



Mugabe's Dilemma: Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

V. Z. Nyawo Viriri Shava
English Department
National University of Lesotho
P. O. Roma 180
Lesotho
Cell: 00266/58577213
Email: Vznyawo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

After 90 years of white domination, the promise of independence meant freedom at last for Zimbabweans. Many had lost their land in the interim, lost their sons, lost their livelihoods not even to mention the hopelessness embedded in being colonized. Expectations were high as was the pressure to deliver on the young leader Mugabe, in 1980, at independence. This article seeks to trace and explain the trajectory of the land reform processes in Zimbabwe from independence and beyond. The central thrust of the paper being to explain the diverse difficulties Mugabe and the new government faced. To explain the mammoth task the nascent democracy had, the researcher carried out interviews with people who fought in the liberation struggle (Second Chimurenga), ordinary citizens as well as farmers in different parts of Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

The great euphoria began with war veterans coming home from their different war zones. However, the joy was to be cut short when the realities of the Lancaster Constitution started to come into play. Promises of land that had been made and exploited by the leading liberation groups had to be delivered by popular demand.¹ Mugabe's dilemma was inevitable and started with the coming of independence. To begin with, he was expected to fulfill the expectations of those who had helped him ascend to power by rewarding

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

them with parcels of land, in the same manner the members of the Pioneer Column were rewarded by Rhodes earlier on in history. The only difference between the two historical situations was that, for Mugabe, the Lancaster Constitution held the key to his wishes, and for Rhodes, acquiring land from blacks was a colonial act. Land could not be taken by force from the white farmers for fear of violating the Lancaster Agreement, however, land still had to be delivered to the black otherwise the independence was futile. A British diplomat best summed up Mugabe's quagmire in his statement that:

*If he (Mugabe) takes too much away from the whites, they will leave but, if he gives too little to the blacks, they will revolt.*²

The statement was uttered with the realization that failure even to pretend to be giving something to the blacks was detrimental both to the white farmers and the new government. Yet, white farmers were not answerable to blacks for failure to deliver land, but, Mugabe was. Without land the black peasantry would invade white farmland, and the white farmers would seek the government's protection. The government was pressured to make difficult choices between the white farmers, the pillars of the economy or the blacks, the indigenous owners of the land. One should never be made to make such choices. To avoid the foreseeable danger, Mugabe had to be seen to be doing something for both sides, no matter how insignificant.

The Lancaster Agreement had its pros and cons but, as though constraints by the LHA were not enough, the first measure put in place to redress land imbalances had too broad objectives which gave rise to unrealistic expectations. The objectives of the Resettlement Programme set up in 1980 were formulated in a very populist manner that comprised several elements which could not be clearly defined, but which addressed the needs of the majority of the population at that time in a very skilful political way.³ However, raising starved people's expectations, though absolutely necessary then, would come back to haunt the Mugabe regime over the years. The Resettlement Programme was intended to:

- reduce population pressure in the Communal Areas;
- improve the agricultural output base;
- raise the living standards of the largest sector of the population, the smallholders;
- relieve the misery of the victims of the war of independence;
- make the distribution more just;
- expand the infrastructure and the supply of services; and
- safeguard national stability and economic progress.⁴

V. Z. Nyawo Viriri Shava

The objectives of resettlement were a mammoth task and on the whole, unrealizable. Though based on recommendations by a survey team, the Riddell Committee,⁵ the scale had implications on financial and human resources, and acquisition methodologies, legalities and implementation pace. Given experiences from other countries, indicating levels of administrative, organizational and financial inputs needed, a target of 162 000 families settled by 1985 was a dream goal. Yet, promises had to be made to create hope of quick restoration, some sense that nothing had been lost after all and to attempt to catch up on the lost time as it were. Setting up resettlement models was a plus on the part of the government which hoped to beat their deadline. The WSWB principle of acquiring land for resettlement, however, proved the greatest draw back because, without the land, no resettlement was bound to happen. The white farmers who had been eager to leave the country in the first three years of independence suddenly reconsidered. Whether they wanted to leave the country because they could not stand a black government, a free black people or, most importantly, afraid of reprisals in a so called communist country, one can only guess. White farmers felt some semblance of security when Mugabe proved them wrong by encouraging reconciliation or neutrality in working relations.

While white political power ended with the coming of independence, real freedom for the blacks where the economy is concerned was not significantly transferred from white hands to black hands. As long as there were about 4 500 white large commercial farms representing 28 percent of the best soils in areas receiving the most rainfall, the freedom blacks could enjoy was economically valueless. For the Mugabe regime to transform this scenario, a lot of risks had to be taken. To begin with, the productivity and performance of the white farms was already known, to take the farms and give to black farmers would be a leap in the dark. White farmers, at the time, had the experience, knew their markets and had created links with banks for loans and other benefits and had property to place as surety in case things did not go as planned.⁶ Black farmers would need a lot of support by the government to equip them with skills, farm implements and starter packs. For the new government, it made economic sense to let land reform trickle while the government looked around for other methods, avenues and help. To deliver slowly would be to fail the black man and his independence expectations, yet, a careful and pragmatic approach to land reform would benefit both the white farmers and the black peasantry.

At independence Mugabe was inheriting a fortunate legacy of a thriving mining sector that produced ferrochrome, gold, nickel, copper, asbestos and coal.⁷ Also an agricultural sector that was self-sufficient and capable of producing great surpluses of food crops as well as export quality tobacco, beef, cotton and sugar. The country also boasted about raw materials from

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

which it manufactured a wide range of consumer goods. Tourism flourished. It was this near perfect scenario that would make Mugabe's transformative choices difficult. Mugabe's prime task was to uplift the ordinary Zimbabweans who had benefited comparatively next to nothing from the colony's prosperity.⁸ There were, definitely, pressures to redistribute land and to nationalize industries to enable equitable distribution. The pressures were in direct contrast to the prosperity on the ground. Yet, despite Zimbabwe's riches, the war-ravaged rural areas and opportunities for landless peasant farmers had to be improved. Initially, the new government had no choice but to employ incentive based multi-racial developmental strategies capable of attracting sustained UK and American financial support.⁹

As if the challenges of the 1980s were not enough, the 1990s unleashed more complex obstacles. The expiration of financial support from Britain meant that the Zimbabwean government had to source donations to see land reform through. The donors donated with strings attached. In 1990, the World Bank, a key donor, would recommend, for implementation by government, a programme that would introduce goal conflict in land reform. The infamous Bretton Woods-led-five-year Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP as it was commonly known) purported to bring long-term economic gains but, had the down side of drastically increasing poverty levels in both the rural and urban areas.¹⁰ Faced by rising urban unemployment caused by seismic retrenchments of people from their jobs following cut budgets as recommended by the programme, agricultural sources of livelihoods became increasingly vital. The impact of this resonated forcefully in the government's selection criteria for resettlement with emphasis moving from farming experience, competence as opposed to need, destitution and land reform goals.¹¹ Peasants remained without while those who already had farms continued farming as though the land reform programme did not exist. Government goals were headed on a collision course and in the end, ESAP was a hopeless failure that created chaos in the economy of the country and that delayed land reform. That delay came back to haunt the government at the close of the decade.

The World Bank was just one donor. Other donors in the international community had their own demands. Demands in the likes of the way the media should be treated,¹² the need for transparency and worse, others would want to control how Mugabe dealt with other issues outside land reform. For example, his stance on homosexuality would cause intractable problems. Mugabe bashed gayism and lesbianism each time he got an opportunity. He did not believe homosexuality had a place in society and he stops at nothing

V. Z. Nyawo Viriri Shava

to make his perspectives about it known to the world. He laments that humans' capacity to decide on mates has deteriorated and they have become worse than animals. In fact, records show that he punished homosexuals, for example, when he sent the late former Zimbabwean Prime Minister, Canaan Banana, to prison for sodomy and other such allegations surrounding gayism. For such a stand, Mugabe faced protests from advocates for democracy on sexual orientation matters, for instance, when he travelled for meetings to France and South Africa. His opinion was read in a broader context that encompassed even unrelated issues. Indeed, the extraneous demands, over time, shifted the land question to a problem of sovereignty. Such a situation ruined irreparably relations between Zimbabwe and the West, rendered the whole land reform programme meaningless and most dramatically, led to the chaotic and unconstitutional fast track land reform programme.

The 1990 – 2000 Decade: Achievements and Problems

To a large extent, in the early 1990s land reform hit rock bottom, it gradually became increasingly peripheral to the political agenda of the government. Statistically, compared to the Lancaster decade which saw the government acquiring 40 per cent of the target of eight million hectares and settling 52,000 families, in the 1990s fewer than 20,000 families were resettled¹³. By the end of what became known as "phase one" of the land reform and resettlement program in 1997, the government had resettled 71,000 families, against a target of 162,000, on almost 3.5 million hectares of land, with only 19 percent of this land classified as prime land and the rest either marginal or less suitable for grazing or cropping¹⁴.

With the land resettlement grant from Britain almost spent by 1988, the Zimbabwean government in its nascence had no economic muscle to shoulder the financial demands of the WSWB, driver of the whole land reform process. Budgetary allocations showed that land acquisition was not a government priority as other sectors like the education and health departments proved to be bottomless pits where funds were concerned. One major example that land reform did not top the government's agenda, was the clear lack of a follow up after the much needed release from the constraints of the Lancaster Constitution. With the advent of the 1990s, the ZANU-PF government had all the freedom to amend the provisions of the constitution concerning property rights and do what they could not do in the first ten s of independence – give land to blacks freely. While some amendments were made, for example, in 1992, they introduced the Land Acquisition Act which gave the government increased power to acquire land for resettlement, subject to the payment of fair compensation fixed by a committee of six persons using set non-market guidelines, including powers to limit the size of

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

farms and introduce land tax, land acquisition slowed down¹⁵. The enthusiasm to change the lot of the blacks had significantly died down.

The 1992 Land Acquisition Act targeted derelict land, under-utilized land, land belonging to farmers with more than one farm, land owned by absentee landlords and land adjacent to communal areas as relief to their ever increasing populations. Though productive farmers had nothing to fear, landowners did not have the option to query stipulated compensation and Mugabe did not hide his feeling on the issue when he responded to a small group of farmers challenging the legality of the act, in 1992, saying:

We will not brook any decision by any court preventing us from acquiring any land. We will get the land we want from anyone, be they black or white and we will not be restricted to under-utilized land¹⁶.

The Act did not only unlock the jaws of the Lancaster Constitution for the new government, it provided the opportunity to get back at the old political enemies in the likes of Ndabaningi Sithole and James Chikerema whose farms were designated¹⁷. Sithole's Churu Farm on the outskirts of Harare was the most publicized. Sithole, the original leader of ZANU and a longtime political adversary of Mugabe, had bought this farm in 1979 and subdivided it to accommodate 4,000 families from his Ndaу ethnic group and was accused of risking pollution of nearby Lake Chivero, Harare's main water reservoir, not owning the property and settling squatters on a farm causing a health hazard¹⁸. Voices of reason from the court dismissed the accusations as a punitive measure and a political weapon that definitely detracted from the original objective of land reform. The government, nevertheless, went ahead and used the police to evict the Churu Farm settlers with Joseph Msika, a government minister, boasting that they should go join their homeless colleagues on the streets and that they would be dealt with from there.¹⁹

The evictions had turned both ethnic and political. Ndaу-speakers occupying Churu farm were supporters of Ndabaningi Sithole and not necessarily the incumbent government. Naturally, when Sithole invited the Ndaу people to his farm, the move was of defiance to the government's policy about squatters. Sithole was canvassing and campaigning to enlarge his party and mobilize politically. Being a minority in Zimbabwe, Ndaу speakers, in Sithole, had found a leader who would make their voice heard through. Realising the potential political and tribal threat in allowing the Ndaу population to grow in Churu farm, Msika went for their eviction,

V. Z. Nyawo Viriri Shava

violating the Zimbabwe Constitution's prescription that everybody has a right to own property.²⁰

This was not the first time the police had been used by the government to violently refuse those deemed to be its political adversaries. It would not be the last either. The government would create for itself a fortress, a defense war guarded by the police each time a foe stepped out of bounce. Others, the media included, would dub the on going violence by war veterans or the police, the rent a thug policy. The eviction of farm dwellers too formed precedence, throwing antagonists on the streets would become a publicized ZANU PF trait. Besides evictions on farms, much later, Operation Drive Out Dirty (Operation Murambatsvina) of 2005 left millions on the streets.²¹ Cornered because of sundry difficult options, the government grew more and more inward looking, defensive, coercive, intolerant, suspiciously cautious and repressive.

The year 1992 ushered new fears with the government losing sight of the land reform objective, prevaricating, failing to plan for long term, acquiring land and not passing it to the needy, acquiring indiscriminately, that is, including productive farms and manipulating land as a tool for revenge on opponents. The face of land reform changed subsequently and as the 1990s went by, the situation did not improve as, on 20 September 1993, Mugabe was quoted to say:

If white settlers just took the land from us without paying for it, we can in a similar way just take it from them, without paying for it, or entertaining any ideas of legality and constitutionality. Perhaps our weakness has been the fact that we have tried to act morally and legally, when they acted immorally and illegally. How can these countries who have stolen land from the Native Indians, the Aborigines and the Inuits [Eskimos] dare to tell us what to do with out land?²²

In the 1990s, inconsistencies showed even in media trammelling. The radio, the television, journalists, newspapers, music and films were censored, tightly controlled, heavily screened, warned and threatened if they did not tow the line. Newspapers which revealed scandalous resettlement patterns were quickly nipped in the bud. Media trammelling grew to disturbing levels with television channels being reduced from six to one. To the government, one channel would be easier to monitor and control. As a result, the remaining channel would become the government's mouth piece on issues of governance and policy. Journalists who reported issues the new government did not feel comfortable publicized were thrown out of the country. Among journalists whose reporting was detested by the Zimbabwe government were Martin Meredith and Nyarota.²³ Earlier, in the mid-1980s, the government had purchased a South African owned press chain that controlled the

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

country's only daily newspapers, exerted official authority over radio and television broadcasts.²⁴ The media continued to be under serious scrutiny and criticism for not siding with the government. The revelation that a farm taken forcibly from a white farmer in Hwedza had not been used to accommodate thirty-three landless peasants as intended, but leased out to a former agriculture minister, Witness Mangwende, was negative publicity.²⁵

Similar publicity concerning other farms which had benefited the head of Mugabe's office, Charles Utete, Perence Shiri, the air force commander, the commissioner of police, Augustine Chihuri and Solomon Tawenga, Harare's first executive major, among many other cronies, did not go down well with the President.²⁶ Black peasants, the liberation war veterans, donors, parastatals and the international community started showing signs of disgruntlement. For most Zimbabweans, the independence party or euphoria of independence was over before it even started. The government had begun to sow seeds of unpopularity given that the land question was not the only area where they under performed. For instance, records have it that unemployment was rising, inflation shooting, social services deteriorating while the size of the cabinet was being unnecessarily increased from twenty-nine to forty-two ministers. The cabinet grew by the day with ministers and their deputies increasing all the time.

In the early 1980s, Mugabe earned himself an honorary degree from the University of Edinburgh (revoked in 2006) for uplifting the education system of Zimbabwe. Many schools were built in all parts of Zimbabwe: in very remote areas, urban areas and in newly established growth points.²⁷ The infrastructure set up for education through out the country and cities alike boosted literacy levels significantly. Schools and health centers were erected in all districts with qualified staff. Other sectors of development which include the establishment of banks at growth points²⁸ were also a marvel to look at. However, from 1985 authoritarian tendencies set in giving birth to the use of an iron hand by the government. Political interference plagued all levels of administration.²⁹ The administration of critical services, including resettlement schemes, faltered, and was bogged down in massive bureaucracy. One document produced by the Department of Rural Development (DRD) listed twenty-five ministries, departments and parastatal organizations as having a role in the resettlement programme.³⁰ By 1999, because of inflation, a falling GDP growth rate and abuse of funds, hospitals were without essential supplies.

With time, the achievements by the new government were wilting, destroyed by the high level of lack of responsibility that prevailed in the government. By 2000, the Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, closed all channels of communication between the government and the masses. Television channels were cut down to remain with a single one which sang praises of the government. Journalists were thrown into jail, into exile and the *Daily Newspaper* was constantly threatened, bombed, fined and closed down. The Minister and the President created a formidable union in defending government policies and verbally confronting all who dared to challenge their stance.³¹ The economic challenges that the government encountered following a failing land reform, created a monster of a government. The government began to tighten its grip and became more repressive.³²

Street riots, looting and class boycotts by students punctuated 1995. These were in protest of the greed and sleaze within the ruling party. Corruption and self-enrichment by ministers through land and lavish pay increases became rampant while the masses suffered and lacked the basic benefits independence is known to usher. The *Herald* was turned into the mouthpiece of the government, while, for most newspapers, it was a see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil affair. With mounting criticism on the inconsistencies, inabilities and short-sightedness of his government's policies in the 1990s, Mugabe began to play the sovereignty card. Being cautious and politically calculating, Mugabe could not fail to know for certain that Zimbabwe would not stand a colonization of a different kind by Britain or America. Talking as though the threat of conquest still lingered over Zimbabwean masses' heads bought Mugabe time to figure out his next moves. Rightly so, for some time, the Mugabe regime managed to make most Zimbabweans believe that Britain and America held the key to their freedom and were the ones acting as barriers between Zimbabweans and paradise.³³ To all intents and purposes, these acts were just politics of convenience and survival, though this is not to say that the British were also not making life difficult for their former colony.

It follows to say popular expectations in land reform could not be satisfied with the entire white community alienated. There was no policy stating the way forward. Almost every decision was taken at the spur of the moment. Moyo records that the issue of land and its redistribution returned to political limelight in 1997 and 1998 when some former liberation fighters, popularly known as war veterans, disgruntled about the lack of recognition for their dedication and effort during the second Chimurenga made their unhappiness known.³⁴ To heighten their political insurgence, they took to occupying farms, making demands of better treatment that included pensions,

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

payouts and land allocations. Mugabe's real test was now. The war veterans' claims and demands were legitimate, but how the regime would respond, sent the whole country to the bottom of the sea by triggering a lot of negatives. In 1997, payments of gratuities and pensions were made to war veterans with each one receiving a lump sum of Z\$50,00 and a monthly payment of Z\$2,000: the bill totalling Z\$4,2 billion (Over £260 million), and also land, free education and healthcare amounting to Z\$4 billion.³⁵

The huge unplanned drain strained the already bankrupt economy and it snapped. Needless to say, in the two years, 1997 and 1998, attention was turned on the war veterans and the rest of the Zimbabweans were nowhere in the government scheme. Though the war veterans did not have to wait for 17 years to be recognized and rewarded for their war efforts, they got their rewards at a wrong time.³⁶ It was not reasonable timing, both for the economy and the land reform programme. Also, sad as it was that war veterans were not included in sharing the cake of the nation for so long, note should be taken that they were not the only ones who won the country. The likes of *chimbwidos* (girls recruited during the war for cooking and servicing the fighters), *mujibhas* (boys sent with war messages in war zones) and the ordinary villagers whose livestock and property benefited the war,³⁷ were still waiting by the end of 2006 to take their share starting with the occupation of land. On the whole, however, the demands by the war veterans illustrated the political, economic and social currency of land, its availability for exploitation for political advantage, the diverse faces the land question can wear and its power as a symbol of total independence.

In every sense, demands by the war veterans were so legitimate that, with hindsight, failure to integrate and rehabilitate these ex-combatants proved the government's lack of foresight. In a way, this indicated that benefits of independence had not been evenly distributed and enjoyed. If the liberation fighters had not yet benefited, who had? The reality was that particular people had allocated themselves too many advantages and assets at the expense of the rest. At least the war veterans had the stamina and capacity to make their grievances heard, the masses dared not complain. The country had been war-ravaged and needed reconstruction.³⁸ As indicated earlier, the Zimbabwe liberation struggle was not won only by the guerrillas. Statistics show that countless girls were left with children born during the war to guerrillas. In the heat of the struggle, war veterans were scattered around the country where they met young girls they befriended and impregnated.³⁹ Indeed, most such children have been named after the war, names such as Flame, Hondo (War), Terurai Ropa (Spill Blood) and many

V. Z. Nyawo Viriri Shava

more.⁴⁰ For the girls the pregnancy robbed them of their youth, the chance to get married properly and many a time, they never saw the fathers of their children again. To the parents of the girls, the chance to marry off their daughters and wed them, send them to school and enjoy the pride and fame slipped through their fingers. The list of those who deserved compensation or recognition at independence goes beyond bringing a helicopter down in the battle front. It affected everybody, including those who were in the working class during the war, for most of them sponsored the war by clothing the guerrillas.⁴¹ When the independence cake was not brought to the table to be enjoyed by all, sections of the population would demand recognition regardless of who else deserves. The war veterans felt robbed for, had they not taken up arms or crossed borders to Mozambique or Zambia, independence might have not been attained. They were angry over unfulfilled liberation promises of land, promises that had, in the war, brought them together as “*vana vevhu*” (sons of the soil⁴²).

As a result of land demands by the war veterans, the government felt pushed to act faster to provide land to more people. In response, the second phase of the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme, (LRRP2) was launched in 1997 with the intention to redistribute substantial parts of the commercial farm sector within five years.⁴³ In essence, nonetheless, the launched programme was a mere pseudo invigoration of the existing resettlement programme given the scope of prevailing debilitating elements. Financial support from donors could not be secured and the programme made no real redistributive impact on the ground. In comparison, the period 1980 to 1990 saw more action in land reform than the 1990 decade. By the end of 1999, only about 18 000 more families on a mere 1.1 million hectares of land, as compared to 52 000 on about 3.5 million hectares by 1990, had been settled.⁴⁴ Targets could not be met, only a total of 72,000 families had been settled by 1990, 90 000 shy of the target set for 1985.

An achievement of 44% in 20 years is not applaudable given that mathematically, about 30 years more are needed to complete the programme, robbing generations of sharing the national cake. Also, given the new global challenge of climate change, owning pieces of agricultural land might no longer be trendy. The pace of land reform had to change if the government was to regain its popularity and credibility. A pace more favourable to the peasants would restore the government’s popularity and respectability.

The Referendum Year

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

While the 1980s shortened the government's hands in facilitating land reform and the 1990s were low keyed in reform, the year 2000 witnessed a completely different tone. The national referendum of February 2000 threw a peaceful country with slow but stable land reform into a politically driven chaos. In an attempt to co-opt the demand for constitutional reform, to develop a home grown constitution for Zimbabwe, in May 1999, President Mugabe created an official government commission, consisting of almost 400 members, to rewrite the constitution. A draft constitution, including provisions that would greatly strengthen the executive at the expense of parliament, and extend the powers of the government to acquire land compulsorily without compensation, was adopted against the protests of a substantial number of members of the constitutional commission and submitted to a national referendum in 2000.⁴⁵ Opposed to the extension of the powers of government and land grabs, the main opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, campaigned for a "no" vote and the government was defeated in the referendum, by 53 percent of the 1.3 million votes cast.⁴⁶ The MDC made known its own position on land reform.⁴⁷ Mlambo argues that both ZANU PF and MDC exploited the opportunity, the effort and the momentum for constitutional reform for political mileage.⁴⁸ The issue of the new constitution was overtaken by political developments. As a result, MDC won a record number of opposition seats in Parliament in the June 2000 elections (57 MDC, 61 ZANU PF).⁴⁹ ZANU PF regained popularity in the rural constituencies and held on to power thanks to a land clause included in the new constitution. Coming after 14 other successful, constitutional amendments, such a vote of no confidence was not expected by the government. It was a wake up call for the government to realize that the urban populace were no longer impressed by constructional amendments.

To shed light on the Zimbabwean political landscape of 2000 the rise of the MDC should be visited and discussed. Following Zimbabwe's shifting fortunes, from the scandalous Willowgate debate of 1988, through the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes, ESAPs, of the early 1990s, to trade liberalization, the nation knew only economic misery. The Willowgate fiasco involved government ministers who abused their privileged positions to buy motor vehicles cheaply and resold them at inflated prices.⁵⁰ Through such catastrophes, the country accumulated debt and in a bid to shrug off the debt and secure loans, the government embraced the ESAPs. A brain child of the International Monetary Fund, IMF, the ESAPs threw the whole nation into disarray. The central thrust of the ESAPs was to promote cutting down

V. Z. Nyawo Viriri Shava

on public expenditure. Consequently, jobs were trimmed, multitudes were retrenched and suddenly families no longer received the incomes that had been their life line. With unemployment mushrooming, thieving, prostitution and trafficking to sustain lives was on the increase. The more able bodied people roamed streets the more chaos was created.

Before the nation learnt how to deal with the developing and discouraging effects of the ESAPs, trade liberalization dealt them a near fatal blow. To borrow from Maxwell;

The removal of protective tariffs on imports through trade liberation caused a 40 per cent decline in local manufacturing and added to the army of unemployed. Meanwhile, the growing shortage of foreign currency limited the growth of new private enterprise. Real wages declined by approximately 50 percent between 1982 and 1994, and by 1995, 61 per cent of Zimbabwean households lived below a level sufficient to provide basic needs. Removal of subsidies on basic foodstuffs left an unemployed underclass malnourished and prone to sporadic rioting.⁵¹

From this multi-faced composite of economic chaos rose the MDC. The origins of the MDC are deeply rooted in the economic landscape of Zimbabwe in the first decade of independence. At the core of the formation of the MDC was a labour movement that had began in the late 1980s.⁵² In September 1999, the MDC was formed headed by Morgan Tsvangirai, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, ZCTU, Secretary General.⁵³ Initially a compliant wing of the ruling party after 1990, the ZCTU, gathered more force both in structure, composition and goals it set out to achieve. With more emphasis on the campaign for democratization, the ZCTU grew to in-cooperate student movements, women's groups and other cognite civil society organizations.⁵⁴ This coalition of opposition movements would be a formidable and effective strike action machinery that would drive the government to become more coercive and suspicious of opposition. Reverbarations of strike actions organized by the ZCTU would draw in new membership from rural areas, smaller towns and mining centers. One historic industrial action against the government's decision to raise money for compensating war veterans by placing a levy on tax-payers would catapult the ZCTU into a political opposition party. This friction would be a political hot seat the MDC occupies till this day, 2006.

Demands in 1997 by the Zimbabwe National War Veterans Liberation Association (ZNVVLA) for compensation and political recognition could not be pushed aside. Rotberg records that:

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

*Frightened by their legitimacy and mobilizing power, Mugabe gave each veteran the sum of Z\$50,000 and a monthly pension [of Z\$2,000].*⁵⁵

The devastation caused to the economy by the unplanned move set the country on a pedestal to an economic meltdown. The ZCTU set out to seek a political solution to the growing economic crisis hence, the launch of the National Constitutional Assembly, NCA, Lawyers' Organisation and other such civil groups.⁵⁶ The NCA would lobby the public for a broad, popular process of constitutional reform and reactively, the government established its own constitutional commission as a counter. Seeking national acceptance of its own draft of the new constitution the government held a plebiscite in February of 2000.⁵⁷ The now highly conscientised and politically aware public, thanks to the MDC, could hear none of the referendum and it failed dismally. The constitutional debate elevated the MDC to a stronger position in opposition politics as its membership ballooned, broadened and strengthened.

The "no" result was significant in that it would shape the future politics of Zimbabwe. Given the political landscape prevailing in 2000, after the rise of ZANU-PF's first real challenge, the MDC, Mugabe could not hide his paranoia. The failure of the referendum was quick to be viewed as a manifestation of the resurgence of white power disguised as the MDC.⁵⁸ This is partly because of its alloy, composite or commingling image. The opposition partly was viewed as a facade of change behind which all opposition conveniently hid. The MDC was regarded as a party with insidious collusion with Britain, the United States, Churches, the old Rhodesia network around the world and disgruntled commercial farmers in Zimbabwe, an amalgam of opposition trying to jeopardize the land reform programme by the Mugabe regime. Labels and comments such as the following would stick:

*The MDC should never be judged or characterized by its black trade union face; by its youthful student face; never by its black suburban junior professionals elements. It is much deeper, whiter and wider than these human superficialities; for it is immovably and implacably moored in the colonial yesteryear and embraces wittingly or unwittingly the repulsive ideology of return to white settler rule. The MDC is as old and as strong as the forces and interests that bore and nurtured it; that converge on and control it; that drive and direct it; indeed that support, sponsor and spur it. It is a counter-revolutionary Trojan Horse contrived and nurtured by the very inimical forces that enslaved and oppressed our people yesterday.*⁵⁹

Labelled as such, the MDC was sure to be associated with everything that ailed ZANU-PF and the government's wrath would be wreaked on them with a vengeance. The opposition endured the Birchenough form of physical torture by the police. (The punishment is named after a famous tourist attraction, Birchenough bridge, akin to the Australian Sydney Harbour bridge in its shape and overall construction).

Various religious groups which were seriously involved in Zimbabwean politics merged with other political groups in making the MDC. Historically, the religious community had not succeeded in reconciling political sides. The reason was that, some religious groups, particular churches or leaders had previously sided with Smith's regime during the liberation struggle. An example was Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole and Bishop Abel Muzorewa.⁶⁰ Mlambo records that:

The resentment caused by this situation is such that when religious groups such as the Catholic Commission Justice and Peace speak about atrocities in Matebeleland, some people label them yesterday's sell outs. And yet, there are [other] well-meaning religious leaders, such as the trio of Patrick Mutume, Trevor Manhanga and Sebastian Bakare, who have tried to bring the MDC and the Zimbabwean Government to dialogue. So far, they have not been given the respect that their efforts deserve.⁶¹

Compiling and polluting the religious atmosphere were others like Archbishop Pius Ncube who spoke of the government with tremendous contempt, and prayed to God for Mugabe's death and called for violent uprisings. This left no space for a church sponsored reunion. Consequently, the churches were regarded by the Zimbabwean Government as speaking in one voice with the MDC, a voice that opposes the government, forging a "Mugabe Must Go Strategy."⁶² It is seemingly joining or siding with one side of the political fray that had determined the way the government had perceived the church. Imagined or real, the threat of a growing opposition loomed and prospects for dialogue engineered by the church fade with each incident.

To make matters worse, a call for sanctions against Zimbabwe made by Roman Catholic Bishops resulted in a food crisis and shortage of basic commodities, leaving the government exposed.⁶³ The church was blamed for making masses starve and thereby humiliating the government. This scenario did not augur well for future relations between the church and the government. The starvation suffered by the masses of Zimbabwe was quick to be linked to the landlessness of most peasants, because of the land

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

dispossession they suffered in the colonial era. Thus, the suggested solution to the call for sanctions was that land should be given back to blacks by whites.

In the sanctions debate and the confusion that followed, the critically vital role of the church was lost. The church had a mandate to broker peaceful negotiations, but the opportunity was lost. Calling for sanctions was for the MDC, the opposition, and the church. It was perceived that the church and the media as being on the same side. The private media and parts of the international media portrayed Mugabe as the devil incarnate.⁶⁴ They demonized him at every turn. Since the media followed, observed, recorded and interpreted events in Zimbabwe as they unfolded, they found themselves acquiring a pivotal position in the Zimbabwean crisis. The media reported as though Mugabe was the only player in the politics of the whole Zimbabwe. In the midst of the chaos, the true Zimbabwean story, one that included all aspects of a nation's life, was lost. At least, Mugabe and the government had found the long lost enemy in the amalgam of opposition that was the MDC.

ZANU-PF had rediscovered its original enemy and this time, vowed to finish the fight and not to settle for another Lancaster. With no chance for anything negotiated, the government had found a platform from which to begin the 21st century. A strategy was drawn that casted any opposition as saboteurs of real land reform. What could be better than that for ZANU-PF, to start a century on a new leaf, promising peasants and reviving their hopes of getting that which had proven illusive for 20 years. It must have felt like being thrown a new lifeline when all hope was depleted. Farms, mine compounds and the country were turned yet again into hotbeds of Zimbabwean politics. The result was a polarization of the nation into black and white that would prove to be detrimental to land reform, food production, the already suffering economy, international relations as well as the well being of a sovereign state. The land issue became completely politically driven with Mugabe proclaiming that "Land is the economy and the economy is land," a slogan coined for parliamentary elections, that witnessed the occupation and collapse of commercial farms, a miscalculation that threatened to starve the whole nation only one year down the line.

With the government reviving the call for radical land distribution to fulfil independence promises, official blessing was given to a new wave of land invasions led by members of the War Veterans Association, WVA, that had grown with the failure of the referendum. A new section 16A was added to the existing constitution and became law in April 2000. The Land Acquisition Act was further amended in May 2000, using the power given to the President to enact six months temporary legislation under the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act of 1986; and again in November, through parliament in a two-day process.⁶⁵ The stated aim was to "clarify and

streamline various procedural aspects of the acquisition process and to prescribe new compensation rules in accordance with the constitution.⁶⁶

The 1990s decade that had started with the government not putting much emphasis on land reform ended in 2000 with the land issues at the centre of the politics and the economics of Zimbabwe. The violence that started at the time of the referendum was carried over into 2001. Land reform was catapulted to being the determinant of strategy and policy by the failure of the referendum. Depending on the creativity of the ruling party to keep political power, land reform could deliver on anything given its mutable qualities. The decade closed with the introduction of the “fast track” programme.

CONCLUSION

The early 1990s saw little action on the land reform front though redistribution was going on slowly and quietly. Self allocation to farmland also went on but, insignificantly. However, towards the end of the decade, political events started to charge the land reform programme leading into the referendum.

The referendum threw a life line to the ruling party when it failed and a new strategy had to be figured out in order to get a firmer grip on the politics of the country. Mlambo observes that the ‘no’ vote was a blessing in disguise to Mugabe. Had the constitutional referendum succeeded, Mugabe would not have been eligible for re-election in the presidential elections of 2002 given that the proposed constitution limited the president to two terms.⁶⁷ That means, by rejecting the constitutional change, the people of Zimbabwe gave Mugabe the latitude to continue as a presidential candidate in all presidential elections that would follow. With his presidential seat half secure, Mugabe would fight the remainder of the battle with opposition from within. In the same breath, the momentum that surrounded the period of the referendum meant that the MDC gained political ground campaigning against the taking of land without compensation spelt out in the new constitution. All those sharing the MDC’s opinion on land made it a point to decampaign ZANU PF and vice versa, changing the landscape of politics in Zimbabwe.

From 2000, all hell broke loose with the introduction of the fast track method of distributing land. Statistically, by 1999, eleven million hectares of the richest land were still in the hands of about 4,500 white commercial farmers. Most rural black Zimbabweans continued to suffer immense poverty due to the government’s failure to deliver, the consequences of ESAP, climate change and droughts as well as an ever dwindling economy. A set of principles, adopted in 1998, to govern phase two of land resettlement, which included respect for a legal process, transparency, poverty reduction,

Zimbabwe and Land Reform at Independence and Beyond

affordability and consistency with Zimbabwe's wide economic interests, failed to make an impact.⁶⁸

At the close of the 20th century the land reform programme had not achieved much and was about to gather new momentum, thanks to the politics of the day. With the beginning of the 21st century the programme became so malleable a substance that it could be used as a reason for the wildest developments or be blamed for any malfunctionality in the government's delivery. Even the legal framework governing land reform would be revised to accommodate the government's strategy.

On the whole, however, the atmosphere surrounding the land issue became tenser heating up at the close of the 20th century. The quietude, slowness and inaction that had characterized the beginning of the 1990s was being replaced by a new drive, new awareness, new strategies and invigorated effort on the part of all, the government, the peasants, the farmers and the opposition. The failure of the referendum charged the politics of the country leaving the issue of land in a pivotal position.

REFERENCES

- BBC Hardtalk, 20. 11. 2006.
BBC News, 28. 09.2001.
Blume, A. "Land Tenure in Rural Zimbabwe An Outline of Problems" in *Study for the Guiding Principle: Land Tenure in Development Cooperation*.
Chimombe, K. T. interviewed at Masianokeng High School, Lesotho, 16.10.2006.
Chitereka, C. "The Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS) in Poverty Alleviation: The Case of Third World Countries" in print.
Chuma, W. "Liberation or Limiting the Public Sphere? Media Policy and the Zimbabwe Transition 1980-2004" in B. Raftopoulos and T. Savage. (ed.). *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, pp. 119-139.
Christian Science Monitor, 17.04.1980.
Christian Sciences Monitor, 16.04.1981.
Dansereau, S. "Liberation and Opposition in Zimbabwe" in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21 (2), May 2003, pp. 1-15.
"Flame," DSTV History Channel 68, a film that captures the heat of the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe. The film highlights the efforts that is put into winning a war by different categories of people in a country. Mothers would be concerned with providing food to the guerrillas, fathers funding the war, boys taking care of errands, girls
-

V. Z. Nyawo Viriri Shava

covering the social and physiological needs while the guerrillas man the battle front.

- Gov of Zimbabwe, *The Millenium Development Goals Report*, Harare, 2004.
- Hamilton, W. "Mugabe's Marxism, Zimbabwe's "Red 1990:" The character of the opposition" in *Socialism Today: The Monthly Journal of the Socialist Party*, May 2000, pp. 1-10.
- Magaramombe, G. "Rural Poverty: Commercial Farm Workers and Land Reform in Zimbabwe" Paper presented at the SARPN conference on land reform and poverty alleviation in Southern Africa, Pretoria, 4-5 June 2001.
- Makgetlaneng, S. "Zimbabwe's 2005 Parliamentary Elections Lessons for the Movement for Democratic Change" in *Journal of African Elections Special Issue on Zimbabwe's 2005 General Election*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 123-141.
- Maxwell, D. *African Gifts of the Spirit Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transitional Religious Movement*, Harare, 2006.
- Mbaya, S. "Zimbabwe's Land Politics and the 2005 Elections" in *Journal of African Elections Special Issue on Zimbabwe's 2005 General Election*, October 2005, pp. 37-62.
- Meredith, M. *Mugabe Power and Plunder in Zimbabwe*, Oxford, 2002.
- Mlambo, A. "The Ambiguities of independence, Zimbabwe 1980-1990" in Lee M. C. and K. Colvard. (ed.). *Unfinished Business: The Land Crisis in Southern Africa*, Pretoria, 2003.
- Muponde, R. "The Worm and the Hoe: Cultural Politics and Reconciliation After the Third Chimurenga" in Raftopoulous and T. Savage. (eds.). *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, pp. 176-192.
- Mushonga, A. "In Defence of Land Reform" in *SAPEM*, Vol. 13, No. 8, May 2000, pp. 1-10. *Zim Online*, 14. 08. 2004.
- Norman, A. *Robert Mugabe and the Betrayal of Zimbabwe*, London, 2004.
- Nyathi, P. T. "Reintegrating of Ex-combatants into Zimbabwean Society: A Lost Opportunity" in B. Raftopoulous and T. Savage. (eds.). *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, pp. 63-78.
- Raftopoulous, B. "Nation, Race and History in Zimbabwe Politics" in B. Raftopoulous and T. Savage. (ed.). *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, pp. 160-175.
- Rotberg, "Ditatorship and Decay: Only Mbeki can rescue Zimbabwe" *Business Day*, 8. 12. 2004.
- SABC 3 News, "Pius Ncube's sex scandal, 17.07. 2007.
- Tibainjuka, A. K. "Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatvina" UN Social Envoy on Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe. *Zim Online*, 14. 08. 2004.