

# THE TRAJECTORY OF LAND REFORM IN ZIMBABWE: POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA 1980-2000

VZ Nyawo-Shava<sup>1</sup> and SL Barnard<sup>2</sup>

## *Abstract*

*There is a general consensus that land reform in post settler colonies fits like a glove. Since extensive land alienation occurred in Zimbabwe, which resulted in the occupation of larger, more fertile, arable healthy pieces of land by minority whites and occupation of the unproductive, crowded, marginal and deteriorating lands by blacks, independence has given the land question a new force. Going through available literature on Zimbabwe's land reform progress, there is the impression that, during the liberation struggle, the land question was more of a political issue than anything else. It was about fighting exploitative governmental agrarian policies, fighting for ancestral land, fighting for the power with which land ownership came. With the advent of independence, the land question, as Moyo opines, has been popularized within the "growth with equity" parameters set out by the new regime allowing for a significant amount of land redistribution.<sup>3</sup> Thus, through reading library sources and literature in private collections, as well as carrying out interviews, this article seeks to demonstrate the essentiality and centrality of the land question in post independence Zimbabwe. Also to register that the land question presently has grown bigger and wider to entail, among other things, land redistribution, solutions to promote rural development of communal lands, political stability of a nation as well as the economics that goes with land utilization, land tenure, grazing schemes, population control, restitution, gender issues and the list goes on.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Moyo defines the Zimbabwean land question, from the point of view of the peasantry, as based on the demand for the redistribution of arable land with reliable rainfall due to the agro-ecology of Zimbabwe.<sup>4</sup> To the detriment of land redistribution though, as was specified by the Lancaster House Agreement (LHA), the land for redistribution was to be acquired on a willing seller, willing buyer basis, which compromised the quantity, quality and location of land to be redistributed as well as the form and pace at which land redistribution would progress. With the ever expanding land question, land utilization by Large Scale Commercial Farmer (LSCF), compared to the peasantry, has been the singular most dominant issue. Since 1976, the ratio between the LSCF and

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- 1 Doctoral Student, Department of History, University of the Free State. E-mail: vznyawa@gmail.co
  - 2 Research Fellow, Department of History, University of the Free State. Prof. Barnard passed away on 31 March 2009.
  - 3 S Moyo, "The agrarian question" in I Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe. The political economy of transition 1980-1986* (London, 1987), pp. 165-202.
  - 4 *Ibid.*

the peasants' use of land has been used to determine the amount of land transferable for resettlement.<sup>5</sup>

Houngnikpo asserts that African leaders failed to detect the subterfuge that came with independence.<sup>6</sup> To quench their thirst for independence, they, in reality, conceded a hollow victory. European powers designed and handed to African leaders a “dependent” independence that would never allow the continent to function on its own.<sup>7</sup> For example, when the liberation struggle for Zimbabwe failed to be decisive, negotiations for independence at Lancaster would come with compromises and conditionalities. The conditionalities would shape the policies the new government would pursue; meaning that, to all intents and purposes, the new government would only deal with land issues in consultation with the government in London. Such a situation is delicate, although it brings a solution favourable to the probable eventual winner. For Zimbabwe, the settlement left the machinery of the old government largely intact. Independence, as the right and ability to control one's own destiny,<sup>8</sup> is not complete if decolonization elements like doing away with guarantees for the white minority, let alone land reform, are not favourably resolved.

## 2. THE LANCASTER HOUSE CONSTITUTION: THE CAT AND MOUSE GAME

The Lancaster House Agreement (LHA) of 1979 paved the way for majority rule in Zimbabwe through the ballot that saw Robert Mugabe rise to power, ending Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) of 1965. The agreement covered the Independence Constitution, pre-independence arrangements and a ceasefire.<sup>9</sup> Represented at the conference were the British Government, the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia Administration and the Patriotic Front led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo. According to the discussions on land reform at Lancaster House, the United Kingdom (UK) understood the need for a land settlement programme. The UK agreed to contribute to the costs and to rally the support of the international donor community, as spelt out by Lord Carrington, the Conference Chairman, on 11 October 1979:

“We recognize that the future Government of Zimbabwe, whatever its political complexion, will wish to extend land ownership. The Government can of course purchase land for agricultural settlement, as we all have seen. The Independence Constitution will make it possible to acquire under-utilized land compulsorily, provided that adequate compensation is paid. Any resettlement scheme would clearly have to be carefully prepared and implemented

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5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 M Houngnikpo, “Stuck at the runway: Africa's distress call”, *Africa Insight* 30(1), p. 5.

8 IW Zartman, *Ripe for resolution* (s.l., 1986), p. 10.

9 G Magaramombe, “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, p. 22.

to avoid adverse effects in production. The Zimbabwe Government might well wish to draw in outside donors such as the World Bank in preparing and implementing a full-scale agricultural development plan. The British Government recognize the importance of this issue to a future Zimbabwe Government and will be prepared, within the limits imposed by our financial resources, to help. We should for instance be ready to provide technical assistance for settlement schemes and capital aid for agricultural development projects and infrastructure. In an agricultural development including land settlement schemes, we would be prepared to contribute to the initial capital. The costs would be very substantial indeed, well beyond the capacity, in our judgment, of any individual donor country, and the British Government cannot commit itself at this stage to a specific share in them. We should, however, be ready to support the efforts of the government of independent Zimbabwe to obtain international assistance for these purposes."<sup>10</sup>

With Zimbabwe's land question, the British Government sought resolutions from Kenya's land reform experience. Kenya had had a comparable land problem and a guerrilla war fuelled by land grievances, and the British sought to defuse the problem by buying out white farmers.<sup>11</sup> It was hoped that a similar solution could be found for Zimbabwe. Financial assistance in the form of a development fund would be strategically placed as a bait to draw the liberation movements to reach an agreement with the Rhodesian authorities. Towards this fund, the British agreed to contribute UK75 million pounds to buy out farms owned by whites who did not want to continue to farm in a new Zimbabwe.<sup>12</sup> At the time, the promise was that America would contribute an extra US\$200 million to the fund.<sup>13</sup> However, as time went by and with a change of government in Britain, the offer of the fund was withdrawn by the American Government.<sup>14</sup>

In place of the fund, a compromise solution was placed. In exchange for guaranteeing existing property rights for the white farmers in Zimbabwe for ten years, the UK would underwrite half of the costs of resettlement needed.<sup>15</sup> In 1980, the UK pledged an initial amount of UK 20 million pounds that would facilitate the changing of hands of land from leaving whites to black peasants. There was no provision in the Lancaster House Agreement to establish a specific fund to support land reform. However, the British Government did play a full part around the International Zimbabwe Donor's Conference (ZIMCORD) of March 1981.<sup>16</sup> At that conference, more than 630 million pounds of aid was pledged with Britain encouraging donors to take part by responding generously to Zimbabwe's requirements.<sup>17</sup> More generous donors were needed, for the British Government made it clear that the long-term requirements of

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10 *Ibid.*

11 *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* [on line] at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/land\\_reform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/land_reform)>Zim, 2005.

12 *Ibid.* Also "And now to share Zimbabwe's bounty", *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 April 1980.

13 *Ibid.*

14 T Lebert "Background-land and agrarian reform in Zimbabwe". Working Paper by National Land Committee, p. 7.

15 Editor, "Winning the peace in Zimbabwe", *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 December 1979.

16 Magaramombe, p. 22.

17 *Wikipedia*, p. 10.

land reform in Zimbabwe were beyond the capacity of any individual donor country. To an extent, this was an indication that the task before hand, of equitably redistributing land resources, was a mammoth task that would require much outside help.

When it commenced, land acquisition was limited to the willing seller willing buyer principle. The principle provided white commercial farmers a grace period to pour over their options. Space would also be made available to allow financial assistance to trickle in for the purposes of compensating those leaving. Practically, however, the snail's pace at which land reform was taking place only postponed the resolution of the land question. There would be no mass expropriation of land by the new post-colonial state. The state's hands were tied by phrases that stipulated that by signing the Lancaster House Agreement (LHA) the parties involved undertook among other things to:

- abide by the Independence constitution;
- comply with the pre-independence arrangements; and
- accept the authority of the governor.<sup>18</sup>

The state did, however, retain the right to expropriate land for public and resettlement purposes, but compensation had to be paid out in foreign currency.<sup>19</sup> White commercial farmers who had opted to sell their land would specify what currency they preferred to be paid in, depending partly on the countries to which they had relocated. This stipulation would, however, be subject to a constitutional amendment in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> As regards agrarian transformation, the hands of the new government were effectively cut short since any significant redistribution of land was ruled out. A negotiated settlement was in the interest of everyone, especially Rhodesian whites and indeed a settlement more favourable to them was more likely to be pressed for. Rotberg observes that, militating against continued denial of independence as Smith had pledged never to condone majority rule in his declaration – “not in 1 000 years” – were the military achievements by the Zimbabwe guerrillas. The guerrillas of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) would shortly achieve a string of military successes, so, for Smith, waiting and hoping was a less good option.<sup>21</sup> Rotberg adds:

“In addition to incursions into northeastern and eastern Rhodesia, the militants had begun attacking in the northwest and the west. There were attacks on the outskirts of Salisbury (Harare) in 1977. Smith's regular army was stretched. Further mobilization of white fighters would cripple the already weakened local economy. By the next year, 50 per cent of white adult males were in the ranks of the military. White Rhodesia was under siege. Morale was questionable. Not surprisingly, 1, 600 whites were leaving beleaguered Rhodesia each month while blacks were also exiting to join the insurgent struggle.”<sup>22</sup>

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18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*, p. 7. See also I Mandaza and L Sachikonye (eds). *The one party state and democracy – the Zimbabwe debate* (Harare, 1991), p. 53.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Rotberg, p. 53.

22 *Ibid.*

With the support from Mozambique, Zambia and further afield that Mugabe's ZANU and Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) got, the battle to sustain white supremacy in Rhodesia was soon to be lost. The struggle to persuade the unwilling Zimbabwean leaders to a conference table would be tricky. Tricky because the Zimbabwean leaders realized their potential and capacity to win the war through creating joint military command, coordinating their attacks and joining hands with other well-organized and experienced insurgent forces. Mugabe and Nkomo saw power at stake and near at hand.<sup>23</sup> They would intensify the struggle, pressurise further and so would not easily be brought to a round table. They realized the probability of winning the war was high.

The guerrillas of Zimbabwe were caught between two fires, namely to continue in the trenches or give in to pressures from other frontline states and grudgingly accept the half full half empty promises. Nkomo and Mugabe saw negotiations as a waste of time but with the dawn of indigenous hegemony beginning to colour the horizon, the decision to negotiate would not be theirs alone. Negotiations by their very nature are a give and take set up. For Nkomo and Mugabe negotiating was not an option because it would surely leave them stuck with decisions they could not live with.

Surrounded by independent neighbours, with the exception of South Africa, the neighbours would push for negotiations to achieve a black-run Zimbabwe. The independence of Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau in 1974, following a military coup in Portugal, meant that only South Africa remained assisting the land-locked Rhodesia.<sup>24</sup> For Zimbabwe's independent neighbours, negotiations were a window of hope that needed not to be thrown to the waste. Eventually, leaders of the British Commonwealth, President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia directed Mugabe and Nkomo towards the conference table.<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, following pressure from the frontline states, Mugabe's Zimbabwe African Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and Nkomo's ZAPU conceded and gave in to negotiations. Patsanza calls the agreement a compromise constitution.<sup>26</sup> The constitution would not be one of the winner takes all, for it had no absolute winner. It would be a give and take that would, for the new government compromise, deny, defer and destroy essential components of freedom. In the interim, under BJ Vorster's successor, PW Botha of South Africa's tutorship/ tutorlage, Ian Smith devolved nominal power to Abel Muzorewa after an election in 1979. This arrangement, a transitional charade dubbed an "essential irrelevance" was disavowed by the liberation leaders.<sup>27</sup>

23 Editor, "The knot that Rhodesia negotiators must untie", *New York Times*, 29 October 1976.

24 Rotberg, pp. 50-51.

25 L.Sachikonye, "The promised land; From expropriation to reconciliation and Jambanja" in B Raftopoulos and T Zavage (eds), *Zimbabwe Injustice and political reconciliation*, (s.l, s.a.), pp. 1-18.

26 AJD Patsanza, *Our Zimbabwe an element of political economy* (Harare, 1988), p. 105.

27 Editor, "The Queen could prevent Armageddon in Rhodesia", *Christian Science Monitor*; 3 January 1979.

They viewed the whole set up as delaying tactics on the part of Smith to allow majority rule. Muzorewa's administration was practically controlled by Smith and the whites and the country would be Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.<sup>28</sup> In the eyes of Mugabe and Nkomo, as representatives of their parties, Muzorewa's administration fell short of satisfying Zimbabwean aspirations for freedom, nor could it stem the nationalist tide. Nonetheless, by the time of the negotiations, Muzorewa was the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. Despite the fact that his administration was not black enough, it allowed some modicum of smooth transition into the Lancaster constitution. As observed earlier, Muzorewa's administration, though heavily discredited, was not completely irrelevant. Deliberations for a new constitutional dispensation for an independent Zimbabwe were among Rhodesian whites, the two main nationalist movements, Britain and Muzorewa's administration.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. THE NEW GOVERNMENT AND LAND REFORM

As a result of this critical capitulation on Mugabe and Nkomo's side, land reform was a nagging albatross around the Zimbabwe Government's neck. The restrictions imposed on the new government by the LHA, remained a constant theme in the question of Zimbabwe land reform in the decades following independence. The fear Mugabe and Nkomo had of a negotiated settlement that had led them to cast aspersions earlier proved to be real and not imagined. The British had had an upper hand in the negotiations with the leverage to literary impose terms they felt would benefit the white commercial farmers in Zimbabwe. To fail to do that, on the part of the British, could have been regarded to be a sell-out. In fact, the whole negotiation strategy was largely a scheme by the British to thwart or stop a possible outright military victory by the Zimbabwean Government.<sup>30</sup> With such an unwanted victory pushed aside, the ground was set for a "loser takes all" scenario. The bottom line was to protect the commercial farmers and their interests and the government in London set to do just that.

As Palmer recounts, compounding these restrictions was the fact that 90 per cent of the country's marketed food requirements were being produced by white farmers following the collapse of peasant agriculture.<sup>31</sup> Peasant agriculture had been rendered moribund due to many factors, among them lack of support such as financial subsidies, unavailability of a market locally and abroad, as well as deliberate efforts to elbow them out. Gradually, peasant farmers were reduced to subsistence farming, producing only for their families and not contributing economically towards the

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28 Patsanza, p. 106.

29 Rotberg, p. 54. See also "Winning the peace in Zimbabwe", *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 December 1979.

30 Rotberg, p. 54.

31 R Palmer, *Land and racial domination in Rhodesia* (London, 1977), p. 166.

economic development of Rhodesia. Left alone to enjoy the viability of the agricultural sector, the white commercial farmers produced for the silos of the nation, exported as well as gained themselves respectable repute. Such respect had given them a bargaining chip and edge over the rest to the extent of allowing them to have political say in decision-making forums, all to the detriment of the black farmer, who got no recognition, authority nor voice to be meaningful. Ironically, the white farmer emerged from the brink of doom in a stronger position, economically and politically. Economically elevated, the white farmers continued to enjoy their position, because despite the pressure on Mugabe to equitably redistribute national resources, no pragmatic leader wanted to interfere with a productive sector such as agriculture in 1980.

Initially, Mugabe promised not to tamper with income producing mining, farming, fishing or manufacturing sectors. In the interest of productivity, that made economic sense for such as addressing the peasants' liberation aspirations was of utmost essentiality, maintaining the country's capacity for growth would be a sure sign of a realistic, pragmatic and visionary leader. The fact that the agriculture sector of 1980 was a formidable pillar for economic growth meant that the decision to embark on land reform programmes would not be economically favourable. Reform in an economic sense was not needed. To reform land would be to disrupt the progress and growth the country was enjoying and this scenario favoured white commercial farmers. It follows then that one who has an economic leverage would have an upper hand where it comes to politics. Vital and critical decisions were made with the knowledge of who would manage to pay, donate and sponsor what. Money could buy the white farmers political importance. In addition, they had the leverage to manipulate their economic advantage to influence policies. It was not unimaginable to use money to frustrate and discourage change as well as the possibility to threaten to stop producing food or raw materials if their positions or privileges were not respected. It was possible to place conditionalities before any transformative policies could be passed. Such was their advantage that abuse went on under the guise of promotion of the country's economic growth – abuse in the sense that not much land changed hands between 1980 and 1990, yet, for black peasants, acquiring land was a priority.

Between 1980 and 1985, the UK provided 44 million pounds for land reform, 20 million pounds as a specific land resettlement grant and 24 million pounds of budgetary support to help meet the Zimbabwe Government's own contribution to the programme.<sup>32</sup> The Resettlement Scheme was a new agricultural policy that would be more favourable to white commercial farmers for it settled a sizable number of landless blacks in one place as opposed to allocating an individual or a family a whole farm. More people could be settled in a relatively smaller area, shorter time and at lower costs. Statistics in *Table 3:2* indicate that more land was purchased in 1980/1981 than in the

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32 Magaramombe, p. 9.

succeeding years. This, among a plethora of reasons, was a result of the availability of funds to resettle the landless and also the accessibility of underutilized land.

The Land Acquisition Act of 1985 drafted under the LHA, gave the government the first right of purchase of white farms for resettlement by blacks. The intention was to support the smallholder sector in improving their farming methodology and to subsequently move away from subsistence farming towards production for the market.<sup>33</sup> The new farmers would thrive with the government opening up markets, financing and advisory organizations for them. Much as this new agricultural policy addressed the central thrust of the land problem, that is, one of redistributing land, conversely, it neglected the issue of property rights. To all practical purposes, the resettlement scheme was essentially opening up channels for subsistence farmers to improve their lot by according them access to services, markets, loans and other cognate resources with no commitment on giving them property rights. In the future of the Zimbabwean land question, however, property rights became the crux of the land problem. The mid eighties witnessed a prosperous resettlement programme with peasant farmers eager to come out of subsistence farming and produce for the market, without giving much thought to the tenure issue.

War veterans and displaced communities immediately applied pressure for resettling on abandoned land left behind by fleeing farmers at the height of the struggle.<sup>34</sup> Farms would further be left unattended and without owners by some white farmers who were uncertain as regards their security under a black government. The future of white commercial farming was balancing precariously and the worst white fear then was the prospect of being ruled by a so called Marxist socialist black government. The liberation struggle for Zimbabwe had been punctuated by “Marxist rhetoric” and fear that “draconian Marxist solutions” would influence Mugabe’s policies crept in.<sup>35</sup> This suspicion, though nullified by Mugabe’s pragmatic approach to the agricultural sector’s position in 1980, was not unfounded. Mugabe’s ZANU-PF had enjoyed military support from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries during the liberation struggle and imagining that the new Zimbabwean Government would fail to continue keeping the same friends would be misleading. If one wanted to know the nature of the new Zimbabwean Government, they had to check the friends the government kept. Britain and America had seen it coming and fought to pre-empt the development and contribution of such relations by pouring aid to the new government. A large amount of aid to support the nascent government was deemed to stem Soviet

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33 M Rukuni, “The evolution on Zimbabwe’s agricultural policy, 1890-1980”. Paper presented for the conference on Zimbabwe’s Agricultural Revolution, 1991, p. 21.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Rotberg, p. 227.



influence in Zimbabwe and the whole Southern Africa region. Financial support would reduce elements of authoritarianism in the young democracy.<sup>36</sup>

The strategic support for Mugabe and his approach was reinforced by the Zimbabwean Government's decision not to collectivize or expropriate land. If anything, the government had plans to promote further commercial farming as well as deny urban consumers any subsidy. Talks of reconciliation were loud in 1980 but pressure to fulfil the hopes of expectant blacks, not to renege on pre-independence promises to friends and citizens and pressure from a population boom would determine how long the whitewash would remain white enough to be meaningful. In fact, Rotberg puts it blatantly obtrusive that, even then, signs of danger had started showing:

"The government had purchased a South African-owned press chain that controlled the country's only daily newspaper, exerted official authority over radio and television broadcasts, and threatened to nationalize all marketing of minerals. Moreover, Mugabe had started to talk about turning Zimbabwe into a one-party state."<sup>37</sup>

By 1983, racial, ethnic and political signs of trouble were lurking in Zimbabwe. Most publicized is the Matebeleland crisis, the massacre of between 20 000 and 30 000 Ndebeles (Zimbabweans in the Southern or Matebeleland province) between 1981 and 1987 by a North Korean-trained battalion sent by Mugabe to stamp out "bandits".<sup>38</sup> The conflict was an act of disturbing political violence with ethnic roots. Government forces, belonging to the ZANU-PF, mostly Shona-speaking, descended on alleged dissidents who were Ndebele-speaking and belonging to the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) based in Matebeleland. The government intended to stamp out ongoing dissident activity which included the burning down of churches, murdering of priests, kidnapping and murdering of tourists and general sabotage and terrorism.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, however, after the government's crack down on the alleged dissidents, the international community interpreted the whole exercise to be an attempt to silence political opposition and to exterminate the Ndebele-speaking people.<sup>40</sup> The interpretation intensified the bitterness and resentment of the Shonas by Ndebeles and fuelled political polarization between the two major ethnic

36 Editor, "Zimbabwe needs aid", *New York Times*, 8 December 1981.

37 Rotberg, p. 228.

38 *Ibid.* See also N Mlambo, "Moods of bitterness. How political polarisation has influenced Zimbabwean election", *Journal of African Elections. Special Issue on Zimbabwe's 2005 General Election* 4(2), p. 17; S Eppel, "Gukurahundi. The need for truth and reparation", *Journal of African Elections. Special Issue on Zimbabwe's 2005 General Election* 4(2), pp. 43-62. Cf. also Zimbabwe: Matebeleland moves on", *Africa Confidential* (46)6, 18 March 2005 and J Muzondidya, "Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans. Invisible subject minorities and the quest for justice and reconciliation in post-colonial Zimbabwe", in Raftopoulos and Savage (eds), pp. 213-235. Also EP Makambe, "Entumbane conflicts 1980-81 and the politics of ethnosocial mobilisation in Zimbabwe", *Tsebo Journal of Research and Creative Writing* 2(1), 2007, pp. 134-144. Cf. also Legal Resource Foundation and Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace 1997, pp. 1-10.

39 Mlambo, p. 17.

40 *Ibid.*

groups of Zimbabwe. The Unity Accord signed between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU in 1987 would partially ameliorate relations but could not wash away the mutual ethnic suspicions born of the Matebeland crisis or the Entumbane crisis as it is commonly known in Zimbabwe. The painful memories of the crisis live on and misinterpretations are fanned on.

With regard to other avenues, although policies were chosen and implementation was done slowly in the fullness of time, Zimbabwe had embarked on unstoppable backtracking. It would never be the same again despite the fact that the leader was undeniably sober, serious, decisive, pragmatic, aware of how other revolutionary regimes had failed and knowing his nation's vulnerability being adjacent to apartheid South Africa. Although agriculture was still enviably prosperous and productive and Zimbabwe was still an economic success story after independence, the country's fortunes were soon squeezed by sundry factors. Aspects such as Marxist resurgence, a strident antimarket path, antithetical policies to economic growth and population doubling and the introduction of family planning would charter a colliding course with reality, the turner of political liberation and the whole being of a nation. It was only a matter of time before the beating on Zimbabwe took its political, social and economic toll.

In 1980, the distribution of land was as follows:

Tenure category	Estimated land allocation (m.ha)	Proportion of total (%)
Communal areas	16,4	41,41
National parks & forests	6	15,15
State owned farms	0,3	0,75
Large-scale commercial farms	15,5	39,14
Small-scale commercial farms	1,4	3,53
Total	39,6	100

Table 1: Distribution of land in Zimbabwe, 1980

Source: Karumbidza (Seminar Paper 2001).<sup>41</sup>

Notes to the land allocation by region:

74% of all communal land is located in regions 4 and 5.

75% of all small commercial land is located in regions 3 and 4.

51% of all large commercial land is located in regions 1 and 3.

41 JB Karumbidza, "An overview of the land needs and the politics of land reform in the run-up to the residential elections in Zimbabwe, the effects on society and economy and the response of the international community". Unpublished seminar paper, p. 5.

In the life span of the Lancaster Agreement, about 8,5 million acres of land were purchased from the whites by mutual consent and paid for by the UK with 44 million pounds in aid.<sup>42</sup> However, the number of blacks resettled on this land, fell short of the government target of over one million. Contrary to expectation as well, part of those resettled people abandoned the land for lack of financial, material and technical support. Members of Parliament, civil servants, police and military officials were not slow to benefit from this desertion and by 1990, eight percent of commercial farmland was owned by them, though they too lacked the wherewithal to make the land productive.<sup>43</sup>

At the centre of the Lancaster decade disharmony was the state-centred market-based approach to land redistribution. The same provisions used to keep the best traditional African lands in minority white hands in Kenya, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and South Africa were engaged.<sup>44</sup> Land acquisition through the Willing Seller, Willing Buyer (WSWB) set up was comparably easier during 1981 to 1983, thanks to a substantial supply of farms abandoned soon after independence. In real terms, the government could not acquire land when and where it wanted. White farmers were either unwilling to sell or required high prices. The Lancaster Agreement had entrenched the rights of a minority and they could not be coerced into selling. They dictated the pace of land reform, at their own time, when they felt like it. The WSWB principle disabled land reform in Zimbabwe. The government turned into a reactive buyer with the private sector leading the identification of land controlling the supply available for resettlement.<sup>45</sup> District officials under the direct supervision of central government officials had the jurisdiction to select beneficiaries.

Dashwood, Karumbidza and many others concur, however, that even with funding from the UK, the drying up of farms for sale influenced farm prices to sky rocket and land redistribution came to a near halt. Dashwood comments:

“Certainly, until 1990, the provisions made the acquisition of land for resettlement very expensive; but even without that constraint, the strong resistance of members of the agrarian elite, and their ability to effectively lobby the government against extensive land redistribution, constituted a powerful deterrent for a government anxious to maintain the export levels of agriculture commodities from this sector.”<sup>46</sup>

To demonstrate the expenditure on purchasing land, Karumbidza provides a table of statistics quoted from Cusworth:

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42 A Norman, *Robert Mugabe and the betrayal of Zimbabwe* (London, 2004), p. 102.

43 *Ibid.*

44 S Moyo, “The political economy of land acquisition and redistribution in Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26(1), p. 12.

45 *Wikipedia.*

46 H Dashwood, *Zimbabwe The political economy of transformation* (Toronto, 2000), p. 190.

Year	Land purchase (ha)	Costs (\$)	Costs (\$/ha)
1979/1980	162 555	3 104 380	19
1980/1981	326 972	3 616 172	11
1981/1982	819 155	15 414 248	19
1982/1983	807 573	21 414 248	27
1983/1984	173 848	4 596 078	26
1984/1985	74 848	3 062 930	41
1985/1986	86 187	3 444 610	40
1986/1987	133 515	389 335	3
1987/1988	80 554	2 889 328	36
1988/1989	78 097	7 431 575	95
Total	2 743 304	65 362 904	24

Table 2: Land acquisition and land costs, 1979-1989<sup>47</sup>

The data in *Table 2* is evidence to the uneven spread of land acquisition over time. The process was not only uneven and unpredictable but also unsustainably expensive. The high prices were deliberate. Exorbitant prices of pieces of land were deemed a deterrent by commercial farmers from a massive transformation that would be too quick. In 1979/1980, 162 555 hectares of land were bought for \$3 104 380 at \$19 per hectare. By the end of the decade, in 1988/1989, 78 097 hectares, far less compared to 1979/1980, had been bought for close to five times the price of 1979/1980. Not only was there less land to buy, but that which was being bought was on great demand and, therefore, the prices for it had shot through the roof. The fluctuating number of farms to be bought as well as the ever-changing prices did contribute to frustrating proper plans by the government in their policy making. The model in place for land acquisition, that of the WSWB, did not coerce white commercial farmers to sell their land so that there could be equitable distribution.

The WSWB, enshrined in the Lancaster Agreement, was simply an act of subterfuge to discourage a winner-takes-all scenario at the dawn of Zimbabwe's independence. As though the deceit was not enough, Riddle observes that talks at Lancaster had vague provisions for containing the land question. The main provision for resolving land distribution contained ill-defined conditions regarding the authority for decision making and the level of compensation for confiscated land.<sup>48</sup> For all practical purposes, the Lancaster House Constitution was largely a ploy by the British to buy time for the white farmers in Zimbabwe to adjust and stay or to decide to move out of the country. Realizing it was a matter of time before the Zimbabwean guerrillas

47 Karumbidza, p. 6.

48 R Riddle, "Zimbabwe's land problem: The central issue", in WH Morris (ed.), *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe behind and beyond Lancaster House* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 1-3.

would win the liberation struggle, negotiation was the best option for the whites in Zimbabwe. Rotberg records:

“With backing from FRELIMO and Zambia, ZANU guerrillas were poised to take their hitherto successful hit-and-run war to the Rhodesian cities. Then there would be a white exodus. Whites simply could not sustain a defensive, unwinnable war for more than a few years against blacks with sanctuaries in neighbouring Mozambique and access to Mozambican as well as Soviet and Chinese weapons, facilities and training. However it happened, power would soon shift in Rhodesia.”<sup>49</sup>

Besides an inevitable victory by black guerrillas, the decision to engage the WSWB as a land corrective measure is a pointer to great scheming by whites. The mode has a quality of not promising anything. It is self-explanatory in that everything is done by those willing. This is in direct contrast with the objectives for both sides in the liberation struggle. People cannot take to battle for something they can in the same breath keep or dispose of at will. It makes logical sense to fight for something you dearly want to keep and it follows to say, with the option, losing it is out of the question. The British realized that if the struggle for Zimbabwe continued, there was high probability that the white commercial farmers would lose their families, homes, income and commerce in the battle. A strategy was curved that would allow the whites to continue enjoying Rhodesia in Zimbabwe and maintaining the *status quo*. Time was needed to observe and study the nascent democracy and make informed decisions. Slowing down reform and blocking radical change in Zimbabwe would ensure that change would not come too quickly. By 1979, Zimbabwe and South Africa were the two last outposts of colonialism. For South Africa, keeping Zimbabwe colonial made strategic sense. South Africa would reduce attention to itself and pressure to democratise and the two countries would share their experiences as the remaining white governments. If Smith lost his grip on Rhodesia, the white government's days would sure be numbered. Focus by all other African leaders, the international community and human rights organizations could be drawn to South Africa and the pressure to abdicate could be insurmountable. The vulnerability of Rhodesian whites would contribute to a potential weakness and isolation in South Africa.<sup>50</sup>

Conversely, however, South Africa was tempted to use Rhodesia as a bargaining chip to protect itself and secure its own moated fortress.<sup>51</sup> Aware of its vulnerability with a troubled Rhodesia on its borders, South Africa had to opt for strategic peace in Southern Africa. Assisting in the removal of Smith would benefit South Africa's strategic interests with the West and with the newly emergent Front Line States like Mozambique. Conscious that white Rhodesia was to fall anyway, South Africa realized a window of opportunity to strengthen its own position by acting in favour of the Front

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49 Rotberg, p. 51. Also “The knell for white Rhodesia” in *Newsday*, 9 February 1975.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

Line States which were pushing for a black-run Zimbabwe.<sup>52</sup> Mozambique, for example, had cut lucrative ties with the landlocked Rhodesia and for South Africa, supporting such a move, would gain it favourable pacts with Mozambique. With increasing Western pressure on South Africa to stop assisting whites in Rhodesia, allowing Rhodesia to fall, would seem the most profitable option for white South Africa.<sup>53</sup>

The Lancaster House employed, in favour of white Rhodesians, an exit package diplomatically. Indeed, Mugabe and his team played into the hands of the British by yielding to pressures to grab the chance for independence. They were pressured by other Front Line States and the Zimbabwean masses being weary of war and the uncertainty of victory. Poring over the decisions to embrace negotiations, it is clear that the political landscape in 1979 was an open and shut scenario – an intractable situation that would not be solved by dictating conditions without giving in to needs by the other part.

#### 4. SETTLEMENT MODELS (1982-1998)

With the whole land issue turned into a game of wits, at the close of the Lancaster decade, the set target had not been reached. Statistically, however, resettlement was not evenly spread out over space and time. Settlement of beneficiaries on land took place through five models from 1982 to 1998 as given below:

- Intensive settlement on an individual family basis (Model A)  
 In this model, beneficiaries received cropping and communal grazing land. Tenure was in form of three annual permits, one for settlement, one for cultivation and one for grazing. Beneficiaries had to give up their rights to land in the communal areas they came from.<sup>54</sup> With Model A, the homesteads are in villages and farmers have fields at a designated area.
- Village settlement with cooperative farming (Model B)  
 Designed to take over existing large commercial farms, Model B was to be run co-operatively with set-up committees for decision making. Credit would be accessed by the cooperative and income allocated either to individual families or for farm development. At the beginning, about 50 cooperative schemes were set up.<sup>55</sup> Many are now defunct – they folded and the members are now individualized. As a result of the partial failure, only two model B schemes are in existence, that is Model B1 – those that are still co-operatives and B2 – the individualized schemes. The cooperative scheme was plagued by inability to share, given the different levels of input individuals contributed in terms of the knowhow, effort, labour commitment

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52 Riddle, p.7; Rotberg, p. 51.

53 Rotberg, p. 51.

54 Lebert, p. 10.

55 *Ibid.*

and accountability. The government did not make an effort to initiate individuals into the culture of working together, sharing both the labour and profits and getting used to group work as it were, given the tradition of individual forms of farming in the country. As a result, Model B played a subsidiary role because of the nature of the African farmer of working with a scattered settlement pattern where farming is carried out on an individual basis.

- State farms with out-growers (Model C)

With this model, beneficiaries are resettled around a core estate where a give and take situation prevails in that the settlers provide labour in exchange for basic services like food, shelter, employment and security. Cropping land within this scheme was allocated on an individual basis with communally managed grazing land. A professional farm manager oversees the core estate. Few people benefited from this scheme as it was not extensively implemented and again the idea of operating as a cooperative is not a very favourable one in Zimbabwe, statistically. The prospect of having to share labour, input and outcome makes cooperative work not an easy alternative for Zimbabweans. They have always enjoyed and appreciated working in family units to avoid disagreements on critical decisions, not to mention the squabble probability the sharing of produce or profit is susceptible to. In two districts of Manicaland province, however, it worked, as demonstrated by its flourishing tea estates.<sup>56</sup>

- Commercial grazing for communal areas (Model D)

Particularly meant for Matebeleland South Province, the model involved the purchasing of commercial ranches next to communal land. Livestock was bought and allowed to fatten on the ranches before being sold.<sup>57</sup> The model was meant to reduce grazing pressure on communal lands. Again the model suffered the fate of model C: it was not extensively implemented, therefore, not sufficiently tested.

- Self-contained units (Model E)

Under this model, farmers were resettled in a way similar to the Small Scale Commercial Farms (SSCF) where an individual has a farm where crop and livestock production is carried out within the farm unit. The average farm is 50 hectares. This model was more generous compared to other land reform programmes partly because it was individualized, modelled on the extensive land use patterns characteristic of the commercial sector and the average allocation was manageable, enabling optimum use.<sup>58</sup> The downside, however, is that less people benefited from it, so beneficiaries were reduced.

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56 Central Statistics Office, *Agriculture and Livestock Survey 2005/2006. Training and Field Manual*, p. 2.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*

The acquisition of land for resettlement was not evenly distributed in both time and space (provinces), resulting in uneven progress. From 1980, going through to 1990, the resettlement pace which started out high was dropping over time.<sup>59</sup> Historians, including Karumbidza, Rukuni and Moyo, concur that redistributive land was most available between 1980 and 1983. A number of factors could have influenced this scenario, ranging from the availability of abandoned farm land during the war, especially in the liberation war zone of the Eastern Highlands, or shortly before or after independence, and also that, for most blacks, the independence party was still on, meaning that the urgency for acquiring land had not grabbed them.

After 1983, with some comfortable modicum of post-war political stability ushered in by Mugabe's declaration of the need for reconciliation and the announcement that the white community was encouraged and free to stay, most white farmers had no need to sell their land. Consequently, white farmers held on to their core productive land and sold marginal land at a time when most blacks were coming alive to the fact that it was time to share the country. Perhaps, had most of the change been implemented between 1980 and 1983, land reform might have been completed. It was prime time. The white farmers who were not happy about sharing might have left and the blacks might have gotten to serious business early enough. Yet, the WSWB principle still held the hands of the government behind their backs, and economically, the market prices of the land available were rocketing due to the peace and calm in the country.

It must be mentioned, however, that, on the part of most white farmers, there was a conscious effort to thwart land reform. Aided by guarantees offered them, thanks to the Lancaster Agreement, the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture was their ear and in liaison with the Agriculture Minister, being white (as well as influences in other ministries), the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) managed to keep land reform in check. The CFU realized that rapid land reform would undermine white confidence and threaten export earnings and employment.<sup>60</sup> Their resolution was to ensure that farms for resettlement would become available in trickles, if at all. The CFU bolstered their position by ensuring that commercial farmers remained secure through taking the government to court to just make a point. The CFU used the court to contest any policies by the government that they felt impinged on their rights or threatened to squeeze them into a smaller space. For them, the courts would decide who had the legitimate right to keep the land. Also, as long as the case was in court, the time the courts took to resolve the differences would benefit the farmers in that they continued to farm, harvest and profit from the land. In the CFU and commercial farmers' favour came the pressure by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank on the government to cut down its budget resulting in a

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59 Karumbidza, p. 10.

60 Lebert, p. 15.



cut back on resettlement.<sup>61</sup> This move meant less pressure from the government for white farmers to release land.

Spells of drought in 1984 also disorganized the government which used the most part of its budget for drought relief.<sup>62</sup> New black farm owners were not spared either, most of them deserted and returned to communal areas in search of better conditions. Climatic change was not yet an issue by then, so much so that most black farmers lacked the expertise to survey their parcels of land and draw up feasibility plans on what to grow on what soil. As a result, periods of drought drained most of their energy, given that initially they were placed in agro-ecologically marginal, drier and climatically erratic land and worse, they lacked the experience of dealing with the impact of drought.<sup>63</sup>

Land reform during the Lancaster decade in Zimbabwe was characteristically state-centred, market-based and, in a way, people driven. The government has always been the key buyer of land depending on its broader settlement planning framework. It is the government that decided to buy available land on the market or issue a one year “no present interest” certificate allowing private buyers to purchase the advertised land.<sup>64</sup>

With the market-based land acquisition approach, the landholders, to a large extent, determine the amount, location, quality and cost of land, meaning that land reform is controlled by them. They hold the key to the pace, meaningfulness and genuineness of the programme, or protection of their own interests. In the same breath, it meant that the government and the beneficiaries alike, could not drive the process in terms of their needs and their urgency. The third trait of land reform, between 1980 and 1990, was what Moyo refers to as the “community land occupation approach”.<sup>65</sup> Under this approach, communities drove land identification through occupation of abandoned and underutilized lands, with government following and purchasing this land at market price.<sup>66</sup>

## 5. LAND INVASIONS

Land invasions and occupations did not start in 2000, they have always been there from 1980, but at a slow, calm and non-disruptive pace. Between 1980 and 1995, the occupations were of farms already abandoned or not utilized, farmland of whose status

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61 *Ibid.*

62 AS Mlambo, “Land grab or taking back stolen land. The fast track land reform process in Zimbabwe”, *Historical Perspective History Compass* 3, 2005, p. 16.

63 I Mandaza, “Introduction. The political economy of transition”, in I Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe, the political economy of transition 1980-1986*, p. 1.

64 *Ibid.*; Lebert, p. 15.

65 Moyo, p. 24.

66 *Ibid.*; Sachikonye, pp. 1-18.

the government was not aware. The amount of land seized was insignificant compared to the seismic scale of occupations from 1996 onwards. The government, however, did put legal constraints on those who dared to continue such occupations.<sup>67</sup>

As a result, though there was evidence of political commitment by the new government of Zimbabwe in 1980 to address imbalances in property ownership in that the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme was initiated in 1980, very little action was seen in that regard due to the effects of the LHA. The conditionalities imposed by the agreement have been a central issue of contention and have especially helped shape hostile relations between the government of Harare and London. The imposed strict conditions, the guarantees for the white minority, the limited financial support to the land reform programme and the unfulfilled promises (support was not as forthcoming as promised) have created sour relations full of suspicion of each other and mistrust. Though unavoidable by 1979, the LHA, to Mugabe and his party, was never favourable.

Once independence was secured, the new government indeed had challenging expectations to meet such as demands by the masses and liberation struggle promises that would unsettle them. With time, promised financial support from Britain began to thin out, wither and fizzle out. Some of the promises, such as the setting up of a development fund, were part of the setup to make negotiations lucrative. The realization by the new black government that some of the pledged or assured goodies would not materialize, created anger in a people who felt cheated. The frustration manifested itself into the condoning of violent white farm invasions by the black landless.<sup>68</sup> Over time, Mugabe would be bad mouthing the government in London and they would do the same. Zimbabwe withdrew from the Commonwealth and, as a result, no Zimbabwean held an influential international post in the United Nations, IMF or otherwise. The West campaigned against such appointments. Soon enough, Zimbabwe, in politics, international forums, sport and other such platforms lost visibility. The relegating of Zimbabwe to the periphery, a result of a debatable issue of sanctions imposed on Harare, paralyzed the country. While the international community refuted sanctions against Zimbabwe, further than targeted sanctions against a few members of the government, the reality on the ground is such that targeted sanctions would not have achieved such devastation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The crux of the souring relations was the fact that, in the eyes of the government in Harare, the British Government that came into office at the end of the Lancaster negotiation was following the same racist discriminatory policies as its predecessors.

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67 Sachikonye, p. 9.

68 M Meredith, *Mugabe power and plunder in Zimbabwe* (Oxford, 2002), p. 166.

The same master-servant, colony-colonizer relations were kept. Where Britain purported to be doing Zimbabwe a favour by giving out grants and donations, Zimbabwe took the favour as a matter of historical obligation rather than development assistance.<sup>69</sup> For as long as financial support was not viewed in the same light by Zimbabwe and Britain, its purpose, target and worth were blamed for creating a donor syndrome in the people of Zimbabwe and in other former colonies of Britain. A donor syndrome is anti-industry, anti-activity, and inculcates laziness in a people and the eagerness to receive more and more regardless of the quality being received. The Zimbabwe Government believed that it is the British Government's place to pay for redistributing land for they caused the lack of equilibrium. The British Government wanted to pose as though they were doing their former colony a favour by soliciting donations.<sup>70</sup> As a result of the different ways of perceiving the financial support Britain promised, a cold war had been ignited between London and Harare.

On the part of the new government, the land reform programme grew explicitly political with time. The criteria for selection of beneficiaries of the resettlement programme showed inconsistencies. Initially, the selection prioritized those who had been marginalized by the previous regime, including refugees, displaced persons and people without land or with inadequate land for subsistence, but subsequent revisions of the programme in 1985, 1997 and 2000 saw this emphasis shift, becoming increasingly partisan.<sup>71</sup>

Note should be taken also that, unlike South Africa, Zimbabwe failed to initiate and implement restitution, yet, possibly, restitution was pre-empted by the Lancaster Constitution. The silence on restoration of land rights assumes that there was no need for restitution, yet, the self-provision to land by communities along the years was a signpost that not considering restitution claims was a miscalculation on the part of the government. Over the years, examples of land occupations by communities as indicators or expressions of underlying expectation of redress did not even help the government to reconsider their oversight. Had restitution been an actively articulated part of land reform in Zimbabwe, indigenous owners of land might have gotten what was due to them during the euphoria of independence. Lack of restitution delayed the process of land reform and, consequently, communities started to resettle themselves on land they deemed unoccupied.

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69 Magaramombe, p. 10.

70 D Anderson, "Mugabe is right about land reform", *The Independence*, 4 May 2000, pp. 1-3.

71 S Mbaya, "Zimbabwe's land politics and the 2005 elections", *Journal of African Elections. Special Issue on Zimbabwe's 2005 General Election*, p. 40.