

ZIMBABWE TUMBLING ?

South Africa's Media Sensation of Zimbabwe's Land Reforms and What Must be Done in Post-Mugabe Democracy

Introduction

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Few events represent Zimbabwe's politics than the country's elections. Successive Zimbabwean elections from 2000-2008 have received maximum coverage by South African Weeklies. However, these elections were generally represented negatively, characterized by the absence of conditions that can guarantee their freeness and fairness. They were represented as fraudulent and full of malpractices including violence, intimidation and, in worst cases, rigging which raised questions on whether or not the elections were misrepresented and consequences of such coverage. Zimbabwe was conclusively presumed to be undergoing a socio-economic and political crisis. The main reason the weekly newspapers represented Zimbabwean elections sensationally is because of spillover-effects fears of the crises. This made the papers harbor a superficial understanding of the historical trajectory of the crisis in Zimbabwean politics yet that history is rich with various interpretations that explain the prevailing electoral situation rooted in the national struggle for redistributive justice regarding questions of land restitution, emanating from the Lancaster House Agreement in 1980, and consequent chaotic land invasions and reforms in subsequent years, that resonated well with land questions in South Africa. The fear was that the chaotic nature in which land questions were handled in South Africa would precipitate a spillover effect of the crises into South Africa consequently complicating immigration politics and homeland security.

Zimbabwe Tumbling ?

Many scholars of Zimbabwe's post-colonial history would not agree with the contention that Zimbabwe

began tumbling after independence in 1980¹. A recent general survey of Zimbabwe history called “Becoming Zimbabwe : A History from Pre-colonial Period to 2008”² has a section called “From Buoyancy to Crisis, 1980-1997” that demonstrates the promise and optimism of the late 1980’s decade in post-colonial Zimbabwe up until the mid-1990’s when International Monetary Fund (IMF) sponsored structural adjustment programs spawned economic crisis. Zimbabwe was relatively stable in the first few years after independence extending to a number of years into the implementation of IMF policies. In fact, in a 1995 World Bank Report into the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme in Zimbabwe, the IMF recorded some positive results as argued as follows :

The original Project Completion Report of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) that governed the new policy regime classified its outcome as “satisfactory” although this was subsequently downgraded to “marginally satisfactory” in the subsequent Performance Audit report³.

The case of Zimbabwe could be a case of failed political leadership owing to the argument that Zimbabwe seemed to be on the right footing after the 1980 Lancaster House Agreement that ushered in black majority rule. However, that momentum seemed to have been lost in the complication surrounding proper policies on property rights and land restitution/reforms. Therefore, genuine questions about land rights, with huge economic implications, later took a political twist and transformed into renewed questions of neo-imperialism that resurrected memories of pre-independence black liberation solidarity and national patriotism, culminating into chaotic land invasions later in the 2000’s. While pan-African discourses surrounding questions of neo-imperialism were given a backseat by the South African Weeklies, those of land invasions took center stage owing to ideological and political inclinations of the editors of the three newspapers. That notwithstanding, it is evidently clear of how it is impossible to achieve impressive economic growth in Africa in an environment that lacks political goodwill and stability required to create investor confidence. Nevertheless, political leadership is hardly the only factor that can account for economic problems for many African countries and Zimbabwe in particular, since there are other factors brought about by liberalized market economic forces or the “free market” that acted as powerful factors beyond political control :

The shift to liberal institutional arrangements in the last 20 years produced a new era marked by the renewed dominance of the market

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- 1 L. ZUNGA, 2003, ‘*Farm Invasions in Zimbabwe*’. Randburg : Truth House Publishing.
 - 2 B. RAFTOPOULOS & A. MLAMBO, ‘*Becoming Zimbabwe : A History from Pre-colonial Period to 2008*’, (Harare : Weaver Press), 2009.
 - 3 E. A. BRETT, ‘From Corporatism to Liberalization in Zimbabwe : Economic Policy Regimes and Political Crisis, 1980-97’, *International Political Science Review*, 26, 1, (2005), 91-106.

principle with economic and political decision making processes subjected to the rule of globally determined prices in the economic sphere and to multi-party elections in the political⁴.

The truth is that democracy, characterized by frequent multi-party election cycles, has changed the political landscape in many African countries as leaders swallowed the idea with a pinch of salt. Democracy has been experimented relatively differently in many African states producing different experiences for citizens and varied economic results. Countries that are relatively stable politically show signs of rapid economic growth with examples of relatively stable countries today like Kenya and Rwanda bouncing back from ethnic violence to register impressive GDP's. Even when economic problems in Africa are blamed on the economic policy shift (ESAP), sight should not be lost of the fact that African leaders are also to blame for the 'low intensity democracy' and political instability that has led to a flight of capital from the continent. This kind of insight is what motivated Zimbabweans back home to pile pressure on Mugabe who was forced to resign under controversial circumstances.

In such a scenario, it becomes clear that leaders ought to craft or adopt policies that are market friendly with minimal disturbance on the local economic base or structure and in the case of Zimbabwe and other African countries, where Zig-Zag economies thrive in sustaining the GDP, the small scale economy ought to have been protected as captured by Jeremy Jones in : "Nothing is Straight in Zimbabwe-The Rise of the Kukiya-kiya Economy 2000-2008" where small scale informal economy is seen to have massively supported the general GDP⁵. Unfortunately, the recommended policy shift that was expected to improve the economies in the continent 'manufactured a crisis'. Although the wider implications of the shift in the global world has been positive, the worse-off have been countries on the periphery of the global metropolitan, some of which have now been safely identified as failed states. Good examples in Africa include : Niger, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Gabon, Somalia and until recently, Zimbabwe and Guinea that have managed to sneak through a promising political transition. "Zimbabwe's recent history provides us with an important natural experiment in understanding the impact of corporatist, as opposed to liberal policy regimes on developmental trajectories in Least Developed Countries (LDCs)"⁶.

In the foregoing complicated context, President Mugabe and his advisers constructed a negative discourses around the need for renewed solidarity struggle to liberate Zimbabweans and the larger African continent from

4 Ibid.

5 J. L. JONES, 2010. Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe.' The Rise of the Kukiya-kiya Economy 2000-2008. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. Vol. 36. Issue 2 : 285-299.

6 E. A. BRETT, 'From Corporatism to Liberalization in Zimbabwe : Economic Policy Regimes and Political Crisis, 1980-97', *International Political Science Review*, 26, 1, (2005), 4.

continued marginalization in the globalization process and neo-imperialism resurgence. This discourse may have emerged from the conviction that the opposition, Movement for Democratic Change, as positively represented by South African Weeklies, was a real threat to Mugabe's authoritarian rule and should be suppressed and destroyed⁷. Against the background of controversial land seizures, collapse of the economy, continuous violation of human rights in a bid to suppress the opposition, and flawed parliamentary and presidential elections in 2000 and 2002, respectively, the European Union and the United States of America imposed targeted sanctions on Zimbabwe's ruling party leading to the country's suspension and subsequent withdrawal from the commonwealth in 2002 leaving the country worse-off⁸. However, the seed of Zimbabwe's tumble as many scholars would argue were planted through electoral crisis and a poor policy regime incapable of properly and carefully addressing national questions of land restitution leading to food shortages and the almost total collapse of Zimbabwe's agricultural economy. This coupled by poor governance, corruption, and primitive accumulation of wealth by those in power worsened the situation in the country as Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) regime struggled to fulfill its desire to make Zimbabwe a *de-facto* or one-party state culminating into electoral violence discussed in the next section.

Political Situation-Elections and Violence in Zimbabwe Since 1980

To a large extent, the Lancaster House willing-buyer willing-seller principle appears to have been an obstacle to land reforms later. However, at the onset of its implementation, it was performing relatively well and enjoying assistance from the United Kingdom, until the politics of power strangled the policy. There is no doubt that African leaders often rush for power first, then complain about the deal later, whenever they are presented with a power sharing opportunity. Good examples are in Kenya where there were cracks in the coalition government formed under the National Accord (agreement) following the 2007/8 controversial elections and the chaos that ensued and in Southern Sudan where we are yet to see how the power sharing deal will be honored. There is a larger political context of Zimbabwean post-colonial history, but one that cannot be neglected is the characterization of most African leaders as power hungry. Neglecting the power greed that characterizes these leaders is akin to neglecting the elephant in the room. The rush to power argument captured in thesis such as *Moods of Bitternes, How Political Polarisation Has Influenced Zimbabwean*

7 I. PHIMISTERAND, B. RAFTOPOLOUS, 'Mugabe Mbeki and the Politics of Anti-Imperialism' *Review of African Political-economy*, 31, 101, (2004), 385-400.

8 B. RAFTOPOULOS & T. SAVAGE, 'Zimbabwe Injustice and Political Reconciliation', (Cape Town : Institute of Justice and Reconciliation), 2004.

*Elections*⁹ largely extends the “rush for power” character of African leaders by indicating how political leaders focus on winning elections at the expense of liberation promises and other pre-elections promises and pacts ultimately creating tensions and polarization between various stakeholders. The latter has easily culminated in political violence in many African countries fueled by politicians and the media and Zimbabwe in no exception.

Such a leadership in Africa discussion is refreshing because it flags the problematic selective history posited in this paper as applied by the South African Weeklies regarding what has been the burden facing post-colonial Zimbabwe and will continue to present a serious challenge in the post-Mugabe era. So, what is it that ails Zimbabwe and how can it be solved once and for all ? Mlambo answers this question by introducing new parties and dimensions in the idea of leadership in the name of political players which gives the rationalization of a lasting solution a new impetus. The new parties and dimensions to the situation in that country presents a more complex and nuanced analysis. Among many stakeholders, Mlambo mentions political parties and the media as the most notorious ones. Even though much of the problem in Zimbabwe stems from leadership failures, suffice is to argue that the black majority rule was haunted by colonially inherited institutions that were traditionally in the service of the interest of the white minority. Without belabouring the time worn idea of the colonialist as the targeted straw-man to be tackled, it is fair enough to point out that the black majority regime had no mechanisms for dealing with the pressures of a newly established government. This cultivated fertile grounds for growing resentment when the fruits of independence were not forthcoming. The political process thus became a hot-house of competing discourses as argued by Mlambo in the following excerpt :

[...] a major cause of bitterness among Zimbabweans is the history of violence associated with political processes. Political violence in Zimbabwe is historically rooted in the brutality of the struggle for liberation. After independence in 1980, there was no social or legal process to deal with the trauma suffered during the struggle and, therefore, the bitterness and mutual suspicions continued¹⁰.

There is one problematic issue that has continued to paralyze democratic development in many African countries : the lack of institutional capacity for governance leading to politics of disorder. Political regimes in Africa have the tendency of resorting to disorder as a strategy to maintain the status quo. The celebration of successes of democracy over white minority rule by both Zimbabweans and the international community was a little premature blinding the State from dealing effectively with the past, and

9 A. MLAMBO, ‘Moods of Bitterness, How Political Polarisation Has Influenced Zimbabwean Elections’, *Journal of African Elections*, 4, 2, (2005), 15-36.

10 Ibid : 16.

that ugly past continued to affect the new Zimbabwe. Therefore, the matrix of the ensuing competing discourses about the situation in Zimbabwe and their polarized nature are convincingly the Zimbabwean crises which leads this discussion to theoretical rationalizations of such discourses.

What Must Be Done Post-Mugabe

Questions are raised by scholars on why Zimbabwe is lagging behind in Africa in many theses such as — *The Collapse of Zimbabwe*¹¹, the latter introduces the idea of property rights, with a special emphasis on land and how land rights were violated in Zimbabwe. However, it does not thoroughly explore the genesis of such violations in that country. The interesting idea emerging out of the thesis's argument is that violation of property rights suddenly becomes an issue only when the rights of white Zimbabwean farmers are in danger. It thus omits the discourse of colonial invasion and how black Zimbabweans suffered under the hands of Ian Smith's regime through evictions and marginalisation from their productive land.

Richardson argues that :

[...] an inclusive property rights system ... where by every single property be it land, house, machinery, is listed in a single legal document... creates security for individual owners and increases the motivation to invest with the objective of gaining some returns. In such a system, the government obtains an organised way of collecting tax and even channeling input from individuals to securities such as government treasuries and bonds that can allow for borrowing of capital to reinvest into the economy for sustainable growth¹².

The above suggestion is highly welcome but its timing is suspect. It seems to have been introduced only when property rights of the white minority in Zimbabwe were threatened. White minority rule in Zimbabwe (Ian Smith's regime) is equally responsible for the anarchy experienced in that country because it set precedence for the marginalisation and domination of the poor by those in power. The important issue though is that property rights must be respected and this should be carefully reconsidered now that Mugabe has exited the scene. Mugabe would have been seen as an obstacle by virtue of earlier historical accusations that he redistributed land to his cronies. His exit presents a new lease of life for the operationalization of land restitution policies that will favour poor landless Zimbabweans and therefore solve past mistakes¹³.

11 C. RICHARDSON, 2004. *The Collapse of Zimbabwe in the Wake of the 2000-2003 Land Reforms*. Lewinston, queenston, Lampeter : The Edwin Mellen Press.

12 C. RICHARDSON, 2004. *The Collapse of Zimbabwe in the Wake of the 2000-2003 Land Reforms*. Lewinston, queenston, Lampeter : The Edwin Mellen Press. pp. 16-17.

13 D. MOORE, 2001c. *Democracy is Coming to Zimbabwe*. Australian Journal of Political Science. Vol. 36. Issue 1 : 163-169. See also Moore, D. 2008. *Coercion, Consent, Context : Operation Murambatsvina and ZANU-PF's Quest for Hegemony*. In Vambe, M. (Ed.) *The Hidden Dimensions of Operation*

It is important to note that settlers who took land from Africans were participating in a form of primitive accumulation that undermined their property rights, — Africans were removed from productive land and restricted to poorer reserves. So, the question is no longer a black-solidarity liberation-question in a post-Mugabe era but more about how the new regime can guarantee property rights for all Zimbabweans irrespective of age and what happened in the past. In fact, it is in order to argue that reforms that only guarantee property rights to privileged elite, while excluding a great majority of citizens, are retrogressive. However, Richardson's theoretical framework of questioning immorality in Zimbabwe leaves a lot to be desired. It appears as if he refuses to go beyond a certain historical moment (pre-Lancaster House agreement) when the white minority leadership of Ian Smith perpetrated injustices that he is criticising the black majority government of Robert Mugabe for. However, the argument here does not intend to serve the purpose of sanitising the actions of Bob's 'corrupt regime'. Actions by the latter regime are written on the wall and now that Mugabe is out of power, they must be carefully highlighted if Zimbabwe is to progress beyond the socio-economic and political difficulties it is currently faced with. Comparing immorality in both regimes does not help the situation and does not equally mean that this thesis wants to overlook the salience of selective memory regarding Zimbabwe's history. It is through past mistakes that societies learn to be more cautious about where they would want to see themselves in the future and selective history plays a refreshing role in that regard. The only problem is that once selective history is employed, it hides very contentious issues within competing discourses. In fact, arguments on redistributive justice are refreshing because they remind us of a very serious and emotive issue in Zimbabwe that requires urgent attention — the idea of colonial inherited redistributive injustice by default as argued in the following excerpt :

The [pre-Mugabe's] Zimbabwean government in the name of revolution has taken the 4,000 most productive agricultural farms away from their owners. A system of accumulation that reserves its opportunities and advantages to only a few people is bound to fail over time. Land taken from legitimate owners' was not, in many instances, given to the poorest but rather to those who showed unconditional support for the regime, and to those who had won the personal favour of the government¹⁴.

It is unfortunate that lands belonging to white minority farmers were being taken illegitimately. However, that may depend on which side of the fence one sits regarding the historical injustices experienced in Zimbabwe. The sensible argument in such a scenario is that questions of legitimacy and land ownership rights in Zimbabwe are contestable and should be

Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe, Harare : Avondale.

14 C. RICHARDSON, 2004. *The Collapse of Zimbabwe in the Wake of the 2000-2003 Land Reforms*, Lewinston, queenston, Lampeter : The Edwin Mellen Press., pp. 17.

approached with flexibility. The land question in Zimbabwe appears prominently often defined and punctuated with discourses of conflict as captured in the thesis titled : *Conflict over Land : White Farmers and the Black Government*. This thesis argues that land was the central issue during liberation struggle for Zimbabwe and continues to be the most important domestic issue in the post-independence period and consequently in post-Mugabe democracy¹⁵.

The appropriation of African land by European settlers guaranteed white economic dominance and black poverty during the colonial period, and the inequitable distribution of land in Zimbabwe today is the most dramatic symbol of the enduring structures of an unequal society¹⁶. Indigenous blacks were evicted and resettled in poor un-productive land as squatters. In the demarcated land, they acted as cheap source of labour for white large scale farmers. In a moral society, it is immoral for a few individuals, irrespective of race, to grab large chunks of land and leave almost nothing to the majority. The fact that they used legislation to acquire title deeds does not moralise their actions. Legislation can favour partisan interests in any society and is sometimes drafted within the narrow consensus of the same immoral regimes.

In the case of Zimbabwe, the legislative, legal, resettlement of white large scale farmers favoured the white minority and were drafted by individuals driven by imperialist motives. Equally, the government of Robert Mugabe, although legitimate, used legislation that favoured only a few loyalists in land allocations and can also not escape the same accusations. This is why there was public displeasure with Mugabe's regime that compelled an uprising of citizens through demonstration that won sympathy from military generals, some of who were Mugabe's cronies, to convince Mugabe to step aside. However, the exit of Mugabe does not mean that Zimbabwe's land questions has been addressed. If this is not done in an orderly fashion we will continue to witness a continuous exclusion of poor Zimbabwean who will continue fleeing the country into neighbouring countries like South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. Nevertheless, discussions on property rights in Zimbabwe however partisan would help confront important issues that should not be taken for granted if Zimbabwe is to recover and restore confidence in its citizens now that it has a new interim leader. The Zimbabwean government has the moral obligation to provide equal opportunities for citizens and avoid confrontational politics of anarchy as noted in the following argument :

The evolution of government's efforts to address the land question is of great importance because of the peasants' expectation that their long held grievances will be addressed as the new regime redistribute property

15 J. HERBST, 1990. *State Politics in Zimbabwe*. Oxford, Los Angeles : University of California Press, pp. 37.

16 Ibid. p. 37.

formerly held by White farmers. In deed there was probably no more controversial question at independence than how the new regime will be able to resist the influence of white farmers and implement the promises concerning land that it had made during the liberation struggle¹⁷.

Part of the problem is a result of the fact that land redistribution was a great challenge for the black majority rule in Zimbabwe and it was seen as necessary to neutralise a looming crisis of expectation on the part of a land hungry population¹⁸. The government was under pressure and people were dissatisfied with the fact that the promise of the liberation struggle was not forthcoming leading to the formation of militia groups some of which kept it under pressure to reap from the benefits of liberation. The latter undermined the spirit of democracy. Zimbabwe's democracy was undermined with the creation of the third force who were armed, resourced and directed to inflict crude justice, by kidnapping, killing, and harassment of civilians¹⁹. Such events affected Zimbabweans, who opted to migrate to other countries, and greatly affected the economy. Meanwhile, the regime became insecure and begun adopting authoritarian tactics for guaranteed survival, a reality that gave birth to other problems like economic crisis as explained in the following observation :

[...] all authoritarian regimes face limitation that imposes constraints on the politics of repression. These limitations take various forms : the economic crisis that such regimes may not have caused but certainly accelerate, lead to the erosion of national legitimacy as a result of perceived betrayal of a vision of renewal, the emergence of an alternative political movement like the MDC in Zimbabwe and the growth of criticisms of the international community²⁰.

The aforementioned argument addresses the historical issues, especially colonial inheritance, that have been overlooked by some scholars in Zimbabwe's situation. The fact that the new government under-estimated the idea of economic leadership considering that they inherited challenges from the previous regime and lacked the capacity in terms of educated Zimbabweans who would take over the engine of that country. The promise of liberation was dented by economic challenges that led to poverty and hopelessness among the very people who desired liberation (the war veterans). This climate of suspicion and pressure is what characterised much of the post-independence Zimbabwe. Much of the challenge centered on the idea of land redistribution under the willing buyer willing seller procedures under a framework agreed in the Lancaster House Conference :

17 J. HERBST, 1990. *State Politics in Zimbabwe*. Oxford, Los Angeles : University of California Press, pp. 17.

18 J. CHAUMBA, I. SCOONES, & W. WOLMER, 2003. FromJambanja to Planning : The Reassertion of Technocracy in Land Reform in South-Eastern Zimbabwe ? *Journal of Modern African Studies*. 363 41, 4 : pp. 536.

19 L. ZUNGA, 2003. *Farm Invasions in Zimbabwe*. Randburg : Truth House Publishing. pp. 7.

20 D. HAROLD-BARRY, 2004, *Zimbabwe: The Past is The Future*. Harare : Weaver Press, pp. 4

Land was purchased by the state for redistribution following willing-buyer willing-seller procedures. This framework was agreed on in the Lancaster House Conference. The private sector led the identification and supply of land available for resettlement, while central government was a reactive buyer choosing land on offer. The government provided land to beneficiaries selected mainly by its district officials under the direct supervision of the central government officials (Raftopoulos in Harold-Berry, 2004 : 4).

The interesting part is that while the framework set the pace for land restitution in Zimbabwe, it was later mismanaged and dogged with numerous problems that ensured it did not achieve much. In fact many observers now perceive the willing-buyer willing-seller principle of land redistribution to have virtually failed²¹. Moyo for instance observes how “the 1980 witnessed low-intensity land acquisition, or squatting carried out by various communities, sometimes unofficially supported by party officials”²². One can argue that such attitudes regarding land policy and reforms might have set precedence for land invasion later in Zimbabwe. Much later, in the run up to the 2000 elections, land invasions, which were not new to Zimbabwe since they were visible through squatting, took a new dimension. “They became political with the objective that the protests would gain national attention... It was this new political setting, yet, significantly, contextualised by a long history of a particular style of a technocratic intervention that set the scene for major land invasions in 2000”²³.

Even though the government made concerted efforts in the 80's to improve the standards of living of Zimbabweans through certain measures like those of protecting workers, Africanising the state and creating a national army, it retained the ‘command element of the colonial state’ using the latter. As argued by Moyo in the following excerpt :

There was a strong element of command reflecting the continuing influence of the often militarist politics of the liberation movement. Such politics emerged in the context of the struggle against a colonial regime, and embedded repressive politics offering few opportunities for democratic participation. Moreover, this emphasis on the transfer of state power from the old to the new was affected with little concern for the civil rights of the individuals – a common feature of post-colonial states. This style of management soon became apparent in many spheres of Zimbabwean politics²⁴.

21 A. GOEBEL, 2005. Is Zimbabwe the Future of South Africa ? The Implications for Land Reforms in Southern Africa. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. Vol. 23. Issue 3: 345-370.

22 S. MOYO 2004. The Land and Agrarian Constraints in Zimbabwe. A Presentation Paper at the Conference on The Agrarian Constraints and Poverty Reduction : Macroeconomic Lessons for Africa', Addis Ababa. 17-18 December 2004.

23 J. CHAUMBA, I. SCOONES & W. WOLMER, 2003. From Jambanja to Planning : The Reassertion of Technocracy in Land Reform in South-Eastern Zimbabwe ? *Journal of Modern African Studies*. 363 41, 4 : pp. 539.

24 S. MOYO 2004. The Land and Agrarian Constraints in Zimbabwe. A Presentation Paper at the Conference on The Agrarian Constraints and Poverty Reduction : Macroeconomic Lessons for Africa', Addis Ababa. 17-18 December 2004. pp. 7.

The many reasons that could account for the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe make it more useful to be cautious about arguments that come to the fore when trying to make sense of it. While Richardson²⁵ points out interesting factors, his arguments are watered down by the time frame in which he chooses to sanction reasoning regarding the situation in Zimbabwe. Moyo on the other hand, extends the argument by shedding light into the nature of prevailing circumstances in that country from the pre-colonial struggle to the post-colonial adventure of primitive accumulation, nation-state formation and democratisation in Zimbabwe. While the approaches advanced by these scholars can all be merited for their usefulness, the best ones would be those that provide a thoughtful insight into the Zimbabwean crises with the aim of reflective criticism in order to advance the understanding of the nature of the problems faced in light of post-mugabe democracy. This should be opposed to those that prescribe a set of possibilities regarding the responsible events and personalities in that country that might be the problem. This article seems to lean to the former.

Building on Successes of Land Resettlement

For at least a decade the land reforms program in Zimbabwe, the Fast-Track program, was labeled land grab and the global media coverage has been dominated by images of chaos, destruction and violence²⁶. A new study “Zimbabwe’s Land Reforms : Myths and Realities”²⁷ however observes the need to have a more balanced appraisal for the process that is considered to have overhauled a century old pattern of land use dominated by a small group of large-scale commercial farmers as Zimbabwe continues with agrarian reforms. The most fascinating issue about public discourse regarding Zimbabwe’s land reform is that media has over time set the agenda and shaped public opinion regarding how people perceive it. What has been widely known and understood about the reform has been from media headlines, particularly, from the year 2000. In the study, an observation is made that : “from early 2000 headlines around the world reputed the invasion of largely white owned farms in dominant terms... this were Mugabe land grabs, with unruly violent mob of war veterans looting and destroying property across the country”²⁸.

Of course, more can be said about the complexity of the land reform program in Zimbabwe and, eventually, how it culminated in land grabs than the manner in which they were represented. The land grabs dominated the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ N. NDLELA, 2005. The African Paradigm : The Coverage of the Zimbabwean crisis in the Norwegian Media.’ In Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture. Special Issue : 71-90 ; Willems, W. 2005. Remnants of an Empire : British Media Reporting on Zimbabwe. Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture © 2005 (University of Westminster, London), Special Issue : 91-108.

²⁷ I. SCOONES, N. MARONGWE, B. MAVENDZEGE, J. MAHENEHENE, F. MURIMBARIMBA & C. SUKUME, 2010. Zimbabwe’s Land Reform : Myths and Realities. Auckland Park : Jacana Media

²⁸ Ibid : 1.

mainstream media both locally and internationally. A deeper analysis of the land reforms program in Zimbabwe show how the process was influenced by myths. These myths are said to have permeated policy narratives eventually affecting the approach taken on land reforms. The dilemma facing various stakeholders was related to how they could reach a political and ideological consensus about the history and nature of land restitution that would form the basis of formulating a suitable approach for the future benefit of Zimbabweans. The dominant political perspective was that land has to be redistributed to address colonial injustices while the economic one centered on how land could benefit the newly landed citizens – a market friendly approach designed to contribute to economic development²⁹.

Political ideology with regard to land utilization, where land was perceived as a necessary correction of colonial ills, took center stage, especially during elections, shaping the political landscape of Zimbabwe going forward. In the lead-up to the 1990 elections for example, “Joshua Nkomo highlighted the land issue in a number of high profiled interventions... Mugabe picked this up and land became (as before) a core issue for the election, with the usual, racial anti-British slant. But it was not simply all about electoral competition but also about what happens beyond elections”³⁰. This meant that the dominant political ideology had to be balanced by the aforementioned market friendly ideological approach which viewed land in terms of economic viability and as a means of consolidating wealth for the elites. The latter perspective (market friendly approach) undermined ideas such as small scale farming which was seen as an insult to large scale viable commercial farming. Commercial farming was mistakenly considered the best option of improving rural livelihoods³¹.

Supporting Small Scale Farming

However, small scale production, which was largely unpopular, was later found not to be a mistake judging on how it was established to have the potency of increased productivity due to its informal nature and off the market arrangements between landlords and tenants – a reality that was taken for granted when assessing the economic implications and the impacts of land reforms in Zimbabwe. The perception, even among the donor community, that small scale production was equally productive was difficult to ignore encouraging a paradigm shift in the idea of land utilization. There was a general conviction that small scale production had the potential to improve rural livelihoods. Therefore, in understanding the successes and failures of Zimbabwe’s land reforms, this paper pays attention to the

29 I. SCOONES, N. MARONGWE, B. MAVENDZEGE, J. MAHENEHENE, F. MURIMBARIMBA, & C. SUKUME, 2010. *Zimbabwe’s Land Reform : Myths and Realities*. Auckland Park : Jacana Media.

30 Ibid : 17.

31 A. GOEBEL, 2005. Is Zimbabwe the Future of South Africa ? The Implications for Land Reforms in Southern Africa. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. Vol. 23. Issue 3 : 345-370.

fundamental question : What happened to different people's livelihoods once they acquired land through land reforms ? The general contention is that peoples' livelihoods were improved³² as shown in the following excerpt :

By late 1990's results begun to emerge from the long term monitoring resettlement households by the Zimbabwe Rural Household Dynamic Study (ZRHDS), led by Bill Kinsey... the research showed how resettled farmers' real income had more than doubled over the period between 1982-3 and 1994-5... resettlement had been much more successful across a variety of criteria than many pessimists had predicted³³.

It is therefore clear that despite the bad press, resettlement schemes and settler schemes were relatively doing well in Zimbabwe. This narrative of relative success challenges one of the five myths raised in his thesis, that Zimbabwe land reform had been a total failure. Other myths addressed are:

- I. The beneficiaries of Zimbabwe land reforms have been largely political cronies.
- II. There is no investment in the new land re-settlements
- III. Agriculture is in complete ruins, creating chronic food insecurity and
- IV. The rural economy had collapsed.

This paper is mostly concerned with the first myth because it directly fingers Mugabe as the person responsible for the mess by rewarding his cronies and effectively responsible for the economic situation that country that largely relies on agricultural production. However, there are several repetitive discourses for the alleged failure of the land resettlement program that came to the fore. Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) mentioned earlier and drought were highly perceived as some of the reasons that accounted for the much proclaimed failure of the program. Other reasons were related to politics, largely the emergence of the MDC opposition, constitutional referendum and the run-up to the delayed 2000 elections. The government was also forced to make substantial unbudgeted pay to war veterans who were demanding compensation for their role in the liberation war. Under the powers of the Land Acquisition Act, the government engaged in a sweeping designation of 1, 471 farms, a departure from the past policy and signaled a shift in political thinking. The results were clear: the government was now prepared to designate and compulsorily acquire land for resettlement³⁴.

"Zimbabwe's Land Reforms : Myths and Realities" must be credited for showing areas in Zimbabwe where the land reforms program actually registered success and pointing out the crucial structural and economic

32 I. SCOONES, N. MARONGWE, B. MAVENDZEGE, J. MAHENEHENE, F. MURIMBARIMBA & C. SUKUME, 2010. *Zimbabwe's Land Reform : Myths and Realities*. Auckland Park : Jacana Media 33 Ibid : 18.

34 I. SCOONES, N. MARONGWE, B. MAVENDZEGE, J. MAHENEHENE, F. MURIMBARIMBA & C. SUKUME, 2010. *Zimbabwe's Land Reform : Myths and Realities*. Auckland Park : Jacana Media, pp. 20.

relationships between new small holder areas, small scale commercial farms and remaining large scale farms. It also addressed the question of how new authorities opened up through land reforms resulted in very different outcomes in various places with intense contestation over legitimacy and control. However, the thesis admits that a two sided debate based on the often simplistic generalization [mostly in the media] and limited empirical data is insufficient for capturing the complexity on the ground. He notes that Jambaja or intensive land invasion period in Zimbabwe, for example, extensively covered by the media since it was the notorious period of invasion, occupation, associated with chaos and confusion is complex and cannot be generalized.

Regarding the myths that farms benefited political cronies, it is true that some new farmers are successful due to political connections and patronage. Yet, despite their disproportionate influence on local politics, in Masvingo, the farmers make up less than 5% of household. Without underplaying the abuses that took place or the challenges that transition brings their research has dispelled the assumption that Zimbabwe's controversial land reform was all bad and therefore this finding should be used as evidence to formulate policies that would be supporting of more small scale farmers in Zimbabwe going forward to boost food production and stimulate the economy post-Mugabe by the interim leadership and eventually the duly elected President in the forthcoming elections. Solid empirical evidence has challenged the myth that there is no investment, that agricultural production has collapsed and food insecurity is universal, that the rural economy is in precipitous decline, and that farm labor has been totally displaced. This points out to the general contribution of small scale farming and informal businesses in keeping Zimbabwe afloat throughout the years.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that electoral politics in Zimbabwe are extensively covered by the South African press since they are rooted in the national struggle for redistributive justice regarding national questions of land restitution that resonated well with land questions in South Africa and the feared spillover effect of the crisis into South Africa that would complicate immigration politics and homeland security – Such coverage was meant to appeal to White South African middle class who harbour fears of a Zimbabwe in South Africa.

So, the central issue of concern was land and therefore, the extensive coverage point out to the fact that land restitution and property rights is a contentious issue that will continue to burden Zimbabwe and South Africa despite the fact that there is an interim government that has been

formed in the former if the successes of the famous land reforms program experienced in the country through small scale farming is not supported.

The paper argues that this is not the time to trade historical racial blames about whose rights were violated but rather the general contention is that it is a period of refocusing on proper policy formulation for the benefit of all Zimbabweans especially the poor and landless. Nevertheless, this contention is not used in the paper to employ selective reading about Zimbabwe's history about injustices but to use the power of memory to recollect historical mistakes like colonialism and policies that rendered black Zimbabweans landless and those that were supported by President Mugabe's black majority regime to seek a fresh start. If Zimbabwe has not tumbled but managed to survive all the years that the country was visibly in a crisis, it is not because it was a miracle but due to the contribution of small scale farming and informal economy to the formal economy and ultimately country's GDP. ■

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