

7 *Cordon Sanitaire*: Prophylactic Settlement

“The alternative, which is generally to be preferred, is to use man to hold the land, or to advance into a fly belt,” wrote Director of Tsetse Fly Operations J. K. Chorley in a 1953 article. “If the land is suitable the villager will clear bush and plant crops, cut wood for fuel and burn thicket for grazing; he will harry game and his goats and later his cattle will continue to hold down the thicket. In this way an area free of such a fly as *G. morsitans* can be established, indeed has been established.”¹

In the article, Chorley acknowledged Mzila’s model of vegetation clearance and prophylactic resettlement as the future of operations to combat *mhesvi* and *n’gana* in Rhodesia: “This historical account is given not to indicate methods we should use, although some of our administrative officers may wish they possessed the powers of life and death enjoyed by a Zulu Chief, but as a challenge. What was done by a Zulu Chief 100 years ago can be done today by us with our infinitely greater knowledge of the tsetse’s biology, of the cause and cure of the disease it carries and with our modern mechanical resources.”²

The deliberate re-placement and overcrowding of *vatema* as forest-clearing agents and shields against *ndedzi* was handled in ways that cynically twisted Mzila’s methods. The argument was made in scientized terms. On one hand, overcrowding *wantima* (blacks) with their *tihomu* (cattle) would overburden the soils and *svidvelo* (pastures) and “lead to widespread erosion, poverty and other ills,” as Chorley had seen in parts of Tanganyika. On the other, too light a population density would cause minimal effect on vegetation and create ideal conditions for *ndedzi*.³

This chapter throws light on the main elements of this method, focusing on fencing, resettlement, and the experiences of resettled people. The argument is that *vatema* and their *zviphuyo* were deployed as human and animate means and ways of pest control and an outer ring of early warning systems to protect white settlements and *zviphuyo*. At the same time, fences

were installed to channel the movement of *vanhu* and *mhuka* and sanitize it of carried *mhesvi*. The keywords in *chidzimbahwe* and other indigenous languages are listed in the glossary for easy reference.

Cordons Sanitaire: Fencing as a Prophylactic Infrastructure

Today, when visiting Nembudziya, people still talk of a road called *Eight Wire*, named in reference to a notorious eight-strand fence, the hardwood poles of which still stand between Chota, Nembudziya, and Gumunyu.⁴ The name bears testimony to the enduring mark of the barbed wire fence as a means and way of controlling *mhesvi* and a marker of boundaries between infected and clean spaces. More importantly, it is a site where *hutsiny'e hwemabhunu* (the cruelty of the Boer) or *hudzvanyiriri hwevachena* (the downpression of white people) was felt in those moments when *vanhu* or *mombe* transgressed the wire. People were beaten up mercilessly, sometimes even shot—and not just here, but anywhere the fence of the *purazi rebhunu* (the Boer's farm) or *waya yehurumende* (government fence) existed.

By 1970, a principle of *cordon sanitaire* had emerged that was simple in its logic. Hunters went in first to clear game. Once shooting teams had cleared an area and *mafrayi* had certified it clear of *mhesvi* and erected a fence bordering the uncleared side (a game fence, locally called *fenzi yemhuka*), they proceeded to set up another fence on the side of *misha* (a cattle fence, locally called *fenzi yemombe*). This area would be clear of *mhesvi*. The space in between became the cattle free, game free corridor.⁵ This corridor was the sanitized lane; the two fences on either side were the cordons or lines.

Sometimes, just to be safe, a third fence called the *middle fence* was erected as extra security in the event of game or *mombe* breaching the first lines.⁶ Otherwise, the game fences were also deployed as “flanking” mechanisms to prevent game from escaping from killing fields,⁷ and they were shifted further into new areas as hunters moved systematically forward.⁸

Flanking fences were erected to counter the advance of *mhesvi* in a set area by placing a formidable barrier. Many such fences had been erected in Gokwe since the 1930s, not least the one along the Mupfure River in 1930. However, it was common for *mhesvi* to also outflank the flanking game fences, as it did along the Munyati fence line in 1946, in the Ngondoma area.⁹

To be an effective barrier, the game-free, cattle-free corridor had to be of sufficient width. Already by 1932, experience in NemaKonde had

demonstrated that “a 10-mile wide game-free cattle-free belt was insufficient to prevent all flies from crossing the area.”¹⁰ The game fence served the purpose of lineating (marking out lines to follow) and delineating (dividing up the land), thereby allowing the field teams to control vectors of *mhesvi*.¹¹ The object of fences was seen more as “defence rather than reclamation of tsetse infested country ... to put a greater distance between the fly limit and the occupied country.”¹²

For these *vachena*, Mzila had achieved this aim very effectively through clearing a wide buffer zone, decreeing that his subjects draw near their king, and deploying armed patrols. Now, first Rupert Jack, then Chorley, and then John Ford all used wire fences. Materially, the game fences were “stout fences” made out of hardwood poles and eight strands of high-tensile steel wire. Steel corner posts, standards, and droppers came much later.¹³ In the fenced area, all big *mhuka* could be held hostage and slaughtered; as they died out, *mhesvi* found no alternative food and also died.¹⁴ Cleared areas could either act as buffer zones between infested and noninfested areas or as paddocks with cattle-dipping tanks constructed for veterinary disease control.¹⁵

Once constructed, these hundreds of miles of wire only stayed in place as long as needed. In 1941, the Public Works Department took down the game fence created in 1926 in the Kadoma area and used it for other purposes after the area was declared clear of *mhesvi*. The southern fence erected in Doma in 1925 was sold, and those established in Nemaconde Southwest in 1930 were dismantled at the end of 1941. Once *mhesvi* was conquered, new grid lines of wire fences were strung for the purposes of controlling stock movements and to prevent *mombe* from straying into or being deliberately grazed in *mhesvi*-prone areas.¹⁶

The department bought wire and nails, then either commandeered African convict labor or paid a pittance to dig holes, fell poles from the proximate *sango*, and erect the wire. Whether a private contractor or a government department was in charge of construction, *vatema* did the work.¹⁷ In summer, a tractor with a hole-digging attachment was used, but as the season grew drier and soils rockier in places, *mafrayi* got down on the ground to dig manually with steel jumpers.¹⁸

The relationship between *sviharhi* and the (Savé West) fence is quite interesting. The fences initially suffered damage as *magocha* harried *sviharhi* toward them, but after a few months *sviharhi* were found “to move up to the fences, inspect them, and then move away.”¹⁹ Large herds of *mangwa* (zebra) and some *nyarhi* (buffalo) going to the Mkwasine to drink were “held up in their eastward movement for about two weeks, during which time

some 300 zebra, six buffalo and one eland died near the fence."²⁰ Other *sviharhi*, like *ndlopfu* the elephant and *timhala* (impala), simply turned back or trekked southward toward the Chiredzi or Runde rivers. Still, many *sviharhi* that followed the fence eventually outflanked it, moving through or around the incomplete section. To address the problem of *sviharhi* following the maintenance roads leading to the game fence and thus getting stranded at it, the department began cutting its maintenance roads to run parallel to the fences. *Vantima* employed as "orderlies" (messengers) were also deployed on bicycles to patrol twenty-mile stretches of fence daily, taking note of breaks and the numbers and kinds of *sviharhi* involved. To increase the visibility of the fence and reduce damage due to animal movements, large, white-painted metal disks were suspended at intervals on the wires.²¹ The appearance and noise of the discs startled *sviharhi*, and they subsequently steered clear of the fences.

Not all fences were erected to stop or canalize the movement of *sviharhi* or *tihomu*, but most were. For instance, in Ndanga East Reserve, a cattle fence was constructed running from the Savé westward along the Muron-donzi River to meet with another fence running north to south. The fence was designed to prevent the movement of *tihomu* from Ndanga East into known *nedzi*-infested areas in the south and to "restrict the wandering of the native population who could, and undoubtedly did, serve as *vehicles for the carriage of the tsetse*" (my italics).²² With the fence in place, all *vanhu* and *tihomu* traffic to and from the reserve was now inspected for *nedzi* at specific surveillance points in the fence, such as Ndari Gate. The Native Department also constructed another fence along the western boundary of the Ndanga East and Sangwe Reserves to further protect *tihomu* from straying into *nedzi*-infested areas. Minor fences were also set up to direct pedestrian—and, to a lesser extent, *tihomu*—traffic toward the inspection gates.²³ The border fence was also erected to channel pedestrian and cyclist traffic in and out of Southern Rhodesia through "deflying" points.²⁴

Local people paid £3 per month were recruited to erect *nedzi* and cattle fences under the supervision and direction of a white man—as in the case of the *nedzi* and cattle fences in Chibwedziva. First, teams cut trees to clear the path along which poles would be erected. The fence erected was *waya yemakurundundu yetsetse* (wire nailed to "crude" poles, with the bark not removed) because it was only temporary. Out in front, surveying and pegging the line that the fence was going to follow, was another white man, named Donati.

The man who was leading the fence gangs was locally called *Ngomakulu*, whose title was *baasboy* (the boss's boy, or "African assistant"). His name

was therefore apropos: Ngomakulu (*isizulu* for *Ngomahuru*) in *chidzimbahwe* means *big drum*, which in *dzimbahwe* traditions was the megaphone or talking drum of the king (*mambo*, or *nkosi* in *isindebele*). Now *muchena* insisted on being addressed and treated as *nkosi*. Like most *baasboys*, Ngomakulu also was a powerfully built man—an insurance against mutiny among the fence-cutting gangs and to mete out instant justice, including becoming angry on behalf of the *nkosi*. *Ngomakulu* was a *mundau* from across Savé, whereas Donati was an Italian national hired specifically for the purpose of installing fences. Donati was in front with “African assistants,” a team cutting trees behind him, another following up and stumping (*kugobora*), and, further behind, a team digging *goji* (holes) and installing *ntsandza* (poles), and, finally, the team inserting and tightening the strands.²⁵ This was in 1962, and bulldozers were on the Chiredzi, but not yet that far east; people there were the human bulldozers. They were paid £3 per month.

The fence was complete by 1963, and BTTC turned to erecting the game fence from the railway line to the Runde. District Commissioner Allan Wright commandeered *vantima* convicted for failure to pay taxes and for frivolous offenses to cut the fence line.²⁶ The corridor between the two fences became a game-free, cattle-free zone to break contact between *sviharhi* from Gonarezhou Game Reserve and *tihomu* in Matibi II Tribal Trust Land.²⁷ By 1968, this five-mile wide Guvulweni-Chepfu Tsetse Corridor, lying between the Runde and Mabalauta, had been hunted out. No *tihomu* were allowed here. The corridor’s sole purpose was to stop the spread of *nededzi* westward and to prevent *nyarhi* carrying foot-and-mouth disease and *n’gana* from exiting the game reserve and infecting *vantima’s tihomu* in Matibi II and, after that, *valungu’s* ranches.

Previously, only an old brush-pole game fence had run along the international boundary with Mozambique; between the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was replaced with two parallel, all-steel game fences set a mile and a half apart. The fences were composed of a 7 ft. high railway line straining posts concreted into the ground and carrying multiple strands of high-tensile oval steel wire. Occasionally, bull *ndlopfu* broke through, but the fences were generally too strong for *sviharhi*. There were unfenceable places that were too steep and inaccessible, such as Chilojo Cliffs on the lower Runde, where it was impossible to cut down trees or build fences; here, the BTTC resorted to aerial spraying of DDT (Thomson 2001, 12, 20).²⁸ The fences had achieved their purpose; neither *sviharhi* nor *tihomu* could cross the corridor, and at last the pestiferous mobilities had been tamed.

Resettlement as a Prophylactic

What was the purpose of creating a *cordon sanitaire* if the trees were going to continue providing habitat for *mhesvi* and if fences fell into disuse because of *majuru* (termite) attacks on poles, breakouts by *mhuka*, or theft of wire by locals? What would be a better way to create a permanent buffer zone between *mapurazi* (white farms and ranches) on one hand and *mhesvi* on the other than to settle *vatema* in overcrowded conditions so that they cut every tree, grazed the grasses almost into the ground every summer, and hunted out every animal? What could be a more perfect way to deny *mhesvi* its bloodmeal and its shelter? (For orientation throughout this section, see figure 6.1.)

In 1928, the Southern Rhodesia government introduced the first “antitsetse resettlement” scheme, under which *abantu abamnyama* or simply *abantu* (*isindebele* for *vatema*) were forcibly settled in the dry, *mpukane*-prone Gwai Native Reserve, squeezed into tiny land holdings while being granted free title to land if they moved to and stayed in the resettlement area for a considerable length of time. The government was hoping that title deeds would entice the massive numbers of *abantu* needed for settlement to act as an effective barrier against *mpukane*. However, the scheme proceeded very slowly, and the objective of using settlement as a *mpukane*-clearing strategy was not successful.²⁹

The reluctance of *izinkomo*-owning people to settle in *mpukane*-infested areas stemmed from a long experience with this *isibungu* (insect), going back long before the coming of *amakiwa* (whites). They knew what the *isibungu* could do and were not interested in the white man’s silly experiment. Of course, those without *izinkomo* had nothing (else) to lose. Only a few that were “used to” an *izinkomo*-less existence, having been forced to the inhospitable margins by the more powerful Ndebele and Tswana, could settle in such areas willingly. In fact, because these borderlands were rich in *inyamazana*, *inkulumende* found that most of these *abazingeli* (hunters) “indigenous to the fly areas show[ed] no desire to leave the infested country and in fact tend[ed] to drift back into it, if officially removed.”³⁰

Farther east, the Hurungwe resettlement scheme is an example of *vachena*’s attempts to introduce *vatema* with their *mombe* to “deflyed” areas to screen *mapurazi* (*vachena*’s farms) (in Karoi) from *mhesvi*-infested areas (in this case, the Zambezi valley). The scheme started in 1928. The following year, the *chipukanana* invaded the native reserve and inflicted heavy losses of stock among resettled *vanhu*.³¹

Another early anti-*mhesvi* shield was the resettlement of *abantu* and their *izinkomo* in the Kana-Shangani River junction in 1939, during a period

of seeming success against *mpukane*. However, in 1943 the *isibungu* returned with much virulence, decimating entire herds and forcing the withdrawal of those still alive.³²

As the situation improved, the government made land available for tobacco farms in the southern Hurungwe and Karoi areas near Magunje for white veterans returning from World War II and for postwar immigrants from 1945 onwards. *Vatema* living there were all uprooted and forcibly resettled with their four thousand head of *mombe* in *mhesvi*-prone areas of Hurungwe Native Reserve.³³ By 1951, over eight thousand head of *mombe* had been brought in.³⁴ The Tsetse Branch and Native Department insisted on swelling herds and locating the *mombe* stockades close to each other to reduce the distance between homesteads, fields, and *hufuro* (pastures). However, the authorities left no room for sons becoming adults, marrying, and needing land to start their own *musha* (homestead) and *mhuri* (family). Already overcrowded at the time of settlement, the reserves could not sustain the rising population as it grew from two million to three million in the 1950s. The government started subdividing the reserves even further, to a point where urban-based men returning from work arrived at month's end to find their land holdings reduced (Palmer 1977, 243–244).

Prior to the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1951, the government designed two main types of land use: the block system and the unit system. The *blocks* were large areas of arable land hundreds or thousands of acres in size, surrounded by correspondingly larger grazing areas, with homesteads and *matanga emombe* (cattle stockades) along one or more edges of the block. The system was considered undesirable for two reasons: First, it was deemed inefficient in terms of manuring (fertilizing) the land in the middle of the block with dung that *mombe* excreted in the *hufuro*. Second, it was seen to canalize *mombe* traffic along the fence line and to water points, causing serious erosion.

By contrast, the *unit* system had much smaller patches of arable land separated by grazing veld, serving just a few families clustered in *misha*. This system enabled easier access to land and grazing and reduced heavy tracking and erosion. The government preferred it for Hurungwe Native Reserve not only because large tracts of arable land were at a premium, but also because it suited the close settlement essential for keeping out *mhesvi*. However, a density of six families per square mile was the heaviest concentration possible—inadequate for controlling *mhesvi*. In any case, the unit method was not applicable everywhere. Some areas with fertile soil not only could sustain more *vatema* with limited acreage, but also supported good natural vegetation ideal for heavy *mhesvi* concentrations. In

such areas, block settlement, with dwellings, water points, and grazing corridors, was preferred to achieve intensive settlement with limited erosion and tracking.³⁵

The new arrivals were immediately subject to agricultural extension work and the application of NLHA, which emphasized strict conservation methods and “good” farming practices, enforced stock-to-carrying capacity ratios, individualized grazing rights, and compact land units registered in every individual’s name. To combat erosion while still achieving close settlement against *mhesvi*, care was taken to ensure against heavy trampling of paths by *vanhu* or *mhuka* traffic, especially on tracks leading to and from water supply points.³⁶ People remember two draconian aspects of *nhimura* (“the slashing,” their term for NLHA): forced destocking or limits to their herds, and *makandiwa* or *madhunduru* (contours) designed to arrest soil erosion.

In 1950, disaster struck. After game destruction, *mhesvi* had adapted to a new and timid host and blood source: *mombe*. It thrived. The first *n’gana* cases were confirmed in February 1950 at a village in northern Hurungwe. Apparently, the beasts had strayed into *mhesvi*-infested country. Things seemed to be under control; chemotherapy was administered, and the strain was stamped out. Then, in May, more outbreaks—this time in the southwest—left five hundred *mombe* of *vatema* dead. The Veterinary Department and trained *vatema* working for the Native Department moved in with chemoprophylactics, but the respite was short-lived. By mid-1951, *n’gana* covered an even wider arc, killing more than 2,300 *mombe*, three hundred cases each month, and reaching the white farms of Karoi, east of Hurungwe Native Reserve.³⁷

Only at that point, after *mapurazi* (white farms) recorded *only* eighty-three cases and two *mombe* deaths, did the implosion become a state of emergency. The government immediately resolved that the Hurungwe Native Reserve be evacuated of all *mombe*. The movement was planned for August and September 1952. In its aftermath, a multipronged strategy was put into operation. *Magocha* were deployed to intensify “game destruction,” while TFOs and private hunters were given incentives for slaughtering *nzou*, including keeping its ivory. This effort to starve *mhesvi* occurred alongside an assault on *hutachiwana* with chemotherapeutic interventions throughout the affected areas.

Three fences for which construction began in September 1951 were completed in May 1952: one game fence along the Hurungwe-Gokwe boundary on the Sanyati, one strong farm fence along its eastern boundary, and one rough *mombe* fence north to south straight through the middle of the reserve. Other cattle fences were later erected along the northern and

southern boundaries, thus completely enclosing the reserve and turning it into a vast game-free, cattle-free area.³⁸

However, this effort was wasted. By July 1952, just 5,500 of the 8,000-strong herd were still alive. A new problem arose: *Hutachiwana* was becoming resistant to drugs, principally dimidium bromide, turning *mombe* into a vast reservoir of drug-resistant *hutachiwana* for *mhesvi*. The government decided to arbitrarily evacuate all *mombe* to the northern banks of the Mupfure River and force the owners to look after them there, leaving only *mbudzi*, *makwayi*, and donkeys, believed less susceptible to *n'gana*. The Provincial Native Commissioner (PNC) explained it thus to *vanhu vatema*: "These cattle will only be *lagisa*'ed ... on the north bank of the Umfuli, and owners must group together for herding arrangements."³⁹

As we discussed in chapter 1, the Ndebele, Tswana, and *vedzimbahwe* deployed *ukulagisa/kuronzera* as a pest-management stratagem; here, we note *hurumende* doing exactly the same, directly referencing the herding arrangements as *ukulagisa*. We also discussed people keeping *mbudzi* and *imbwa* in the *mhesvi*-infested areas of the Zambezi. The difference in approach is the arbitrariness, with *hurumende*'s actions being not preventive but for damage control. *Mhuka* "unfit to be moved" were taken over by the government at dipping tanks or sale pens, the owner being paid "at compound grade and estimated live weight." The animal was slaughtered on site, the carcasses removed and buried or burnt as far as possible or converted into biltong (dried meat). The compensation rate for *n'gana*-related deaths was set at three pounds per beast, which the PNC deemed "a fair one."⁴⁰

But what constituted "fair" when *hurumende* arbitrarily used only a monetary or property value for *zvipfuyo* that *vatema* also valued in spiritual, social, economic, or other ways? They felt *mombe* were priceless; to remove them from *vatema*'s lives was to disarm their owners of a critical spiritual and social armament, to rip off not just the flesh, but also that which conjoined mortal and ancestor. The PNC stated: "We are going to make special arrangements in regard to your agriculture and your ploughing during the time that you cannot have cattle and these are being worked out."⁴¹ Yet, as Chorley admitted, "Many African people have a close attachment to their cattle and are unwilling to be separated from them. They prefer to stay with their cattle and see them die rather than be separated."⁴²

Vatema's Experiences of Prophylactic Resettlement

During the 1960s, after deciding that Gokwe District was sufficiently cleared of *mhesvi*, the government embarked on a propaganda exercise to persuade *vatema* who felt overcrowded in the western, southern, and

central provinces of Rhodesia to resettle in the district. This section focuses only on some of those who came from Bikita District (Fort Victoria District; now Masvingo) and Charter (now Chivhu) District to settle in *Ishé* (Chief) Nembudziya's area. The government provided lorries to ferry these families. To the north of Nembudziya along the Zambezi were the local *vechishangwe* (the *shangwe* people), so-called because of their tendency to farm in the valleys. Remembers Reuben Mavenge: "We called them *vechishangwe*, which they hated, saying 'We are *vakorekore*, don't call us *vechishangwe*, *shangwe* is a place,'" they would protest angrily⁴³ (see also Nyambara 2001, 2002; Worby 2002).

The first group of immigrants from the south arrived in 1963 from Bikita and the Chivhu-Sadza area. Others also came from Marozva in Bikita, where they had lived by the generosity of the Duma under *Ishé* Marozva. However, because most local land was seized by *vachena* and parceled out into *mapurazi*, Marozva now wanted land he had given to the Murozvi chief, *Ishé* Gumunyu, back. Therefore, Gumunyu, along with his two siblings, Jiri and Masuka, left to settle in Hurungwe and Gokwe, separated only by the River Sanyati (also called Munyati further upstream). Two other sons of Tohwechipi, Ushé and Makotore, remained.⁴⁴

Others, such as Raymond Muzanenhamo, born in 1942, came from Chivhu and settled first in Chief Chireya's country, then in Mhondoro, then in *Ishé* Neuso's country in Sanyati, before finally arriving in Nembudziya.⁴⁵ Still other groups came much later, in the 1970s, after the initial groups—who became *vekupureya* (spraymen), *magocha*, and *mafrayi*—had long been settled.⁴⁶ When these immigrants arrived, there were no people living in Nembudziya—bar *vechishangwe*, *Ishé* Dandawa's people of *Korekore* lineage, who lived in the vicinity of the Gandavaroyi Hills, named after the sacred waterfall and pool into which those convicted of witchcraft were thrown alive (Mapara and Makaudze 2016). Most of these arrivals from Bikita were Rozvi people, descendants of Chirisamhuru and siblings of Riwanika (Lewanika), who had crossed into and settled in what became Barotseland (Varozviland).⁴⁷

Just as in the adjacent areas of Lupane and Nkayi, the newcomers saw themselves as more "modern" because they had exposed themselves to large-scale farming and Western equipment and machinery; they were organized into cooperative societies, guaranteeing them capital and technical support; many held master-farmer certificates and grew cash crops like cotton and introduced their production to Gokwe; they were members of the nationalist political movements; and so on (Nyambara 1999; Alexander and Ranger 1998). *Vechishangwe* called these strangers from

the south *madheruka magochamiti*. *Kudheruka* means “suddenly showing up without invitation or forewarning,” which is what these *strangers from nowhere* did.

Magochamiti came from these *madheruka*'s practice of cutting and burning trees on the uplands to clear the land, kill pests, and produce ash fertilizer—all activities preceding the planting of crops. By contrast, *vechishangwe* had no need for these activities because they planted crops in the riverine valleys.⁴⁸ Here we have two identities, two encounters, based on where each farmed: the upland forest, favored haunt of the *mhesvirutondo*, and the riverbanks, preferred habitat of *mhesvirupani*. As land-clearing agents, *vechishangwe* and *madheruka* complemented the control of *mhesvi* perfectly—at least on paper. Some *madheruka* chose to settle in the fertile soils of the Sanyati Valley. They were warned that they would die of *nyong'o* (malaria), but went anyway; they lost all their children there.⁴⁹

The new area was thick with *mhuka*, among them *nhéma* (rhinoceros), *nzou*, *nyati*, *dzoma*, *nhoro*, *njiri*, and *nguruve*.⁵⁰ However, strong in their faith in ancestral spirits, both *vechishangwe* and *madheruka* had no reason to fear these *mhuka*, particularly *nzou*. They say the animal did not bother anyone who meant no harm to others; it reserved its ire for murderers, prostitutes, philanderers, and those who dabbled in bad medicines or witchcraft to harm others.⁵¹ Said one elderly woman in March 2016: “If you are an evildoer—then yes.”⁵² *Nzou* did not get into people's fields, but would go around the enclosures. The violence of these *mhuka* as the century progressed thus is not hard to explain: “We have followed those people, the white people, who destroyed our *hunhu*, we threw away our *chivanhu* [culture], our *vadzimu* [ancestors] have abandoned us.”⁵³

Inevitably, the presence of *mhuka* and movement back and forth between cleared and infested areas meant *madheruka* faced the problem of *mhesvi* and *hutunga*.⁵⁴ Because of the *mhesvi* presence, *hurumende* banned all *mombe* from Gokwe. Only donkeys were allowed, and only a few people, mostly among *vechishangwe*, had them. Otherwise, most *madheruka* relied on tilling with a hoe, or zero tillage. Without draft power, plows were not even necessary; the farming was thus limited to homesteads and small gardens near rivers.⁵⁵ *Ishé* Gumunyu later owned a tractor, but did not plow for everyone or always—just those who performed *magobo* (stumping) to clear the chief's fields in return for tillage. The equivalent of the land that one had stumped was plowed.⁵⁶

On the other side of the Sanyati River, the district commissioner for Hurungwe had commandeered *vatema* to build a big kraal in which all *mombe* were kept and pastured safely from *mhesvi*, but no *mombe* were allowed in

the homesteads—just the donkeys.⁵⁷ Those who had donkeys used them for plowing. A plow could be purchased for £2. 5s. at Gokwe Center, and the donkeys were bought in Makonde and Hurungwe. As we discussed, donkeys were more resistant to the bite of *mhesvi* than *mombe*.⁵⁸ It is the common understanding locally that “the donkey would survive when bitten; the blood of a donkey is stronger than that of cattle. That of goats is stronger than that of cattle.”⁵⁹ Strength here is measured based on resistance to disease.

Madheruka and *vechishangwe* were only able to keep *mombe* after the civil disobedience campaign, when the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) leader, Ndabaningi Sithole, toured Nembudziya.⁶⁰ At that time, nationalist leaders, who included Robert Mugabe, were detained at nearby Sikombela Detention Camp (see figure 7.1), with rights to visit the surrounding areas and conduct political activities. Sikombela itself was well within the *mhesvi* belt; it was, along with Gonakudzingwa in southeastern Zimbabwe (Mavhunga 2014), strategically designed to dump these “hot-heads” in inhospitable, animal-infested forests to “cool off.” This form of prophylactic settlement was designed to isolate the vocal elements of the nationalist movement from the cities, but they ended up subverting the entire countryside. In the end, they had to be moved to maximum security prisons further inland.

When Sithole arrived in Nembudziya, he found that all people had were *mbudzi* and donkeys. He said: ‘Why do you only have *mibhemhe* and *mbudzi*? Why not *mombe*?’ And the people said: ‘There is *mhesvi*, and the government has said *mombe* can’t enter because they will all die.’ Ndabaningi said: ‘No ways, let them die while you at least have the opportunity to eat meat. Find *mombe*.’ That is how people started keeping *mombe*. The white veterinarian named Johnson was a thoroughly despised man, and people worried he would have them all thrown in jail—but *mombe* were now there to stay. People began plowing larger acreage.⁶¹

Madheruka had never known *mhesvi* in Bikita—at least in their lifetime. Thus they had no *ruzivo* on how to prevent it from biting them and, once it did bite, how to treat its effects. The locals relied on *mafrayi* at the tsetse gate to prevent *mhesvi* from coming in and escalating the situation. “It bit you until it was full then left you,” one said.⁶² The *mhesvi* in the area apparently did not transmit *gopé*—only the painful bite and *n’gana*. Says one elderly woman who arrived with the first emigrants from Bikita: “*Mhesvi* terrorized people. Do you know that if it bites you, you feel like you have been pierced by a needle? Yeah, it pierced like a needle, looking for your blood, to suck so that it fills its stomach.”⁶³



Figure 7.1

Inmates at Sikombela, including Robert Mugabe (foreground), reading books in the 1960s.

Source: *The Sunday Mail* (March 6, 2016).

There were many *mapere* (hyenas) in Nembudziya, and they preyed upon *mbudzi* and *mibhemhe*. “So,” the same old woman continued, “to safeguard these *zvipfuyo* from *mapere*, you would sleep in one room, your *zvipfuyo*, and you. *Mhesvi* would follow *zvipfuyo* that had entered the house. Particularly the goat pen; that was the most tsetse-infested.”⁶⁴ People had no toilets, and they relieved themselves in the bush—and when they “went to the bush” (*kuenda kusango*), *mhesvi* detected them and followed. Killing the *chipukanana* was impossible because it kept shifting places, each bite feeling like a razor cut. *Mhesvi* bit by day, *hutunga* at night.⁶⁵

There is one known case of suspected *gopé* in 1968, involving Ambuya (Grandma) Misi, wife to *Ishé* (Headman) Misi. She says when she was bitten at Dandawa, she developed *mapundu* (boils), had a devastating fever, and a persistent sleep. She was admitted to a hospital, given two injections, and placed on intravenous fluids for three days. She only woke up the third day,

finding a nurse at her bedside, who told her what had happened since she was rushed in by ambulance.⁶⁶ Otherwise cases of *gopé* in Nembudziya were rare. “You died of other things,” said a neighbor. “What killed people was *nyong’o* (malaria) caused by *hutunga*, not *mhesvi*.”⁶⁷ Yet that is true only for areas to the south. The further north people went, the nearer they came to the shores of Kariba, the source of several sleeping sickness cases—including fatal ones—throughout the 1960s. That is where Dandawa is located.⁶⁸

Clinical medicines came to Nembudziya much later, in the mid-1970s. Up until then, people traveled all the way to Gokwe Center or Sanyati to be treated, which made traditional medicines very important. *Madheruka* arriving in *vechishangwe’s* country first knew about *mhesvi* when they left Bikita and Chivhu, which were much colder and more elevated, whereas Shangwe country (Gokwe) was very hot and at a low altitude.⁶⁹ When *madheruka* are asked what traditional medicines they used against *mhesvi*, the answer is standard: “We had no mechanism to prevent tsetse from biting us.”⁷⁰ Evelyn Musengi expresses *madheruka’s* complete dependence on clinical medicine in this way: “Unlike *vechishangwe*, we knew absolutely nothing about *mhesvi* and therefore had no *ruzivo* of herbal medicines obtainable from the forests.”⁷¹

Vechishangwe’s intimate *ruzivo* of herbal medicines, strategic deployment within the environment, and inoculants was based on long residence in the *mhesvi*-infested areas.⁷² As relations improved, *vechishangwe* taught *madheruka* the names of key herbs and medicines derived from them. One such plant was *zimumhuwenhuwe* (smelly plant), which looked like sweet potato and smelled like *tsvina* (human excrement). The medicine was fed to the patient through the rectum and acted as a purgative.⁷³ To protect against *hutunga* and *mhesvi* accompanying *mbudzi*, people placed *mbudzi* dung on top of burning charcoals so that the smoke would act as a repellent against the pests. Where *zumbani* (eucalyptus or mint) was available, people would stick it into the wall (where grass thatch-roof meets walls), or put it on burning charcoals to smoke *zvipukanana* out of the house or suffocate them.⁷⁴ The occupants returned a while later, after *zvipukanana* were dead or gone.⁷⁵

Once bitten, *vechishangwe* had yet another therapy for *gopé*: eating a very hot pepper. They would crush it, put it in a cup, and drink it. It served as an emetic; when the patient vomited, relief would come. The same medicine was applied against *nyong’o*; the patient would vomit the offending yellow substance after which the fever was named.

Nyong’o must be understood within a larger (spi)ritual context. In *dzimbahwe*, land was not just a geophysical expression; *dzimbahwe* was

a “supra-spiritual commonwealth” that fell under five territorial spirits, complete with subordinate structures: the Matopos *Mwari/Mlimo* (Ranger 1999; Werbner 1989; Daneel 1970), Mutota/Nehanda (Lan 1985; Mudenge 1988), Chugumbi/Dzivaguru (Mudenge 1988; Bourdillon 1978); Musikavanhu/Chapo (Rennie 1978), and Nevana (Alexander and Ranger 1998; Tapson 1944). The latter was in the Gokwe and Nkayi areas—which was Sebungwe under Rhodesian rule—home to *vaTonga*, *vaRozvi*, *vaNyai*, and *vechishangwe*. Big ceremonies commemorating the start and end of harvests were intended not just to thank the spirits, but also to ensure good health.

In the entire belt from Gokwe to Lupane, endemic seasonal fever was called *nyong’o* (*chidzimbahwe*) or *inyongo* (*isindebele*). *Nyong’o* was “a non-fatal disease of the rainy season attributed to gorging on the first fruits” (Alexander and Ranger 1998, 223). That is why the festival of the first fruits every year was held with offerings to the spirits, who—along with kings and chiefs—saw to the management of all pestilence within their territories. *Nyong’o* was blamed on eating “fresh, sugary and green foods such as watermelons, sweet reeds, greens and pumpkins,” not *hutunga*, which were repelled by burning or rubbing “strong-smelling herbs and leaves,” not least *msuzwan* or *mutandamsenya* (literally, “a very smelly log”; 224) (Lukwa 1994). *Hutunga* themselves were not killed nor malaria prevented. *Mombe* too suffered from *nyong’o* when changing from eating dry winter grass to fresh green grass as the rains began. *Nyong’o* was also found in the air, water, soil, and vegetation. It was treated with bitter herbs deployed as emetics and purgatives, to cleanse and revitalize the body. Two other medicines, *mukombehwa* and *murumanyama*, were taken when a person fell ill. The medicines would be put in water, and a big stone placed in *moto* (fire). This stone would then be put in a dish containing the water, and the patient would go on all fours over it, the whole body and the dish being covered with a blanket. The patient was supposed to open his or her mouth and inhale the medicated steam, almost to the point of passing out, before being taken out from under the blanket and placed in the shade to recover.⁷⁶

There was no hospital in Nembudziya until one of these *madheruka*, Cleto Zharare, took the initiative to build one with his own savings from his psychiatric nursing job at another foundation started by *munhu mutema*, the priest named Jairos Jiri. The story of Zharare Clinic is outside the scope of this book, but it speaks to an overlooked theme in the history of knowledge, means and ways, and innovation under Rhodesia⁷⁷—namely, that of *vatemala* who built and ran educational, business, technology, public health, and scientific infrastructures such as clinics and grocery stores for

their own communities. There was nothing political about what they were doing—just the imperative to take risks, make money, and improve the lot of their own people.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I signaled that *mhesvi* forced the Rhodesian state to deploy *kugarisika kwevanhu* (human settlement) as a prophylactic structure against it. In beginning this chapter, I highlighted that people removed to these *mhesvi*-infested margins considered themselves ejected to live like other *mhuka*—as *mhuka*. They felt like *dirt*, to use Mary Douglas's term. But Douglas was thinking of dirt from the eye of the beholder—namely, the perception of something or somebody as dirt. I am talking about the feeling of being treated as dirt (*tsvina*), what it felt like for *vatema* to be ejected from their ancestral lands by *vapambevhu* and forcibly resettled as *madheruka* in a place befitting dirt. This is called *kubatwa setsvina* (being treated like dirt). I have shown that contrary to Douglas and Wildavsky (1982, 102), the borderland asserts its presence to *hurumende* because of *mhesvi*. Once resettled on the margins, *vatema* cannot be left on their own with *mhesvi* lurking; they must be controlled just like the *mhesvi* so that the insect cannot breach their villages to reach *vachena's* heartland.

The irony of prophylactic settlement is precisely that it was *vatema's* idea, now deployed to displace them from their lands and turn them into a preventative means to fight the encroachment of *mhesvi*. This chapter has traced the direct mobility of prophylactic settlement (as an intellectual idea and a practice) that *vatema* practiced to the control of *mhesvi* under the regime of *vachena*. This is quite contrary to the work of Kjekshus ([1977] 1996), who sees the advent of *vachena's* regime as destroying rather than appropriating *ruzivo rwevatema* to control the environment. This does not mean that *vachena* took all *ruzivo* at face value or that no *ruzivo* and practices were destroyed; instead, this is a call for more careful readings of moments of knowledge translation, which we will not see if we read too much into the civilizing mission narrative.

Appropriating the *ruzivo rwavatema* while turning them into surveillance equipment and land-clearing machines, then spreading the propaganda of the Rhodesia project as introducing knowledge and civilization from Europe, exposes Europe's imperial project in Africa as a fraud. It shows, yet again, how the settler project was built on *ruzivo rwevatema* and (not just) the labor of *vatema*—and that is one of the least explored secrets of Europe's occupation. The fraud was sadistic: taking ideas invented by

vatema and using *vatema* as guinea pigs to ensure its success. No *vachena* were settled in these *mhesvi*-infested borderlands—only *vatema*, who under *hunhapwa* were designated, as we discussed in this book's introduction, as eugenically inferior. Their lives could be experimented with, and if they died, it would not be homicide; they would have succumbed to other *mhuka*. It was survival of the fittest out there. "I am fixed. ... I am laid bare," Fanon said ([1952] 1967, 115–116). Reduced to a contrivance, a device against pestiferous *zvipukanana*, the status of *vatema* as instruments was confirmed. Cabral (1974, 30) was right: "To co-exist [with *vachena*] one must first of all exist."

The role of *vatema* in prophylactic settlement was now that of "an instrument of production," what Aimé Césaire called *thingification*—the transformation of the black person into a thing—in this case, a machine or "an instrument of production" (Césaire [1955] 2000, 42–43). Robbed of the *ruzivo* now deployed to make him an instrument, the deintellectualization of the black person was complete.

And yet!

Always, in these moments of utter despair, I look for moments of creative resilience. Of "African nationalists" dumped at Sikombela to vegetate, only for them to fan out into the countryside and subvert it in defiance of *hurumende yehudzvanyiriri* (the oppressive state) to embark on *kuzvisunungura* (self-liberation). Of *vechishangwe* deploying their *ruzivo* of medicine and their spiritually anchored practices to deal with *nyong'o*. Of *madheruka* that extend the *ruzivo* they have appropriated from *vachena* on the central watershed to their new home, where they can be seen engaging in thriving cotton production, well-organized cooperatives—and building a clinic when *vapambepfumi* have left them to the mercies of *mhesvi* and *hutunga*.

Vatema at work, rehumanizing themselves, reintellectualizing themselves—turning extreme adversity into a future for themselves and their children.

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