

## The politics of locating the third spinning mill in Southern Rhodesia, 1951–1953

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### Introduction

Scholars have examined the manufacturing industry in general and the textile industry in particular in colonial Zimbabwe because of the importance of these industries to the economy of the country during and after World War II.<sup>1</sup> Some have focused on protectionism of the industry in the context of the Customs Union with South Africa.<sup>2</sup> Others have looked at the debates leading to the sale of the spinning mills to private enterprise.<sup>3</sup> Still others have highlighted the importance of labour in the manufacturing industries in general and the role of African workers in the textile industry in particular.<sup>4</sup> There are also works that have paid attention to cotton agriculture because of its linkage to the textile manufacturing industry.<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on the textile industry has focused largely on its contribution to the industrialisation of the colony. However, discussion on how growth took place in the industry and the debates on its expansion are still missing. The textile industry's expansion was largely based on locally grown cotton and particularly on the capacity to spin the seed cotton.

The beginnings of the cotton industry in Southern Rhodesia can be traced back to 1924 when the Gatooma (now Kadoma) Municipality co-operated with the

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1. See for example, P. Mayawo, "A History of the Textile Manufacturing Industry in Zimbabwe: 1945–1990", MA dissertation, Department of Economic History, University of Zimbabwe, 1991. See also A.S. Mlambo, E.S. Pangeti and I. Phimister, *Zimbabwe: A History of Manufacturing 1890–1995* (University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, 2000); E. Pangeti, "The State and Manufacturing Industry: A Study of the State as Regulator and Entrepreneur in Zimbabwe, 1930–1990", DPhil thesis, Department of Economic History, University of Zimbabwe, 1995.
2. A. Mlambo and I. Phimister, "Partly Protected: Origins and Growth of Colonial Zimbabwe's Textile Industry, 1890–1965", *Historia*, 52, 2, November 2006, pp 145–175. I. Phimister, "Secondary Industrialisation in Southern Africa: The 1948 Customs Agreement between Southern Rhodesia and South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17, 3, September 1991, pp 430–442.
3. Mlambo and Phimister, "Partly Protected"; Pangeti, "The State and Manufacturing Industry".
4. W.H. Chikwinya, "Labour in the Manufacturing Industries in Rhodesia, 1945–79", BA Honours essay, Economic History, University of Zimbabwe, 1986; A. Mushaniga, "African Workers in the Textile Industry in Rhodesia with Reference to David Whitehead & Sons Ltd, 1945–1979", BA Honours essay, Department of Economic History, University of Zimbabwe, 1988.
5. Publications on cotton production in colonial Zimbabwe abound, see for example S. Zhara, "The Development of the Cotton Industry in Southern Rhodesia from the Early 1920s to 1942", BA Hons essay, University of Zimbabwe, 1983; T. Moyo, "A History of the Cotton Industry in Colonial Zimbabwe: 1903–1940s", BA Hons essay, University of Zimbabwe, Department of Economic History, 2001; E.S. Chicheko, "A History of Cotton Growing in Sanyati, 1968–1990", BA Hons essay, Economic History Department, University of Zimbabwe, 1992; P. Nyambara, "The Origins and Development of the Cotton Industry in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1903–1935", *Eastern African Social Science Review*, 6, 2; and 7, 1, 1991; P. Nyambara, "Colonial Policy and Peasant Cotton Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia, 1904–1953", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33, 1, 2000.

Southern Rhodesian government to create some plots on the Gatooma commonage and conduct a series of experiments there. This modest but farsighted beginning laid the foundation of the Cotton Research Station (CRS), and indeed, the cotton industry as a whole.<sup>6</sup> The CRS was opened as a co-operative undertaking between the government and the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation (ECGC),<sup>7</sup> with the government providing the land, running expenses and supporting staff, while the ECGC provided the technical staff for the research. The project was under the direction of Major Cameron a cotton specialist.<sup>8</sup> The Gatooma/Hartley district was one of the main cotton producing areas at the time and this justified the establishment of the CRS in Gatooma.<sup>9</sup>

In 1936, the government, the ECGC, and the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA) established the Cotton Research and Industry Board (hereafter the CRIB or the Board) in Gatooma to oversee the development of the cotton industry in the country.<sup>10</sup> The Board established three ginneries again in Gatooma with funding from the BCGA. In 1941, the CRS became an integral part of CRIB because the Board assumed responsibility for cotton research following the withdrawal of the ECGC from direct involvement in Southern Rhodesia. In 1942, the CRIB was reconstituted by the Cotton Research and Industry Act with extended powers “to establish and develop within the Colony, textile and allied industries ... and other matters connected therewith ... development of the cotton industry in the Colony”.<sup>11</sup>

A year later, the Board also established and began operating a cotton-spinning mill (No. 1 Mill) with a capacity of 1 000 spindles – the first of its kind in southern Africa. The capacity of the mill was increased to operating 17 500 ring spindles and 850 doubling spindles in 1951. Construction of the second mill (No. 2 Mill) began in the same year, so that at the beginning of 1952 it commenced operation, bringing the spindles operated by the Board to an impressive 35 000.<sup>12</sup> The Board also established a factory for the manufacture of absorbent cotton wool in Gatooma which supplied the colony's requirements and, later, exported its product to other territories.<sup>13</sup> The existence of the CRS, ginneries and an absorbent cotton wool industry in one place was ideal for the location of spinning mills in Gatooma rather than anywhere else where such infrastructure was non-existent.

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6. National Archives of Zimbabwe (hereafter NAZ): *Vision, Official Organ of the Federation of Regional Development and Publicity Associations*, 2, 1, September 1951, p 7.
  7. The ECGC was a research organisation founded by the British Board of Trade for the development of cotton growing in the British Empire.
  8. H. Weinmann, *Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Rhodesia, 1924–1950* (University of Rhodesia, Salisbury, 1975), pp 12–13.
  9. J.E. Glendhill, “The Cotton Research Institute, Gatooma”, *Rhodesian Agricultural Journal*, 76, 1979, p 103.
  10. For a study that focuses on the Cotton Research and Industry Board, see E. Matowa, “The Cotton Research and Industry Board and African Cotton Production in Southern Rhodesia, 1936–1955”, BA Hons essay, Department of Economic History, University of Zimbabwe, 1999.
  11. NAZ: F296/23/2/4/49, CRIB, 28 April 1949 to 30 December 1953; NAZ: F296/23/2/4/49, CRIB, “Fourteenth Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 1950”.
  12. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, CRIB, Memorandum on the need for a third spinning industry, Gatooma, 26 May 1951.
  13. Weinmann, *Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Rhodesia*, p 91. The manufacture of absorbent cotton wool at Gatooma was started as an essential war measure. The need arose when there was a possibility of Southern Rhodesia being converted into a large convalescent camp for the sick and wounded from the Abyssinian and Italian campaigns.

Discussions to consider the building of a third mill (No. 3 Mill) began in 1951 as it was expected that the two mills then in operation would not cope with the growing demand for yarn from concerns in the country as well as for exporting purposes. It was deemed necessary to plan for the construction of a third spinning mill with a capacity of 35 000 spindles which would double the country's yarn production.<sup>14</sup> The third mill is the subject of this article because it generated debates and controversy throughout the period of study. The article seeks to address the following questions: Why was it necessary to build the third mill? When exactly would it be built, at what cost and who would pay for its construction? A more pertinent question is: Where would the mill be located, and why? Why did the third mill generate so much debate and controversy?

It is illustrated here that the increase in the number of industrial concerns using the Board's yarn as well as the impending Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953, generated serious discussion in government and business circles and interest groups, on the need to increase the spinning capacity. How and where that expansion would take place became a terrain of intense struggle between the Board and the Gatooma Municipality. The CRIB, which operated the spinning mills as a statutory board on behalf of the state, cited their frustration over exorbitant municipal water and electricity charges on their properties and claimed that they feared African labour unrest with the expected increase in the number of African workers when the third spinning was built.

CRIB developed a profound resentment towards the municipality to the extent that they wanted to move out of Gatooma and locate the mill elsewhere. Alternative locations such as Melfort near Salisbury, Rusape and Marandellas, were suggested on the basis of advice provided by textile experts from the United Kingdom. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that these locations offered advantages of cheaper water and electricity charges, or that they were less susceptible to labour unrest compared to Gatooma. Gatooma had several overwhelming advantages as the centre of the cotton industry. Among other factors, it lay within the Hartley district which produced half of the country's seed cotton. This article takes the view that moving out Gatooma did not make economic sense and that the reasons put forward by the Board to establish the mill elsewhere had nothing to do with financial considerations, but were mainly motivated by the desire to operate completely outside the jurisdiction of the municipality. The Board's main argument was that it would be in the best interests of the industry if the mills were outside the jurisdiction of any local authority.<sup>15</sup> They simply "did not like to be under a local authority".<sup>16</sup>

The Gatooma-Hartley Development and Publicity Association, the Federated Chamber of Commerce and the Rhodesia Cotton Growers' Association (RCGA), supported the municipality and wanted to retain the mills in Gatooma. These organisations worked towards keeping existing industries in the town and tried to attract new ones. The objectives of the Gatooma-Hartley Development and Publicity Association were largely to promote the area, create new industries and

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14. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Cotton Board Spinning Mill: July 1951 to 26 May 1954, "Municipality of Gatooma, Gatooma and the Cotton Industry".

15. "Action by Publicity Association", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 26 July 1951.

16. "Council Debates on Cotton Research Station Move", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 16 July 1953.

attract fresh capital for further development.<sup>17</sup> The Federated Chamber of Commerce represented the interests of the taxpayers who deemed it a waste of resources to establish a spinning mill outside Gatooma because this would duplicate existing infrastructure and services. The RCGA, formed in 1951 to represent the interests of European cotton farmers, was headquartered in Gatooma and would therefore naturally resist any efforts to locate the spinning mills anywhere else.

By the end of 1953, the Board had not succeeded in its quest to have the third mill set up elsewhere. It had to wait to take advantage of the spirit of decentralisation engendered by Federation to locate spinning mills in Nyasaland, where much of the cotton was grown. This period falls outside the scope of this study and deserves a separate paper. Instead, this article makes a significant contribution to the study of the manufacturing industry in general and the textile industry in particular. It uses these debates as a window to explore other aspects of the economic history and political economy of colonial Zimbabwe. For example it raises issues about colonial labour policies as well as European attitudes to Africans. It exposes the tensions within the settler community, thus confirming what other scholars have noted, namely that settler society was not homogeneous but was made up of different classes often with different interests.<sup>18</sup> Tensions arose from these different interests in the settler community and there was no equanimity on the development of the cotton industry in the colony. Stakeholders in the spinning industry held different opinions on where the third spinning mill should be sited. For the CRIB, the welfare of the third mill was better served if the Board operated outside the jurisdiction of the municipality with no interference. To the municipality and other interest groups, retaining the mills in Gatooma was paramount in promoting the much needed industrial development in the town. Herein lay the source of tension.

### **CRIB: Making the case for the third spinning mill**

In his memo of 26 May 1951, explaining the need for a third spinning mill, D.W. Sommerville, who doubled as the CRIB cost accountant and general manager, noted the expansion that had taken place in cotton growing and the cotton textile industry in the colony since 1946 as well as estimates of further expansion that was likely to occur up to 1954, as indicated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Production figures: seed cotton, cotton yarn and exports**

Year to 31st March	Seed cotton produced	Cotton yarn produced (2 shifts)	Cotton yarn sold in S. Rhodesia	Cotton yarn exported chiefly to S. Africa
1946	1,546,000	448,000	440,000	NIL
1947	1,057,000	462,000	460,000	NIL
1948	533,000	733,000	730,000	NIL

17. "Calling Gatooma: Do you want Gatooma to Go Ahead? Are you Satisfied with the Speed of Present Progress? This is YOUR Town – What are YOUR Ideas?", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 21 June 1951.

18. See I. Phimister, "Accommodating Imperialism: Compromise of the Settler State in Southern Rhodesia 1923–1929", *Journal of African History*, 25, 3, 1984; F. Cooper and A. Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997).

Nyambara – Spinning mill Southern Rhodesia

1949	873,000	1,081,000	768,000	168,000
1950	2,876,000	1,894,000	1,160,000	770,000
1951	6,866,000	2,428,000	1,432,000	973,000
1952	10,000,000	4,023,000	3,221,000	681,000
1953	15,000,000	6,030,000	5,770,000	360,000
1954	20,000,000	7,500,000	7,140,000	360,000

**Source:** NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/12a, CRIB, Memo explaining the need for a third spinning mill, 26 May 1951.

Sommerville expressed confidence in the continued increase in seed cotton production in subsequent years because the CRIB guaranteed both the purchase of the colony's entire crop thereby giving the farmers an assured market, and the price paid for the cotton. There was a ready and expanding market in Southern Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa for the products of the colony's weaving, knitting and twine factories.<sup>19</sup> The textile manufacturing industry had grown tremendously since WW II so that in 1952 it stood in third position of the ten major manufacturing industries in Southern Rhodesia in terms of output.<sup>20</sup> In 1951 there were 12 weaving and knitting factories in Southern Rhodesia established since WW II, using mainly the Board's yarn.

The Board expected the demand for its yarn to increase further "especially as it is known that several of the Board's customers have plans for further expansion and that some of them are increasing their consumption of yarn at the present time".<sup>21</sup> All these concerns would require more than the whole of the yarn production of both spinning mills at Gatooma even when working double shift of 16 hours per day in 1950. In addition, they were receiving constant enquiries from concerns in England and the southern African region expressing interest in establishing themselves in Southern Rhodesia. There was "every reason to believe that the trend of expansion over the past seven years will continue for some years to come".<sup>22</sup> It was therefore necessary to plan for a third spinning mill of 35 000 spindles which would double the capacity of existing mills. The growing demand for yarn from the Board's customers led to No. 1 mill being placed on a three-shift basis on 1 February 1951 in the hope that the Board could satisfy the demand.<sup>23</sup>

The Customs Agreement with South Africa in 1948 stimulated the growth of the textile industry. The purpose of the agreement was "to achieve complete removal of all customs and other trade barriers between the two countries. . ." Ian Phimister has noted the great success of the agreement in facilitating expanded trade between the two countries. In its first year of operation, Southern Rhodesian exports to South Africa more than doubled, and in 1950 they increased by a further 70%. On the whole, Southern Rhodesian exports to the south increased

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19. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/12a, Statutory Bodies, CRIB No. 3 Mill. Memorandum explaining the need for a third spinning mill, Costing Department, 26 May 1951.  
 20. NAZ: F294/12/12, Economic Report: Manufacturing Industries, 1955.  
 21. NAZ: F114/413, Cotton Industry Working Party, Case for the erection of No. 3 Spinning Mill and the absorbent cotton wool factory in Nyasaland, Memo prepared by the General Manager, CRIB, 17 June 1954.  
 22. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/12a, Statutory Bodies, CRIB No. 3 Mill. Memorandum explaining the need for a third spinning mill, Costing Department, 26 May 1951.  
 23. NAZ: 296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, Minutes of Meetings Part II from 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952. Secretary CRIB to Fitt, Gatooma Textiles Ltd, 5 April 1951.

tremendously from £1, 2 million in 1948 to £7 million in 1953.<sup>24</sup> Capital, largely from Britain and South Africa, poured into Southern Rhodesia and was attracted by guaranteed access to the huge South African market, as well as by the prospects of lower production costs in Southern Rhodesia than in South Africa. Between 1945 and 1953 the net inflow of capital amounted to £139 million and much of this capital went to clothing and textiles. Exports of textile and clothing products increased more than any other exports; total exports in 1948 amounted to a modest £65 000; in 1949 they reached £988 000; in 1950 £2 million and in 1953 over £4 million.<sup>25</sup> The accession to power in 1948 of the Nationalist Party in South Africa generated the fear that it might nationalise British interests. This development temporarily made Southern Rhodesia appear a safer haven for British investments.<sup>26</sup> The knowledge that foreign capital was making its way to Southern Rhodesia generated intense competition between Salisbury, the capital city, and the small towns and between towns and municipalities in the colony, to attract that capital.

### High cotton prices and peasant cotton growing

The higher price for seed cotton in 1951 was significant in accelerating the expansion of cotton growing in the colony. Peasant seed cotton output in 1950 stood at more than 4 million lbs, the highest on record and would remain so for some time to come. According to the CRIB, “for the first time in Rhodesian history, the native grown crop has exceeded the European crop and by a very substantial margin”. If the high cotton prices were maintained, a still larger crop was expected in the following few years.<sup>27</sup>

The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, American stockpiling and the shortage of raw cotton in various producer countries, brought about increased demand for raw cotton and high prices in almost every part of the world.<sup>28</sup> In April 1951, the government reviewed the matter and raised prices by 3d per lb. for the first three classes. This move placed cotton in a very favourable position as a cash crop and gave a further impetus to growing it in the colony, which was reflected in the exceptionally heavy demand for planting seed from as early as May, 1951, until as late as December.<sup>29</sup> The CRIB, therefore, worried that any expansion beyond 20 000 000 lbs could not be processed by the Board's two spinning mills even if they worked a double shift. Under these circumstances, they considered that there was good reason for constructing a third spinning mill.<sup>30</sup>

The Board estimated that in 1951 about 20 000 Africans were growing cotton. This had the effect of “raising the standard of living for Natives in the

24. Phimister, “Secondary Industrialisation in Southern Africa”. See also P. Mosley, *The Settler Economies: Studies in the Economic History of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1900–1963* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983), p 212.
25. Phimister, “Secondary Industrialisation in Southern Africa”, p 437.
26. R. Gray, *The Two Nations: Aspects of Development of Race Relations in Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (Oxford University Press, London, 1960), p 199. See also G. Arrighi, *The Political Economy of Rhodesia* (Mouton, The Hague, 1967), pp 41–42.
27. For a detailed examination of cotton growing among Africans in Southern Rhodesia during this period see Nyambara, “Colonial Policy and Peasant Cotton Agriculture”, pp 81–111.
28. NAZ: F29/23/2/3/49, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, Annual Reports and Accounts, CRIB Sixteenth Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 1952.
29. NAZ: SRG 3, Southern Rhodesia, Reports of Statutory Boards, Cotton Research and Industry Board 1936/37–1952/53, 16th Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 1952.
30. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/12a, Statutory Bodies, CRIB No. 3 Mill. Memorandum on need for a third spinning mill, Costing Department, 26 May 1951.

reserves, to say nothing of those employed in the mills.”<sup>31</sup> Table 2 below shows the number of Africans employed by the Board between 1950 and 1953 compared with Coloured and European employees. The CRIB employed an average of 1 400 Africans annually in the spinning mills and they were aiming to increase the figure to 2 000 with the completion of the No. 2. Mill.<sup>32</sup>

In line with the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934, Africans employed by the CRIB performed unskilled work. The 1934 Act served to protect white workers against competition from blacks for skilled jobs. Section 4 of the act excluded Africans from the definition of an employee and, therefore, from wage bargaining and skilled trades since only “employees” were allowed to become involved in collective bargaining and to become apprentices.<sup>33</sup> This aspect of the act may explain the Board’s constant fear of African labour unrest. The Board considered that the best market for the cotton grower was the home market, “and this meant that to give the grower ... the best price for his cotton, the Board had to ensure [the] textile industry was capable of processing all the cotton grown”.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 2: Number of Africans employed by the Board in relation to other races, 1950–1953**

	1 Jan. 1950	31 Mar. 1951	31 Mar. 1952	31 Mar. 1953
Africans	1 316	1 456	1 633	1 199
Europeans	51	68	77	72
Coloureds	4	5	6	3

**Source:** NAZ: SRG 3, Southern Rhodesia: CRIB 17th Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1953.

### **Struggle between CRIB and Gatooma Municipality over location of third mill**

While the CRIB was making the case for a third spinning mill, the question arose on its possible location. This involved the CRIB in a bitter struggle with Gatooma Town Council. Since 1951 the Board had favoured a different site rather than having it at Gatooma:

At present the Board is investigating the financial aspect of developing the colony spinning industry in districts other than Gatooma ... Financial considerations alone should not be allowed to overshadow others (strategic for instance) that are more important for the Colony as a whole, as against further development of more favoured sites.<sup>35</sup>

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31. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/12a, Statutory Bodies, CRIB No. 3 Mill. Memorandum, need for a third spinning mill, Costing Department, 26 May 1951.
  32. NAZ: S296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies” CRIB, Minutes of Meetings, Part II 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952.
  33. For a detailed examination of the Industrial Conciliation Act, see B. Raftopoulos, “The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1945–1965”, in B. Raftopoulos and I. Phimister (eds), *Keep on Knocking: A History of the Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1900–97* (Baobab Books, Harare, 1997), pp 56–57.
  34. NAZ: S296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies”, CRIB, Minutes of Meetings, Part II 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952.
  35. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/12a, Statutory Bodies: CRIB, No. 3 Mill, Memorandum on need for a third spinning mill, Costing Department, 26 May 1951.

The memo makes it clear that the location of additional spinning mill should not be determined by financial considerations alone, but also by other matters, such as strategic issues. Textile experts in the United Kingdom certainly played some part in influencing the Board's decision. The Board requested Cameron, who was on leave in the United Kingdom in 1947, to seek advice on a number of things relating to the development of a spinning industry in a young country. He was advised that "subject to rail and/or road communications being suitable, it would be as well to avoid urban areas, and plan for future expansion to take place in various centres in preference to concentrating on any one area".<sup>36</sup> No particular reasons were given for this recommendation.

Cameron also cited the visit to Southern Rhodesia in 1948, by G.H. Meredith of Messrs Platt Brothers, Lancashire, and his advice on the matter. Meredith was a well-known "cotton spinning mill designer in Europe, possibly in the world" with "an unrivalled knowledge of the planning and layout of spinning mills all over the world", and the Board felt that it was "fortunate in being able to obtain the advice and guidance of an authority with his experience."<sup>37</sup> Meredith recommended the siting of further extensions to the spinning mills well away from Gatooma, either in the Bulawayo or Umtali direction. He travelled from Bulawayo to Umtali by road with Cameron, and discussed the "pros" and "cons" of the various possible sites pointed out to him.<sup>38</sup> The Board took Meredith's advice and identified Melfort, 22 miles to the east of Salisbury, as one of the most favourable sites. One of the reasons why Meredith favoured Melfort, "was the possibility of [abundant African] labour" because of the existence of reserves in the close vicinity. This factor, among others, was given prominence in one of the CRIB reports:

It is geographically the centre of a great many Native reserves ... [that] are already well established cotton growing areas. They are a potential source of intelligent African labour which would be more likely to remain static than labour recruited from more distant parts in, and outside the Colony. The stabilisation of the Native labour force could be encouraged by providing African housing and amenities ... This, in turn, would overcome one of our main difficulties namely, that of retaining our African labour after it has been trained.<sup>39</sup>

Once the decision to locate the spinning industry at Melfort was reached, the Board would seek the permission of the Town and Country Planning authority to lay out housing schemes and decide on the location of the mill buildings.<sup>40</sup> "Everything would be undertaken in an organised, orderly scheme of planning under the direction of the Board, which itself would be responsible for its own building and development programme." This was expected to free the Board from the nightmare of unreliable contractors who had been a constant hindrance to the

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36. NAZ: S482/166/11/48, CRIB-Reports, 1948/1949, CRIB, Twelfth Annual Report for the period ending 31 March 1948.
  37. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/12a, Statutory Bodies, CRIB No. 3 Mill, Memorandum on the need for a third spinning mill, Costing Department, 26 May 1951.
  38. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/12a, Statutory Bodies, CRIB No. 3 Mill, Memorandum on the need for a third spinning mill, Costing Department, 26 May 1951.
  39. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Statutory bodies, CRIB No. 3 Mill: Additional notes on the necessity of a third mill and location site.
  40. For more details on the Town and Country Planning authority see, among others, NAZ: S62/1, Commission of Inquiry, Town and Country Planning Control, Terms of Reference and Establishment; NAZ: S65: Commission of Inquiry, Town and Country Planning Control Report; NAZ: S63/1, Commission of Inquiry: Town and Country Planning Control, Oral evidence.



industry's progress.<sup>41</sup> The Board thought that the location of the mill at Melfort would mean the living conditions of its employees would be favourable "similar in many ways to those initiated by well known industrialists like Lever Brothers whose enlightened schemes have endured [a stable workforce] over a long period of years." The new mill at Melfort would also "develop a hitherto, undeveloped part of the Colony industrially", in a way which "the State could look back on with pride, fifty, or more years hence".<sup>42</sup> The CRIB thought that Melfort would be different from "the piecemeal progress in Gatooma". If by any chance they were to discover 10 to 15 years down the line that this decentralisation policy did not work, they could always modify it.<sup>43</sup>

It was foolhardy for the Board to assume that establishing the mill near reserves would automatically assure them of abundant and presumably cheap African labour. Labour studies in colonial Africa generally agree that colonial enterprises suffered from severe "shortages" of labour not because labour was unavailable, but because of poor working conditions.<sup>44</sup> If the Board offered attractive wages, it would get adequate labour, but the general trend was that African workers were paid below subsistence wages. If the Board offered low wages Africans would be reluctant to provide the necessary labour.

It is not clear under what circumstances A.E. Winterton, the Minister of Trade and Industrial Development, in one of his speeches, mentioned Rusape as an alternative site for the spinning mills. The Rusape Town Management Board seized upon the speech to campaign for their town as the most suitable site. The secretary of the Board wrote that he had been "directed to put forward certain points in favour of Rusape being considered as a suitable centre for the cotton milling industry".<sup>45</sup> He enumerated many advantages of locating an industry in Rusape, for instance, the availability of abundant water "from the perennial river Lesapi". He claimed that there were no town requirements which restricted the usage of water and in addition, "the water charges are possibly the cheapest in the colony".<sup>46</sup>

Another major consideration was that local Africans produced raw cotton around Rusape in the Chiduku, Dowa and Weya reserves. In the 1949/50 season 36 936 lbs of cotton were grown in these areas and the estimate for 1951 was an increase to 40 000 lbs. In Inyanga and Makoni reserves 40 000 lbs and 50 000 lbs

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41. CRIB annual reports are replete with complaints by the Board about contractors who failed to meet the targets set. For instance, the completion of No.1 Mill and No. 2 Mill was delayed due to contractors who did not complete the task on time.

42. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Statutory bodies, CRIB: No. 3 Spinning mill, Additional notes on the necessity of a third and location site.

43. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB: No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Meeting between Minister for Trade and Industrial Development (A.E. Winterton); Geo Munro, MP; representatives of the CRIB; and the Town Council of Gatooma, Friday 20 July 1951.

44. For workers in the mining industry, see C. van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900–1923* (Pluto Press, London, 1980). The agricultural and plantation sector is well dealt with by D.G. Clarke, *Agricultural and Plantation Workers in Rhodesia* (Mambo Press, Gwelo, 1977).

45. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/3a, Secretary, Rusape Town Management Board to Secretary, CRIB, 9 August 1951.

46. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/3a, Secretary, Rusape Town Management Board to Secretary, CRIB, 9 August 1951.

were grown in 1949/50 and 1950/51 respectively.<sup>47</sup> The secretary added that the production of food was currently a “priority in these areas, [but] as the urgency for food production decreases people tend to grow cash crops.”<sup>48</sup> As shown later in this article, the above figures of peasant cotton production in the Rusape area are nowhere close to those of the peasants in the Hartley district for the same period. In terms of levels of cotton production, therefore, Hartley district was still the most suitable location for the spinning mills.

For the European staff, Rusape was said to have “the finest climate in the Colony, situated ... within easy reach of Umtali and Inyanga”. The secretary boasted of the available services and facilities such as nursery and boarding schools, a child care centre and the Makoni Country Club which provided good sporting facilities. Fishing could be done at Inyanga, various private dams as well as the Lesapi River. In addition, “new stands have recently been opened up, about half of which have been sold or leased; industrial stands are available with rail access”.<sup>49</sup> The list of attractions also included the likelihood of the establishment of one of the largest departmental stores in the Colony and “this will solve shopping problems for the housewife, an important factor”.<sup>50</sup> With regards to the availability of African housing, the Rusape Board boasted of “a large location with ample room for extension”, and went on to explain that not only was “an economical type of housing ... being constructed in order to keep rents down to the lowest figure”, but a beer hall and a bioscope were other leisure-time attractions in the location.<sup>51</sup> The Rusape Board claimed that they had the support of the Inyanga Farmers’ Association, which at one of its meetings passed the resolution that: “This Association asks that if a new cotton ginnery and mill be built, it be situated at Rusape, owing to the interest being taken in cotton growing in the Eastern Districts”.<sup>52</sup> A copy of this letter was sent to the Rusape Tobacco Marketing Board, presumably to lobby for additional support to this cause.

Marandellas also made a bid as the most suitable location for the cotton industry in general and the spinning mill in particular. The town authorities issued a publicity brochure under the title, “Marandellas, the Obvious Choice for the Textile Industry”, in which it claimed that the town had also been chosen “as the site for an overseas firm of cotton weaving and processing ... cotton ... ginning, spinning and weaving; cotton seed and oil extraction”.<sup>53</sup> This report claiming that Marandellas was the future cotton textile centre brought home to the Gatooma Municipality Action Sub-Committee the urgency of holding discussions with the government. The sub-committee was formed specifically “to keep a watching brief

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47. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/3a, Secretary, Rusape Town Management Board to Secretary, CRIB, 9 August 1951. See also T.O. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study* (James Currey, London, 1985).

48. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/3a, Secretary, Rusape Town Management Board to Secretary, CRIB, 9 August 1951.

49. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/3a, Secretary, Rusape Town Management Board to Secretary, CRIB, 9 August 1951.

50. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/3a, Secretary, Rusape Town Management Board to Secretary, CRIB, 9 August 1951. This resonates with the idea of housewives as consumers that U. Kufakuninani explores. See his recent paper, “Housewifery in Rhodesia”, presented to the Economic History Department seminar series, 10 May 2013, pp 15–16.

51. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/3a, Secretary, Rusape Town Management Board to Secretary, CRIB, 9 August 1951.

52. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/2, A. Young, Hon. Secretary of Inyanga Farmers’ Association to Minister of Trade and Industrial Development, 31 July 1951.

53. “Council Deputation to PM to Seek Government Assurance on Gatooma’s Industrial Future”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 17 December 1953.

on Gatooma's industrial development and encourage new industry to the town". It was made up of the mayor and his deputy, the town clerk, and one of the councillors, J.W.A. Wixley.<sup>54</sup> The sub-committee sought assurance from the government that "Gatooma is not forgotten as a future industrial centre – particularly as a cotton industrial centre".<sup>55</sup> It presented its case thus: The "council had been committed to considerable financial expenses" to improving the water supply situation, on new electricity schemes and upgrading the sewage system. It had also taken steps to "attract new industries ... to help pay for these services". The sub-committee stressed that it was time the government helped to "put Gatooma on the map".<sup>56</sup> The sub-committee subsequently met the prime minister, Garfield Todd, in late 1953 and "received a sympathetic hearing" from him on the matter.<sup>57</sup>

### Why CRIB wanted to move out of municipal jurisdiction

It is unclear why the Board desired to move out of the jurisdiction of the Gatooma Municipality. A casual reading of the documents seems to suggest that they were disgruntled by the high water and electricity charges on their properties and also by the constant fear of labour unrest. But there is no evidence to suggest that water and electricity charges in Gatooma were any worse than in other municipalities and that Gatooma was more vulnerable to labour unrest. It appears that the Board used these reasons to mask other underlying problems with the municipality. What is clear though is that the relationship with the municipality had become frosty to the extent that the Board simply wanted to find another location especially for the third mill. They used the recommendation of 1951 for a third mill as an excuse to move away from Gatooma.

In January 1952, Sommerville complained about the increased electricity charges payable to the municipality:

We are disappointed to note your increased charge of .50d per unit, plus the existing K.V.A. charge of 7/6d. Considering the substantial increase in the Municipality's consumption (largely due to the Board's increased consumption), which has had the effect of reducing the E.S.C.'s charge to the Municipality, it was expected that the old charge of .45d per unit would have been reduced.

It is observed from the Municipality's Annual Accounts for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1950 ... that a profit of roughly £4,000 was earned on the sale of electricity. Such a figure of profit does not indicate any serious financial need to raise the charge, but if such a course has been necessary, surely this increased charge should have been passed on to other consumers ... We understand that other consumers have not been charged extra and we should be interested to know if this is correct and if so, why. We ask the Council to reconsider the increased charge you have made.<sup>58</sup>

Again in October 1952, Sommerville warned the Council of the Board's desire to move the CRS and the absorbent cotton wool factory away from "its current location." This was triggered by the municipality's intention to increase water and electricity tariffs for the Board's properties following proposed increased

54. "Council Deputation to PM...", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 24 December 1953.

55. "Council Deputation to PM ...", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 17 December 1953.

56. "Council Deputation to PM ...", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 17 December 1953.

57. "Council Deputation to PM...", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 24 December 1953.

58. NAZ, F296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies, CRIB Minutes of meetings: Part II from 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952, D. Sommerville, CRIB Cost Accountant, to Town Clerk, Gatooma Municipality, re Electricity tariff to spinning mills, 19 January 1952.

capital expenditure by the municipality.<sup>59</sup> The new electricity tariffs resulted in increases in charges varying from about 10 percent for domestic, business and industrial use.<sup>60</sup> The Board also disliked the inconvenience caused by council directives on the use of electricity. In October 1952, the town electrical engineer emphasised the necessity of companies to utilise the night shifts between 7 pm and 7am, when electricity consumption was at its lowest.<sup>61</sup> The CRIB was working on a one-day shift at the time and the council complained that the Board's power use was costing several hundred pounds; it requested the Board to operate on night shifts when there was less call for electricity use.<sup>62</sup>

The Board was also irritated by the move on the part of the Gatooma Town Council to extend its boundaries to include "the residential and industrial portions of the Cotton Research Station ...The area to be included is of 32 acres and contains 7 residential houses, the Research Station offices and laboratories and the Cotton Wool Factory."<sup>63</sup> Council considered it necessary to include this area within its boundary from a town planning point of view. One reason was that the CRS had been supplied with municipal electric power and water since 1949.<sup>64</sup> What hurt the Board most was that they "knew nothing of the Municipality's move until it appeared in the Government Gazette".<sup>65</sup> The Board disliked the inclusion within the municipal boundary. Cameron outlined the difficulties of not only being within a municipality but also of being in the Gatooma district. He wanted the Board to be "master in its own house and run its own township away from municipal control [because] within a municipality this is difficult".<sup>66</sup> It felt that by moving "to fresh ground", it would be able to "plan the mill township properly and not be forced into a 'bit-by-bit' growth as in Gatooma".<sup>67</sup>

The Board also claimed that its desire to move was influenced by the fact that if expansion of the mills took place in Gatooma, this would be accompanied by an increase in the number of African workers, which they deemed unhealthy from a labour relations point of view. They considered it better to "scatter employees" by

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59. "Cotton Research Station and Cotton Wool Factory may Move: Warning by the General Manager to the Municipality", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 9 July 1953.
  60. "Electricity Tariff", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 5 November 1953; "New Municipal Estimates of Income and Expenditure: Electricity Charges Increased, Assessment Rate and Water Charges Unchanged, but Sanitation and Vehicle License Fees Up", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 29 October 1953.
  61. At the end of June 1952, it was found necessary to stop the 2nd and 3rd shifts in the No. 1 Mill and to work only one shift. Because of a severe recession in the cotton industry, demand had fallen to a level which justified the working of only one shift. See NAZ: SRG3, Southern Rhodesia: Reports of Statutory Boards, Cotton Research and Industry Board, 1936/37-1952/53, CRIB 17th Annual Report for Year Ending 31 March 1953.
  62. "Electricity Tariff", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 2 October 1952.
  63. "Town Boundaries Increased", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 5 November 1953. See also "Municipality Seeks to Include Research Station within Boundary", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 9 April 1953.
  64. "Municipality Seeks to Include Research Station within Boundary", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 9 April 1953.
  65. "Municipality Seeks to include Research Station within Boundary", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 9 April 1953.
  66. "Fresh Emphasis on Gatooma as Third Cotton Mill Site: Social Life of European and African Employees an Important Factor", *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 6 September 1952.
  67. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB: No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting at Gatooma between the Hon. Minister for Trade and Industrial Development (A.E. Winterton, M.P), Geo Munro (M.P.) and representatives of the CRIB and the Town Council of Gatooma, 20th July 1951.

establishing additional mills out of Gatooma “in the event of trouble with the natives”. “Many people”, Cameron remarked, “think Gatooma is too hot” and this may prove a difficulty in recruiting labour, especially European labour.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the general strike of 1948, that began in Bulawayo and spread to Gwelo and Salisbury, was still fresh in their minds.<sup>69</sup> The strike had demonstrated the power of African labour for it resulted in the abolition of the 2s.6d. rent that some married workers paid for special quarters.<sup>70</sup> It is however, unclear whether or not African workers in Gatooma had been involved in industrial action prior to the 1948 general strike. Neither is it clear how the scourge of industrial action was to be avoided merely by moving out of Gatooma, without necessarily addressing the working conditions of the workers, which were the main cause of industrial action. The 1948 strikes spread through the major urban areas of the country and had neither begun nor ended in Gatooma but it is recorded that the largest mine strike broke out at the Cam and Motor Mine near Gatooma on 20 April. It is likely that the Board used the fear of industrial unrest as an excuse to move out of Gatooma.

Sommerville’s warning of the Board’s desire to move outside the municipal boundaries attracted a barrage of criticism from members of the Gatooma Town Council. According to S.E. Poole:

The CRIB ... had been our main stand-by for quite a long time and . . . [we have] given up many things for the sake of keeping the Board here and of assisting them; and now all that had been given up and wiped out when it appeared we were no longer of assistance.<sup>71</sup>

Mayor Hudson noted that “Council was in bad water as far as the CRIB was concerned. ...It seemed there was something wrong with the Municipality at every turn”.<sup>72</sup> He thought that the Board was ungrateful because,

the Municipality had been subsidising the CRIB for some considerable time, spending some one quarter of a million pounds on the CRIB housing, water, electricity, etc. ... Council had also had to urgently go ahead with sewerage for their sake.<sup>73</sup>

He felt that the Board had adopted “a very high handed attitude”, and that for the previous two years the higher authorities of the Board were virtually unapproachable and everything the Council did was viewed with suspicion.<sup>74</sup> Another of the Gatooma councillors, R. Sternberg added his voice:

As soon as they [CRIB] were set up they forgot their origins and thought they themselves had done it. They got high-handed and turned against those who had set

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68. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB: No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of meeting at Gatooma, 20th July 1951.

69. For more details on the General Strike of 1948, see among others, I. Phimister and B. Raftopoulos, “*Kana sora ratswa ngaritsve*: African Nationalists and Black Workers, the 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 13, 3, August 2000; J. Lunn, “The Meaning of the 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe”, in B. Raftopoulos and T. Yoshikuni (eds), *Sites of Struggle: Essays in Urban History* (Weaver Press, Harare, 1999), pp 163–182; Raftopoulos and Phimister (eds), *Keep on Knocking*, p 67.

70. Raftopoulos and Yoshikuni (eds), *Sites of Struggle*, p 168.

71. “Council Debate on Cotton Research Station Move”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 16 July 1953.

72. “Council Debate ...”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 16 July 1953.

73. “Council Debate ...”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 16 July 1953.

74. “Council Debate ...”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 16 July 1953.

them up. ... These ... boards were self sufficient except for money, acted on their own and were not responsible to the Government.<sup>75</sup>

Council felt betrayed by the CRIB as they believed that it had done everything possible and was still prepared to do so, yet it was considered a nuisance by the Board.<sup>76</sup> At a special meeting of the Gatooma Town Council held on 16 July 1951, attended by Winterton, the MP of Gatooma and representatives of the municipality and the Board, discussion centred on whether or not to expand existing spinning facilities at Gatooma.<sup>77</sup> Alderman C.C. Elliott questioned why the CRIB had surveyed Melfort before considering extending their organisation in Gatooma. Council members went on to promise attractive conditions for the Board if it remained in Gatooma.<sup>78</sup> Councillor J. Burke opined that Council “should make sacrifices to retain this industry in Gatooma”.<sup>79</sup> And Wixley suggested that the municipality was prepared to release any land under its control to the Board for its use and that European housing (but not African), could be built on this land which was outside the municipal boundary, and was therefore subject to municipal rates.<sup>80</sup> The municipality was also prepared to supply water and electricity at normal town rates. “Surely”, said Wixley, “such an offer cannot be bettered anywhere”. He hoped that these incentives would “have a bearing on what appears to be the growing opinion of the Board that the third mill should be set up outside the Municipal area and will influence the Board in its decision”.<sup>81</sup>

Wixley did not think the CRIB “realised how lucky they were [sic, it was] to have such a reasonable supply of labour” and that “setting up a factory ‘in [sic] the blue’ raises many problems. Apart from the reluctance of Europeans to live away from town, it will not be easy to attract native labour”.<sup>82</sup> He suggested that the Chamber of Commerce, which represented the largest body of taxpayers, would not support the establishment of a third mill anywhere but in Gatooma.<sup>83</sup> His argument was that since 20 percent of European cotton acreage was in the Gatooma-Hartley district and that 50 percent of African grown cotton came from the Mhondoro Reserve in the Hartley district, it made economic sense to have the spinning mills in Gatooma. The period 1948/49 marked the beginning of sustained

75. “Council Debate ...”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 16 July 1953.

76. “Council Debate ...”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 16 July 1953.

77. The Meeting was also widely reported in the *Rhodesian Herald*, 21 July 1951.

78. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13; Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill: Minutes of the Proceedings of a Meeting at Gatooma between Minister for Trade and Industrial Development (A.E. Winterton), George Munro (MP), Representatives of the CRIB and the Town Council of Gatooma, 20 July 1951.

79. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council of Gatooma, in the Council Chamber, 16 July 1951.

80. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council of Gatooma in the Council Chamber, 16 July 1951.

81. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB: No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Meeting at Gatooma between Minister for Trade and Industrial Development (A.E. Winterton), George Munro (MP), Representatives of the CRIB and the Town Council of Gatooma, 20 July 1951.

82. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill: Minutes of the Proceedings of a Meeting at Gatooma between Minister for Trade and Industrial Development (A.E. Winterton), George Munro (MP), Representatives of the CRIB and the Town Council of Gatooma, 20 July 1951.

83. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill: Minutes of the Proceedings of a Meeting at Gatooma between Minister for Trade and Industrial Development, George Munro, and Representatives of the CRIB and the Town Council of Gatooma, 20 July 1951.

cotton production, especially in the Mhondoro Reserve and the Msengezi Purchase Area. The acreage planted to cotton that season was more than that of the previous year, due chiefly to a large number of new growers taking up cotton, coupled with the relatively high prices fixed by the government in advance, which made cotton attractive. The yield was in fact the highest recorded since 1926.<sup>84</sup>

From the mid-1930s, cotton was perhaps the only crop in suitable areas of the country that Africans produced at the behest of the state. The CRIB used various strategies to stimulate cotton production in African reserves. They worked hand-in-hand with members of the departments of Native Education and Native Affairs to distribute free seeds and pamphlets written in indigenous languages on aspects of cotton growing and held informative meetings prior to harvesting time. The positive response to cotton growing especially in the Hartley district was due partly to these propaganda campaigns as well as the attractive prices paid. F.M. Micklesfield, the land development officer and his wife, and P.W.L. Swift, the NC for Hartley district popularised cotton in Mhondoro. The campaign involved buying cotton for cash on the spot. These officials hoped that the act of paying cash on the spot and the impression that this had on the onlookers would generate interest in growing cotton.<sup>85</sup> This strategy stimulated interest in cotton and led to an increase in the acreage planted in the areas where the campaign was held; the initiative had also been run for a number of years. The Board also provided one free bag of cotton seed for new growers. This modest inducement stimulated an increase in the acreage planted during the 1949/50 season.<sup>86</sup> In each season from 1948 to 1953, Hartley district produced more than 80 percent of the total peasant crop.<sup>87</sup> Paul Mosley observed that “Hartley District had become emphatically the most prosperous in the early 1950s, having by far the greatest African cotton acreage”.<sup>88</sup> *The African Market* described the Mhondoro Reserve in 1950 as “one of the richest cotton-producing areas in Southern Rhodesia”.<sup>89</sup> Mhondoro produced the highest amount of seed cotton for three consecutive years, with 1 630 099 lbs., 737,074 lbs. and 503 090 lbs. for the 1951, 1952 and 1953 season respectively.<sup>90</sup>

Wixley was supported by George Munro, MP of Gatooma-Hartley district, who pointed out the difficulties and expenses of starting an isolated township and also the challenge of recruiting and retaining European staff where entertainment facilities were poor.<sup>91</sup> For Winterton, “as far as the industry was concerned, that would always remain in Gatooma ...”. As far as the minister was concerned, “the economical side would have to be taken into account when a final decision is made” and “the Board has the right to say where it would like the third mill to be

84. NAZ: SRG3, Southern Rhodesia, Reports of Statutory Boards, Cotton Research and Industry Board, 1936/37 to 1952/53, CRIB 15th Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1951.

85. NAZ: S160/C/100/1/50-CM/100/50, Cotton Marketing, Minutes of meeting held to discuss Native Cotton Marketing Organisation, 21 June 1948.

86. NAZ: S296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, Minutes of Meetings Part II from 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952.

87. Nyambara, “Colonial Policy and Peasant Cotton Agriculture”, pp 106–107.

88. Mosely, *The Settler Economies*, p 108.

89. *The African Market*, 108, 1, January 1950, p 43.

90. NAZ: SRG3, Southern Rhodesia, Reports of Statutory Boards, Cotton Research and Industry Board, 1936/37 to 1952/53.

91. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Meeting at Gatooma between Minister for Trade and Industrial Development, George Munro, representatives of the CRIB and the Town Council, 20 July 1951.

but the Government provides the money and it has the final say”.<sup>92</sup> He also reminded the Board that as the government was the representative of the people, [theoretically] the taxpayer had the final say before any decision was made.

The municipality aimed to increase the population of the town to 5 000 in the following five years. Maintaining the cotton industry in Gatooma was one way to achieve that objective.<sup>93</sup> The growth of the European population from 871 in 1946 to 1 600 in the 1951 census was seen as a result of there being an established industry in the town. The biggest increases were registered in the building, light engineering and textile trades. The increase in the number of employed Africans from 2 380 to 4 500 in the same period, had also been the result of the expansion in these trades. The CRIB in particular, by direct employment and by encouragement of textile companies to the town, was responsible for an increase in African employment of over 1 200.<sup>94</sup> It was no wonder that the municipality was prepared to make a number of concessions to the Board “in order to encourage ... [it] to accept Gatooma as the appropriate site”.<sup>95</sup> Its main argument was that to place a branch of the cotton industry away from Gatooma, the government would have to supply most of the services and amenities for employees which they considered an unnecessary burden to the colony.<sup>96</sup> On the contrary, if the mill was sited in Gatooma, many of these services and amenities would be available. The council then made the following resolution: “That the Government be requested to give firm undertaking that in the interests of economy, organisation and the industry generally the projected cotton spinning mills be erected in Gatooma as an extension of the existing mills”.<sup>97</sup>

### Position of interest groups on the third Mill

Interest groups keen to see Gatooma develop as an industrial centre, also opposed building the mill outside Gatooma. The most active was the Gatooma-Hartley Regional Development and Publicity Association formed in 1949, whose activities embraced the Hartley magisterial district. Its objectives were:

To encourage and promote the progress and development of this area ... to develop ... primary and secondary industries in the area, with the object of attracting an influx of fresh capital and revenue, which will in turn contribute to further development ... Ultimately [it aimed] to contribute to the establishment of the Gatooma-Hartley region as the ... industrial hub of Southern Rhodesia.<sup>98</sup>

92. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Meeting at Gatooma, between Minister for Trade and Industrial Development, George Munro, Representatives of the CRIB and the Town Council, 20 July 1951.
93. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Meeting at Gatooma, between Minister for Trade and Industrial Development, George Munro, Representatives of the CRIB and the Town Council, 20 July 1951.
94. “Population Increase of Gatooma”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 28 June 1951.
95. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.
96. These amenities included “ample accommodation, 3 hospitals ... and 2 clinics, subsidised milk for mothers and children, subsidised cinema, recreation, dance hall and band, free transport, sports equipment, schools and welfare work”. See NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.
97. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.
98. NAZ: S3268/88(e), Gatooma-Hartley Publicity Association, Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the Hartley-Gatooma Regional Development and Publicity Association,



One of its immediate tasks after its formation was to do “everything possible to keep future cotton spinning development within the Gatooma-Hartley District”.<sup>99</sup> A meeting of the association held on 11 June 1951 issued the following statement:

This Association views with concern the statement in Hansard that any new Cotton Spinning Mill to be erected will not be sited in Hartley or Gatooma ... it would appreciate receiving the reasons for this decision as Gatooma is so eminently suited for the expansion of the cotton industry.<sup>100</sup>

Addressing the annual general meeting of the association in July 1951, its chairman, Wixley, pointed out that one of their major successes during the year was the debate on where the new the mill should be developed and that due to all the “publicity and sound argument the decision of the CRIB concerning the selection of a site for the third spinning mill was in all probability delayed.”<sup>101</sup>

When the Hartley Association broke away from the Gatooma-Hartley Association in early 1951, the Hartley and Gatooma Associations operated as separate entities but continued to co-operate closely on all matters of mutual concern. They joined the QueQue Association to form the Central Group. Their delegates met in Hartley to discuss resolutions for presentation to the annual Congress of the Federation of Regional Development Associations of Southern Rhodesia (later the Federation).<sup>102</sup> This was the national umbrella of member associations whose function was “to coordinate the activities of the various Member Associations and to investigate and report on any project put forward by any Member Association.”<sup>103</sup> All regional development and publicity associations were affiliated to this federation. The debate on the location of the third mill was one of the items presented at the congress.<sup>104</sup> Gatooma delegates presented an important resolution requesting government that in the interest of economy and organisation in the industry generally, the third cotton spinning mill be erected as an extension of the existing mills in the town. QueQue and Hartley delegates supported the resolution without reservation.<sup>105</sup>

Gatooma delegates took this resolution to the second Annual Congress of the Federation held in Gatooma on 15 September 1951, where N.F. Grant, the vice chairman of the Gatooma Association, presented it. Grant drew attention to the figure of £1 million which was the estimate of what the cost to the country would be in the event of the mill being sited elsewhere (other than Gatooma) and

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Gatooma, 23 November 1949. See also “Calling Gatooma: Do you want Gatooma to Go Ahead? Are you Satisfied with the Speed of Present Progress? This is YOUR Town, What are YOUR Ideas?”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 21 June 1951.

99. “Calling Gatooma: Do you want Gatooma to Go Ahead?”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 21 June 1951.
100. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Sangster’s Honorary Secretaries, Gatooma-Hartley Regional Development and Publicity Association to Minister of Trade and Commerce, Salisbury, 19 June 1951.
101. “Publicity Association, Chairman’s Address”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 31 July 1952.
102. “Central Group Unity on Five River Survey: Gatooma, QueQue and Hartley Delegates meet at Hartley”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 9 August 1951.
103. NAZ: Report of the Federation of Regional Development Associations of Southern Rhodesia, Annual Congress, Minutes, 1949–1955. Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Congress held at Specks Hotel, Gatooma, 15 September 1951, p 16.
104. “Cotton Mill on Congress Agenda”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 6 September 1951.
105. “Central Group Unity on Five River Survey: Gatooma, QueQue and Hartley Delegates meet at Hartley”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 9 August 1951.

argued that “there is sufficient land in Gatooma to cope with any contemplated expansion, and more land is still available”. Wixley, the chairman of the Gatooma Association, seconded the motion and said that they had demonstrated to the public and particularly the taxpayers that locating the third mill elsewhere would be an uneconomical proposition.<sup>106</sup> What his Board proposed was an addition to the present mill rather than constructing a new mill. He went on to say that “if anybody else can produce a better case than Gatooma, we will support them.”

The representative of Marandellas present at the Congress, J.A. Moss, after hearing Gatooma’s view, intimated that he felt Gatooma had the best claim and he would therefore, not put forward any proposal to have the mill at Marandellas.<sup>107</sup> Following the presentation of the Gatooma case, D. Goldberg, the Congress president, with the consent of the proposer and seconder of the Gatooma resolution, and with the consent of the representative for Marandellas, substituted the following resolution: “Before considering the establishment of additional mills, the Government is urged to give careful consideration to expanding the present mills in the interests of economy, efficiency and organisation of the industry generally.”<sup>108</sup> The amended resolution was put to the meeting and was carried unanimously.

### **Council response to the Board’s defiance**

Despite the concessions promised by the Council to entice the Board to stay in Gatooma, and despite the pressure from various interest groups mentioned above, the Board insisted on finding an alternative site away from Gatooma, citing the following reasons:

- Decentralisation of the industry
- Difficulty of transport, in particular the Salisbury Railway bottleneck
- Removing the industry in future from any form of control by a municipality, by locating it outside the area of a local authority
- Unsuitability of the Gatooma climate.<sup>109</sup>

Council dismissed each of the above reasons. On the first, Council felt that the Board had misconstrued the government policy of decentralisation because decentralisation meant the dispersal of industries away from the larger towns. This had been achieved by the establishment of various industries at most of the smaller towns.<sup>110</sup> To Council, “to split one particular industry placing extensions in other areas in the colony under the cloak of decentralisation is merely

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106. NAZ: Report of the Federation of Regional Development Associations of Southern Rhodesia, Annual Congress, Minutes, 1949–1955. Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Congress, Gatooma, 15 September 1951, p 16.

107. NAZ: Report of the Federation of Regional Development Associations of Southern Rhodesia, Annual Congress, Minutes, 1949–1955. Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Congress, Gatooma, 15th September 1951, p 16.

108. NAZ: Report of the Federation of Regional Development Associations of Southern Rhodesia, Annual Congress, Minutes, 1949–1955. Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Congress, Gatooma, 15 September 1951, p 16.

109. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.

110. For example, a roasting plant in Bulawayo; steelworks in QueQue; and the cotton industry in Gatooma.

subterfuge.”<sup>111</sup> Col. T. Nangle, commenting on the Board’s argument of decentralisation, said that decentralisation was generally understood to mean that steel should be established in one district, cotton in another and so on. He was of the opinion that to divide up a single industry was absurd. Munro thought that it was ridiculous to talk of decentralisation with reference to a relatively small population of Gatooma – a mere 1 600.<sup>112</sup>

With reference to the second reason, Council argued that the establishment of a third mill on the east side of Salisbury in Rusape or Melfort would only increase the traffic in Salisbury and therefore overcrowding on the railway line sidings. They pointed out that they had already planned to build extensions to the Gatooma railway facility that would handle a much greater volume of traffic.<sup>113</sup> As for the third reason, that it was in the best interest of the industry if the mills were located outside the jurisdiction of any local authority, the Council dismissed this as “a fallacious contention” because “wherever the new mill is sited the Board would be under some form of control”.<sup>114</sup> Council were of the view that being under the control of a local authority was far less onerous in all regards than being under the control of the Town and Country Planning Act especially in the initial stages of establishment.<sup>115</sup> A local authority, they contended, had readily available amenities and services whereas the Board would have to provide these to the satisfaction of the Town and Country Planning Act before they could start any development of a new site.<sup>116</sup>

The Gatooma Town Council warned the Board that it would encounter serious labour difficulties if they established the proposed mill away from a township and that it would take them many years to reproduce the conditions that prevailed in Gatooma – and at a far greater cost. “Native labour”, Council contended, would be more readily available in urban areas than in the rural areas because “there is a definite and proven drift to the towns, more especially to those towns which have given practical evidence of providing housing, social amenities and welfare that is so much appreciated by the Africans”. It emphasised “married native labour” as a stabilising factor and pointed to a 25 percent increase in indigenous labour in the urban areas over the previous year which they attributed to the provision of housing and other facilities.<sup>117</sup> In an attempt to entice the Board to stay in Gatooma, the Council emphasised its African housing policy to a great extent, boasting of having set aside a portion of Rimuka African Township for the sole use of the Board. They also bragged about having accommodated 136 married Africans in their employ who lived in Ngesi and Rimuka townships. They described Rimuka in particular, as an established township complete with all the necessary educational, religious and welfare amenities for African employees and

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111. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.
  112. “Central Group Unity on Five River Survey: Gatooma, QueQue and Hartley Delegates meet at Hartley”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 9 August 1951.
  113. “Fresh Emphasis on Gatooma as Third Cotton Mill Site: Social Life of European and African Employees an Important Factor”, *Gatooma Mail and Mining Gazette*, 6 September 1952.
  114. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.
  115. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.
  116. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.
  117. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50, Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Town Council, 16 July 1951.

further claimed that the “amenities [had] largely contribute[d] to the increase of 83 percent in Gatooma’s African labour force over the past twelve months”.<sup>118</sup>

The employment and provision of housing to married workers was a colonial strategy to stabilise labour.<sup>119</sup> Yet this does not seem to have improved the labour situation in the spinning mills at Gatooma. The Board’s annual reports since 1948 are replete with complaints about the transitory nature of African labour.<sup>120</sup> In 1950, the CRIB noted that the problem of stabilisation of labour had not really improved since 1948, pointing out that, “the total number of natives to leave our employment was 501, the lowest number in any one month being 10, and the highest 99.” The solution was to “make allowances for ... continual training of new labour” as well as “improving living and working conditions for native personnel and the question of mechanisation throughout the organisation to economise labour”.<sup>121</sup> In their 1952 report, they said that although African labour was more easily obtained and attributed this to the “improved accommodation and amenities in the native location ... it was restless as ever”, and the mill manager still faced the same old problem “of training labour carefully in the various spinning processes only to find that they leave after a few months for no apparent reason”. Labour turnover continued to be on a high level at 72 percent.<sup>122</sup> It is reasonable to speculate that this high labour turnover was perhaps connected to the labour unrest discussed earlier.

Cameron also confirmed the problem of labour stabilisation in the spinning mills when asked whether the Board had any difficulty with the supply of African labour:

Yes, our difficulty has been in keeping them ... one of the big difficulties is that a boy will go to the mill ... and they are perfectly happy as far as we can see. They can’t tell you there is anything wrong with the conditions ... Six months to a year, two years or three years, is about the longest and that means you always have to have others in training.<sup>123</sup>

With reference to European staff, Council pointed out that since the majority of the mill staff had lived most of their lives in towns and cities, they and their

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- 118. NAZ: F296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, Minutes of Meetings, Part II: From 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952; Municipality of Gatooma, Memorandum on African Housing at Gatooma (undated).
  - 119. See for instance, Van Onselen, *Chibaro*; J. Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners’ Struggles 1870–1980* (Zed Books, London, 1984), pp 23–24; J. Parpart, *Labour and Capital on the African Copperbelt* (Tempe University Press, Philadelphia, 1983); C. Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa: Industrial Strategies and the Evolution of a Black Proletariat on the Copperbelt, 1911–1941* (Africana Press, New York, 1979). For a wider discussion on the arguments for and against labour stabilisation in French and British colonies, see F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1986). Some employers would go an extra mile to introduce long service awards and offering above average wages to foster a commitment to work.
  - 120. See for instance, NAZ: S482/166/1/1/48, CRIB Reports 1948/1949, CRIB Twelfth Annual Report for the period ending 31 March 1948.
  - 121. NAZ: S296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, Minutes of Meetings Part II from 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952, CRIB 14th Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1950.
  - 122. NAZ: SRG 3, Southern Rhodesia, Reports of Statutory Boards, Cotton Research and Industry Board: 1936/37–1952/53, CRIB 16th Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1952.
  - 123. NAZ: F114/413, Cotton Industry Working Party, Interview with Major Cameron, the chairman of CRIB, conducted by chairman of CIWP, C.H. Thompson, 4 September 1950.

families were unlikely to be happy if settled in areas outside the urban areas where amenities were non-existent. Thus, “educational, religious and social amenities are essential factors and will not be provided at such a place as Melfort whereas they already exist here”.<sup>124</sup> Council easily dismissed the fourth reason about the unsuitability of the Gatooma climate, on the grounds that “there has been no change in the climate since the establishment of the original mill, not even since the most recent extension to the mill not yet complete”.<sup>125</sup>

After considering all the deliberations on the subject, Council passed a resolution that “the Government be requested to give a firm undertaking that the interests of the economy, organisation and the industry generally the projected cotton spinning mills be erected in Gatooma as an extension of the existing mill”.<sup>126</sup> By the end of 1953, however, the third mill had still not been constructed, neither had its location been determined. The Board continued to insist on a location outside the jurisdiction of the Gatooma Municipality whereas the Council remained adamant that the spinning mill should be located where the other two already existed, largely for the reason of developing the industries in town and avoiding the expenses associated with a completely new location.

## Conclusion

In the aftermath of WW II, the number of industrial concerns established in Southern Rhodesia had increased exponentially, as had and the demand for the Board’s yarn, which was produced by two spinning mills situated in Gatooma. The third mill, whose construction had been sanctioned by the government after the establishment of the second mill in 1951, became an urgent matter to cater for increased demand. The Customs Agreement with South Africa and the impending Federation of the central African territories increased the tempo on discussions on the need to increase spinning capacity beyond the two existing mills.

The need for the third mill did not generate as much controversy and debate among stakeholders as did its location. This article argues that for reasons which are unclear, the Board simply wanted to operate outside the jurisdiction of the Gatooma municipality. The Board’s reasons, for instance, exorbitant water and electricity rates on the Board’s properties; and the likelihood of labour unrest, are unconvincing because the alternative locations did not have the advantages of infrastructure for the cotton industry that were already in existence at Gatooma. There is no evidence to suggest that alternative sites offered better water and electricity rates than Gatooma. Neither is there evidence that points to the fact that these locations were less susceptible to labour unrest than Gatooma. In the absence of tangible evidence, we may never really know the reason for the Board’s frustration and deep-seated dislike for the Gatooma Town Council.

What is clear however, is that the municipality fought tooth and nail – with the unanimous support of interest groups, to retain the third spinning mill in Gatooma. By the end of 1953, the struggle between the CRIB and the municipality over the location of the third mill was still very much alive with no apparent solution

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124. NAZ: F296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies, CRIB Minutes of Meetings, Part II: From 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952, Municipality of Gatooma, Memorandum re Third Cotton Mill, etc.
  125. NAZ: F296/23/2/4/49, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, Minutes of Meetings Part II: 1 November 1950 to 19 March 1952, Establishment of No.3 Spinning Mill.
  126. NAZ: F295/23/2/19/50/13a, Statutory Bodies, CRIB, No. 3 Spinning Mill.

in sight. Frustrated by the obstinacy of the municipality, the Board took advantage of the Federation's spirit of regional integration to locate additional spinning mills in Nyasaland, where local peasants cultivated large amounts of cotton. It engaged Messrs Ralston and Lisborg Consultancy Engineers to investigate and examine alternative sites for a spinning mill and an absorbent cotton wool factory in Nyasaland.<sup>127</sup> This part of the story lies outside the scope of this particular article and will be pursued in a separate paper.

### Abstract

The textile industry in Southern Rhodesia witnessed rapid growth during and after the Second World War. The industry was largely dependent on locally grown cotton and the capacity to spin the cotton into yarn. The Cotton Industry and Research Board (CRIB) established to oversee the development of the cotton industry in the colony, constructed the first spinning mill in Gatooma in 1943 with a capacity of 1 000 spindles, which was later increased to 35 000 spindles with the construction of the No. 2 mill in 1951. In the same year the government sanctioned the construction of a third mill, but it was not immediately built. The increase in the number of industrial concerns using the CRIB yarn and the expected expansion of textile demands from a wider federal market from 1953, generated debate in government, business circles and by interested parties on the possible location of the third mill. This article examines these debates that have largely escaped the attention of scholars who have largely focused on other aspects of the textile industry. For reasons that are not very clear, friction between the CRIB and the municipality of Gatooma developed to the extent that the Board expressed the desire to locate the additional mill (and thereby increase the spinning capacity of the industry) in other parts of the country rather than in Gatooma. The municipality was supported by interest groups that were motivated by the desire to retain the spinning industry in Gatooma. The article is not just about the third mill; it also examines how this struggle informs us about other aspects of the political economy of colonial Zimbabwe.

**Key words:** Southern Rhodesia; Zimbabwe; Gatooma; textile industry; cotton industry.

### Opsomming

Die tekstielnywerheid in Suid-Rhodesië het getuig van snelle groei tydens en na die Tweede Wêreldoorlog. Die nywerheid was hoogs afhanklik van plaaslik verbuide katoen en die kapasiteit om die katoen in draad te spin. Die katoennywerheid en Navorsingsraad (Cotton Research and Industry Board – CRIB), wat tot stand gebring is om toesig te hou oor die ontwikkeling van die katoennywerheid in die kolonie, het in 1943 die eerste spin-meule, met 'n kapasiteit van 1 000 spin-spille, opgerig, wat later tot 35 000 spin-spille uitgebrei is met die oprig van meule Nr 2 in 1951. In dieselfde jaar het die regering 'n derde meule goedgekeur, maar dit is nie onmiddellik gebou nie. Die toename in die aantal nywerheidsake wat die CRIB-draad gebruik het en die verwagte toename in tekstielaanvraag uit 'n breër federale mark sedert 1953 het debat in die regering en onder sakegroepe en belanghebbende partye ontlok oor die moontlike ligging van

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127. NAZ: F114/4/413, Cotton Industry Working Party, CRIB, Report on the introduction of a absorbent cotton wool and cotton spinning mill in Nyasaland, Consulting Engineers, Ralston & Lisborg, Salisbury, March 1954.

die derde meule. Hierdie artikel gaan in op hierdie debatte wat die aandag van vakkundiges, wat hoofsaaklik op ander aspekte van die tekstielnywerheid gefokus het, grootliks ontglip het. Weens redes wat nie baie duidelik is nie, het wrywing tussen die CRIB en die munisipaliteit van Gatooma ontwikkel – in dié mate dat die Raad die begeerte uitgespreek het om die bykomstige meule (en daardeur die weefkapasiteit van die nywerheid) in ander dele van die land, eerder as in Gatooma, te vestig. Die munisipaliteit is ondersteun deur belangegroepes wat deur die begeerte gemotiveer is om die spinnywerheid in Gatooma te behou. Die artikel handel nie alleen oor die derde meule nie; dit ondersoek ook hoe hierdie stryd ons inlig oor ander aspekte van die politieke ekonomie van koloniale Zimbabwe.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Suid-Rhodesië; Zimbabwe; Gatooma; tekstielnywerheid; katoennywerheid.