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From Enslavement to Environmentalism

POLITICS ON A SOUTHERN AFRICAN FRONTIER

David McDermott Hughes

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*To my mother,
and in memory of my father*

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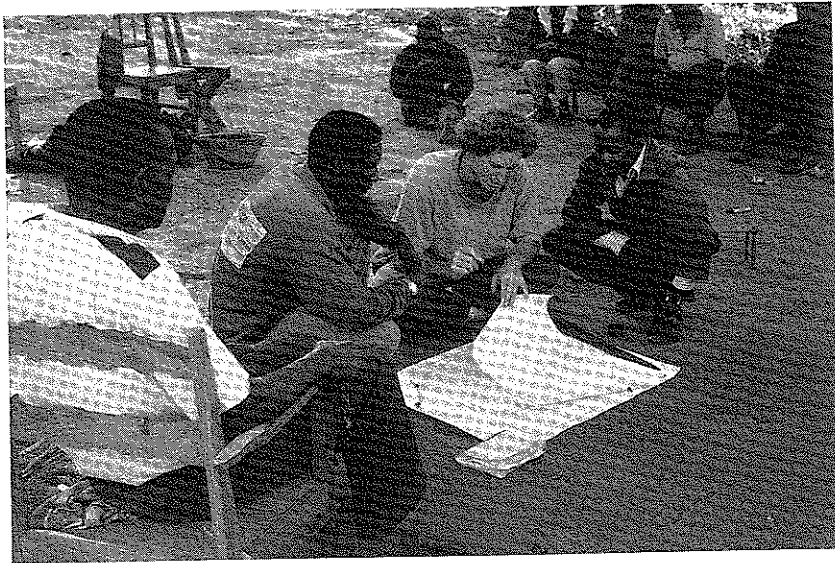
ABBREVIATIONS

ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
AEF	Africa Evangelical Fellowship
AHM	Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique (Historical Archives of Mozambique)
BCG	Beira Corridor Group
BSAC	British South Africa Company
Campfire	Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources
CC	civil commissioner
CIES	Centro Informazione e Educazione allo Sviluppo (Center for Information and Education for Development)
CNA	Companhia Nacional Algodeira (National Cotton Company)
CNC	chief native commissioner
DA	district administrator
DC	district commissioner
DNFFB	Direcção Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia (National Directorate of Forestry and Wildlife)
DPAP	Direcção Provincial de Agricultura e Pecuária (Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Livestock)
Frelimo	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique)

LINGUISTIC CONVENTIONS

FSM	Floresta e Serração do Muda (Muda Forest and Sawmill)
GTZ	Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (Organization for Technical Cooperation)
INSANI	Fundo da Inspeção Nacional dos Serviços Administrativos e dos Negócios Indígenas
MARRP	Manica Agricultural Rural Reconstruction Programme
NAZ	National Archives of Zimbabwe
NC	native commissioner
RDC	rural district council
Renamo	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Mozambican National Resistance)
SAFIRE	Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources
SIM	Serving in Missions
SPFFB	Serviços Provinciais de Florestas e Fauna Bravia (Provincial Services of Forestry and Wildlife)
VADC	Vhimba Area Development Committee
Vidco	village development committee
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted, and the original text or statement usually appears in an endnote. In most cases, I have used Zimbabwean Standard Shona spellings, even for Ndau dialect words that do not exist in Standard Shona (apologies to Michel Lafon). For Portuguese quotations, I have kept with the original despite different spellings and diacritics used in that language fifty or more years ago.



*Members of the mapping team in Gogoi, Mozambique in 1997:
(from left) Bernardo Melo Meque, David M. Hughes, and Samuel Dube.
Chief Gogoi sits in the foreground. Photo by Melanie H. McDermott*

PREFACE

IN 1995, DURING MY FIRST FORTNIGHT IN VHIMBA, ELIAS NYAMUNDA showed me his map of households and administrative divisions. The map did not surprise me. After all, Elias walked regularly up and down the escarpment of this remote area of Zimbabwe, performing his duties as an officer of two local committees. A map would help him find his way, and I copied Elias's map for the same purpose as I carried out fieldwork in Vhimba. In 1996, Elias made more maps—these showing various possible locations of the disputed boundary of Chimanimani National Park. These cartographic efforts did not surprise me either. The Zimbabwean organizations that had helped place me in Vhimba had warned that land and boundaries were political there. Elias drew his maps to defend squatters inside the Chimanimani National Park and to undermine the government's claim to land. The government, he argued, had unjustly moved the park's boundary to the detriment of Vhimba people. Smallholder farmers had not encroached upon the park. Rather, through a surveyor's sleight of hand, the park had encroached upon smallholders. Since my historical research confirmed Elias's position, I assisted him and his committee to elaborate upon the original maps. We joined together in what is sometimes called "countermapping"—the effort legally to substantiate the use of land and natural resources by groups not represented in the state.

In 1997, a similar engagement led me to direct a project in Mozambique, at a location only thirty kilometers distant from Vhimba. Gogoi—the name of the place and its chief—challenged my assumptions in a way Vhimba had not. The same organizations and some new ones had briefed me again:

Gogoi, they said, resembled Vhimba in every respect—same Nda language, same structure of traditional leadership—and, so, I should have no problem in functioning there. Thus assured, I opened the project by asking Chief Gogoi to draw a map of his territory. Gogoi understood that this map would help protect his people's sacred forests and farmland from expropriation by South African timber companies. Yet, he could not draw a map appropriate to the task. The problem was not technical. Rather, at a cultural level, Chief Gogoi did not grasp what I meant by "territory." Marking the ground with a stick, he indicated the location of sacred forests and of his headmen's homesteads, but he did not and could not encircle them with a boundary. Chief Gogoi simply did not know where the physical limits of his rule lay. Nothing in my experience in Vhimba or anywhere else had prepared me for this impasse. The project plowed ahead, nonetheless, and in the course of making more maps and walking around the landscape, Chief Gogoi grappled with boundaries and their current importance. By the end of the project, Chief Gogoi had demarcated his zone of control and presented the provincial government with a map to prove it. He and those around him were starting to think about land in Vhimba's terms.

This book attempts to account for the vastly different concepts of territory and geography that I encountered in Vhimba and Gogoi. It also attempts to explain the change I witnessed in Gogoi. How can two Nda communities view the landscape and the politics of land so differently? To answer this question, the book explores the past hundred-odd years of this region's history—a period in which British-ruled Vhimba became "territorialized" and Portuguese-ruled Gogoi did not. White settlement around Vhimba and wildly different forms of administration, development, and conservation caused Vhimba and Gogoi to diverge from one another. In effect, the wider colonial and state systems—and local reactions to them—created two distinct cultures. Thus, for almost the entire twentieth century, the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border has marked a sharp disjuncture in the politics of land, chiefship, farming, timber, labor, and numerous other factors. In the late 1990s, however, power in Gogoi began to move into line with Vhimba. White South Africans sought to establish timber plantations in and around Gogoi. These loggers—as well as "countermappers"—reoriented the relations between strong and weak parties so that land emerged as the pre-eminent political object. In large measure, these processes in Mozambique recapitulate the dynamics of white settlement on earlier hinterlands, from Vhimba to the American West to Australia. Ultimately, then, this book describes power on a frontier of colonization.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK GREW FROM THE APPLIED ACADEMIC SCENE OF HARARE IN the 1990s—a remarkable time and place where social scientists and policymakers collaborated, debated, and learned from one another. This ferment drew together scholars of the University of Zimbabwe—particularly of the Centre for Applied Social Sciences—and NGOs and government departments involved in conservation and development. Despite the government's steady decay into dictatorship, free discourse and mutual respect prevailed. I write of this time and place with great sadness, for the moment has definitely passed and once-open doors are firmly closed. Policymakers with power do not listen to scholars, and those few who do listen have too little power to effect change. At a more basic level, my closest friends and colleagues in Zimbabwe must now concentrate on economic survival and physical security. Paramilitary bands have assaulted a number of my dear, defenseless friends. With trepidation, I visited Vhimba—the chief Zimbabwean field site discussed herein—in late 2002. Almost as soon as I had driven away, the police arrested and beat one of my hosts. He associated with an American, a white—presumably an opponent of the government and possibly an agent of the opposition. Research, advocacy, and criticism can hardly continue in this atmosphere. These acknowledgments, then, commemorate freedoms and modes of action made impossible by Zimbabwe's current government.

In Zimbabwe, people contributed time and energy to my work in ways that I cannot reciprocate. Smallholders in Vhimba left banana fields and beer drinks to talk to me, lead me around, and feed me. I thank, in particular, Elias Nyamunda, Elias Muhanyi, Ruben Zuze, and D. Mapuisa, and

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In Gogoi, I worked closely with Chief João Maquinasse Gogoi, Joseph Maquinasse Gogoi (his son), and headmen Bundua, Hlengana, and Matsikiti. As chapter 6 explains, the land rights project I planned provided both the context and a form of thanks for this collaboration. The project team—to whom I am extremely grateful and without whom I would not have achieved any results in Gogoi—included Samuel Dube, Bernardo Melo Meque, Muíno Amarchande Taquidir, and Melanie Hughes McDermott. The Espungabera trio of Felix Camba, Felix Filemone, and Michel Lafon housed and transported me and made me laugh. In Chimoio, Ana Paula Reis and the staff of Serviços Provinciais de Florestas e Fauna Bravia facilitated my work, academic as well as applied. In Maputo, I am grateful for the privilege of collaborating with Bartolomeu Soto (of the Direção Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia), Rod de Vletter (of the World Bank), and (although then based in Johannesburg) Ken Wilson (of the Ford Foundation).

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Finally, I owe a debt to readers near and far, beginning with my dissertation committee at the University of California, Berkeley: Christine Hastorf (chair), Elizabeth Colson, Louise Fortmann, and Donald Moore. I owe a similar debt to the “Alcatraz 5.5” writing group of the Berkeley-Oakland borderlands: Sharad Chari, James McCarthy, Melanie Hughes McDermott, and Janet Sturgeon. A large group of friends, relations, and colleagues commented in indispensable ways on one or more draft chapters: Jocelyn Alexander, Simon Anstey, James Bannerman, Sara Berry, Erica Bornstein, Vupenyu Dzingirai, Angelique Haugerud, Gerhard Liesegang, Max Likin, Bonnie McCay, Corey Robin, Thomas Rudel, Richard Schroeder, Jay Singh, Eric Worby, and the late David Beach. At and through University of Washington Press, Lorri Hagman, K. Sivaramakrishnan, and three anonymous readers provided thorough and sensitive guidance. My mother and father read and commented on the entire manuscript and made me a better writer. How I wish my father could have lived to see this book. Thank you, Melanie, for being a companion and colleague in this work from the beginning.

*From Enslavement
to Environmentalism*

INTRODUCTION

Power on African Frontiers

THE TERM *FRONTIER* MEANS TWO THINGS, BOTH OF THEM STRIKINGLY political. The frontier is a zone, a hinterland, lying outside the spatial core of a society but within grasp of adventurers and colonists. Frontiers also bound and demarcate national, sovereign territories (Kopytoff 1987:9; Worby 1998a:55–56). In one meaning, the frontier “opens” as a “territory or zone of interpenetration of two previously distinct societies.” So write Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar in their classic comparison of Southern Africa and the United States, both once expanses for conquest (L. Thompson and Lamar 1981a:7; cf. Lattimore 1962:469–70). Put slightly differently, frontiers are “contact zones”—the term Mary Louise Pratt (1992:6–7) uses to avoid privileging the conqueror’s perspective. In the second meaning, the frontier is the fence line where conquest has stopped. In practice, however, the same frontier can both permit and circumscribe conquest, even at the same time. Beginning in the sixteenth century, European or European-descended settlers expanded west and south into zones that were to them *terra incognita*. By the 1880s, states realized that their personnel, or at least their territorial ambitions, would collide geographically. Through war and diplomacy, they marked their hinterlands with international boundaries.¹ Of course, white settlers continued to colonize zonal frontiers up to the linear frontiers of their various national territories. In some cases, settlers approached the boundary from both sides, closing the two zonal frontiers separately, as part of different national and colonial processes, and at very different rates. Geographically, such a boundary distinguishes one hinterland, with one set of political dynamics, from its twin, joined at the hip and evolving interdependently.

Rather than treat hinterlands and boundaries as interlinked in this fashion, most studies consider them as distinct phenomena. For most of the world effectively colonized and settled by Europeans, this analytical separation, in fact, makes sense. All of the “neo-Europes”²—the United States, Canada, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, and arguably Siberia—occupy islands or, at least, border only a small number of other states. International boundaries hardly constrained or otherwise influenced white expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³ Pioneering in Southern Africa, however, lasted longer and, in consequence, survived into a different geopolitical era. Whites⁴ began to leave the original Cape Colony only in the 1820s. As many historians have noted, these *trekboers* variously fought, ruled, enslaved, employed, dispossessed, raped, and married Africans.⁵ In the 1890s, they were still doing so on the northward trail across the Limpopo and toward the Zambezi River. Then, between the years 1897 and 1902, borders crystallized. The Anglo-Portuguese demarcation settled the extent of sovereignty in what are now Zimbabwe’s Eastern Highlands, and the Anglo-Boer War made the Limpopo the dividing line between South Africa and Zimbabwe. Once circumscribed in this fashion, did pioneering, trekking, and the process of closing hinterlands die out? Yes, they did, most scholars imply. White colonization—as distinct from its legacy—hardly figures in current accounts of either Zimbabwe’s or Mozambique’s borderlands.⁶ “The frontier,” write Thompson and Lamar (1981a:7), “‘closes’ when a single political authority has established hegemony over the zone.” Pioneering as a whole would appear to have ended with Africa’s partition into administered colonies.

This book argues that, on the contrary, settlers and colonization continue to shape politics in a locale of partition. The Chimanimani-Sitatonga region of the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border—the site of this study—comprises a double hinterland. Whites settled the Rhodesian side in the 1890s. On the temperate, fertile plateaus, they established “white highlands” of intensive agriculture.⁷ Together with the timber industry and the Department of National Parks, these land managers expropriated and evicted wave after wave of African smallholders. Nevertheless, Africans continued to farm what I call “black lowlands.” Officially designated as “native reserves,” the spaces provided an answer to the colony’s “native question”: “Where are Africans to live and farm?” In the late 1980s, environmental agencies posed that question anew and reexamined the spaces. In effect, programs and projects reopened Zimbabwe’s lowland frontiers long considered to have closed. Thus, in the 1990s, land alienation, evictions, and countersquatting dominated local political life. Across the border, by con-

trast, colonization is only now moving toward a peak. Since 1994, South African-owned timber firms have laid claim to the bulk of Mozambique’s half of the Chimanimani-Sitatonga region. White Zimbabwean farmers have sought access to even larger tracts slightly to the north. As in Zimbabwe, state agencies have encouraged these outsiders to settle and invest. In short, the pressure to colonize and expropriate this binational hinterland is a contemporary fact.

A word about power in Africa’s hinterlands is in order. Two factors condition hinterlands’ political evolution: relative underpopulation and the acts of land-grabbing themselves. Initially, natives and colonists alike barely cover the landscape. Economic wealth and cultural capital depend upon controlling a scarce resource: people. Elites on the hinterland focus on accumulating clients, wives, children, bonded sons-in-law, and sometimes even slaves. Then, land alienation and evictions partition the hinterland, bringing a second matter to the fore. Agricultural and silvicultural estates confine African smallholders on all sides. In this new regime of land scarcity, Africans retain only the “black lowlands,” otherwise known as native reserves. Among chiefs and local government agencies in such places, the locus of struggle shifts decisively from amassing and manipulating clients to keeping territory. “The world had been turned upside down,” writes John Iliffe (1987:277) in a retrospect on South African poverty. “Labour was abundant, land and work were scarce, and the great transition which has dominated the history of the poor in every continent was taking place.” In blunt terms, it was the transition from rule by enslavement to rule by enclosure.

Another transition soon compounds this one. Late-twentieth-century environmental organizations launch what has been called a “new enclosures movement”⁸—the third act of the drama being played out on Southern African frontiers. Beginning in the late 1980s, social and natural scientists reexamined the “native reserves.” Such experts have long blamed smallholders for wasting their reserves economically and, what is worse, degrading them ecologically. Now, a new generation of technocrats argues that outside investors can and must bring in knowledge, skill, and finance to transform these backward zones. So goes the narrative I call “settler-led development.” It has come to dominate debate on the fate of the reserves and on conservation in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. In effect, this discourse has declared the black lowlands “open,” in much the same fashion as earlier settler myths spoke of “empty land” in the neo-Europes. Latter-day colonists have not yet descended en masse, but politicians and intellectuals have blazed the trail for them. The frontier lives again.

ENSLAVEMENT

Igor Kopytoff labels Africa a “frontier continent” of ubiquitous hinterlands (1987:7). Beginning with the prehistoric Bantu expansion in the savanna and continuing to the present, farmers and herders south of the Sahara have continually migrated, colonized, and seceded. In a systemic “frontier process,” kin groups and polities ejected members and turned them into frontiersmen. These variously dissenting or destitute groups moved to an uninhabited area and therein founded a new polity. As the polity grew, political authority came increasingly to rest upon length of residence, though these polities did accord a ritual role to the original inhabitants and their ancestral spirits. Yet, unlike the bursts of colonizing whites in most parts of the world, Africans moved continuously from one hinterland to another, advancing outward and backfilling the interstices.

This political geography depended upon what other anthropologists and historians have termed “rights-in-persons,” and lately “enslavement.”⁹ In these systems, patriarchs sought to accumulate control over people, or “wealth in people” (Guyer 1993, 1995). Patrilineages acquired wives, and their “wombs of iron and gold” bore children.¹⁰ Likewise, matrilineages, which are never matriarchal, recruited the fathers of their youngest generation. In either case, marriage was a corporate concern designed to maximize the corporate group’s procreative potential and rights over progeny. Lineages concentrated on manipulating the relationships involved in marriage. Specifically, they could best multiply their stock by converting a marriage that would normally be patrilineal into a matrilineal one. For example, patrilineages would normally relinquish daughters and rights in progeny in return for a bride-wealth of cattle, hoes, or cash. If a daughter-taking lineage did not possess these material goods, it might still acquire a bride, but only by foregoing its patrilineal rights to her progeny. In this way, the wealthier lineage would accumulate, rather than deplete, its store of people. Impoverished or orphaned men, refugees or those separated from their kin made cost-effective sons-in-law (Meillassoux 1991:30). Indeed, as precolonial raids, wars, and droughts detached people from kin, they sought refuge as the clients and fictive kin of stronger lineages and eventually married in, freezing that subordinate status for life (even for their descendants). In sum, the slave suffers from what Orlando Patterson (1982:5) identifies as an essential social deficit: “natal alienation,” or an isolation from the “social heritage of his ancestors.” Dislocated, deracinated people lost their rights.

Such servile individuals and their relationships, rather than land, were the

measured, counted resource. As a matter of relationships, political rivals used marriage transactions to gain the upper hand. In the more extreme situations, lineage elders used juniors as assets, exchanging and accumulating them strategically over long and short distances. The exchanges became infamous. Overseas slavers tapped supplies in Atlantic Africa and along the Indian Ocean coast. Especially during the “slave century” of 1730–1830, circumstances forced African rulers to sell, rather than accumulate, clients, captives, and other dependent people. In the interior of Southern Africa, rulers mostly accumulated, rather than exchanged, people. From the 1830s to the 1890s, Nguni states conscripted destitute people and captives into male regiments. By waging war, they acquired further prisoners, orphans, and wives. Nobles did exchange their subordinates, but mostly as an internal, Nguni trade and set of marriage relations. I use the term *ambulatory enslavement* to distinguish this form of accumulation and transfer from ship-borne trade—and also to indicate the coproduction of mobility and servitude. Nguni relationships unfolded in space through certain kinds of traffic, as Nguni goods moved on foot (or on hooves) across the landscape.

What of the territory across which those goods traveled? “Land,” as Sara Berry (2001:9) writes with respect to precolonial Ghana, “was valued primarily as a means to attract followers, rather than as an asset in its own right.” Additionally, specific burial sites and spiritual abodes commanded religious respect. In any case, Africans marked land in ways that made measurement, counting, and comparison impossible. In what became Zimbabwe, some chiefs used rivers, tolerating the cadastral ambiguities that inevitably arose at their headwaters.¹¹ Elsewhere, dotted lines sufficed. According to an oral account collected in eastern Zimbabwe, “people . . . were sent by Paramount Chief Mutema. They performed their rituals while naked and possessed and where they sat down became the boundary of the village.”¹² The Ndebele state was even less territorial. In 1887, its king wrote the neighboring king of the Batswana: “In olden times . . . we never spoke about boundary lines. . . . It is only now they [the British] talk about boundaries.”¹³ Thus, Africans did cherish land, but not as discrete parcels of bounded hectares. Colonizing whites introduced such a mentality and, thereby, helped replace ambulatory enslavement with a new political economy.

ENCLOSURE

White expansion shaped the southern subcontinent in ways profoundly different from the rest of Africa. In a fashion more typically identified with

the Americas or the antipodes, rural whites have colonized Southern Africa's hinterland. And they continue to do so. *Trekboers*—an Afrikaans phrase best translated as “migrating farmers”—expanded from the original Cape Colony in three major movements. In the 1830s, the Great Trek took them to the Orange Free State (in the center of what is now South Africa) and northward to the Transvaal. In the 1890s, some crossed the Limpopo River to Rhodesia,¹⁴ and, in the 1990s, frontiersmen and women trekked to Mozambique, Zambia, and points further north. Each step of the way, settlers have gained access to hinterlands with minimal interference from states or colonial powers. Pioneering of this sort often led to bloodshed. As Laurens van der Post (1966:56) writes of the first migrants,

[T]hey penetrated deeply into the interior and took this nightmare of tribal warfare, like a bridal opportunity, into their arms. First they settled with the strongest of their black rivals for the country. They broke the Amazulu, repelled the Matabele, cowed many others and pinned down the formidable Basuto among the hills [later, Lesotho]. . . . When all that was done, they turned to the accepted refinement of conquest in Africa: the extermination of the Bushman.

Extermination was, however, the exception to trekker rule. Unlike frontiersmen of the American Great Plains, Australia, or Amazonia, Southern African whites have mostly managed to take land without wiping out indigenous inhabitants. Dane Kennedy describes this singular circumstance as a “demographic conjunction”: descendants of the original inhabitants outnumber white settlers and their descendants.¹⁵ Having survived, therefore, Southern African blacks live with the cultural legacy of dispossession and face contemporary land-grabbing.

In seizing the landscape, frontiersmen both define territory and place a premium upon its control. Colonizers act from two fundamental principles—exclusive ownership and physical boundaries—that together constitute enclosure and a territorial paradigm. In New England, for example, colonists expected unique titles when they acquired land from Indian tribes (Cronon 1983:71). Such control of land demands a *total* claim, that is, the negation and cancellation of any and all overlapping rights. Indian farmers, who operated under a different paradigm, sold or gave access to the same piece of land to numerous white buyers and, additionally, expected to retain access for themselves. The misunderstanding irritated the newcomers and complicated their designs. On other frontiers, where whites

did not encounter agricultural natives, settlers simply discounted indigenous grazing, hunting, and collecting. Throughout what became neo-Europes, settlers rode in with John Locke's theory of property: only improvement and “mixing labor with the land” conferred ownership.¹⁶ Landscapes used solely for foraging or low-input agriculture remained “empty” and “unowned”—an open frontier legalized as *territorium nullius*.¹⁷ Many Europeans, by contrast, intended to transform the landscape into intensive monocultures. Even if settlers frequently failed, the passage of their plow negated age-old attachments to forest and grassland. “Unproductive” natives found themselves fenced out.

Fences and other property lines constitute the second crucial concept of a territorial mentality. In order to be exclusive, zones of ownership must occupy space up to an unambiguous demarcation line. The owner must mark the landscape in a way that signals the geographical terminus of one claim and the beginning of another—no overlap allowed! Again, the mentality of boundaries may be quite foreign to the original inhabitants. Especially where natural endowments have been abundant relative to their economic activities, prior inhabitants may have felt no need to fence resources in or fence encroachers out. From the colonial perspective, natives' failure to create boundaries undermined their claims to land. *Territorium nullius* was not even “territory” until Europeans drew lines across it. So argued a family of western Australian pioneers in refusing even to *negotiate* with aboriginal occupants.¹⁸ These frontiersmen and others have implemented a whole range of bounding practices and technologies. In the American West, in Australia, and in Southern Africa, the surveyor has marched but a few paces behind the pioneers—and sometimes in front of the pioneers. Both the lines marked on the landscape and the property map and register—known together as a cadastre—justify land-grabbing and the idea of territory itself. “The cadastral map,” Roger Kain and Elizabeth Baigent write, “is *active*: in portraying one reality, as in the settlement of the New World or in India, it helps obliterate the old.”¹⁹ Spirit-blessed soil now constitutes hectares, counted, measured, and contested.

But do land-grabbing and the cadastral map truly obliterate an older mentality of overlapping, shared claims to land? Much of the Africanist literature on customary land tenure and common property insists that such systems are, on the contrary, alive and well (Fortmann and Bruce 1988). The issue turns on the balance between individual or household rights and the corporate rights of some larger social unit. For a number of decades, it seemed as if individuals were gaining rights to land while lineages and chief-

taincies were losing hold (Bohannan 1963). In some countries, the twentieth-century growth of a rural cash economy promoted informal, or even formal, capitalist markets in land. Smallholders were not immune, and it seemed as if exclusive ownership and land titles might become the order of the day. Yet, counterposed against the market, chiefs, headmen, and various native departments defended "customary land tenure." In defending it, of course, they partly invented it.²⁰ Under these "traditions," chiefs held the land in trust for their subjects and could allocate and reallocate rights among households. In effect, chiefs' tracts constituted a common pool resource (Ostrom 1990), open to members—and all their overlapping claims to soil, flora, and fauna—but closed to outsiders. In this fashion, chiefs maintained their own prominence in agrarian relations, and they kept land off the capitalist market.²¹ Or, as in Pauline Peters's (1994) description of cattle grazing in Botswana, local convention has often forced privatization down a path that is complex and uneven in the extreme. It would seem that lineages stopped (or delayed) the surveyors at the gates.

On another level, however, chiefs *appropriated* the cadastral mentality. Precisely in closing the gates to colonists and land merchants, ruling lineages insisted upon boundaries. They may not have made maps, but their territorial ideals fit the cadastral model. Where colonization confined them to reserves, as in Rhodesia, chiefs coveted those reserves. They did not wish to share land with white settlers. Thus African and European authorities partitioned the country without privatizing all of it. The hinterland closed, not only as an outgrowth of capitalist land ownership, but also as a process of segregation between colonizers and colonized. Recently, scholars have begun to describe similar processes as "territorialization." In Europe, the notion of national territory and separateness evolved from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.²² The change was most evident in the administration of border regions. There, as Peter Sahlins (1989:7) writes of the Franco-Spanish Pyrenees, principles of overlapping jurisdiction and of strictly demarcated sovereignty coexisted for two centuries—until the latter won out. France and Britain spent the better part the nineteenth century corresponding, lecturing, and, at last, marching in the woods to explain to the king of Siam what a linear boundary meant. In the end, they succeeded; as Thongchai Winichakul writes, Siam traded its web of ambiguous tributary relations for a modern "geo-body."²³ The map and the nation (or territorial chieftdom) were born together.

This twin birth amounted to a closing of the frontier in both senses of the word. The hinterlands became demarcated tracts, and this process, as

explained above, continues to this day. What was lost in this transformation? The older system of wealth-in-people, tribute-based polities, and slavery was deprived of much of its strength in Southern Africa. Among chiefs, private interests, and branches of the state, political contestation and compromise have come to depend increasingly on the allocation and bounding of land. In a closed hinterland, clients are not valuable in and of themselves. Indeed, they often remain uncounted until they serve the cause of land-grabbing and landholding. Thus, land displaces people as the locus of political culture.

I write "political *culture*" because the territorialization of political *economy* is necessarily more subtle. In that sphere, control over land can never fully replace control over people because one confers the other. The eighteenth-century English enclosures are the classic case. For Marx, the enclosures ensued from something akin to ambulatory enslavement. Tellingly, he titled his essay on the subject, "The Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land," not vice versa. E. P. Thompson's (1975) account of the enclosures also focuses more on the control of people rather than on the control of land. Capital punishment—the most blatantly embodied power over people—underwrote the whole drive against poaching and tree felling. Finally, Karl Polanyi (1944:42) describes the subsequent industrial revolution as arising from the commoditization of labor *and* land.

How, then, can one usefully separate power over people and power over land? They are distinct, not as material outcomes, but as modes of debate and contestation in long, complex processes. Power over people and power over land are forms of political culture. Moreover, they are ideal types, helping to clarify a social reality that is still more complex. Above all, "power over people" and "power over land"—and cognate terms used throughout this book—refer to struggles over meaning. They are claims and arguments that, in Sara Berry's (1989) formulation, foment, propel, and sometimes help resolve struggles over material resources. Thus, this book submits: as the frontier closes and its inhabitants vie for livelihood and predominance, they shift the cultural terms of their engagement from categories of people to categories of land. What counts as a legitimate or persuasive claim changes. Discourses of enslavement give way to those of enclosure, boundaries, and maps. Then arises an enduring cultural pattern that I call "cadastral politics."

ENVIRONMENTALISM

It is not entirely accurate or fair to label environmentalism anywhere in Africa a "new enclosures movement." At least, it is not becoming such a move-

ment in a straightforward fashion. On the ground, environmentalists and associated interests have seized far less land than did nineteenth-century colonists.²⁴ They neither endorse nor imagine colonization. Yet, their ideas are creating the political will to enclose black lowlands. In the 1970s, environmentalists revisited physiocratism—or, more aptly, explored the converse of the physiocratic argument. That is, if as the physiocrats claimed, economic activity derives from nature, then the degradation of nature will surely stifle economic activity. This pessimistic insight posited—to quote the title of an influential 1972 document—“limits to growth.” Governments previously happy to extract minerals, soil fertility, and biomass began to grapple with the nonrenewable, finite nature of some of these endowments. By 1987, international panels were regularly invoking the need for “sustainable development.”²⁵ According to this doctrine, careful husbanding of the Earth’s resources would permit modest economic advancement. It gave rise to a plethora of programs and projects in “conservation and development,” and Zimbabwe played a prominent role in the ferment. With greater alacrity than most, Zimbabwean governmental and nongovernmental agencies redirected their attention from agriculture to tourism and other supposedly low-impact enterprises (without altogether ceasing extractive industries, of course). Donors, NGOs, and eventually the same actors in Mozambique became boosters, promoting, subsidizing, and advertising “ecotourism” (even when it would fail financially).

In so doing, they embarked on an intellectual journey of remapping space and nature. On paper, conservation and development agencies have repackaged and recombined white, black, settler, and native spaces as “bioregions.” They did so by transforming a third spatial category: parks and protected areas. Earlier conservationists had removed people—as supposed agents of degradation—and fenced these “pristine” zones. By the 1990s, many environmentalists recognized the human-made, anthropogenic qualities of many protected forests and grasslands.²⁶ They also recognized the potential for wildness outside the parks, for the presence and influence of rainforest and ungulates in farmed spaces. Concretely, programs and projects established new spaces of management and intervention, from the straightforward “park buffer zone” to the increasingly vast and amorphous “conservation area,” “transfrontier area,” and “peace park” (Hughes 2005). Often loosely tacked onto watersheds, mountain ranges, and other ecological units, the new “conservation territories” (Zimmerer 2000) seemed to expand as far and as fast as funding would allow. They engulfed native reserves and white-owned commercial farms—in four countries in one case—casting over

them an unwieldy net of regulations and injunctions to “comanage” natural resources. Under the new rubric, landowners were to cohabit and coordinate with nature and with each other. They fell under what Karl Zimmerer calls the “geographical production of nature-society hybrids” (2000:356). Black lowlands and white highlands became less and less distinguishable.

To the extent that enclosure is taking place in Southern Africa, it emerges from the gray area between environmentalists’ liberal intentions and their oversights. Cindi Katz’s “new enclosures” are an unintended consequence. Hence, they differ radically in political culture from deliberate, colonial landgrabs or from the English enclosures. Professionals in conservation and development have battled precisely against closure and boundaries. They unfenced and unbounded both parks and nation-states. They also unbounded businesses, permitting partnerships between smallholders and capital. People, investment, and wild animals crossed the escarpment between black lowlands and white highlands. Of course, they did so mostly in one direction—from the white/rich space to the black/poor one. Having invested, tourism firms now derive profits from the natural resources of smallholder spaces—and sometimes seek to expel smallholders from those spaces. To this extent, “ecological capital” and what Katz calls “bio-accumulation” are enabling something close to a new enclosures movement.²⁷ Yet, in Southern Africa, they are fostering a change that is both more profound and less easily condemned than enclosure: racial integration. Black lowlands are a vestige of colonization, violence, and rural apartheid. Especially in Zimbabwe, environmentalists and other liberals would now like to sweep them away, abolishing the economic and spatial segregation that so marks that country. To their minds, they are, at last, surmounting the inequities of conquest. From a different point of view, they are opening a new frontier and a new era of colonization. How can one bridge the gap between these two positions? This book attempts to do precisely that, using history, ethnography, and criticism to trace the nine lives of the frontier on the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border.

SCENARIO OF THE BOOK

In Southern Africa—and surely elsewhere—polities and elites have occupied, closed, and reopened the frontier in a highly complex and contingent fashion. Rather than present a study of the subcontinent or of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, this book focuses on a narrow, but diagnostic, region and time period: the vicinity of the Chimanimani and Sitatonga mountains from

1890 to 2000 (map 1). The area receives some of the highest rainfall in Southern Africa—an ecological condition that has made it desirable to black and white farmers. Focusing the analysis still further, much of the book describes processes and indices of change in two sites falling under the authority of two chiefs. Ruled by Chief Ngorima, Vhimba lies just inside what is now Zimbabwe, at the southwestern end of the Chimanimani Mountain Range. Only thirty kilometers away, Gogoi and Chief Gogoi are similarly situated on the western side of the Sitatonga Mountains in Mozambique. Smallholders in both Vhimba and Gogoi speak the Nda dialect of Shona. Between 1862 and 1889, both areas came under the Gaza Nguni kingdom.²⁸ Therefore, many observers describe inhabitants of the Chimanimanis and the Sitatongas as “one people.” They are mistaken. Throughout the twentieth century, vastly different cultural and political logics governed Vhimba and Gogoi. Vhimba and Gogoi present extreme forms in the range of ways by which authorities rule subjects.

Part 1 examines this historical pattern of divergent evolution for the two sides of the region (and will appeal to a more specialized audience). Chapter 1, on Gogoi, Mozambique, establishes the baseline: a Gaza Nguni kingdom oriented toward the accumulation and circulation of subordinate people—toward ambulatory enslavement. Those fundamentals did not change when the Portuguese took control of the area in 1895. Administrators and private companies taxed the human resources of the Sitatonga region, and they used exactly the same collectors that the Gaza Nguni had—Chief Gogoi, other chiefs, and headmen. Since whites neither alienated nor transformed the landscape, politics began and ended with *corvées* and forced labor, never quite outlawed in the colonial period. Indeed, Mozambique’s postcolonial war (1979–92) revived forced labor and its association with chiefship in the Sitatongas. Chapter 2 describes the strikingly different experience across the border, in and around Vhimba, Zimbabwe, during exactly the same time frame. By 1900, the British South Africa Company had facilitated white settlement of the Chimanimani plateau, created native reservations, and began to relocate Africans to those reservations. Timber companies and nature conservationists continued grabbing and holding land into the period of Zimbabwe’s nationhood. Chief Ngorima and his subjects resisted through arson and squatting. Periodically evicted, they contested cadastral lines by engaging in cadastral politics. At the threshold of the 1990s, therefore, the Sitatongas and Chimanimanis presented a stark contrast: a political culture of personal subordination and a political culture of land tenure separated by the thin line of the border.



MAP 1. Vhimba, Gogoi, and three white migrations

The border, thus, represents a sharp disjuncture. Part 2 discusses the implications of that “hard border” for border crossers and for the politics of Vhimba and Gogoi in the 1990s. In the early part of the decade, refugees fleeing the war in Gogoi and neighboring parts of Mozambique came to Vhimba. As chapter 3 shows, they approached Zimbabwean headmen (deputies of Chief Ngorima) to pledge themselves as clients. Such pledging followed a wartime custom dating back to the nineteenth century. Vhimba’s headmen, though, did not respond in the fashion of a hundred years earlier. Instead, headmen took advantage of refugees’ subservience and used them to regain territory from a private estate owner and a national park. Whereas refugees prepared for clientship, they participated in land-grabbing. Chapter 4 explores the political economy of land allocation in Vhimba and its relationship with development projects. In the mid-1990s, NGOs, the Zimbabwean state, and entrepreneurial smallholders in Vhimba

tried to implement community forestry and other programs that took the boundaries of the native reservation as given. Headmen sabotaged those efforts. They did so by pursuing turf battles and squatting, a form of “extensive development” that challenged the boundaries of the reservation. In short, an important segment of Vhimba’s leadership pursued a territorial notion of prosperity—essentially the enlargement of their geo-bodies.

Chapter 5 returns to Mozambique to witness the birth of eviction and of territorial politics. Again, border crossers are implicated. With the conclusion of Mozambique’s war, South African firms and individuals were seeking to establish timber plantations in and around Gogoi. These expatriates, many of whom were Afrikaners, stood poised to reenact the events of the 1890s in the Chimanimanis. This time, however, NGOs attempted to preserve land in the Sitatongas and adjoining regions from alienation. These organizations, many of whose managers crossed the border from Zimbabwe, brought their experience of cadastral politics to the Mozambican hinterland. In the mid-1990s, they began to assist Mozambican chiefs to claim land by mapping the landscape. As one of the consultants, I left Vhimba to direct a project that surveyed and documented Chief Gogoi’s “territory.” The job was not easy because the territory—in this client-focused polity—did not exist. Like refugees, the mappers initially misconstrued the political culture of their host communities. Yet unlike the refugees in Vhimba, expatriate mappers helped prompt fundamental change. Assisted by central Mozambique’s general climate of land and tree claiming, these mappers began to create a cadastre and to make it understood. Politics turned the corner from ambulatory enslavement to territorial (dis)possession. In short, the Mozambican hinterland began to close.

Part 3 elaborates upon that closure. Chapter 6 explains how processes in Zimbabwe contributed. Beginning in the late 1980s, environmentally oriented tourism entered and began to restructure the native reserves. Up to then, administrators had, by and large, honored the original, beneficial intent (among many subsequent pernicious ones) of the reserves: to keep white settlers out and preserve a territorial entitlement for black farmers. A conservation program known as Campfire (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) overturned that principle entirely. Backed by NGOs, the government of Zimbabwe, and donors, conservationists invited the tourism industry to begin operations in the black lowlands. Blacks lost their right to farm, but could thenceforth appeal to the government and NGOs for the privilege of farming on the basis of their economic productivity and/or ecological sustainability. Campfire redefined and rezoned the

reserves. Meanwhile, as chapter 6 further relates, Mozambican civil servants began to ask a version of the question that had first generated Rhodesia’s reserves: “Where shall the natives live in relation to investment?”²⁹ Policymakers looked for examples in neighboring countries, but, by the late 1990s, they could no longer discern entitlement-based reserves in Zimbabwe. They did see—and Zimbabwe’s environmentalist intelligentsia showed them repeatedly—the reformulated lowland investment zones. With surprising speed, the bulk of development and conservation agencies in Mozambique opened smallholder spaces to business. In their terms, “communities” and corporations should form partnerships for mutual, ecologically responsible profit making. There were no signs of that happening in central Mozambique. Rather, in early 2001, intensive farmers stood poised to alienate 440,000 hectares. Despite the best intentions, conservation has begotten colonization.

Or, perhaps conservation has begotten colonization *because of* conservation’s best, liberal intentions. The book’s conclusion reassesses three liberal projects active on the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border: development, democracy, and, from an earlier era, emancipation. As the classic program, nineteenth-century emancipation and abolitionism have undoubtedly achieved the greatest success. Virtually everywhere, including the Zimbabwe-Mozambique borderland, people no longer constitute property.³⁰ In the course of rooting out Rhodesian enslavement, British administrators considered themselves morally superior to the labor-extracting Portuguese. Surely, one would agree that forcing someone off the land is preferable to forcing him or her to work. But is it preferable by very much? Land alienation compounded emancipation to impoverish African elites. Deprived of both clients and land as stores of wealth, rural Africans had to concentrate on amassing money. Development, the second liberal project, helped them to do so. More recently, both Zimbabwe and Mozambique have pursued the third and final liberal project: democratic empowerment. In this connection, most strategies are territorial; governments decentralize and cede responsibilities, for specific areas, to the people associated with those areas. Known as “communities,” these village republics increasingly run their own affairs, but they run very little in the way of national affairs. Having restrained smallholders in space, governments advertise them as “partners” to business. Investors, whom policies have unleashed, swoop down from the highlands. Frontier conditions reign again, and the Chimanimani-Sitatonga landscape lies *open* to settlers.

The value of openness and its close associates, freedom and markets, pre-

dates the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border. They lie at the core of liberalism, an ongoing Enlightenment tradition. If John Stuart Mill celebrated the individual, equality, and the possibility of improvement, so do today's so-called neoliberals (Gray 1995:85–96). They would level the playing field so that individuals improve to the limit of their capacity. Lower the barriers, let blacks and whites, peasants and investors, meet and compete equally toward self-betterment! As this book will argue, such an ambition—liberal in root and branch—is dangerous. It would strip black peasants of the unequal, race- and class-based entitlements that have protected them (although only minimally) up to now. Instead, I propose the continuation of Zimbabwe's thoroughly illiberal, paternalistic practice of reserving land for black smallholder communities. (This position is not to be confused with the policy, under South African apartheid, that blacks should live *only* in reserves.) The practice would suit Mozambique just as well. In other words, I argue for maintaining and raising barriers against buying, selling, or investing in smallholder lands—against frontiersmanship in its nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms. Where others support precisely that kind of openness, this book counsels for closure. At the very least, on actual or potential frontiers, liberal projects and good intentions deserve fresh scrutiny.

PART 1

Colonization, Failed and Successful

The two chapters that comprise part 1 do not attempt to recount the colonial histories of Vhimba and Gogoi. Neither of these places has experienced a “colonial period” of the sort usually imagined: a tight three-quarter-century of European control capped by African self-rule of one kind or another. True, the 1884–85 Congress of Berlin did partition the midsection of Southern Africa among Britain, Portugal, and Germany. Furthermore, formal independence—even if it did not come in 1960 as in more northerly parts—has come. Vhimba and Gogoi felt the reverberations of these events. Yet, in the course of long-distance transmission from the official ceremonies, the various treaties lost much of their original significance. The Anglo-Portuguese boundary delineation of 1898, for example, prompted neither British nor Portuguese actually to settle in the Chimanimani or Sitatonga areas.¹ Instead, imperial partition prior to the delineation itself facilitated colonization by a third white group, South African whites speaking Dutch and English, whose presence in Africa dated back to 1652. If one includes these actors, then the colonial period started long before the Congress of Berlin (1884–85) and reached the region of this study only rather late in the day. The tail end of colonialism is similarly murky. A generation after Mozambique ceased to be a colony of Portugal, Afrikaner-led colonization reached Gogoi. Only in the 1990s were people in Gogoi learning how to resist the seizure of their land by white settlers. Is rural Mozambique, then, somehow stuck in the colonial period? A simplified time line of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras raises exactly these types of contradictions.

Fortunately, historians have improved upon this three-act play and its

narrative of states and treaties. As Southern Africanists have long recognized, stateless whites began to *colonize* long before European state rule materialized in the form of *colonialism*.² Colonization—or physical settlement for agriculture or silviculture—has often occurred independent of colonialism. Occasionally, colonization has left a more profound mark on African society than has colonialism. Portuguese first settled the Mozambican coast in 1505 and between the early seventeenth century and the Nguni conquest two hundred years later farmed the *prazos* (estates granted by the Portuguese crown) along the Zambezi all the way to Zumbo. Cut off entirely from the metropole, these “transfrontiersmen” intermarried with Africans, becoming chiefs until all visible trace of their origin was lost.³ Not so the Dutch. Enough of them maintained a separation from Africans—called *apartheid* in some times and places—to establish lasting neo-European enclaves. Thus, a more complicated time line links the Cape Colony to the treks to today’s Chipinge Club. Such continuities figure prominently in Zimbabwe’s historical record. Indeed, not so long ago that record largely consisted of triumphalist settler narratives about Afrikaners and other pioneers.⁴ Yet, later histories and contemporary accounts of the 1980s and 1990s have tended to minimize the influence of whites in favor of African agency. As elsewhere in Africa, accounts of independence movements and wars of liberation have emphasized and/or endorsed African nationalism. Even the more skeptical anthropology of African “postcolonies” implies that the colonial period is past. At the very least, “postcolonial studies” suggest that the flag ceremonies held in 1957 and thereafter changed the cultural face of Africa.⁵ The time line of states and treaties may be creeping back in.

Vhimba and Gogoi do not permit this intrusion of “official history.” In neither place was national independence an important turning point. Nor was the state often the most important actor. In 1893, whites seized the Chimanimani plateau in an administrative vacuum. The following year, officials stepped in, but they represented a private company—the British South Africa Company—rather than the British state as such. Even after the expiry of that company’s concession in 1923, settlers held the balance of power in Rhodesian affairs. This unusual degree of self-government resulted in Zimbabwe’s double independence: the unilateral separation from Britain in 1965 and the transfer to a black government in 1980. For the distribution of land in Zimbabwe today, the first, much less recognized independence may have had the greater impact. In Gogoi, private agencies also kept European state rule at arms’ length. The Mozambique Company governed Manica and Sofala for fifty years (1893–1943). Portugal ruled it directly for

only thirty-two years, until independence in 1975. After independence, however, the Mozambican state hardly governed Gogoi. War and rebel occupation kept the region beyond civil servants’ reach for more than a decade. In short, Gogoi is and Vhimba was a hinterland, a place where freebooters, adventurers, and land-grabbers often carry the day.

The two chapters that follow present this frontier history from shortly before white penetration to the start of my ethnographic research. During this period, whites colonized Vhimba more than once. They did not do so because they were *white*, in some essential or “civilizational” sense (as per Huntington 1996). In a more contingent fashion, these European-derived individuals acted with a set of motives, methods, and consequences that frequently accompany long-distance domination, migration, and agricultural settlement. They took land and, in so doing, precipitated far-reaching changes in African society. Chiefs and other powerful African men responded to land alienation, eviction, and timber plantations by holding and expanding their geographical spaces. As described above, politics and political struggle in this part of Zimbabwe became cadastral. The frontier closed. In Gogoi, by contrast, no such changes occurred. Despite several attempts, white settlers did not colonize the area (although they did establish *colonatos* elsewhere in Mozambique). Gogoi became, by default, a labor reserve, in which politics treated the control of people as far more important than the control of land. At least until the arrival of loggers and mappers described in part 2, Gogoi’s frontier remained open. Thus, Vhimba and Gogoi span the range of possible outcomes of white colonization—a bull’s-eye on the first try versus repeated misfiring.