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## **Imperialists without an empire?**

### **Finnish settlers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Rhodesia**

#### **Abstract**

This article discusses settler identity formation, in the colonial polity known as Rhodesia, using Finnish nationals as a case study. It studies the involvement of Finns in natural resource extraction in Rhodesia at a time when the colonial economy and settler domination were still in their infancy, and examines both Finnish participation in colonial practices and the limitations of Finns as colonialists. White settlers in Rhodesia have typically been categorised as “Europeans” partly because of their sense of representing a generalised idea of Western civilisation and partly in order to underline contrasts between black and white experiences in the history of colonialism. By focusing on the more specific provenance of the settlers (their nationality and country of origin), it is possible to reveal idiosyncrasies through which we can appreciate settler identity formation more precisely. Finnish settlers, in their various capacities as prospectors, soldiers, hunters and planters, adapted ideas and identities that cannot easily be disentangled from those of colonisers.

#### **Keywords**

ethnicity, migration, identity, Finns, settlers, colonialism, Rhodesia

## Introduction

This article discusses a colonial polity called Rhodesia which bears the burden having been founded on the idea of imperialism and its expression in the form of colonialism. A colony such as Rhodesia consisted of a relatively small number of white colonialists who colonised an overwhelmingly larger indigenous black community. Outside the scholarly field of imperial and colonial studies, a study of the birth of white Rhodesian identity runs the risk of being considered old-fashioned. The reputation of emotive words such as “settler”, “pioneer” or “coloniser” has declined sharply since the days of empire and imperialism. Heroic tales of pioneers in exotic environments and the perceived romantic glamour that surrounded them persisted into the 1950s, but today the same stories are often considered drab. New historical works emerging within a globalisation framework typically site notions of empire and imperialism (including the question of colonial identity) squarely within networks of migration, knowledge and ideas, and tend to adopt analysis informed by a long-term historical perspective.<sup>1</sup>

This article approaches the origins of Rhodesian settler identity from the specific perspective of Finnish ethnicity and migration. It is motivated by an attempt to highlight Finnish history within the framework, and as a part, of European and global development. The research is also informed by scholarly discussions relating to Finnish national history and questions of Finnish identity and self-understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> On recent discussion of this point in the context of Southern Africa history, see Neil Parsons, ‘Towards a broader Southern African history: backwards, sideways, and upside-downs’, *South African Historical Journal* 66:2 (2014) 217-226, 222-223.

The Finnish national myth, like those of other nations, is based on the idea of exceptionalism. An attempt to emphasise Finnish involvement in the process of colonialism runs the risk of becoming a heroic tale of forgotten “Finnish imperial grandeur” in a colonial context. This is clearly contrary to the intention of this article, which seeks to examine Finnish migrant identity in Rhodesia as well as to detail the involvement of Finns in colonial practices and to assess their limitations as colonialists.

The study of colonial identities provides the theoretical framework through which analysis of Finnish migrants in Rhodesia can be developed. While individuals might define their identities in particular ways, researchers may impose on them different social variables such as gender, class, race or occupation. Identities are constructed within specific discursive formations and practices, and thus need to be understood in specific historical contexts. In culturally heterogeneous contexts identities are formed from the interwoven strands of multiple discourses and through the use of specific enunciative strategies.<sup>2</sup>

For a researcher of ethnicity and migration, definitional questions form a perplexing problem. How should we refer to these Finnish migrants, if the term “Finnish migrant” alone will not suffice? Those Finns who migrated to Southern Africa had multiple, often overlapping identities based on factors such as gender, race, language and profession as well as nationality. In different theoretical settings the same individuals may have had numerous, often conflicting identity-labels, such as migrant, settler, pioneer, coloniser, sojourner or expatriate. A “settler” was

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction. Who needs identity?’, in: Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), *Questions of cultural identity* (London 1996) 4-5.

someone who migrated with the intention of establishing a permanent home in a new environment. By contrast, the “expat” or “sojourner” intended to return home (in so far as their definition of home corresponded to their country of origin) after living overseas for a period. Though it brings with it obvious definitional problems, research suggests that the term settler is the most appropriate choice. A settler was someone who was in the process of acquiring a new identity, at least in part.<sup>3</sup>

The concern posed by researchers of colonialism is that surrendering to the ambiguous language of identity may obscure certain details of colonial history and the experience of people in colonies.<sup>4</sup> The advice is to avoid sticking too mechanically to overly-fixed collective categories of identity such as race, ethnicity, class or nation to explain away the complexity of the past, but instead to focus on categories that bind people together rather than divide “us” from some constructed “other”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On these definitional problems see John Darwin, ‘Orphans of empire’, in: Robert Bickers (ed.), *Settlers and expatriates. Britons over the seas*, Oxford History of the British Empire, Companion series (Oxford 2010) 329-333. The eventual departure of many individuals – whether to other surroundings or back to their countries of origin – can perhaps be seen to reflect the harsh realities of the life they undertook, rather than necessarily implying the weakness or insincerity of their original intentions. (*Loc. cit.*)

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question. Theory, knowledge, history* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2005), 59-90.

<sup>5</sup> David Cannadine, *The undivided past. History beyond our differences* (London 2013) *passim*.

Why then, given this advice, should this article seek to highlight the identity categories of ethnicity and nationality? Why not instead focus on occupation or profession, categories shared by settlers of various nationalities? The first argument is that, even if we oppose the reduction of language to history, it is difficult to escape the fact that history cannot be grasped without reference to language. Historical concepts such as nation and class, unlike mere historical words, have the capacity to carry a number of meanings across time and place. These concepts confer explanatory power not simply because they are generalizable, but because they are also generative.<sup>6</sup> Ethnicity and nationality have themselves become motivations for groups of people rallying various political interests and ideological principles, as can be seen in the Finnish cases below. The second argument is practical rather than methodological. While European settlers in Southern Africa represented a number of nationalities and ethnic minorities, this ethnic diversity is not reflected in the field of scholarly research.

By focusing on a smaller and less studied group of nationals, we can discover new sources written in languages that have as yet rarely been heard in accounts of the colonial experience. Thus, this article maintains that Finns formed a defined nationality group that has been a neglected social variable in the study of colonial identities. Identification as a coloniser also seemed to provide a space within which

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<sup>6</sup> The *Begriffsgeschichte* project is illustrative in this sense. See Reinhardt Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt 1979), 107-129 and various entries in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-socialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Band 1-8 (Stuttgart 1972-1997).

national identity-building could be manifested (through language, religion and political ideologies).<sup>7</sup>

How many Finns were involved in shaping the contours of natural resource extraction in colonial Southern Africa? Hundreds of thousands of Europeans migrated to Southern Africa during the great wave of European overseas migration that took place between the early nineteenth century and the outbreak of the First World War. The overwhelming majority of these migrants came from Britain, Germany, Russia or the Netherlands. By contrast, migration from other parts of Europe was significantly more modest. Analysis of official Finnish migration statistics (including passport registers) and independent sources (newspapers, journals and various printed ephemera) suggests that an estimated 1,200 individuals emigrated from Finland to South Africa between 1886 and 1914.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A study organised according to settlers' nationality and country of origin like this one has its potential drawbacks. It both seeks to focus on a nationality and to explore networks and connections (and connectedness). Clearly, a study exploring different professional groups, such as prospectors, within a relatively limited geographical area would also add much to our understanding.

<sup>8</sup> Eero Kuparinen, *An African alternative. Nordic migration to South Africa, 1815–1914*. *Studia Historica* 40 (Helsinki 1991), 22-30. Overall, more than 360,000 individuals emigrated from Finland between the Great Famine of the mid-1860s and the Great Depression of the 1930s. See Anna-Leena Toivonen, *Etelä-Pohjanmaan valtamerentakainen siirtolaisuus 1867-1930* (hereafter cited as *Emigration overseas from Southern Ostrobothnia in 1867-1930*), *Historiallisia tutkimuksia* LXVI (Helsinki

Historically, seafaring occupations such as fishing, shipbuilding and tar distillation have been economically important within the western and southern regions served by Finland's long coastline. Seafaring expertise was a feature of Finnish involvement in colonial Southern Africa and elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> just as it was of Scandinavian participation in colonial ventures.

The question of Finnish settler identity will be addressed in this article through a case study which offers a concise overview of the exploitation of African natural resources during the first decades of colonialism. It deals specifically with Finnish

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1963) 287. However, these net migration figures fail to reflect the scale of remigration and serial migration, trends that are particularly difficult to track. (*Op. cit.*)

<sup>9</sup> One example is the Congo, where between 1,500 and 2,000 Scandinavian seamen were employed to carry goods and people along the Congo River network from 1885 to 1930. See Espen Wæhle, 'Scandinavian Agents and Entrepreneurs in the Scramble for Ethnographica during Colonial Expansion in the Congo', in: Kirsten Alsaker Kjerland and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen (eds), *Navigating Colonial Orders. Norwegian Entrepreneurship in Africa and Oceania* (New York and Oxford 2015) 339. Though difficult to estimate accurately how many of the Congo River steamer captains (the most famous of whom was the fictional Marlow, Conrad's alter ego in *Heart of Darkness*) were actually Finns, biographical records do reveal that several individuals came from the coastal towns of Finland. H. Jenssen-Tusch, *Skandinaver i Congo. Svenske, Norske og Danske virksomhed i den uafhængige Congostat* (Kjøbenhavn 1902-1905). H. Jenssen-Tusch, a Danish officer who served in the Congo Free State, does not regard Swedish-speaking Finns as a separate ethnic group from the Swedes but does separate their provenance by birthplace. (*Op. cit.*)



settler identity and the involvement of Finns in the mining economy in Rhodesia. The limited temporal and spatial context of the case study provides an opportunity to analyse or theorise key aspects of the global dimensions of Finnish colonial engagements. At the heart of the case study are the lives and times of two Finnish nationals, Carl Theodor Eriksson (1874–1940) and Oscar Johannes Boijer (1868–1943). The time they spent in Africa is exceptionally well documented thanks to the survival of their diaries, letters and photographs.<sup>10</sup> Such extensive documentation makes their cases unusual among pioneer-settlers, who were often ‘far too busy making history to find time to write it.’<sup>11</sup> Eriksson and Boijer, as prospectors, hunters and sometime soldiers, cannot represent the full range of individual experience, but their lives can provide insight into the experiences of young male Finnish nationals in colonial Southern Africa.

In the early 1900s Eriksson and Boijer took up positions in Northern Rhodesia and Katanga as prospectors of Tanganyika Concessions Ltd (TANKS), a London-based holding company with several mining and railway concerns in South-Central Africa. Material in the company’s archives highlights the argument that the nature of colonialism in Africa was such that the interests of various interest groups were often intertwined. In expectation of significant benefits, the exploitation of the area’s rich mineral deposits was championed from top to bottom, from colonial governments to petty prospectors in the field. In light of this, there is little doubt that micro level

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<sup>10</sup> The most important sources are Eriksson’s African diary (published in 1932 in Swedish and Finnish) and Oscar Boijer’s correspondence with his family and the Finnish-language newspaper *Aura*. All translations by the author.

<sup>11</sup> W.V. Brelsford, ‘Editorial’, *The Northern Rhodesia Journal* I (1950–1952) 5-6, 6.

studies can be meaningfully linked to the larger contexts of colonialism, migration and the global economy.

### **Rhodesian settler society emerges**

White settler society did not precede capitalist development in Rhodesia: the original impetus and much of the capital for natural resource extraction in the colony came from British mining interests that had been operating in South Africa since the 1860s.<sup>12</sup> The expectation and intention that gold mining be the basis of the colony's economy provided the first great incentive for migration to Rhodesia. The occupation of land was driven by gold fever. It was hoped that the highlands of central Southern Africa beyond the Limpopo River could match the yields in the Witwatersrand in the Transvaal, where the discovery of a hitherto unknown gold-bearing formation in 1885 had generated an unprecedented gold rush to the country.<sup>13</sup>

White settlers provided the British South Africa Company (BSAC) with an effective but low-cost way of staking its claims over the country.<sup>14</sup> The Pioneer

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Leonard Thompson, *A history of South Africa* (New Haven and London 1995) 115-117.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Phimister, *Economic and social history of Zimbabwe* (London 1988) 6.

<sup>14</sup> J.S. Galbraith, *Crown and charter. The early years of the British South Africa Company* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1974) 106-127. The BSAC was incorporated on 29 October 1889 under a royal charter to extend British administrative control over the then ill-defined interior of Southern Africa. (*Op. cit.*)

Column of 1890 did not establish a *volk* when they crossed the Limpopo River. The country's new immigrants may have been predominantly men but they were somewhat heterogeneous in terms of nationality, country of origin and class.

Although the majority were first-generation immigrants from Britain or sons of South African families, there were also a number of men from Ireland, other British colonies and continental Europe, including Scandinavia.<sup>15</sup> Together they formed an armed body of young, unmarried men making a precarious living from raiding, prospecting, trading and later dealing in gold-mining stock. Many joined the BSAC Police forces on short-term engagements, and in this way the force also operated as an unofficial settlement scheme.<sup>16</sup>

The optimism of the pioneers, evident in the regular greeting 'See You in Chicago in '93',<sup>17</sup> was made concrete in the lavish surroundings of South Africa's pavilion at the World's Fair. The prospects of 'the land of Ophir', as Rhodesia of the early days was sometimes known, was the initial draw for many migrants, the Boijer brothers among them. Oscar and Axel Boijer, were born into a large upper middle-class family headed by Lutheran clergyman Gustaf Magnus Boijer. Upon the death of their mother Augusta Ulrika Spoo (the daughter of a wealthy merchant in the Finnish

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<sup>15</sup> A.S. Hickman, *Men who made Rhodesia. A register of those who served in the British South Africa Company's Police* (Salisbury 1960). See, for example, service numbers 348 and 715.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis H. Gann and Thomas H. Henriksen, *The struggle for Zimbabwe. Battle in the bush* (New York 1981) 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia. The white conquest of Zimbabwe, 1884-1902* (Pietermaritzburg 1983) 363.

coastal town of Turku) the six surviving Boijer children inherited a substantial sum of money. Axel and Oscar Boijer's relatively wealthy upbringing in Pöytyä, a small village in south-western Finland, was followed by periods of secondary education in Helsinki and Tampere. In 1883 Axel enrolled in the Faculty of Law at the University of Helsinki, but he never attended lectures and lived largely on his inherited money. His brother's tertiary studies were more successful, however, and in 1889 Oscar graduated as a civil engineer from the Polytechnic Institute.<sup>18</sup>

Despite having no experience of day-to-day newspaper work, in 1892 Oscar Boijer became a correspondent for the *Aura*, a liberal pro-Finnish newspaper founded in 1880. His employment was probably due to the close connections between the *Aura* and his uncle Dr Axel Reinhold Spoo (1845–1930), the city medical officer of Turku. Writing under the pseudonym 'Job' (an abbreviation of his full name, Johannes Oscar Boijer), Oscar found a readily available, although not especially independent, channel through which he could express his views. In 1892 he cycled across Scandinavia and England. He returned to England later the same year and set sail for the United States in order to report on the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Inspired by South Africa's pavilion at the exposition and by the prospects of gold discoveries in Matabeleland, Oscar Boijer persuaded his brother that they should take their chances in Africa.<sup>19</sup> On

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<sup>18</sup> Yrjö Blomstedt, 'Boijer, Poijärvi', in: Olavi Wanne and Gunnar Soininen (eds), *Uusi Sukukirja II. Suomen sukututkimusseuran julkaisuja XIX* (Helsinki 1950) 442.

<sup>19</sup> Letters from Chicago to *Aura* under 'Job' from 13 May to 17 August 1893. Axel Boijer's decision to migrate may in part have been an attempt to stave off pulmonary tuberculosis: the South African climate was considered a cure-all climate for those suffering from pulmonary complaints.

13 January 1894 they travelled by steamer from Hanko to Hull. Less than two months later, on 3 March 1894, they boarded the Castle Line passenger and cargo liner *Pembroke Castle* in Southampton and set sail for Cape Town.<sup>20</sup>

The Boijer brothers arrived in Cape Town during a period of social turmoil, and Oscar Boijer's letters to Finland described their perceptions at a time of great transformation. The BSAC strongly suggested to 'persons desirous of proceeding to Rhodesia' that they should arrange to be at the Cape ready to commence the journey not later than the middle of April in order to make the utmost use of the dry season, which typically continued until the end of November.<sup>21</sup> However, the brothers' plans to penetrate the interior were postponed by a sudden opportunity to work for the Indwe Railway Collieries and Land Company (formed in Kimberley in late 1894) on the construction of a branch line from the Sterkstroom railhead to the Indwe coal mine. On 24 June they boarded a train in Cape Town and set off for the Eastern Cape, but *veldt* life proved to be a disappointment.<sup>22</sup> Oscar's letters detail their somewhat disillusioned views. Kimberley was the 'most miserable hole' they had ever seen. The chief engineer 'Oom Kerle' was described as unmotivated and drunken. And they were frustrated by their dealings with black workmen and personal servants, 'Cape-boys' whose language and beliefs they did not understand and whose incompetence

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<sup>20</sup> At this time, the voyage from England to Cape Town took an average of nineteen days. 'Job's' first letter from Africa was published in the *Aura* on 17 May 1894.

<sup>21</sup> The BSAC. Report on the Company's proceedings and the condition of the Territories within the sphere of its operations 1892-1894 (1895) 5.

<sup>22</sup> 'Job', *Aura*, 20 July 1894.

irritated them.<sup>23</sup> Disappointed by their experience of railway engineering, in August the Boijer brothers boarded a steamer in East London and returned to Cape Town, though according to Oscar their final destination was to be ‘Lobengula’s country’ [Matabeleland].<sup>24</sup>

The base from which the immigrants approached Rhodesia was Mafeking, which by 3 October 1894 had become the railhead of the Cape railway system. In theory, Northern Express Line coaches could cover the scheduled route from Mafeking to Bulawayo via Palapye (a distance of 500 miles) in just four and a half days. However, this option was only available to wealthy passengers who were prepared to travel light. The BSAC announced that ‘parties not pressed for time, who have much luggage, will find it considerably cheaper to travel by ox-waggon.’<sup>25</sup>

Oscar and Axel Boijer boarded a train for Vryburg on 25 August and in September they set off ‘up north’ from Mafeking by wagon. Their route took them through Bechuanaland to places that ‘nobody wants to read a description of’, including Gaberones (12 October), Palla Camp (21 October) and Macloutsi (13 November).<sup>26</sup> Travellers were not only faced with the tedium of a monotonous journey, they also encountered some of the usual hazards of *veldt* life: water shortages, overturned wagons, becoming stuck fast in drifts, the loss of oxen and the risks posed by wild beasts. To these discomforts of the journey were added the flies that came ‘in their thousands’ buzzing around one’s head ‘in a sort of horizontal

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Job’, *Aura*, 16 August 1894.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Job’, *Aura*, 28 September 1894.

<sup>25</sup> The BSAC. Report 1892-1894, 4-8.

<sup>26</sup> ‘From our special correspondent’, *Aura*, 29 December 1894.

bobbing devil's dance, watching for a chance to sit on the eye-lids and drink, or, failing that, to get into our ears'.<sup>27</sup> Besides being irritating, 'the fly' posed risks of malarial fever. Fever was rampant mainly because the cause of malaria was as yet still unknown.<sup>28</sup>

After three months of trekking the Boijer brothers finally arrived in Bulawayo. The wet season was just underway and Axel Boijer was looking very pasty and unhealthy.<sup>29</sup> Geographically Bulawayo was founded 'in the barren dreariness of the high veld' as one contemporary settler bluntly stated. By March 1894 Stands had been auctioned, and on 1 June 1894 the new town was declared open. The growth of the

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<sup>27</sup> C.E. Finlason, *A nobody in Mashonaland or the trials and adventures of a tenderfoot* (Bulawayo 1894) 92. Charles Edward Finlason (1860–1917), a South African journalist, set out an evocative description of the life experienced by pioneers in Rhodesia.

<sup>28</sup> Paul P. Russell, *Man's mastery of malaria* (London 1955) 52.

<sup>29</sup> The view that all these difficulties could be overcome by the pluck and the true grit of the pioneers, as was reflected in accounts told in hindsight. See Mikko Uola, *Suomalaiset Afrikkaa etsimässä (Finns in search of Africa)* (Tampere 1976) 28. Axel Boijer's weak lungs forced him to return south soon after their arrival. Surprisingly he was able to recover his health sufficiently to return to Bulawayo only six months later. (*Loc. cit.*) In *Finns in search of Africa* perseverance and tenacity (in Finnish *sisu*) are considered to be characteristic of the Finns. *Sisu* is seen as the natural outcome of life in the harsh conditions of the north and as the most marked peculiarity of Finnish pioneers. The same features are also to be found in Finnish folklore and a wide range of adventure literature.

new Bulawayo was immediately apparent. Ndebele style straw houses were replaced by the modern American- or ancient Roman-style regular oblong grid brick houses of mining magnates and the modest tin sheds of petty prospectors, traders and hunters.<sup>30</sup> The number of settlers in Bulawayo also increased rapidly. The census of 1 March 1895 revealed that population of the town was 1,537 (adult males 1,232; adult females 164; children 141). Those from the United Kingdom were by far the largest group (1,017), followed by various 'colonials' from not only South Africa, but also Australia, New Zealand and Canada (299). Immigrants from Germany (108) and the USA (33) were considered sufficiently numerous to be counted separately. The remaining 79 immigrants were designated 'others'.<sup>31</sup>

Because the provenance of Bulawayo's white population was so heterogeneous, the town strongly proclaimed and insisted on its British character. Though motley of nationalities, the settlers shared similar outlooks in many respects. Most were young bachelors, but beyond age, marital status and gender, it was the contrasts between black and white interactions that most defined them. These interactions were governed by a strict racial division not only derived from attitudes

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Terence Ranger, *Bulawayo burning. The social history of a Southern African city 1893–1960* (Harare 2010) 14-17; Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia*, 359-361.

<sup>31</sup> The BSAC Report 1894-1895, 71, 78. See also Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia*, 379. Melina Rorke was presumably the first white woman settler in Bulawayo in early 1894. Melina Rorke, *Her amazing experiences in the stormy nineties of South Africa's story told by herself* (London 1939) 138.



and theories about race, but perhaps more importantly grounded in the religion which settlers brought with them to Bulawayo.<sup>32</sup>

The Lutheran conviction of the Boijers was reflected in their moral and rational objections to both the Chartered Company's plundering of Lobengula's lands and cattle and Britain's civilising mission in Matabeleland. Oscar Boijer seemed to think that control of Matabeleland on the grounds of material necessity was liable to moral abuse. The real issue concerned motives and methods of ruling. He asserted that an act of imperialism was only justifiable if it contributed to the good of the natives. Yet the handing over of large regions in central Southern Africa to the virtually unchecked government of the Chartered Company exposed natives to the dangers of private commercialism. Although he considered the Ndebele to be fierce and warlike savages, Oscar Boijer pointed out that immoral actions towards the Ndebele – such as looting their cattle, forcing them to work for whites and imposing strict discipline, through blows, shouts and insults – in fact corrupted the character of the settlers.<sup>33</sup>

It was argued that missionary activities had caused dishonesty among natives, who had adopted Christian doctrines only in so far as they seemed good to them and had fallen back into their old habits, characterised by what appeared to look like poor work morale, loitering and laziness. According to the Protestant ethic and vocation of a pioneer, men should work to save money and improve themselves; Africans did

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<sup>32</sup> Ranger, *Bulawayo burning*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> 'Job', *Aura*, 26 January 1895.

neither and were consequently criticised as lazy.<sup>34</sup> In this light, Oscar Boijer was inclined to think that the missionary work that had been undertaken by The Finnish Missionary Society in Ovamboland since 1870 was ‘a great mistake’.<sup>35</sup>

The Boijer brothers, like many settlers, believed in the economic future of the country and in the prospects of gold mining in Matabeleland. Hoping that the mines would soon go into production and that the mining companies would already be in a position to pay dividends to their shareholders in 1896, they became actively involved in building the economic foundation of the country. In 1895, during the dry season, they purchased their prospecting licence and pegged their combined twenty claims (those who were not Pioneers of the 1890 column were allowed only ten claims per man) near Gwelo.<sup>36</sup> By this time, countless speculative, undercapitalised prospecting companies and syndicates had begun to mushroom across Southern Rhodesia. Listed in the Bulawayo Stock Exchange and Transfer Agency Ltd. (itself founded in early 1895) such companies and syndicates provided opportunities for those interested in stock-jobbing and speculating.<sup>37</sup> Besides prospecting and speculating, the most obvious way of making a living, colonisation of the land and farming, was not seen as an attractive option by many: it was easier to buy food from the natives than to try to

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *White settlers in tropical Africa* (Harmondsworth 1962) 9.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Kirje Afrikasta’ [A letter from Africa] dated 9 February 1895, Bulawayo, *Aura*, 20 March 1895.

<sup>36</sup> Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia*, 362-364.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Job’, *Aura*, 31 March 1895.

grow and sell it oneself. Furthermore settlers tended to be adventurous young men who lacked the mentality of family men.<sup>38</sup>

The sudden and unexpected Ndebele and Shona uprisings halted prospecting and exploitation of mineral resources. In March 1896 the Ndebele killed a number of whites outside Bulawayo and besieged the town itself, bringing the settler community to the brink of destruction.<sup>39</sup> During the siege Bulawayo's early hearty, devil-may-care attitude, characterised by drinking, dancing, gambling and speculating, was replaced by a gloomy atmosphere and dead silence on the streets. Shares lost their value and food prices soared.<sup>40</sup> Both Boijer brothers served as troopers in Gifford's Horse (a mounted infantry formed by the settlers at the height of the siege)<sup>41</sup> and thus had first-hand experience of the war in the savannah that was later famously described by Olive Schreiner in her *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897).<sup>42</sup> However, unlike their fictional counterpart, the Boijers' attitudes to the Chartered Company and

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<sup>38</sup> Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia*, 370-371.

<sup>39</sup> For further details see T.O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896-7. A study in African resistance* (London 1967).

<sup>40</sup> Ranger, *Bulawayo burning*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> 'Job', *Aura*, 17 May 1896.

<sup>42</sup> Schreiner's protagonist is Peter Halket, a BSAC police trooper, who experiences a religious awakening during the war against the Ndebele in 1896. Through a dream dialogue between Halket and a disguised Jesus, the novella charts Halket's gradual conversion from supporter of British imperialist policies in Southern Africa to staunch critic of the BSAC. Olive Schreiner, *Ratsumies Peter Halket Mashonamaasta* (trans. Aino Malmberg) (Helsinki 1911).

the British imperial mission in Southern Africa became more positive as a result of their war experiences.

In the wake of the Ndebele and Shona uprisings, the white administration in Southern Rhodesia was reorganised. The worst abuses against Africans ended, and the system of forced labour waned with the introduction of a cash economy. This permitted the formation of settler domination in Southern Rhodesia and the development of the mining economy.<sup>43</sup> As speculation gave way to actual development work, the supply of unskilled, semi-skilled and finally (by 1903) even skilled white labour outstripped demand.<sup>44</sup> Disillusioned by the country's economic future and lack of opportunities, Axel Boijer left Rhodesia for good in October 1896. The rest of his life is not so well documented, but some details can be gleaned. In the early 1900s he spent time in Australia before returning to Helsinki, where he had real estate interests. He died during the Finnish Civil War on 28 March 1918 at the age of 53 at the Takaharju Sanatorium.<sup>45</sup>

### **'The Finnish idea' and the South African War**

The idea of Finland as a nation emerged through a conflict between authoritarian tradition and constitutionalism in the late nineteenth-century Russian Empire. In 1899

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<sup>43</sup> Gann and Henriksen, *The struggle for Zimbabwe*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Phimister, 'White miners in historical perspective: Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1953', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3:2 (1977) 187-206, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Blomstedt, 'Boijer, Poijärvi', 439.

the Russian Government introduced an imperial policy which sought to bring the Grand Duchy into a closer union with the empire. The subsequent repressive measures for the first time largely unified the Finnish people, who saw Russification as an erosion of their national privileges.<sup>46</sup> The idea of Finland as a nation took a variety of forms in international settings. Imperious and imperial ideas, whether of Anglo-Saxon or Pan-Slavonic origin, seemed to dominate the world at a time when questions of nationality and ethnicity were acute in countries such as Finland or South Africa. ‘Why be Finns?—become Russians! Why be Dutch in South Africa?—become English! [...] How absurd to be a Finn! What is the Finnish idea?’<sup>47</sup> With this question in mind, we will examine here how the idea of Finland emerged among Finnish immigrants in colonial Southern Africa.

‘If you decide to fight, I am willing to sacrifice myself for Finland’, Carl Theodor Eriksson flamboyantly wrote from Bulawayo to his family in Helsinki at the height of anti-Russian sentiment in Finland in March 1899.<sup>48</sup> Eriksson had been born into a Swedish-speaking working-class Helsinki family in 1874. Despite his rather modest family background, Eriksson had attended the Helsingfors Lyceum and followed its classical curriculum, which included the literary, historical and philosophical study of the Roman and Greek civilisations as well as German, French,

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<sup>46</sup> For further detail see Tuomo Polvinen, *Imperial borderland. Bobrikov and the attempted Russification of Finland, 1898–1904* (London 1995) 17ff.

<sup>47</sup> Augustine Birrell, ‘Finland and Russia’, *Contemporary Review* 78 (1900) 16-27, 17.

<sup>48</sup> C.T. Eriksson, *Seikkailujeni Afrikka* (hereafter cited as *African diary*) (Jyväskylä 1932) 44.

Russian and Latin lessons.<sup>49</sup> However, such a curriculum could offer little insight into the lives of *trekboers*, Boers living a frontier existence, about whom Eriksson had read in Alfred Wilks Drayson's *Among the Zulus* (1868). In the hazard-filled lives of the *trekboers*, survival was the prime objective as they hunted for food, hides or to eliminate predators.<sup>50</sup> Such were the adventures for which the seventeen-year-old Eriksson yearned when he decided to seek his fortune overseas. Four years later, in October 1895, Eriksson, now a deck boy on the barque *Record*, decided to desert his ship as it docked in Cape Town.<sup>51</sup>

Like many tenderfoots of the time, Eriksson made his way to Johannesburg, a large cosmopolitan city inhabited by some ten thousand white and a hundred thousand black miners working in the gold mines of the Witwatersrand.<sup>52</sup> South Africa in the

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<sup>49</sup> By the standards of late nineteenth-century Finland, where the elementary school decree had been introduced in 1866, Eriksson belonged to the educated social class.

<sup>50</sup> A.W. Drayson, *Among the Zulus. The adventures of Hans Sterk, South African hunter and pioneer* (London 1868). Eriksson refers here to the Swedish edition, *Elefantjägaren Hans Stark. Jagtäfventyr i boernes och zulukaffrernes land* (Stockholm 1881).

<sup>51</sup> Eriksson, *African diary*, 8, 10. Finnish seamen deserting ships docking at Cape Colony ports was a phenomenon dating back to at least the early nineteenth century. For further details see Kuparinen, *An African alternative*, 118-120.

<sup>52</sup> Most Finnish mine workers in the Witwatersrand came from Southern Ostrobothnia, a poor riparian coastal province of Western Finland and the birthplace of a third of all Finnish emigrants. Toivonen, *Emigration overseas from Southern Ostrobothnia*, 287.

late 1890s consisted of a number of British colonies and protectorates existing in an uneasy alliance with the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In the war of 1881 (for Boers, the War of Independence) the Transvaal had defeated British troops at the battle of Majuba Hill. At the London Convention which followed, the President of the Republic, Paul Krüger, won a series of diplomatic victories over the British. Despite these victories, the Transvaal was surrounded by expanding British territory over the course of the 1880s. This diminished the authority of Krüger, whose presidency was already being undermined by corruption charges. The dispute that was to alter the President's situation altogether rested on the political rights of the *uitlanders*, immigrants of mostly British origin who constituted the majority of the white population in the major cities of the Transvaal. The *uitlander* franchise question emerged in the early 1890s but beneath it lay the Rand capitalists' discomfort over the government's mining policy (which was believed to be weakening mining companies). The Raid on the Transvaal Republic – later known as the Jameson Raid after its filibuster leader Dr Leander Starr Jameson (1853–1917) – proved to be the beginning of a series of events that eventually led to the war in South Africa in October 1899.<sup>53</sup>

Finnish pro-Boer activists considered the South African War a British attempt to steal Boer land as payback for the First Anglo-Boer War of 1881. The Boer Republics were believed to be in no way guilty for the outbreak of the war. The blame was placed firmly on the 'foreign gold seekers and criminals', the *uitlanders*. The

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<sup>53</sup> Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, 115-117. Jameson was a medical doctor and a close friend and admirer of Cecil Rhodes, whose column of irregular mounted infantry attempted to invade the Transvaal in December 1895.

conflict was also analysed in the wider context of British imperialism; the independent Boer states were stumbling blocks for the Chartered Company and Rhodes. After the failure of the Jameson Raid, the British Government started to support imperialists in order to steal Boer land and gold. Unlike the British, the Boers were believed to be peace-loving people who were forced to arms in defence of their national sovereignty.<sup>54</sup>

This view was still evident when the second Finnish edition of the Boer War memoirs of General Christiaan de Wet (1854–1922) was published in 1942, at the height of the Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union. The preface to this edition drew on very recent events in its comparison of questions of self-determination of the Grand Duchy and of the Boer Republics at the turn-of-the-century. In a post-apartheid world it is sometimes difficult to remember just how persistent a phenomenon pro-Boerism in fact was. Many voluntary groups fighting in the Boer ranks (including American, Russian, German, French, Hungarian, Scandinavian and Finnish) viewed the whole pro-Boer atmosphere in practical

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<sup>54</sup> Antero Manninen, 'Suomalaiselle lukijalle', in: Christiaan de Wet, *Buurien ja englantilaisten sota* (Preface to the second Finnish edition of *De strijd tusschen Boer en Brit*) (Porvoo 1942) 6-8.



terms.<sup>55</sup> Up to the mid-twentieth century, in many parts of the world Boers were still seen as a progressive rather than a pariah people.<sup>56</sup>

Pro-Boer attitudes were not shared by Finns in Rhodesia despite the fact that the Boers were similar to the Finns in background and outlook. Eriksson, who had arrived in Bulawayo just before ceremonial opening of the Bechuanaland Railway on 4 November 1897, also joined and served in the Rhodesia Regiment, a mounted infantry raised through voluntary enlistment, until he was discharged from active service in August 1900. His decision to align himself with the Rhodesian settlers suggests that the Rhodesian colonial context quickly tended to blur existing national identities. Eriksson felt ill at ease with Finnish pro-Boer expressions and activists.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Preben Kaarsholm, 'Pro-Boers', in: Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism. The making and unmaking of British national identity*, Vol. I: *History and politics* (London 1989) 110-121. The Scandinavian Corps, a voluntary enlistment that fought on the republican side, included eighteen volunteers who have been categorised Finns or 'ethnic Swedish' living in Finland. H.E. Uddgren, *Hältarna vid Magersfontein (The heroes of Magersfontein)* (Stockholm 1924) 15, 86-89. For further detail see Frederick Hale, 'The Scandinavian Corps in the Second Anglo-Boer War', *Historia* 45:1 (2000) 220-237, 220-221, 224.

<sup>56</sup> Donal Lowry, "'The world's no bigger than a Kraal". The South African War and international opinion in the first age of "globalization"', in: David Omissi and Andrew S. Thompson (eds), *The impact of the South African War* (Basingstoke 2002) 271-284.

<sup>57</sup> Eriksson, *African diary*, 20, 45-65.

Anti-Afrikaner feeling was an enduring feature of Rhodesian public culture,<sup>58</sup> and the views expressed by Finnish settlers' were not particularly divergent in this respect. Like their countryman, the Free Church journalist Frederick Lönnbeck (1854–1914), they believed that the British Empire had shown its civilising capacity and was therefore capable of furthering European culture and Christendom in Southern Africa. 'Dutch race superiority in South Africa' did not serve 'the general interest of peace' and consequently did not legitimate Boer national existence.<sup>59</sup>

### **Being a pioneer in Northern Rhodesia and Katanga**

In Northern Rhodesia and Katanga, the southern province of the Congo Free State, copper was the main form of mineral wealth. The majority of the early expedition and development work there was undertaken by TANKS. This London-based holding company was established on 20 January 1899 with the intention of securing and exploiting a mining concession of over 2,000 square miles, with exclusive surface rights for prospecting and locating 1,000 claims north of the Zambesi.<sup>60</sup> In order to

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<sup>58</sup> Donal Lowry, 'Rhodesia 1890–1980. "The Lost Dominion"', in: Bickers (ed.), *Settlers and expatriates*, 124-125.

<sup>59</sup> F. Wald. Lönnbeck, *Pro Britannia (Pro-Britain)* (Ekenäs 1900) 3-8, 11-15.

<sup>60</sup> Manchester University (MU), John Rylands Library (JRL), Tanks Group Archive (TANKS), Zambesia Exploring Co. Ltd (ZE), ZE4, Sir Robert Williams & Co., 1893-1900, Williams to ZE, 29 November 1898; 9 February 1899. See also S.E. Katzenellenbogen, *Railways and the copper mines of Katanga* (Oxford 1973) 23-24.

take over the concession and undertake the principal exploration work, TANKS organised a mineral-seeking expedition under the command of George Grey (1868–1911), whose expedition party set off from Bulawayo for the Congo-Zambesi watershed on 15 April 1901. The party was equipped to spend two years working in isolated conditions, without modern forms of transport and communication. The *Bulawayo Chronicle* reported that ‘the white members of the expedition which leaves here [Bulawayo] are George Grey, Wynn, Jocks, Robinson, Ericson [Eriksson], Boijer, Whitton, Studt, and Dr. Middleton. Messrs Holland and Farrell will start from Abercorn, on Lake Tanganyika, and join the main body of the expedition in North-Western Rhodesia.’<sup>61</sup>

The expedition party was heterogeneous in terms of class, profession and nationality. The manager of TANKS in Africa, George Grey, the younger brother of Sir Edward Grey (Foreign Secretary 1905–1916), had no profession but was ‘just a fine, plucky young Englishman full of refreshing honesty’. Grey had emigrated to Mashonaland in 1891 and had been appointed to the service of the Zambesi Exploring Company (ZE) the following year.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> ‘Mr. George Grey’s Expedition to North-western Rhodesia’, *Bulawayo Chronicle*, March 1901.

<sup>62</sup> ZE was founded on 26 March 1891 (MU, JRL, TANKS, ZE, Board Minutes, 31 March 1891). ZE and TANKS belonged to a financial group formed around Scottish-born Robert Williams, a major financier of exploration and mining in South-Central Africa. Quotation from Robert Hutchinson and George Martelli, *Robert’s people. The life of Sir Robert Williams Bart. 1860–1938* (London 1971) 72.

The expedition's prospectors were carefully selected from a pool of around 400 settlers who had notified Grey of their interest. Those chosen included 31-year-old Oscar Boijer and 26-year-old Carl Eriksson. Both men presented impressive testimonials: in Boijer's case service in Gifford's Horse and his prospecting experience, and for Eriksson his service in the Rhodesia Regiment and work at the Bulawayo electric plant. Beyond being fit, young bachelors, many of the prospectors seemed to have little in common. Boijer and Eriksson, relatively well-educated first-generation immigrants from Finland, were accompanied by men like Charles J. Jocks, whose 'education had been practically nil and it was about all he could do to write his name'.<sup>63</sup> The provenance of some of the other prospectors was a matter of speculation. Jocks, 'one of the best type of Dutchmen', was a Transvaaler<sup>64</sup> and John was 'a Portuguese and no one appears to know his proper name, Portuguese John being all that he goes by'. On the surface, ethnicity and nationality seemed to matter little. 'He [John] is a good hunter and prospector and a good comrade, which is quite sufficient.'<sup>65</sup> In reality, however, ethnic definitions such as "Jew", "Portuguese", "Irish", or "Greek" often carried pejorative connotations.<sup>66</sup> The pioneers were

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<sup>63</sup> R.R. Sharp, *Early days in Katanga* (Bulawayo 1956) 5.

<sup>64</sup> J.B. Thornhill, *Adventures in Africa under the British, Belgian and Portuguese flags* (London 1915) 154.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Gelfand (ed.), 'Diary of Dr. Richard Watson Middleton, 12th April, 1901, to 18th July, 1902', *The Central African Journal of Medicine*, Supplement to 9:5 (May 1963) 12, diary entry 3 May 1901.

<sup>66</sup> In the sources of the time, Eriksson and Boijer are not defined as "Finns" but are identified through their various occupations as Rhodesian settlers.

accompanied by an armed party of 'the best class of Matabele' who drove the wagons or worked as porters and whose number varied as they as the trek progressed.<sup>67</sup>

The expedition set out in small parties for the Kansanshi mine, some 850 miles north of Bulawayo. After spending 32 days out in the open, Eriksson and Boijer's party arrived at Victoria Falls on 17 May. The expedition party spent the next three weeks ferrying wagons and animals across the river at Sekuti's Drift, three miles above Victoria Falls. On 10 June, the expedition divided itself into five groups, of which one was composed of Eriksson, Boijer and twelve porters with eighteen pack-donkeys and two mules for riding. The parties set out on a north-west course for Nkala, where there was a Methodist mission. During the 300-mile stretch from Nkala to Kansanshi the prospectors first encountered 'the fly'. After the first attack all the oxen were useless and had to be shot within a few days. Once almost all the oxen and donkeys had died, the party was left virtually without any means of transport. The only real option was to induce local natives to carry the party's goods north. Encounters with the local population were not as a rule hostile, but nevertheless the natives were rather unwilling to offer their labour. Local quarrels, slave traders' raids and lack of previous encounters with prospecting parties made the local population suspicious of attempts to draft porters. Entire villages could have been scared off in panic as they had no previous encounters with screaming mules.<sup>68</sup>

The village of Kapile M'Panga, near Kansanshi, had been agreed on as a general rendezvous at which all parties of prospectors should meet in October, the last month of the dry season. During November and December, huts and storehouses were

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<sup>67</sup> MU, JRL, TANKS, ZE4, George Grey to Robert Williams & Co., 29 October 1898.

<sup>68</sup> Eriksson, *African diary*, 66-91; Middleton, 'Diary'.

built, and most of the supplies that the prospectors had been forced to leave behind were retrieved and transported. At the same time the Abercorn party became the nucleus of the Katanga section of the expedition. It established a permanent camp at Kambove mine, in the Congo Free State. The Kansanshi mine was located at the top of a 40- metre-high sandstone hill, with a diameter of between 200 and 300 metres. Ore had long been extracted from the site by African miners and so the hill was already full of mine shafts.<sup>69</sup>

The original plan had been to undertake mining development during the rainy season of 1901-1902. However, there were serious challenges to overcome in Kansanshi. After the onset of the rainy season in November, many of the men suffered from high fevers for months. In retrospect they were cherished for their achievement of surviving their first rainy season without a single death.<sup>70</sup> That is of course to say without a single *European* death.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Eriksson, *African diary*, 98, 100; Middleton, 'Diary'.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Gelfand, 'Preface', in: Gelfand (ed.), 'Diary of Dr. Richard Watson Middleton', 5-6. Excepting a prospector called Savage, who died before he reached headquarter camp, and whose death was caused by malaria contracted in North-Eastern Rhodesia. Durham University (DU), The Barker Research Library (BRL), Grey Estate Records (GRE), X/V142, Tanganyika Concessions Ltd. (TANKS) Reports on the Discoveries Made by Mr. George Grey's Expedition in Northern Rhodesia and Congo Free State, and Reports by J. R. Farrell, Mining Engineer, 5 January 1903, 15.

<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, an incident reported by Middleton that apparently led to the death of a mining worker. Middleton, 'Diary' 61, diary entry 25 April 1902.

The first white prospectors and miners mostly lived in the “bush” in much the same way as the early explorers before them had done. In short, they lived the life of a frontiersman, an existence that was in some ways romanticised as a life ‘in far-off lands, amidst alien peoples, in friendless solitudes, under burning suns’.<sup>72</sup> The harsh reality was that prospecting under these conditions was a difficult undertaking. When contact with Boijer was lost for months, Middleton, the expedition’s medical officer, began to fear the worst. On the Finn’s return to Kansanshi (on 21 February 1902), the doctor noted his condition: ‘Yesterday Boyer [*sic*] arrived from Kasempa. He looks very pale and ill and somewhat thinner than when we last saw him. He says he has had fever since early in December, off and on the whole time.’<sup>73</sup>

Prospecting in Northern Rhodesia and Katanga was often reduced to locating ‘ancient workings’. Prospectors were largely negotiating their way to existing mines rather than making discoveries. ‘We just asked if the natives knew where we could find *makuba* [copper] and in exchange for the information we gave the negroes a few

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<sup>72</sup> Gann and Duignan, *White settlers in tropical Africa*, 52-53; Quotation from Lord Curzon at ‘A dinner in his honour by the London Society, 6 April, 1906’, in: Desmond M. Chapman-Houston 1915 (ed.), *Subjects of the day. Being a selection of speeches and writings by Earl Curzon of Kedleston* (London 1915) 33-34. Of course, Curzon thought that such a life was the true calling only for the Anglo-Saxon race. (*Loc. cit.*)

<sup>73</sup> Middleton, ‘Diary’ 56, diary entry 22 February 1902.

metres of cotton-textile [calico] or a cheap blanket, and the deal was done.’<sup>74</sup> Hence the retrospective use of the term “blanket” prospector.<sup>75</sup>

### **Contrasts in black and white experiences**

In previous studies of early Rhodesian settler society white racial attitudes have been attributed to patterns of thought and behaviour that had been evolving in South Africa, where many immigrants had spent time before moving to Rhodesia.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, power relations have been attributed to European beliefs and attitudes transferred by those who came from overseas to a colonial context.<sup>77</sup> In the case of Finnish immigrants, it would be tempting to analyse many aspects of race relations in light of the context of masculinity, violence and honour evolving in nineteenth-century Finnish society, where levels of violent crime (as recorded in juridical proceedings) and domestic violence were staggeringly high by Northern European standards.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Eriksson, *African diary*, 142.

<sup>75</sup> Thornhill, *Adventures in Africa*, 165.

<sup>76</sup> Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia*, 376-380.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Nigel Worden, ‘Demanding satisfaction: violence, masculinity and honour in late eighteenth-century Cape Town’, *Kronos* 35:1 (2009) 32-47, 33-34.

<sup>78</sup> H. Ylikangas, ‘Major fluctuations in crimes of violence in Finland’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 1 (1976) 81-103, *passim*. However, historians disagree about interpretations and explanations of levels of violence in Finland.



However, the most plausible explanations for the enforced racial difference in Rhodesia can be found in the nature of colonial economy itself, not in the provenance of the settlers. The early settlers in Northern Rhodesia and Katanga found that in addition to cultural barriers, they also faced significant technical hazards. In the early years of mining in Northern Rhodesia the colonial economy and settler domination were still in their infancy. All the basic prerequisite infrastructure for an operational mining business, such as roads and railways, had to be built largely from scratch. Site installation and road construction were carried out manually using axes, picks, shovels and wheelbarrows. The early mines were thus heavily reliant on a great deal of African labour. As a consequence, there was a massive, indiscriminate mobilisation of unskilled African labour to fulfil the companies' short-term needs for excavators, porters and wood-cutters.<sup>79</sup>

There were no labour regulations in place until 1904, when the principle of raising revenue from the indigenous population through a 'hut tax' was gradually extended to North-Western Rhodesia.<sup>80</sup> For practical, as well as ideological, reasons wage labour was preferred over forced labour for most mining and construction work. Eriksson was in favour of taxation: when obligated to pay taxes, Africans would be more ready to work in waged employment. In the absence of any other options, the

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<sup>79</sup> Jean-Luc Vellut, 'Mining in the Belgian Congo', in: David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin (eds), *History of Central Africa*, Vol. 2 (London and New York 1983) 136, 138.

<sup>80</sup> Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Financial and Economic Position of Northern Rhodesia, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 145 (London 1938), 29, 111.

only real alternative was to force unwilling Africans to take up mining work.<sup>81</sup> For the mining companies, the chief asset of Rhodesia was the low cost of native labour: 'I know of no place where the same amount of mining work could be accomplished for as low a local expense.'<sup>82</sup> However, the negative effects of mining were felt from the outset. The exploitation of mineral wealth was dependant on an African labour force, and this situation caused many problems at a time when the colonial economy in Africa was still in its infancy.<sup>83</sup>

Another urgent concern that faced the mining industry was the practical question of how to provide labourers with sufficient food. Prospectors tried to solve this problem in various ways. It proved impossible to buy enough foodstuffs from local villagers, and so Grey established trading stations within a radius of 150 miles from Kansanshi where food could be purchased from villagers. Another method was to give workers a weekly allowance of calico with which they could then buy food.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See for instance Eriksson, *African diary, passim*. See also Gann, *A history of Northern Rhodesia*, 102-103.

<sup>82</sup> DU, BRL, GRE/X/V142, TANKS, Reports, J.R. Farrell, 6 January 1903, London 98.

<sup>83</sup> For further details see S.E. Katzenellenbogen, 'Labour recruitment in Central Africa: the case of Katanga', in: Clive Dewey and A.G. Hopkins (eds), *The imperial impact: studies in the economic history of Africa and India* (London 1978) 270-279; Charles Perrings, *Black mineworkers in Central Africa. Industrial strategies and the evolution of an African proletariat in the Copperbelt 1911-41* (London 1979) 14ff.

<sup>84</sup> Gelfand, 'Preface', 4; DU, BRL, GRE/X/V142, TANKS, G. Grey, General Report 18-20.

When the mining industry eventually made African mineworkers solely responsible for securing their own supplies, food shortages and undernourishment ensued. As Eriksson noted, in many cases villagers tried to hide their foodstuffs when they saw company men approaching.<sup>85</sup>

Violence and power took many forms in early colonial societies. The masculinity of the settler culture coupled with conventional bourgeois taboos, left African labourers vulnerable to mistreatment. Like many of his contemporaries, Eriksson looked upon his personal servants, carriers and work groups as 'his people', more or less if they were children. 'Nothing made my blacks as happy as meat. When a hippo was shot and its meat cut, they suddenly turned childishly joyful'.<sup>86</sup> He believed that it was necessary to enforce some degree of authority, but that force should remain in the background to be employed only as a last resort. Boijer had a reputation of being a tough master, who did not hesitate to use his *sjambok*. 'A day or two ago a Native came in who reported that at a kraal about 100 miles to the south-east there was a little-man with two police who was very masterful and used his sjambok freely. I expect this is Boyer [*sic*].'<sup>87</sup> The cultural barriers between those coming from overseas and the local population were too vast for any real understanding to develop. Hence early settlers often mistreated their African labourers and were quick to express harsh criticism of African societies.

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<sup>85</sup> Eriksson, *African diary*, 108, 110.

<sup>86</sup> Eriksson, *African diary*, 271-272.

<sup>87</sup> Middleton, 'Diary' 52, diary entry 22 December 1901.

## **Pioneer-settler men in retrospect**

At the end of the dry season the expedition started out on its return journey to Bulawayo where they arrived in November 1902, a year and a half after they had first set out from the settler town. Oscar Boijer soon left Rhodesia for good, in January 1903. Between 1908 and 1911 he lived in San Francisco and from 1917 to 1920 in Sydney, Australia, apparently taking up his father's vocation as a Lutheran pastor. Oscar Boijer died in Hämeenlinna, a southern Finnish town, on 25 February 1943.<sup>88</sup>

In 1906 also Eriksson resigned from his service with TANKS. In 1907 and 1908 he spent some months prospecting for gold in Ust-Kamenogorsk (Oskemen), East Kazakhstan. He also visited Finland for the first time in sixteen years and, on 19 November 1909, donated his ethnographic collections to the National Museum of Finland (Antell collection). He also joined the *Societas pro Fauna et Flora Fennica* and the Geographical Society of Finland. Eriksson then returned to Bulawayo, where in February 1910 he married Annie Adkins, an Englishwoman whom he had first met in 1903. At around this time he went into business with two Norwegian settlers, G. Stenmark and C. Valeer. Stenmark & Valeer, Ltd. undertook the electrification of mines and plants in Rhodesia, but its work was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War. Eriksson joined the British South African Police in 1915 and served as a Captain on the German East African front until his discharge from service four years

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<sup>88</sup> Blomstedt, 'Boijer, Poijärvi', 442.

later. In 1923 Eriksson bought a farm called Judsonia in Insiza, near Bulawayo, which remained his home until his death in 1940.<sup>89</sup>

It has been argued that ‘the Rhodesians were essentially permanent colonists, bringing up their children as Rhodesians and nothing else.’<sup>90</sup> Although Eriksson, who emigrated from the Grand Duchy of Finland, self-identified as Finnish, his own son Frank Theodore Eriksson (born 10 December 1910) had no official nationality. Frank’s Naturalisation Certificate bluntly states ‘none’ under nationality. Under the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act of 1914 he was deemed to be a natural-born British subject. However, it was not until 1938 that Frank Eriksson finally applied for British citizenship.<sup>91</sup>

Although Eriksson and the Boijer brothers were Finns and immigrants, their outlook was largely indistinguishable from that of conventional Rhodesians. They adopted ideologies and identities in Southern Africa that could not be easily disentangled from those of colonisers. However, in their discourse about national identity, they showed strong and unequivocal devotion to the cause of the Finnish people. In the colonial context place-based identities tend to blur existing national identities, and place-based identity-building was very much intertwined with empire-building in newly formed settler communities like Bulawayo. Dominant national

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<sup>89</sup> Timo Särkkä, ‘Eriksson, Carl Theodor (1874-1940)’, in: *The National Biography of Finland* (Finnish Historical Society 2010),

<http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/kb/artikkeli/9381/> (20 April 2015).

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Lowry, ‘Rhodesia 1890–1980’, 118.

<sup>91</sup> The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Home Office (HO), 334/253/2304, Naturalisation Certificate: Frank Theodore Eriksson, 23 November 1938.

identities such as “Englishman” were sometimes used as a blanket term to describe all white settlers and British colonial rule in Southern Africa in general. And, of course, in the context of the South African War certain identity labels such as Boer or *uitlander* became crucially important.

The main question posed by this study is whether one needs to be a national of an empire-owning state in order to be an imperialist. In its attempt to answer this question, the study has explored the lives and times of Finnish settlers in Rhodesia, their involvement in colonial practices and their limitations as colonialists. The case study of Finnish settler identities discussed here seems to diverge from the existing literature on colonialism in Southern Africa. The conventional image of Finland does not fit well with the traditional image of European Great Power colonialism in Africa. However, colonial projects were by no means exclusively associated with the major Western powers. A closer examination reveals that even European countries that never had overseas colonies, such as Finland, were involved in the colonial world: Finns were sent out as colonisers and produced images of colonial ‘others’. Certain beliefs and perceptions expressed by the Finnish settlers reflected their nationality and national concerns in ways that perhaps distinguished their colonialism from the more typical trajectories of colonialism (such as British colonialism). The term ‘Nordic colonialism’, from which this discussion partly stems, has been employed as a pragmatic analytical tool rather than as a theoretical term per se, and as such it

provides a descriptive framework of the various economic motives of Nordic migrants (Finnish, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian) in various colonial contexts.<sup>92</sup>

Colonial identity-building was a complex process, marked by geographical and temporal variations, and its study requires localising theories and historically specific accounts of various colonising and counter-colonial theories and practices.<sup>93</sup> Thus, it is imperative that colonial identities should be approached through localised case studies. In order to advance our understanding of the process of colonialism, its development and its impact in the modern world, it is necessary for historians, anthropologists, social scientists, scholars of migration and scholars of literature and culture to compare, discuss and debate theories, methods, sources and case studies. Ethnicity and migration research arguably has an important role to play in this discussion.

## **Photograph**

Building British identity? C.T. Eriksson, Katanga, c. 1906. Finland's National Board of Antiquities (NBA), Picture Collections (PC), 367/3. Hunting was part of Eriksson's everyday life in Katanga. Eriksson secured a hunting permit from the Belgian

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<sup>92</sup> On the definition of the term 'Nordic colonialism' see Bjørn Enge Bertelsen, 'Introduction. Norwegians Navigating Colonial Orders in Africa and Oceania', in: Kjerland and Bertelsen (eds), *Navigating Colonial Orders*, 1-22.

<sup>93</sup> This approach has been advocated in Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's culture. Anthropology, travel, government* (Cambridge 1996) 3.

authorities that allowed him to collect specimens for the Finnish Museum of Natural History. The photograph may have been taken by his Irish hunting friend Mick Mangan using Eriksson's Sanderson field camera.

### **Photograph**

'It is Christmas Day, 1901, and Boijer, a member of the expedition, is dressed up for the occasion. He stands at the now-completed shaft-head at Kansanshi.' NBA, PC, 367/3. Caption taken from Ted Scannell, 'Pioneer of 1901 comes back to the copperbelt', *Horizon. The Magazine of the Rhodesian Selection of Trust Group of Companies*, 3 (March 1961) 10-14, 12.