

"There is no such thing as a spirit in the stone!"
**Misrepresentations of Zimbabwean
Stone Sculpture:
An Anthropological Approach**

Olga Sicilia

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Boca Raton, Florida
USA • 2009

ISBN-10: 1-59942-711-7
ISBN-13: 978-1-59942-711-9

*For my parents,
my grandmother Heli,
and Sergio*

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Acknowledgements

My special thanks and debt of gratitude go to the sculptors I had the opportunity to meet. To Crispen Chakanyuka, Boira Mteki, Colleen and Fabian Madamombe among others. To Agnes Nyanhongo, her husband Joseph Munemo, and their kindred and friends, for generously allowing me to share their intimacy and everyday social life. To Nicholas Mukomberanwa (and to his son Anderson, and kindred) for the seriousness and respect that they showed towards my work; I immensely enjoyed the humorous and challenging approach that they gave to our discussions. To Eddie Masaya for the sincere and heartfelt dialogue and confrontation. My deep gratitude goes to Tapfuma Gutsa and his wife Nicole for inviting me to enter their familiar sphere in Shurugwe, as well as for his constructive, implacable, and sharp insights. To all of them I am indebted for their warmest hospitality and trust. Without their collaboration this work would not have the sense it has.

I am particularly grateful to my advisor Prof. Andre Gingrich for his unflinching trust and support, and for having introduced me to Dr. Christopher Steiner. Prof. M.F.C. Bourdillon, Chairman of the Department of Sociology, University of Zimbabwe wrote the necessary letters of introduction, I am grateful for his support, interest and advises. Mrs. Luness Mhlope was an indispensable help at the Library of the National Gallery in Harare.

I wish to express my honest gratitude to Dr. Chr. Steiner for having facilitated my access to the written and filmed documentation at the School of World Arts Studies and Museology, University of East Anglia, U.K., and for his useful bibliographical suggestions. His generous interest at the pre-writing stage —when the organisation and interconnection between ideas, theoretical approach and empirical data was lacking— represented for me an invaluable and much-needed motivation at that difficult stage.

My heartfelt thanks to the ÖED (Österreichischer Entwicklungsdienst) in Harare for their sincere hospitality and their willingness to resolve my lodging difficulties at the crucial early stage of my stay. Their camaraderie challenged any hesitation and isolation I brought with me.

I am indebted to Mr. Fernando Curcio Ruigómez, Consul of Spain in Harare, and Mr. Nbewe, Deputy Chief Immigration Officer at Harare, for their resolute and decisive bureaucratic assistance.

Roy Guthrie, Curator and Director of Chapungu Sculpture Park, as well as Diana Coutts, Director of Vhukutiwa Gallery, supplied me with material. I wish to thank the Rees family who provided me with a place to live and work in Harare during the last month of my stay, and offered me the useful insights of committed and involved expatriates.

To A. Hobbs and S. Pinés for their patient dedication and the uncountable hours invested in translating and proof-reading the original drafts.

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to elaborate an approach to modern Zimbabwean stone sculpture —not from the perspective of aesthetics, but through a critical anthropological analysis of identity and representation. I do not set out from a category, for example “Zimbabwean sculptors”, but from the following problem: precisely those sculptors —i.e., a group of people, which I understand as a collective that shares common cultural traits but which is not for that reason necessarily homogeneous— are represented through a discourse that evokes their socio-cultural being in a way that does not correspond with the real context of their social practices. Hence the point of departure is a problematic disadjustment between the representations that are constructed through this discourse and the reality that it (mis)represents; in other words, the central problem approached here is how —and to a certain extent why— a specific social reality comes to be distorted. I have not rendered cult to any methodological monotheism in this undertaking; rather, I have ended up combining discourse analysis, open-ended interviews and ethnographic descriptions.

The present study is predominantly based on bibliographic material; it draws on sources obtained from the libraries of the World Art Studies Centre, at the University of East Anglia, U.K., the SOAS, London, and the National Gallery in Harare, Zimbabwe. However, this chiefly bibliographical aspect of research is also supported by three months of fieldwork in Zimbabwe, which I undertook from January to April of 1997.

Many aspects of this thesis, especially the more critical ones, are inspired by certain aspects in the thought of P. Bourdieu and of J. Fabian, although the analyses presented here do not pretend to go beyond an incipient stage of reflection on an issue that is common to both of them and which I will here denominate a *critical constructivism*. Fabian’s *Time and the Other* reveals how Anthropology has often presented its practices according to “positivist canons of ‘empirical observation’” (1983:148), that is, as if it were engaged in a straightforward task of collecting and ordering a neutrally ‘given’ empirical material, whereas the central object that defined its endeavour, instead of being in any such way ‘given’, was in fact one that it strove from the very beginning to define or to *construct*, and in ideologically and politically relevant ways. According to Fabian, this

object was ‘the Other’, and the technique by which it was constructed conformed to what he calls an “allochronic discourse”, i.e.:

a science of other men in another Time. It is a discourse whose referent has been removed from the present of the speaking/writing subject. This “petrified relation” is a scandal. Anthropology’s Other is, ultimately, other people who are our contemporaries (*ibid*:143)

Fabian’s book is subtitled “How anthropology makes its object”, and it reflects on an epistemological standpoint that is close to P. Bourdieu’s, who advocates an anti-positivistic materialism that does not abandon to idealism the notion that science’s explanations and descriptions of reality always entail certain acts of construction. Fabian quotes Marx’s ‘First Thesis on Feuerbach’ as an epigraph for a chapter where the implications of practice and construction are discussed and, significantly, Bourdieu very often alludes to the Feuerbach Theses to underscore his point. In his *Sense Pratique*, for example, he says:

The theory of practice as practice insists, contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions, it is possible to step down from the sovereign viewpoint from which objectivist idealism orders the world, as Marx demands in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, but without having to abandon to it the ‘active aspect’ of apprehension of the world by reducing knowledge to a mere recording (1990:52).

So we could say that both Bourdieu and Fabian entertain a similar “constructivist” element in their theory—but for the present purposes I am more interested in the critical potential of their respective standpoints than in their finer epistemological discussions concerning scientific objectivity. The idea of construction, “which is to say thinking about the ways in which the object is apprehended, at the very start” (Bourdieu 1992:46), entails a crucial momentum of critique, for “to say that the scientific fact has to be fought for is radically to defy ... all of the ‘givens’ that social scientific researchers find before them. Researchers in the social sciences have, within arms’ reach, just at their fingertips, preconstructed facts which are wholly fabricated: so many terms, so many subjects” (*ibid*:42).

The following analyses are therefore interested in discussing a particular construction that is exhibited in the art arena as if being anything but a construction — the construction is primitivist, and what it offers are aesthetic objects that are purportedly genuine expressions of a culture, which is systematically mystified through the discourses that legitimate it. But this construction ties in with more fields other than the art market alone, most importantly with colonialism, neo-colonialism, and with the very history of anthropology itself. An adequate analysis of this topic would require the construction of some kind of model with which to explain the realities that it critically confronts. This, however, would exceed the scope of this work which, as already mentioned, will merely keep in mind the theoretical reflections of Fabian and Bourdieu as it develops a more modest analysis of its topic. One of the consequences of the limitations that beset this work is a deficiency in this area of theoretical construction and empirical validation, and yet the most serious deficiency lies elsewhere. Since this thesis critically analyses everything that has been said about modern Zimbabwean sculpture but hardly investigates what the actual producers of it have to say, it could give the impression that this phenomenon is felt to be relevant only from the former perspective, leaving its producers out of the picture as if they were merely passive agents within a socio-historical situation. However, the impression would be very misleading, as in fact the intention is completely the contrary: this study is interested in performing a critique of the aforementioned constructions, and it does this *first* because it respects the point of view of its actual producers enough to avoid speaking for them from the start without having established a longer-term basis of communication. Although I have tried to insert texts where they do express themselves, as well as personal communications that I received during my stay in Zimbabwe, I am aware that to present their point of view would require much more extensive empirical research. Hence this study sets its focus on a discourse that represents modern Zimbabwean sculpture (which I will designate ‘Shona discourse’, for reasons that will be clarified later on), and consciously limits itself to that aspect, which is in a way external to, and arises through a social distance from, the socio-cultural world of its actual producers. It seeks to analyse the socio-historical circumstances that determine this determining construction, which is of interest from the point of view of anthropology — a discipline that, following Fabian, was traditionally caught up in similar practices of construction and representation.

In the first chapter I will broach precisely this subject of “socio-historical circumstances” with an overview of the history of colonialism that led from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. Emphasis will be placed specifically on the social context of inequality and racial segregation, for it is essential to keep this in mind later on in the discussion of modern Zimbabwean sculpture. What I first confronted in our exchanges was not the sculptors’ ‘mythological world’, which is so often exalted in ‘Shona discourse’, but rather the ‘colonial memory’ —understood as an incorporated historical and social experience, etched in their bodies and lives, which they transmitted with a tremendous emotional charge and, in some occasions, emotional violence. I want to consider the accounts of colonial history in this study as ‘empirical data’. They should serve as evidence to back up my critiques, although I am aware that we are dealing here with pre-constructed data.

The second chapter will briefly describe the uses and meanings that the concept of the “primitive” has had in the history of anthropological theory, and then in the field of art and in art theory. Having analysed, in the first chapter, the history of colonialism in Zimbabwe, it is relevant to question in what ways anthropology was, and was not, involved in that history when it defined “primitive society” as its privileged field of study. For this purpose, I will draw on A. Kuper’s “The Invention of Primitive Society” (1988), where he argues that this construction entailed a projection of Westerner’s own society, as they understood it. My approach to the concept of the primitive does not intend an exercise in theory, but rather seeks out the central argument and critique that I will elaborate. Passing from this short portrayal in anthropology over into the field of art, I will examine how this concept is configured there. The relevance of these analyses lies with the ‘Shona discourse’ which I will finally focus on in the third chapter. It entails a primitivist construction that is directly linked with modernist primitivism, which will be the last item to be discussed and will close the second chapter, in order to prepare the ground for the central arguments of this work that will be developed in the final part.

THE NEGRO¹ (1911)

Encyclopaedia Britannica

MENTALLY THE NEGRO is inferior to the white. The remark of F. Manetta, made after a long study of the negro in America, may be taken as generally true of the whole race: "the negro children were sharp, intelligent and full of vivacity, but on approaching the adult period a gradual change set in. The intellect seemed to become clouded, animation giving place to a sort of lethargy, briskness yielding into indolence." We must necessarily suppose that the development of the negro and white proceeds on different lines. While with the latter the volume of the brain grows with the expansion of the brainpan, in the former the growth of the brain is on the contrary arrested by the premature closing of the cranial sutures and lateral pressure of the frontal bone. This explanation is reasonable and even probable as a contributing cause; but evidence is lacking on the subject and the arrest of even deterioration in mental development is no doubt very largely due to the fact that after puberty sexual matters take the first place in the negro's life and thoughts. At the same time his environment has not been such as would tend to produce in him the restless energy which has led to the progress of the white race; and the easy conditions of tropical life and the fertility of the soil have reduced the struggle for existence to a minimum. But though the mental inferiority of the negro to the white or yellow races is a fact, it has often been exaggerated; the negro is largely the creature of his environment, and it is not fair to judge of his mental capacity by tests taken directly from the environment of the white man, as for instance tests in mental arithmetic; skill in reckoning is necessary to the white race, and it has cultivated this faculty; but it is not necessary to the negro.

On the other hand negroes far surpass white men in acuteness of vision, hearing, sense of direction and topography. A native who has once visited a particular locality will rarely fail to recognise it again. For the rest, the mental constitution of the negro is very similar to that of a child, normally good-natured and cheerful, but subject to sudden fits of emotion and passion during which he is capable of performing acts of singular atrocity, impressionable, vain, but often exhibiting in the capacity of servant a dog-like fidelity which has stood the supreme test.

¹ Quoted in Jacoby, R. and Glauberger, N. (eds.) 1995. This entry for "Negro" from the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* was written by Walter Francis Willcox, who was Chief Statistician of the United States Census Bureau, and professor of social science and statistics at Cornell University.

1. Colonialism - The Context of Social Inequality and Racial Segregation

1.1 In the Name of Civilisation: From the Settler Gold Rush and the Pioneer Invasions to the Founding of Southern Rhodesia

The Anglo-Saxon colonial expansion in Zimbabwe began in 1880 with the arrival of white settlers led by Cecil Rhodes, who were searching for gold and were attracted by the reputed mineral wealth of Matabeleland. Rhodes was then prime minister of the Cape Colony (present-day South Africa). In the words of M. Sithole, Rhodesia was born of a dream: “Cecil Rhodes, who gave the country his name, dreamt of a railway line from Cape Town to Cairo that would connect most of the British Empire in Africa” (1995:139)². In October of 1880, Lobengula, king of the powerful Ndebele State, was deceived into signing the Rudd Concession. Through this Concession, in return for a stipend of one hundred pounds monthly, as well as a gunboat (which was never delivered), a thousand guns, and a hundred thousand bullets, Lobengula granted Cecil Rhodes and his associates the exclusive prospecting and trading rights in his domain. Furthermore, the Concession guaranteed that prospecting for minerals would not entail colonisation by Europeans. But the text of the treaty did not coincide with the verbal agreement. As it was explained to Lobengula, only part of his territory would be accessible to a limited number of gold prospectors. In reality, the treaty granted the British settlers unlimited prospecting rights. In March 1889, with the Rudd Concession in effect, Rhodes set up a private trading enterprise, the British South Africa Company (BSAC)³. During the same year, the Queen of England gave the BSAC a royal charter, granting the company administrative sovereignty over the territory north of the Transvaal and west of Mozambique for twenty-five years. In return, the BSAC would be responsible for developing the region’s infrastructures, promoting free trade, passing legislation, maintaining a police force (to be paid for by the BSAC shareholders), and issuing currency. As a further condition, the government in London had the right to turn this BSAC territory into a protectorate of the British Crown at any time. In June of 1890,

² My translation.

³ On the role of the BSAC cf Ian Phimister: *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890-1948. Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle*. London, 1988.

a “pioneer column” set out, which consisted of white South African settlers, armed soldiers, and black mercenaries. In light of the above, some analysts regard the colonisation of Rhodesia as the expansion northward of the British economic interests which were firmly established in South Africa (e.g., cf. Murphree 1995:147).

With the death of the Ndebele ruler in February of 1894 (under unexplained circumstances), the fate of the Ndebele territories was sealed. The immediate consequences were: the seizure of land by white settlers, the confiscation of herds of cattle, the taxation of the indigenous population (e.g. the hut tax, originally passed in 1893), and forced labour in the mines. Taxes had to be paid in monetary form, so increasingly Africans were compelled to work for wages which led them to neglect their crops. Chiefs loyal to the colonial regime were responsible for rounding up work gangs and collecting taxes. After the defeat of the first war of liberation (*Chimurenga*), in which the Ndebele and the Shona fought together for the first time against the colonial rulers (from 1896 to 1897), the BSAC forcibly resettled countless Africans on newly created reserves, the ‘Native Reserves’, in territories where most of the land was infertile. The British government demanded that the settlers leave enough land for the Africans to ensure their food and shelter. This obligation is generally regarded as the origin of the ‘Native Reserve’ policies and of racial segregation through land alienation, under the cover of the protective paternalism of the British authority (Balans 1995:83). For the Africans, the hut tax was doubled.

It was gradually becoming clear that the territory’s mineral riches had been greatly overestimated, and hopes for exploiting deposits the size of South Africa’s were dashed. In 1903, as further information came to light, the BSAC shares on the London stock exchange plummeted. If the investment in infrastructure was going to pay off, the BSAC would have to recruit farmers. In 1908 Rhodes made an appeal to South African capital and the compensation for these contributions was in the form of land grants (Balans 1995:83). The newly arrived would be given prospecting rights for 15 gold claims, approximately 1,200 hectares of farmland, and cattle which had been confiscated from the Africans. A legal foundation for the exploitation of the black labour force had already been created in 1901, namely the Master and Servant Ordinance, which forbade the Africans to organise trade unions or to terminate their own job contracts.

In 1922 the settlers opted by referendum to become a self-governing British colony. Only sixty Africans (well-to-do immigrants from South Africa) out of 900,000 were allowed to vote in the election. Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) received its first constitution, which gave greater autonomy to the settler society than existed in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Bechuanaland (Botswana) and Nyasaland (Malawi). The latter were administered as British protectorates by the Colonial Office in London. By contrast, Southern Rhodesia's status as a settler colony empowered the white community to modify the general imperial policies in such a way as to leave no doubt about the fact that the settlers' interests came first (Summers 1994:8).

Great Britain retained veto power over foreign policy⁴ and affairs involving the *natives*, the official designation of black Africans until 1961. The constitution of 1923 kept the power in white hands through franchise based on British citizenship and a minimum annual income that excluded Africans from the polling booths, while that same constitution defined the system as a non-racial democracy. As a result of the Land Apportionment Act, passed in 1930, twenty million hectares of the most fertile land were set aside for an estimated population of fifty thousand white farmers, with nine million hectares of poor land allocated to approximately 1,080,000 Africans. The latter areas were the 'Native Reserves', which later came to be known as Tribal Trust Land and which were renamed Communal Lands after independence. Thus, countless Africans were evicted from their homes and resettled in less desirable regions. Christopher Magadza, biology professor and head of the Lake Kariba University Research Station, testifies on the impact of this act:

I was born in a place in the Burma Valley in the eastern part of Zimbabwe, near the Vumba, on the border with Mozambique. I was told it was 1939, in November. But I remember very little of that because we left—it became a white area in the times of the Land Apportionment Act; so we had to move from there.⁵

⁴ Great Britain's role as protector from the excesses of the white settlers never had a real impact and, most importantly, it did not entail the recognition of the equal rights of Africans and Europeans until tension reached the crisis point in the sixties.

⁵ Interview with Magadza quoted in Veit-Wild 1993: 170

The Ndebele writer Ndabezihle Sigogo, referring to the effect of this act on his home, the Filabusi District (Matabeleland), says: “The removal of people from their traditional land of my district to various areas in smaller groups ‘to kill their resistance’ lingered in my memory for years” (quoted by Veit-Wild 1993:90).

In other areas the act did not displace the occupants until twenty years after the law was passed, as occurred in the Chiweshe Communal Areas (the former Chiweshe Reserve) about fifty miles north of Harare (the former Salisbury). In this area, the direct effect of the law was to prevent these families from legally acquiring land (Bessant and Muringai 1994).

This act turned de facto discrimination into institutionalised segregation, by establishing a land apportionment system based exclusively on race. Furthermore, the railway lines, the cities, the industrial zones, as well as most of the mines, were located in the areas reserved for whites. So the law consolidated white economic power or, from the opposite standpoint, the powerlessness of the blacks, who had a small amount of very poor farmland and thus became a source of cheap labour for white-owned farms, mines, urban areas and industries. The precursor of the act was the Harris Caster Commission which in 1926 had recommended the allocation of sixty-two per cent of the land to whites after the success achieved by many African small farmers. In 1934 the Industrial Conciliation Act was passed by the Godfrey Huggins government. The law put an end to the blacks’ potential rivalry for industrial employment by forbidding them to be classified as employees; in other words, this signified their exclusion from the group of salaried white employees in terms of benefits. In exchange for this legal advantage, white workers gave up their right to strike. Africans were also excluded from white labour unions. Shielded by these two acts (the Land Apportionment Act and the Industrial Conciliation Act), Huggins furthered white supremacy. In the words of the African writer Lawrence Vambe⁶:

⁶ Vambe was born in 1917 about 20 km northeast of Salisbury. He was a supporter of nationalist organisations (moderate nationalist activity, that is, accepting white rule and calling for reforms within this framework, never questioning the paternalism of white liberals). He worked as a journalist at the African Newspaper group (of which the *Bantu Mirror* and the *African Weekly* were members), while he developed his political ideas during the Federation period campaigning for a multiracial society.

It was within this social, economic and political framework that I was to grow up to manhood. Economically circumscribed, politically proscribed and socially not tolerated by the ruling minority, it was a fearful prospect, in which any progress could only be achieved as a result of toughness and stubbornness, plus a certain measure of luck (quoted by Veit-Wild 1993:23).

If any illusions remained as to the non-racial character of this democracy, they perished in 1936 with the passing of the Native Registration Act (also introduced by Huggins). From the moment the law went into effect, Africans who were searching for work in the city or who had to move about in white urban neighbourhoods for job-related reasons needed an authorisation, which was stipulated in the Pass Law, and those who found employment in the cities were considered temporary migrant labourers. The administration also provided closely supervised habitats for the urban black wage-labourers, who were rapidly growing in number. The townships, known as “locations”, were exclusively black suburbs sited several miles from the European towns. At first these controlled quarters only housed Africans employed by whites in the town (in line with government stipulations); but from the fifties on, the townships experienced a massive influx from the country which neither pass laws nor any other government order could restrain. Vambe, who worked as a journalist from 1946 to 1955 in one of these compounds, reports:

Those nine years in the Harare African Township [Mbare] were undoubtedly some of the most interesting times in my life. They were probably most valuable in the experience and knowledge I gained about my people and the psychological effects of the social, economic and political burdens they laboured under. The life here was at once miserable and intensely exciting. It was a regimented existence, in which each person’s movements, income, opinions and even visitors, and of course drink, interested the [white big brother] (quoted by Veit-Wild 1993:26).

For Dambudzo Marechera, who was township-raised, that life was less exotic than for Vambe, a member of the first generation of African writers who, as a rule, only left their rural communities (and their extended families) temporarily and were mainly concerned with teaching their fellow-Africans how to lead a dignified (Christian), “civilised” way of life according to European standards. A stark picture of coming to age in a Rhodesian segregated township is provided by Marechera (1952-1987), one of the

second generation black literary writers. In *The House of Hunger*⁷, violence and oppression by the colonial authorities was exacerbated by the violence within the compound and by the alienation of a people systematically stripped of every trace of humanity and dignity, subjected to rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. As Marechera chronicles, for the majority township life meant suffering and a hopeless battle:

In *House of Hunger* I don't talk much about politics, I depict mainly, specially, the violence, whether purely domestic or purely drunken or any other forms of it, which in the ghetto became quite the natural way of life. The only way to survive was to be able to fight back in any situation. There was no way except prostitution for most of the women—schoolgirls, married or unmarried women—to survive in the ghetto. (...) A little domestic argument in the house, and the man would drag the woman out of the house into the yard—there were no hedges between the road and the yard—and really beat her up out there, calling out to all the men to come and witness it. When I was about nine years old I was a witness to such a beating where the man actually beat his wife until she was unconscious, and we, all the men and little boys, were all standing in a circle round them, watching, and then he raped her, there and then, whilst she was unconscious. I put that directly into *House of Hunger*. I am not talking about violence as something one suddenly notices when one has grown up a bit, but violence which surrounds you from birth. From the time you are almost a baby and not able to understand anything you already have all those violent visual images around you. As you get to be two or three or four years old you take it to be the normal way of life." (*An Articulated Anger*, Marechera interview 1988 quoted in Veit-Wild 1993:165).

In the *House of Hunger* diseases were the strange eruptions of a disturbed universe. Measles or mumps were the symptoms of a malign order. Even a common cold could become a *casus belli* between neighbours. And add to that the stench of our decaying family life with its perpetual headaches of gut-rot and soul-sickness and rats gnawing the cheese and me worrying it the next morning like a child gently scratching a pleasurable sore on its index finger (ibid:259).

Here he describes political radicalisation in the townships:

This was the sixties. Upheavals in politics, the search of black nationalism, the banning of ZAPU, the early attempts at armed struggle. I was too young to know. Even when

⁷ *The House of Hunger* was written in 1977 in the U.K. after his expulsion from New College, Oxford, for his defiance of the academic regulations.

Nkomo arrived to hold a meeting and my sister took me with her; and there were all these police and reservists firing tear gas shells and I was choking, dying, not knowing what was happening, why I was running, everybody running, the police dogs coming, running, my sisters screaming for me to get up and RUN! (ibid:165).

The Southern Rhodesian immigrants regarded themselves as the legitimate owners of a new country which they had created and where their quality of life and their privileges were the natural rights derived from their superior civilisation. Prime Minister Huggins articulated this notion in 1938:

The Europeans of this country can be compared to a white island in a black sea; the skilled workers and the merchants form the beach and the upper classes the heights of the isle. Are we going to allow the native to encroach on the beach and then gradually usurp the heights? To permit that would be to remove the leaven of civilisation from the country, and thus the black man would inevitably succumb to a life more savage than he has ever known (quoted in Balans 1995:88)⁸.

Regarding the capitalist mode of production, several authors have defined Southern Rhodesia as a 'labour coercitive' economy⁹. Wolf's discussion of the development of the labour system in South Africa (1982:367-8), whose essential points, I believe, can be extrapolated to Southern Rhodesia, explains the institution of Native Reserves as a component of a more complex system of labour control in which the Land Act and the pass laws were integrated, a system that simultaneously furnished an African labour supply for white farmers and denied Africans permanent legal residence in towns and cities. Compared to South Africa (Kimberly or the Rand), the mining potential in Southern Rhodesia was limited. Eventually, the white settlers realised that Mashonaland was not the country of King Solomon's mines and that most of them would make their fortunes by farming rather than mining; this spelled the end of the short-lived prosperity of black farmers, which commenced at the turn of the century¹⁰. It

⁸ My translation.

⁹ C. Van Onselen 1976, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933*; I. Phimister and C. van Onselen (Eds), 1978: *Studies in the History of African Mine Labour*; T. Yoshikuni 1987: 'Strike Action and Self-Help Associations: The Emergence of an African Working Class in Zimbabwe. 1918-21', Seminar Paper, History Dept., U.Z.

¹⁰ Since the first settlers were almost exclusively interested in finding gold, they ignored the land and soon grew dependent on African farmers for their food supply.

is worth noting that by 1904, black agricultural production represented over ninety percent of the country's total marketed agricultural output¹¹. From 1904-5 on, African farmers experienced increasing difficulty competing with European farmers, who were amply subsidised (the policy of the British South Africa Company), and blacks were simultaneously cut off from access to markets. This process forced Africans to become wage-labourers, since they were no longer able to support themselves¹². Summers's thesis (1994:79) that "the new economy" provided opportunities since "wage labour offered not merely money to pay taxes, but money obtained outside the customary structures of authority, money that could be used as the wage-earner chose" is in my opinion untenable and insulting. First of all it blurs the line dividing the dominators and the dominated, thereby concealing colonial control and exploitation, as well as creating the illusion that the possibility of choice was equivalent for the colonialist and the colonised; and secondly, it distorts the notion of "customary".

Two major advantages gained by whites from land alienation, dating from 1930 with the passing of the Land Apportionment Act, should be stressed: firstly, the restriction of blacks to areas of low productivity (a strategy common to South Africa and Kenya) limited competition¹³, and secondly, the Land Act created a larger wage-labour supply for industry and agriculture, purchased by white employers at a price lower than would otherwise have been possible¹⁴. The explicitly segregationist legislation imposed in the late twenties and early thirties bolstered the powerful system of labour control at a time when the 'raw native' seemed to be learning the rules of the market economy more rapidly and more successfully than the settlers had expected from their inferior, uncivilised nature in 'savage' Africa.

Strangely enough, some authors still argue that in Southern Rhodesia "segregation was a compromise strategy", that it was "no one's first choice" (Summers

¹¹ Phimister 1986, in Amin, N. 1992: *The Establishment of White Agrarian Capital in Zimbabwe 1890-1930* (in *State and Peasantry in Zimbabwe since Independence*, *The European Journal of Development Research*, Vol.4, No.1, June 1992. London).

¹² Palmer 1977, in Amin, N. 1992.

¹³ In 1908, 70% of all cash earnings by blacks came from produce sales, but by 1932 over 80% came from the sale of manpower.

¹⁴ Arrighi 1970, in Amin, N. 1992.

1994:269) and that it had its own “logic” rooted in the “conviction that communities had different attributes and different histories, which made their separation and *independence* important” (emphasis added). Summers goes even further:

Segregation both promoted and smoothed over conflict. It prevented educated Africans from seceding from the larger African community to struggle with Europeans for limited resources, and forced them to compete within the African community for racially delineated opportunities. But even as it put “traditional” and “progressive” leaders into contention, the logic of segregation pushed for intracommunal solidarity in the face of outside threats (1994:268).

Summers makes it seem as if there had initially existed a *civilising* colonialist project in Southern Rhodesia, whose ideal had been to institute ‘equal rights’ for all, and as if the authorities in charge of this project, faced suddenly with the ‘Native Question’, found themselves constrained to resort to segregation because “the notion of an assimilative civilisation had become increasingly untenable in the colony’s early years” (1994:271). She seems to forget that the very idea of “civilising mission” as conceived by Cecil Rhodes and the BSAC was, quite clearly, a unilateral one: “Equal rights for all civilised men south of the Zambezi” was implicitly segregationist, since “civilised men” were and could only be white, and no educational achievement (in the mission schools or anywhere else) could white-wash ‘the native’ who was coming to believe that “a mere veneer of education and civilisation ... gives him equality with the European”¹⁵. According to the records of the South African Native Affairs Commission, “civilisation” rests on three pillars: first, individualism, as opposed to the communalism that settlers ascribed to Africans; second, affiliation with European culture, that is, the English language, literacy and Christianity; and third, the capitalist market economy. Now, if we take this into account, we see that Summers continuously forgets that the notion of man as an autonomous, capitalist being, which is implicit in the concept of “civilisation”, was based on the denigration of ‘the native’ as inferior, Black, Other. Rigby perfectly hits the mark when he argues that: “The ‘civilising mission’ and its attendant racism which was the overt characterization of nineteenth-century European imperialism ...

¹⁵ *Rhodesia Herald*. 16 April 1929, quoted in Summers: 1994

was, of course, a *rationalization* for genocide, plunder, economic exploitation, and political repression in the colonies” (original emphasis) (1996:50). Summers however apparently entertains an enchanted notion of “civilisation”, making it seem as if an original and benevolent ideal of equal rights, purportedly upheld by the always glorified Cecil Rhodes, had needed to be revised, though not discarded, in facing irreducible cultural differences between (colonised!) Africans and (colonising!) Europeans; furthermore, as if segregation had then occurred as a compromise, agreed upon both by Europeans and Africans alike (cf. 1994:251-252, 266-267)¹⁶, taken up with the sole concern of optimising the functionality of the social order, and as if this “flexible” and somehow positive arrangement¹⁷, which purportedly meant to realise Rhodes’ ideal in the long run, had circumstantially gone astray and become a violent racist state—in short: as if history had gone off its intended course instead of, as I see it, having developed from originally violent and racist roots to a consequently violent and racist society.

This tendency to blur the obvious differences and to recreate the events with false theoretical distinctions is manifested in many other works. V. Wild, for example, in his highly ambiguous article “An Outline of African Business History in Colonial Zimbabwe”, focuses his attention on a comparatively limited number of Africans during the colonial administration, whom he describes as “self-employed” (1992). Under the vague category of African ‘businessmen’ or ‘business community’, he includes an assortment of hawkers, small farmers who sold their market-garden produce in the European towns, general-store operators, carpenters, bricklayers, tailors, shoemakers, mechanics, bus-line operators, etc. He draws no finer distinctions, nor does he analyse the subject in terms of the control of the means of production and capital accumulation. Three points are worth noting: (1) While during the first period, the colonial administration in Southern Rhodesia tolerated and granted licenses for certain independent business activities operating in the outskirts of the cities (referred to in Salisbury as the

¹⁶ She also speaks often of a “menu of choices” that segregation offered to “individuals”—white or black.

¹⁷ “That flexibility and appeal was possible because while the basic idea of segregation—separation—was simple, its policy applications were almost infinitely flexible” (1994:269).

‘native trading area’), those same activities were strictly prohibited in the townships. But from the mid-thirties on, the administration legalised these businesses in the townships in order to cleanse the city of—in their own words— ‘kaffir trade’. With the passing of time, as the townships grew, the businesses grew, and became (in the eyes of the government) an informal urban sector (or unregistered urban self-employment) which was uncontrolled. (2) European urban areas were always closed to African enterprise. (3) What might be concluded from this article is that, although the administration, by providing education and licences, improved the prospects for capital accumulation by a limited number of Africans, who eventually formed an indigenous bourgeoisie, there was no danger that the de facto control of the means of production would fall into black hands, no matter how “threatened” both the working-class and bourgeois Europeans “felt”, as Summers asserts (1994:101).

1.2 The Policies of the Federation

During the thirties the African nationalist movement began to organise and become articulate, particularly with respect to the problem of land distribution, working conditions and the disadvantages faced by blacks in education and health care. The *Bantu Mirror*, the *African Weekly*, the *Daily News* and other African periodicals expressed the growing anger at colonial government. The establishment of the Central African Federation—the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland— (from 1953 to 1963), uniting Southern Rhodesia, the British protectorate of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, intensified political polarisation. On the one hand, it strengthened the settlers’ awareness of their identity as Southern Rhodesians, since they were not only the strongest of these territories politically and economically, they were also the main usufructuaries. On the other hand, the black opposition could take advantage of the opportunity for close co-operation with their confederates in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, where the British colonial administration was more broad-minded about the political emancipation of the Africans.

A new and rather ambiguous official policy¹⁸, which was really a continuation of the so-called “non-racial policy” of the first constitution, would define the entire Federation period: racial parity. This entailed the possibility of political and social advancement for the Africans but with certain restrictions; for example, Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins definitely expressed that “The Africans would not be granted their full political and economic rights until they were capable of exercising them according to European criteria” (Balans, 1995:90). Black workers in the mines and factories received higher pay as they were promoted to the category of “employees”, but such was not the case with farm hands and domestic workers.

From the sixties on, in reaction to the extreme discrimination under the increasingly powerful Rhodesian Front party, those Africans who had been calling for a better government began to demand the right to self-determination. In 1955 a mass party capable of extensive national action was created by the merging of the African National Congress (ANC), headed by Joshua Nkomo, and the City Youth League¹⁹. In 1958 the Southern Rhodesian parliament forced the resignation of Prime Minister Todd because he championed the improvement of the living conditions of the African population under the slogan “brotherhood of the races”. One year later, the ANC was outlawed and five hundred members were arrested. In early 1960 its leaders managed to regroup, forming the National Democratic Party (NDP) with Joshua Nkomo as president and Robert Mugabe²⁰ in charge of public affairs. The political position of the NDP was unequivocal: “We no longer want better governors; we want to govern ourselves”. The right to vote now depended on education and income. Even before the Federation

¹⁸ Ambiguous in presenting a “liberal” facade without pursuing any real advance in terms of equality and desegregation, let alone majority rule.

¹⁹ The Youth League of the African National Congress was organized in 1949 at Fort Hare (the first university college for Africans in South Africa, founded in 1916) and within its ranks were the future South African leaders Robert Sobukwe, Mangosuthu, Gatsha Buthelezi and Nelson Mandela, as well as Robert Mugabe who studied at Fort Hare from 1949 to 1951.

²⁰ Ghana, where Mugabe had been teaching until now, was the first state to win its independence (1955) in the decolonization of Africa. He was deeply influence by President Kwame Nkrumah, particularly a speech he gave in Liberia in 1952 in which he demanded: “Africa for the Africans! ... A free and independent state in Africa. We want to be able to govern ourselves in this country of ours without outside interference” (1973:153).

period, the racial policy of the future Rhodesia had crystallised and the inequality of economic development had been consolidated by racial segregation.

The NDP was banned following violent confrontations in the townships between the Africans and Rhodesian troops. Shortly afterwards, in late 1961, its leadership founded the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) with Nkomo as its head. ZAPU advocated the need for illegal insurgency measures. Concurrently, whites continued to swell the ranks of the Rhodesian Front party, established in 1962 for the purpose of preventing majority rule and political decision-making by black Africans. When ZAPU organised a boycott of the parliamentary elections, the party was again outlawed. This time part of the leadership went underground and other leaders went into exile in Tanzania, which was independent. That same year the Rhodesian Front party won the elections and its victory hastened the dissolution of the Central African Federation. In 1963 the Federation was dissolved, and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were granted their independence, renamed Zambia and Malawi respectively. Southern Rhodesia now called itself Rhodesia and retained its status as a British colony.

In 1962 diverging opinions on the resistance strategies to be employed against the Rhodesian Front brought about a crisis in the ZAPU active leadership. Nkomo supported the mobilisation of international assistance abroad, while Mugabe favoured armed struggle, which in his opinion was incompatible with internationalisation. As a result Mugabe founded a new party in 1963, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) with himself as general secretary. The fact that Mugabe was a Shona and Nkomo a Ndebele affected the history of the nationalist movement both before and after independence, in which Ndebele-Shona rivalry was always a key factor in promoting divisiveness. While ZANLA, the military force of ZANU fought mainly in the north (the Shona region), ZIPRA, the ZAPU militia, operated chiefly in south-western Rhodesia (Ndebele territory), using a long-term military strategy that was more conventional than the ZANLA guerrilla warfare. The ZIPRA training camps were headquartered in Zambia, and the ZANLA camps in Mozambique (Balans 1995:101). Both parties were Marxist-oriented (and remain so today), and even when ZAPU was supported by Moscow and ZANU by the Chinese, co-operation between the parties during the initial period of resistance was unconditional.

1.3 *The UDI Terror*

In 1964 Ian Smith took over the leadership of the government, stating explicitly that “as long as I live, there will be no black government in Rhodesia”. Consequently, ZANU decided to include armed struggle in its party programme and trained the first guerrilla units. After a politically-motivated attack on a deputy of the Rhodesian Front, the Smith government banned ZANU and ZAPU and arrested Mugabe and Nkomo.

In October of 1964 Smith bribed 622 chiefs and village representatives to approve Rhodesia’s separation from Great Britain in order to establish an independent state based on the discriminatory constitution of 1961²¹. During that same year (1964) Smith began his offensive against the African press and banned the politically most outspoken periodical: the *African Daily News*. One month later the white Rhodesians opted in referendum by absolute majority for independence from Great Britain. After the Rhodesian Front party won the elections of May 1965, in November of that year Ian Smith signed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), without Great Britain’s approval, asserting that the UDI had “struck a blow for the preservation of justice, civilisation and Christianity” (Godwin²² and Hancock 1993:42). After the overwhelming victory of the segregation policy due to the full support of the white electorate, I find it difficult to believe that “For all their sins and for all that the system institutionalised discrimination and exploitation, most White Rhodesians were not racist thugs or heartless beings” (*ibid*:49). Cynicism or justification to deny their guilt? And in a similar vein Godwin and Hancock continue: “at one level, therefore, ignorance —of their own world and of the world outside, an ignorance born of distance rather than of an innate racism or idiocy— was another mark of Rhodesian-ness” (*ibid*:49).

On the subject of violence, a major aspect inherent in the process of the colonisation of both Southern Rhodesia and Rhodesia, A. Chennells²³ argues in a paper

²¹ In which the right to vote still depended on literacy and income.

²² Peter Godwin, born in Rhodesia, was a former member of the Security Forces.

²³ Anthony Chennells: ‘Cultural Violence During the Pax Rhodesiana: The Evidence from Rhodesian Fiction’. *Journal of South African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, Sept, 1992. Oxford University Press.