The Chief Native Commissioner reported in 1919 that "although no figures are available shewing the exact amount contributed by the native in indirect taxation through custom dues, the indications are that the importance of the native as a consumer of imported goods is increasing, and that there is a growing native demand for better class articles."[12] In the Chief Native Commissioner Annual Report from 1920 it was stated that "in the more prosperous districts the enormous prices do not appear to have prevented the natives from purchasing what they required, and the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, writes: -'In the same district (Bubi) ploughs are reported to be almost universal; in Matobo there is now a plough for every twelve souls of the population; in Bulalima fully 1,000 ploughs were purchased at the enhanced price of

[9] PRO CO 603/3 Annual Report Chief Native Commissioner Southern Rhodesia, 1903
[10] PRO CO 603/6 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner Mashonaland 1906
[11] PRO CO 603/11 Report of the Native Affairs Committee of Enquiry 1911
[12] PRO CO 603/19 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner 1919

fully 100 per cent."'[13] It was further stated that "the buying of a motor car is interesting, as a sign of the increasing wealth of the natives; but the purchasing of a farm is of the utmost importance, as it opens up the whole question of the acquisition of land by natives."[14]

Population growth in the Reserves intensified competition over land control. Cheater (1990: 192) uses findings from Rangers to make the argument that land transfers occurred every now and then within the Reserves without the involvement of chiefs or the colonial authorities. Moving to the Reserves, before they became congested, can be considered as a more secure undertaking since the risk of being evicted was smaller compared to staying on private or Crown land. Hence some of the more well-to-do Africans purchased land in the Reserves for both cultivation and as pastures. This seemingly took place outside the control of the authorities.

However, buying land within the Reserves became increasingly difficult due to land shortages. Instead an increasing number of farmers bought land outside the Reserves. The rights of Africans to acquire land under different contractual arrangements, including buying land, were stipulated in the Order-in-Council of 1894. In 1911 the Native Affairs Committee of Enquiry stated that "it is impossible to prevent a native from acquiring land privately, as for instance by purchase from a European, and in fact such cases occurred in Rhodesia".[15] Palmer (1977) provides us with, as far as we know, the only systematic source of Africans purchasing land in the early colonial period. His figures show that the number of farmers buying land was small. Only fourteen farmers were recorded purchasing land between 1898 and 1930. All in all they bought 47 000 acres of land in various areas, with individual holdings varying from 25 to 1400 acres (1977: 279-282). However, Palmer only observes recorded purchases and there are reasons to believe that they underestimate the actual number of purchases. Both the colonial government and the white farmers expressed their concerns over what they considered to be a growing trend of Africans purchasing land in the 1920s. The fears were not ungrounded. The Morris Carter Land Commission of 1925 reported that an increasing number of poorer European farms sold both land and cattle to Africans in the 1920s.[16]

In the early colonial period European farmers had been quite sceptical to ideas of restricting Africans access to land. The Minister of Agriculture R A. Fletcher, who was at the time also one of the most influential farmers in Southern Rhodesia, did in 1910 argue that "wholesale

[13] PRO CO 603/20 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner 1920
[14] PRO CO 603/20 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner 1920
[15] PRO CO 603/11 Report of the Native Affairs Committee of Enquiry 1911
[16] Enclosed in DO 64/3 Chief Native Commissioner Report, 1926

segregation of natives was an impossible proposition, because it would affect the supply of labour" (cited in Palmer 1977: 135). By the 1920s, as the number of European immigrants continued to increase, opinions shifted. Only two of 110 farmers interviewed by the 1925 Land Commission were in favour of a continuation of an open land market for Africans (Palmer 1977: 137). The colonial authorities, however, remained reluctant to the idea of complete institutional segregation of landholdings rights between Europeans and Africans. After debating the issue for nearly 10 years and appointing a Land Commission the compromise became to continue allowing Africans to buy land, but only in areas demarcated by the colonial authorities, so-called Native Purchase Areasfollowing the proposal of the 1925 Morris Carter Land Commission (Punt 1979: 49-53).

By 1932 six million acres were assigned NPA and in 1958 it had increased to eight million acres, accounting for approximately eight percent of all land in Southern Rhodesia (Punt 1979: 54, Floyd 1962: 567). Early recruits to the NPA tended to be over-represented by relatively wealthy Africans like chiefs' families and successful businessmen (Pollack 1975: 265). The overrepresentation of African elite groups is not surprising. Purchasing land required access to capital. While the Europeans bought their farms with a five per cent deposit and nineteen years to pay the remaining Africans had to deposit 10 per cent and pay the balance within ten to fifteen years. In practices this meant that applicants were required to have accumulated between £10 to £100 in cash, cattle or small stock (Palmer 1977: 213-14). The first selected farmers purchased on average 350 acres land to a price of £74 (Punt 1979: 150). The average amount of land purchased declined in the 1940s. Our own calculations, based on figures from 1944, show an average land size of 250 acres.[17] These figures could be compared with the colonial authorities' estimate of the average farm size in the Reserves, which was estimated to be between 30 and 50 acres (including grazing land) in 1947.[18]

After a slow start, applications to purchase land started to increase by mid-1940s. The number of annual applicants more than doubled in the post-war period.[19] The initial reluctance to purchase was in some areas due to political opposition from various African interests. More important though, was the low quality of land, shortages in water supplies and limited access to transport

[17] PRO CO 603/696 Background Report of the Native Production and Trade Commission, 1944
[18] The data is very uncertain. The colonial administration counted an average household of consisting of 4.5 individuals, which is most likely an underestimation given the existence of polygamous marriages and the complex structures of extended families. PRO DO 64/53 Annual Report of the Director of Native Agriculture, Southern Rhodesia 1947
[19] Schutt (1997: 563) and PRO DO 64/66-68 Annual Reports Chief Native Commissioner, 1953-1955

(Palmer 1977: 215-217). The Secretary of Native Welfare Association declared already in 1927 that land allocated to became NPA was “quite dry and very infertile” (quoted in Palmer 1977: 176). The Native Purchase farmers themselves complained mainly about lack of water supplies and transport (Pollack 1975: 266).

The situation was further strained by the Depression in the early 1930s. Markets collapsed and it became increasingly difficult for many Rhodesians to generate incomes. Even if the main concern of the colonial authorities might not have been the welfare of the Africans it was at least reported back to London that many Africans faced declining real incomes not least due to falling prices of staples, lack of alternative income sources and falling wages.[20] It was, however, reported by the Chief Native Commission that the applications for purchase of land in the NPA were steadily increasing and that the applicants were the “more advanced type of native”.[21]

THE UNINTENDED EXPANSION OF NPA

The Great Depression had an equally negative impact on European farmers who lost important export markets and faced high costs of agricultural inputs. Concern was raised on the fact that the settlers could not compete on the local market, even in the European areas, and if the European agriculture would not be assisted, Southern Rhodesia would “gradually but surely revert to a native State as is happening in Nyasaland”.[22] The colonial authorities, pressured by the global economic circumstances therefore decided to an even larger extent meet the white farmers’ demand for protection (see also Palmer 1977). In 1934 a quota system was introduced, which meant that Africans as a group were only allowed to contribute with 25 per cent of domestic demand and all maize had to be delivered to Maize Control Board (Punt 1979: 95). The European farmers did not only gain from protection on the domestic market. Equally significant war the British post-depression measures, which enabled the Europeans in Southern Rhodesia to re-enter and expand their production for the world market. In 1933 United Kingdom decided to guarantee Southern Rhodesia 25 percent Imperial Preference on tobacco for ten years (Punt 1979: 108).[23] Attracted by favourable world market prices an increasing number of white farmers shifted from maize to the more profitable tobacco production. Tobacco acreage in 1934 was

[20] PRO DO 64/15 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner 1931
[21] PRO DO 64/17 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner 1932
[22] PRO DO 64/19 Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Economic Position of the Agricultural Industry of Southern Rhodesia 1934
[23] In the 1932 Ottowa agreement Britain abandoned its earlier policies of free trade by adopting a general system of imperial preferences (Austen 1987: 202).

nearly double that of 1929 and from mid-1930s tobacco was responsible for the bulk of growth of European settler farming (Punt 1979: 107). The success of European farming implied that they were no longer providing the colony with sufficient amounts of maize and by 1940 Southern Rhodesia had become a net-importer of maize. The colonial authorities were left with no option than to re-open the domestic markets for African participation and this time they met no major opposition from the European farmers. The Maize Control Act of 1941 implied an ending of the quota system which led the Director of Native Agriculture to state that "For the first time, maize grown by natives was admitted into European farmers (markets)".[24]

The relative success of European settler farming from the 1930s and onwards was thus signified by a falling out of the settlers from the domestic markets. It marked a loss of control over the rural African commercial forces and Africans were from the 1940s facing new opportunities to regain control over the domestic market. However, differently from the early colonial period the Africans – a majority of them living in the Reserves - were now strained by land shortages. The total amount of land in the Native Reserves slightly decreased in the 1930s and 40s, while the African population grew steadily.[25] In 1947 the Director of Native Agriculture reported that all Reserves were overpopulated and in a third the population exceeded the estimated carrying capacity with more than fifty percent.[26] In 1955 the Native Department warned that population pressure in the Reserves "[…] have destroyed the system of shifting farming, have increased the pressure upon the soil to such an extent as to endanger the natural resources and have resulted, in many areas, in the fragmentation of the arable land down to uneconomic bits and pieces."[27] Hence, the Native Reserves were not able to accommodate the population pressure and the marginal productivity of labour was most likely subject to decreasing returns, while the aggregate demand on the domestic market provided opportunities for surplus production and commercial activities. For Africans who had managed to accumulate capital over the years the NPAs provided an opportunity to escape land shortages and gain direct control over land.

The important factor is not the number of farmers that were certified native purchase farmers, but the number of applicants. By the mid-1950s there were more than 5 000 farmers on the waiting list.[28] The number of farmers that were granted the right to but land was severely

[24] PRO DO 64/44 Annual Report Chief Native Commissioner, Southern Rhodesia 1941
[25] The estimated acreage of Native Reserves declined from 21 127 040 in 1930 to 20 859 350 in 1952. Meanwhile, the total number of Africans increased from 937 000 in 1931 to 1 970 000 in 1951 (Floyd 1962).
[26] PRO DO 64/53 Annual Report of the Director of Native Agriculture, Southern Rhodesia 1947
[27] PRO DO 64 /69 Annual Report Chief Native Commissioner, Southern Rhodesia 1955
[28] PRO DO 64 /69 Annual Report Chief Native Commissioner, Southern Rhodesia 1955

restricted by colonial authorities' reluctance to spend more money on the programme. The Native Chief Commissioner continuously complained about the lack of staff, especially land surveyors.[29] In 1951 the Chairman of the Native Land Board reported that "a considerable increase in the purchase price of land, introduced to cover the increased costs of survey and administration, has done nothing to reduce the numbers [of applicants]" which the Chairman considered to have beneficial effects "in that applicants tend to improve their agricultural methods in order to strengthen their claim".[30] Evidently many Africans were eager to move to the NPAs and apparently had the means to do so.

It is clear that the colonial authorities had underestimated the demand for individual land rights among the African populations and that they did as much as they could to re-gain control over the situation. Following the Second World War the colonial authorities anticipated (and welcomed) a second boom in immigration of Europeans to Southern Rhodesia. In the Five-Year Plan for Agricultural Production 1946 it was estimated that the number of Europeans in Southern Rhodesia would increase by more than 100 percent the coming five years.[31] They were also aware of the fact that land pressure in the Reserves attracted wealthier Africans to buy NPA land.[32] The Chief Native Commissioner wanted to further increase the possibility for Africans to buy land by investing more resources for surveying Native Purchase Land. Some even warned about the political consequences of not investing in the Purchase Areas. In 1953 the Native Commissioner in Gwanda district stated with reference to NPA that:

"The yardstick by which the political situation can be measured, is land. With adequate land and security of tenure the people are contested and amenable to good administration. The political agitators is not likely to find support among them". [33]

The central colonial administration was, however, not prepared to meet the demands from the Native Commissioners. Their concern was the inflow of Europeans. The five-year plan had been correct in anticipating a large inflow of Europeans in the immediate post-war period. The number of Europeans increased from 81 000 in 1945 to 152 000 in 1952. By 1960 the number had increased to 225 000 (Floyd 1962: 567). The newly arrived settlers were in need of land. To

[29] See various reports from the Chief Native Commissioner for the years 1947-1961. PRO DO 64/55-85. See also Palmer 1977: 199.
[30] PRO DO64/65 Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, Chief Native Commissioner and Director of Native Development 1951
[31] PRO DO 64/65 Five-Year plan for agricultural production in Southern Rhodesia, 1946. Enclosed in Annual Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, 1947
[32] PRO DO 64/65 Annual Report of Native Land Board 1951
[33] PRO DO 64/67 Annual Report of the Chief Native Commissioner Southern Rhodesia, 1953

transfer Native Reserve Land to the Europeans was out of question given the land shortages. However, Africans that still lived on European controlled land was evicted. Between 1949 and 1955 71 000 Africans had been evicted and moved to the Reserves and approximately 448 0000 acres of unassigned Crown Land had been sold or leased to Europeans.[34] White settlers' dominance over the institutional arrangements became increasingly stronger. The main concern was not competition and control of domestic markets but access to land. In that sense, the political situation of the 1950s reminded of the early colonial period.

Instead of meeting the Native Commissioner's and Africans demand for more sources to the NPA, the colonial authorities tried to reduce the number of applicants by introducing tighter restrictions for the prospective applicants as a strategy to regain control over the situation. In 1953 it was decided that an applicant had to have a Master Farmer certificate and a possession of £ 300 above the purchase price before submitting the application (Duggan 1980). In practice this meant that a farmer had to be under the tuition of an extension worker to improve crop and husbandry practices further with the aim of having all land under systematic crop rotation (see Massell and Johnson 1968: 9).[35] To even be considered an applicant was thus a time-consuming process, which required that you had access to adequate size of land to allow for rotation farming. In reality, the tighter restrictions had little effect on the demands for Native Purchase Land among Africans and the total number of applicants on the waiting list continued to grow.

DYNAMIC FEATURES OF THE NPA

Historians have generally downplayed the role played by the farmers in the NPA most likely for two reasons; they were few in numbers and their overall performance was meagre. It is argued that the native purchase farmers invested in agriculture for political and social rather than economic reasons (e.g. Schutt 1997, 2000, West 2002). Palmer, for example, claims that the native purchase farmers mainly consisted of urban workers that bought for their retirement land with no intention to invest in it (Palmer 1977: 217). In the Oxford History of the British Empire Shula Marks conclude that the NPA were 'isolated and tsetse-infested' (1999: 545). The colonial authorities commonly complained about the modest performance of the selected native purchase

[34] PRO DO 64/69 Annual Report Chief Native Commissioner, 1955
[35] PRO DO 64/55 Annual Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1948

farmers.[36] Detailed investigations into specific NPAs, however, give a strikingly different view of their performances.

It is questionable to assume that the Native Purchase Areas were small and disproportionally situated in less fertile areas. Maps provided by Palmer (1977: 184) and Floyd (1962: 658) show that NPAs were found in all ecological regions and varied significantly in size. Some areas were situated far from major markets, while others were found relatively close to urban centres and/or in areas of relatively well developed infrastructure. Given this it is not surprising to find that the native purchase farmers on average performed far better than commonly assumed in the scholarly literature.

In the informative study made on the socio-economic realities of a Native Purchase Area found in Cheater (1975), data on farm households in Msengezi Freehold Area was collected in the early 1970s. Since much of the data is based on interviews it sheds light upon who the purchasers were and why they became NPA farmers in the late colonial period. Another meticulous account of the production system of a Native Purchase Area (Darwin) is provided by survey data by Massell and Johnson (1968). Taking these rich and detailed studies of both Cheater and Massell and Johnson into account, it seems clear that the purchase of land in NPA was made for economic purposes and that they in the context of general neglect from the authorities successfully managed to explore emerging market opportunities by adopting sound investment strategies and agricultural practices. These accounts are particularly interesting in that the type of purchasers differed between the NPA of Msengezi and Darwin. The settlement of the former was completed before 1953 and hence prior to the requirement of being a Master Farmer was introduced. The latter on the other hand was settled somewhat later and according to Massell and Johnson "settled mainly or exclusively by Master Farmers" (1986: 71). Even if about 75 per cent of the farm holders in Msengezi had been born in the Reserves, many of the purchasers came from a variety of professional backgrounds and ethnicities and "were not selected on the basis of their farming experience" (Cheater 1975: 52). Thus, in terms of selection, this stands in sharp contrast to the Darwin farmers. In both places, however, farming became the principal activity and by being responsive to domestic demand, output increased and marketization of crops became the main source of income.

[36] See various reports from the Chief Native Commissioner for the years 1947-1961. PRO DO 64/55-85. See also (Palmer 1977: 217-218)

The output among these farmers was significantly above the average and it is estimated that these producers by the 1960s accounted for one third of the total market produce of the indigenous population (Dunlop 1970, Cheater 1975). Our own estimates, based on figures obtained from the colonial reports reveal that yields per acre were significantly higher in the NPA Areas than in the Reserves (see fig 6). Looking at other sources, it looks like the estimates from the colonial archives underestimate the productivity gap between the average farmers and the NPA. Massell and Johnson (1968) compare the performance of a selected NPA area (Darwin) with a Reserve (Chiweshe). Despite lack of access to credit and organised marketing facilities, the production for commercial purposes was much larger for the NPA farmers. In 1960/61, NPA farmers produced 9 times as much per farm and sales were 150 times as high of the combined value of production of maize, groundnuts and millet. According to information from the Chief Native Commissioner Reports the Chiweshe Reserve was above national average in terms of production per farm so the figures are not likely to be overestimates.[37]

Fig 6. Estimated yields per acre (bags of 203lbs) in Native Reserves and Native Purchase Areas, 1951-1959

Year	Total production Native Reserves (bags 203 lbs)	Average yields (bags/acre)	Total production Native Purchase Areas (bags 203 lbs)	Average yields (bags/acre)
1953	5734900	2,3	260400	3,3
1954	5798225	2,2	294213	4,1
1955	5861550	2,1	320000	3,5
1956	5924875	2,0	474254	4,7
1957	5988200	1,9	n.a	4,1
1958	6051527	1,8	430278	3,5

Source: PRO DO64/66-88 Annual Reports Chief Native Commissioner, 1952-1961

Part of the gap is explained by differences in farm sizes, which was significantly larger in the NPA area. However, the gap remains significant after control for land size. The Native Purchase farmers were, on average almost four times as productive (measured in value of yields per acre) compared to estimates of Master Farmers in the Chiweshe Reserve (1968: 70-71), a difference that is significantly larger than the volume based estimates in figure 6 would suggest. Since yields fluctuate unpredictably and the selling price of, for instance, maize from the Market Board is

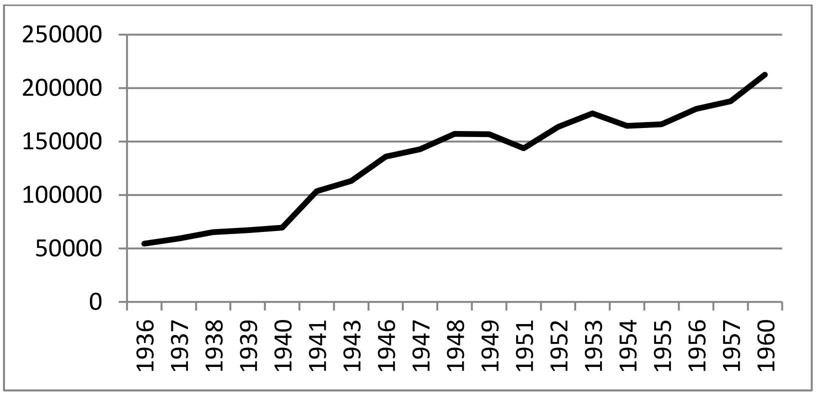
[37] See PRO DO64/66-68 Annual Reports Chief Native Commissioner, 1953-1955

much higher than its purchasing price, a bad harvest would be devastating for a Reserve farmer barely above subsistence. Therefore it is more rational to produce to meet the consumption requirements of the household rather than take the risk of specialising and produce for the market. These mechanisms do not apply to the NPA farmer who can produce for the market with lower stakes. Hence the value gap is larger than the production volume gap.

We cannot capture the developments in the NPAs by looking at overall performance only. There was more going on under the surface. Although farming was the main economic activity in the NPA, the generated income stimulated other types of subsidiary enterprises. The authorities reported in 1955 that many applications were filed for dealers' stores, milling, eating houses, bakeries, carpenters. In general, agriculture in NPA was relatively labour intensive and the more successful farmers employed hired labour. Many of these were residents in the NPAs enjoying usufruct rights and in general they were related to the title farmers by for instance kinship (Cheater 1975). Including family members, in average 12 persons were engaged per farm in Msengezi in 1962. According to Massell and Johnson the average family size in Darwin was 5.3 persons and if this number is applicable also to Msengezi it clearly indicates that NPA farms created job opportunities beyond family labour.

Furthermore, figure 7 reveals that estimated number of total African population in the NPA. Total population was significantly larger than the number of selected purchase farmers. In 1957 the estimated number of 187 505 people was living in the NPA. Of this about 160000 was living communally without legal title. Schutt argues, based on in-depth interviews with Native Purchase Farmers in Marirangwe NPA that people in the area classified migrants into the NPAs in two groups; renters and squatters. Both groups came to the area with the long-term intention of buying or leasing land from the Native Purchase Farmers. The squatters initially found a piece of land where they planted vegetables to sell in town. The money saved was later used to buy land from the Native Purchase Farmers. The renters, on the other hand, provided labour services on the Native Purchase farms in exchange of land. In some cases the contract was transformed as the renter managed to buy the land after a couple of years. In other cases, the squatter continued to rent land, but began to pay in cash rather than in kind (Schutt 2002). Part of the reason for this gap is that many areas were already occupied by African farmers before declared NPA. However, the figures also indicate that Africans moved into the areas once they had been converted into purchase areas. The significant increase in annual population growth in 1940 to 1950 and to some extent 1955 to 1960 cannot be explained by a natural growth of population. In fact, the few in depth investigations on selected NPA, such as Msengezi by Cheater and Darwin by Massell and Johnson clearly show that family size was smaller and birth rates were declining among NPA farmers, suggesting higher living standards and that they envisioned better prospects for the future. Hence, many went voluntarily to the NPA where conditions, in the relative absence of both tribal chiefs and government-imposed restrictions, were freer and better even for farmers that were not legal title holders.

Fig 7. Number of Africans in Native Purchase Areas in Southern Rhodesia, 1936-1960



Source: PRO DO 64/25-88, Chief Native Commissioner Reports, 1936-1960

What these detailed accounts show is that the dynamics on the ground were far more complex involving more people than the colonial authorities had anticipated. The colonial authorities had little control over these developments probably because they were both unexpected and unintended. Paradoxically, while the colonial authorities tried to restrict and control African land use by various development schemes, the establishment of NPAs enabled Africans to leave the Reserves and both settle and thrive on purchase land. The central administration wanted to take further steps to secure the interests of the Europeans. An amendment to the Land Apportionment act in 1960 marked a final attempt of the colonial authorities to curb the developments in the NPAs, by giving the Europeans the permission to buy land in the NPA.[38] It was, however, too late. The European farmers loudly opposed what they believed to be colonial support of African agriculture and even threatened to leave the country (Alexander 2006: 71). They feared that the British were about to declare Southern Rhodesia independent, just as they were preparing to do in the case of Kenya, leading to African majority rule and a withering of prosperity in white agriculture. The victory of the Rhodesian Front Party in the 1962 elections

[38] PRO CO 64/88 Annual Report Chief Native Commissioner, 1960

effectively ended any proposition of that kind. Instead, steps were taken to tighten the control of the purchase areas, thus eliminating the possibility to further allocate land to Africans. They first focused on the squatters who in 1965 were declared illegal residents (Schutt 2002: 496). Further steps were taken as the government began to redistribute purchase land to the Europeans. By 1970 the total land size of the Native Purchase Areas had declined to less than a half of the size in 1960 (Duggan 1980: 236). To quote Duggan (1980: 236): 'Their [RFP] triumph in 1962 ensured that an African rural elite would never flourish'.

CONCLUSIONS

The impact of colonial institutions on long-term economic development is an important field of research that has rightly received increased attention in recent years. A major puzzle is how one could measure the impact when the institutions are moving targets. In much of the literature, especially the studies which include cases of highly unequal societies, the puzzle is ignored as institutions are assumed to be persistent. Our prime motive has not been to measure outcomes, but to apply an analytical approach based on unintended consequences to grasp the processes of change. A significant feature of the colonial period is the growth of a class of relatively wealthy Africans that accumulated capital by engaging in the production of marketable crops. They played a role in shaping both informal and formal institutions and affected not only the socio-economic structures within the Reserves, but settlers' access to and control of labour as well as the colonial policies of land redistribution, credit provision and market access.

The continuous reinforcement of indigenous dynamics should, according to our analysis, also be understood as cumulative processes. The more measures introduced to separate Africans from Europeans and boost the settler economy, such as the Land Apportionment Act, the quota system and enforced movement of population into the Reserves, the more opportunities were opened up for a segment of the African population to gain ground by focussing on the domestic market, such as the farmers of the NPA. To fully appreciate this dynamic, we need to take external events into account, such as the impact of the Great Depression and the two wars that preceded and followed it. These disruptions altered the relative cost structures as well as colonial strategies.

By the 1930s, the depression threw Southern Rhodesian settler agriculture into crisis by the fall of agricultural prices relative to agricultural inputs. Demand for labour dropped and the rising cost of rents forced Africans to continue their move into the Reserves. By this time the Native Reserves had become congested and the fertility of the land had diminished. Farmers in the NPA and some of the more advanced farmers in the reserves could use this situation to get ahead. The opportunity costs for being a farmer in the reserves vis-à-vis NPA had changed. It had risen for the former since agricultural productivity and therefore income was deteriorating vis-à-vis work for wages. But leaving the reserves in times of weak demand for labour created uncertainties about income in particular as you lose the user right to cultivate in the communal system of the reserves. Farming for the markets was an option only for the few, given little land at disposal and costly agricultural inputs, and risk avert strategies were applied among subsistent farmers. For the skilled and wealthy farmers in the Reserves, however, the rising opportunity cost of staying in the reserves made them to an increasing extent apply and move to the NPA. For the NPA farmers, on the other hand, opportunity costs had been lowered thanks to relatively high output and market opportunities in relation to wage employment.

On a general level, the more or less unlimited supply of land that characterised Southern Rhodesia during the early part of the colonial period became by the 1930 converted into unlimited supply of labour. But given the weak possibilities to enter the labour market, the best strategy for African farmers would be to intensify the use of the factors of production in their possession, land and labour. Due to diminishing fertile acres per farm in the Reserves, this option was in practice only at hand in the NPAs where population pressure was less and commercial opportunities greater.

Our story refers not only to institutional change but also tentatively detects the dialectic mechanisms at play. It was not a development that benefited the Africans at large. Our analysis is perfectly compatible with the idea that white settlers and the colonial authorities extracted resources from the broad masses. However, the mechanisms of growth and institutional change are in our framework significantly different from the conventional views where institutional persistence and the marginalisation of Africans are assumed to have been prominent during the colonial period. The political ambitions may have been to continue ensuring the dominance of white settlers, but the colonial authorities were facing economic realities moving in a different direction and had to adjust to those forces. The playing field altered when the whites efficiently organised resistance and elected an apartheid regime that blocked the changes underway. Somewhat provocatively, we ask ourselves: are the recent political developments in Zimbabwe a sign of a return to the order that partly existed in the early colonial period, but more notably in the period 1930-60? On a more general note, the recent discussion on getting the institutions right often implies imposing a fixed set of institutional arrangements from above. But in the presence of unintended consequences, institutions are contextual and should be geared towards change rather than persistence.

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