

**To share the land**  
**Another look at the Zimbabwe crisis and a plea for resumption**  
**of support**

Summary

The present crisis in Zimbabwe has its origin in the limitations to decolonization which blocked any significant alteration to the colonial land distribution pattern. President Mugabe brought the issue to the fore and manipulated it expertly to save his growingly unpopular regime, in a context where "the land card" had become his only option: the country was reeling from the disastrous results of ESAP, and Zanu's record of mismanagement and corruption added to costly policies had exhausted people's patience. Zimbabwe's gradual isolation deepened the crisis.

Still, as farms are divided and many are resettled, it becomes crucial to resume international help and prevent the country from total collapse. A formal recognition of Zimbabwe sovereignty could help mend the relations and open avenues for a new contract towards a Zimbabweanization of willing white farmers.

Michel Lafon – Research Officer - Linguistics  
IFAS, Johannesburg  
[lafon@vjf.cnrs.fr](mailto:lafon@vjf.cnrs.fr) & [michel.maikoro@gmail.com](mailto:michel.maikoro@gmail.com)

**To share the land**  
**Another look at the Zimbabwe crisis and a plea for resumption**  
**of support<sup>1</sup>**

Michel Lafon - Research Officer - Linguistic  
IFAS, Johannesburg (2001-2004), Llacan-UMR 8135 Cnrs (2005-)  
[lafon@vjf.cnrs.fr](mailto:lafon@vjf.cnrs.fr) & [michel.maikoro@gmail.com](mailto:michel.maikoro@gmail.com)

As a way to mark its entry into the new century, Zimbabwe, rather unexpectedly, has taken centre stage with what has been generally described by the media as a desperate bid by an aging potentate to remain in power at all costs.

But isn't that a view which blinds itself to fact that the present situation is the result of various historical processes and political events, to which Mugabe's policy came - in part - as a reaction?

We wish to argue that the Zimbabwe crisis results from a combination of factors; in particular, the deterioration of the economic climate, which started much before the last turn of events and is not of Mugabe's sole making, made land the last frontier; also, Mugabe's present strategy would have stood no chance had decolonization in Zimbabwe being carried out more thoroughly.

Further, we should recognize the possibility for land occupation to be moving away from the clouds that marred its inception, generating a dynamic of its own; hence, we feel, the moral obligation to give it a chance, not to mention the necessity to save Zimbabwe from complete collapse.

A brief overlook at the origin of the land issue in Zimbabwe is in order, even if it appears common place: first, the mere statement of the facts leads to a more balanced account of the events, second, unless one believes in symptom treatment only, there is no alternative but to tackle the root of the illness. Then we move on to show how Mugabe was able to manipulate the land issue to further his own aims. We conclude with suggestions on ways to allow for support to the land reform and help the country overcome this troubled moment.

**I The Land question in Zimbabwe**  
*Background*

This is no place to detail the land issue in Zimbabwe, which has been the object of many comprehensive studies<sup>2</sup>. But the lasting effects of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Paper completed by mid 2001 and published in Internet Jnl of the African Association of Political Sciences n 1 but the website ([www.aaps.co.zw](http://www.aaps.co.zw)) has apparently been discontinued (June 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See J Moyo's seminal opus (1995) and Peter von Blackenburg (1994) among others.

colonial dispossession cannot be overemphasized: from the coming of the Pioneer Column in 1896 on through until as late as 1975, land was allocated to the white settlers by the Colonial power (the British South African Company, later the British then Rhodesian Governments), in total disregard of the native population's rights, conveniently deemed nonexistent since "there was no title"<sup>3</sup>; the native population was at best allowed to stay on their ancestral lands as tenants or squatters; more often, especially in the later period, they were forcibly evicted<sup>4</sup>.

This led to the claim for land being the engine behind the peasants' mobilization in the liberation struggle. The promise of redistribution ranked high in the agenda of the Liberation Movements.

Yet, the 1980 Lancaster House agreement blocked any extensive redistribution, as the Zimbabwean government was to desist for 10 years from any compulsory acquisition and keep to the "willing buyer, willing seller" principle<sup>5</sup>; part of the purchase price of farms was to be paid in foreign currency. Britain and the US pledged to contribute towards the payment. Further, provisions were entrenched in the legal framework to ensure that government would respect "property rights".

This prevented - as was the objective - any significant land reform in the wake of the liberation war as the Zimbabwean Government abode by its signature, and few farms became available, which were not necessarily situated conveniently for resettlement purposes. The people's Government even removed peasants from commercial farms they had invaded at the end of the struggle.

Moreover, a lack of funds, worsened by Britain's reluctance to fulfill its financial commitment, caution on part of government not to endanger a sector contributing to foreign currency earning as well as ensuring food security, possibly a lack of interest of the political elite once they found themselves provided for, meant that the scope of the resettlement achieved remained extremely limited: official figures give 71 000 families resettled on 3 and half millions ha, as opposed to the set target of 5 millions ha for 170 000 families<sup>6</sup>...

Still, as early as 1992, when the restricting provision of the Lancaster

---

<sup>3</sup> In traditional Shona society, land is allocated by chiefs and elders according to the needs of the families residing in the area. They are answerable to the ancestors since the resource is meant not only for the present but also the yet unborn members of the community. Like most pre-industrial societies, Shona tradition does not recognize private ownership of land, even less its transfer.

<sup>4</sup> Rangers (2000) describes how areas in the Matopos solemnly pledged by none other than Rhodes to the inhabitants were gradually seized over by the Rhodesian government renegeing on the promise, as pressure from white farmers mounted.

<sup>5</sup> The Liberation movements were arm-twisted into accepting these limitations by Britain, the US and the frontier-states, anxious - for differing reasons - to see the war to an end.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted for the period 1980 to 1998 by JW Msika's - Zanu vice-president and chairman of the National Land Acquisition - at the Dec 2000 Zanu Congress.

House died out, the Zimbabwean Government started to revisit the issue. A first and crucial move was to alter the modality of compensation for designated farms, which was to be set unilaterally and would not include foreign currency. This prompted an outcry from the farmers, echoed by their kith and kin in the International Community. The Government, challenged at court and in diplomatic circles, gave way to pressures and little again was achieved on the ground.

The following attempt in 1995, with a listing of farms, was foiled, but resulted in the gathering of an International Donor Conference in Harare in 1998, which accepted the necessity of redistribution but imposed stringent conditions on financial support: redistribution should be transparent, benefit the poor or communal farmers, and no productive farm was to be affected. Straightforward as this may seem, it also betrays the vested interests of Britain and the US in maintaining the status-quo.

In the meantime, the courts had cancelled the designation of a number of the targeted farms<sup>7</sup>, while farm occupations by impatient peasants continued throughout the country, to which Government reacted cautiously, according to the political context and local circumstances.

It was soon to transpire that many of the designated farms had ended in the hands of party stalwarts, a fact which led the Donors to withdraw their support altogether and the Government in turn to denounce this intervention.

The situation was stalled.

### *The unequal distribution of land*

As a consequence of both the colonial dispossession and the absence of any land reform, farmland distribution in Zimbabwe in the year 2000 still reflects the colonial dispensation, where land was apportioned according to race.

Large-scale commercial farms, at the hand of circa 4000 mostly white families cover over 10 millions ha, while communal lands shelter over 1 000 000 black families on circa 16 millions ha<sup>8</sup>.

Commercial farms are situated as a rule on the best agricultural lands, linked to communications networks; water rights and capital allowed for the creation of irrigation system. Whether the land belongs to individual or companies, there exist normally title deeds or long-term leases, and the land can be transferred.

Communal lands on the other hand, often on poor soils and away from major roads, rely mostly on rainfalls. Generally over-populated, they grow in the main subsistence crops with a little surplus in good years; ownership is along the traditional fashion, with no title deed.

Resettlements schemes, dating back to Independence, account for over 3 and half millions ha; together with a small-scale commercial farming

---

<sup>7</sup> 500 out of 847 according to Sam Moyo: 2000

<sup>8</sup> BBC on line, Zimbabwe file, who owns land ?, April 2000

sector, a continuation of former African purchase areas where Africans were encouraged to own small plots, they complete the picture. Both cast a contrasted image - neither an overwhelming success nor a total failure. In most cases, production turned away from exportable crops to staple food and cattle. In the year 2000, African small-scale farmers have been plagued by lack of capital to the point that many are under threats to have their properties auctioned.

Government-run farms experienced the problems of similar endeavours in the Third World, bedevilled as they are by lack of autonomy in decision and finance and political interference, while white-run commercial farms represent the bulk of the marketed agricultural output whether for export or domestic consumption, apart from maize.

### *Cultural divide*

Adding to their geographical and economic predominance, commercial farms still present an image of colonial life.

The white owners or managers inhabit a mansion equipped with all the modern amenities (water, electricity, phone and internet, swimming-pool, etc) and enjoy a life-style that many in Europe would envy (cars, domesticity, good schooling and university for children, etc), whereas their black labour force is housed in compounds, few with electricity and running water, where a whole family may have to share a room...

The whites socialize amongst themselves, in the privacy of their homes or in exclusive country clubs, and seem to have organized their life to limit as much as feasible intercourse with their black fellow-citizens, be they their workers, neighbours or otherwise. The farmers have in general hardly a trapping of the culture and traditions of the African majority; most that claim to speak Shona rarely do so, referring in fact to Chirapa-rapa or Fanagalo, so depreciated its use was prohibited after Independence.

In spite of limited material improvements to the workers' conditions brought about by Independence, the cultural and social gap between the white managers and their immediate environment has probably widened. Once deprived from political power, the whites were content to maintain the economic and social status-quo. Few farmers made any attempt at better integrating their environment<sup>9</sup>.

## **II The political scene**

### *Zanu's gradual loss of support*

Zanu, with Mugabe at the helm, has been in government since hard-won Independence in 1980. Over the years, Mugabe has steadfastly strengthened his power, changing the Lancaster House Constitution to befit his greed for power.

---

<sup>9</sup> One exception is Roy Bennet, coffee farmer in the eastern Highlands, who is leading his African neighbours into coffee production. Bennet has been elected to Parliament on a MDC ticket after he declined a Zanu proposal.

Running parallel to this process, as the memory of the struggle became dimmer, Zanu's support among the population gradually declined. It is difficult to establish when this started, as election outcomes can hardly be relied on. Whatever the case may be, the political outlook in the ending months of 1999 looked definitely gloomy for Zanu, with elections due for Parliament and Presidency. A number of negative factors had accumulated, which it would be unfair to reduce to those of Zanu's own making.

### *Economic Structural Adjustment Plan*

From 1992 onwards, the economic and social fabric was affected by the socially disastrous results of the IMF and WB-imposed recipes for economic growth, known locally as ESAP: measures such as the abolition of price-control on basic commodities, including maize, the staple food, and combustible, the dismantling of protectionist trade barriers, meant an end to the implicit social contract in vigour since Independence, which ensured stability in a dual economy: the top layers of society - the dynamic sectors of the economy and the state bourgeoisie - could prosper away from public scrutiny, while the underprivileged saw their basic needs - food, health care and primary schooling - catered for by the state. Education and politics would offer a few opportunities for upward mobility.

In a country where state interventionism had for decades benefited the white minority, its drastic reduction when it had started to reach out to the black majority entailed a de facto cancellation of the social gains of Independence after hardly ten years. It was particularly untimely.

The dismantling of tax-barriers that accompanied ESAP led to retrenchments in industry and commerce, due to the obsolescence of huge sectors of the industry, especially after 1994 when Zimbabwean production and services faced unbridled competition from South-Africa, both internally and externally. In the same time, state employment could no longer offer alternative. For those who retained their jobs, the constant rise in living cost meant that low salaries could not meet basic necessities any longer.

### *Worsening of the economic context*

Things took an abrupt turn from 1997. To placate veterans of the liberation war who had gone to the streets in protest against the oblivion they resented from the State and society at large, Mugabe offered them gratuities<sup>10</sup>; this unbudgeted generosity caused such a strain on an already depleted economy that the resulting inflation led to food riots in Feb 1998; the following salaries increments further nurtured inflation, in a spiral movement which has not ended yet.

The military intervention in the DRC since 1998 pumped out the country's foreign exchange reserve; it coincided with a decrease in gold prices and the effect of the ban on asbestos, two of the country's major

---

<sup>10</sup> 5000 US per person for an estimated 70 000 ... (Mwanza 2000: 26)

mineral resources. Added to the lasting misunderstanding with the IMF, which conditioned its help not only to abiding by the stated principles for land redistribution but also to an halt to the military intervention in the DRC, a significant reduction of public expenditure, and to the subsequent shrinking of private investment, it created a dramatic pressure on foreign exchange; this resulted from December 2000 in regular shortages of combustible, which in turn added to the misery... All this, coupled with an International smear campaign, led to a considerable decline in the tourist industry, another major foreign currency earner, since the beginning of 2000.

To crown it all, the country was hit by cyclone Elline in March 2000 to which government failed to respond adequately<sup>11</sup>.

### *Opposition to ZANU rule*

Meanwhile, on the political scene, ZANU's act was questioned like it had never been before. Since the beginning of 1999 the press titled almost daily on cases of corruption, mishandling of funds and embezzlement by government and ZANU top officials ... not to mention the coming out of reports on the brutal slaughter of civilians to quench the Matabeleland dissidence in the beginning of the eighties.

Opposition to ZANU rule was gaining momentum. The National Constitutional Assembly, promoted from September 1999 by a cluster of civil society bodies to launch a national debate on a new Constitution was meeting with enthusiastic response from the population. One major issue at stake was a reduction of the president's powers. This movement contributed to the birth of a new party, the Movement for Democratic Change. For the first time since the Unity agreement of 1987, which did away with ZAPU as an autonomous force, a credible opposition was emerging; ZANU's rule was facing its first serious challenge, with odds against it.

The writing was - apparently - on the wall, for ZANU and its Secretary General.

## **III The conjunction of factors**

### *Playing the land-issue*

Mugabe and the ZANU hierarchy were not prepared to relinquish power "voluntarily"<sup>12</sup>. Their political culture is that of a one-party state; besides those moved by pure greed, some in the top echelons are undoubtedly convinced that only their guidance will ensure the betterment of the

---

<sup>11</sup> International aid flowed to Mozambique, where it went well beyond the capacity of this nation to make use of it, and hardly considered Zimbabwe, conveniently deemed equipped to respond by its own means.

<sup>12</sup> Although this attitude is by no means democratic, it is rather common in Africa. Nyerere and Mandela self-withdrawals remain the exception - note however that both were secure that their designated heirs would be elected.

masses they claim to represent. Further, a defeat would open way for investigation into the past, not an appealing prospect for many, as the world does not guarantee any more safe haven for unseated dictators and their clique<sup>13</sup>.

As there was no escaping going to the polls, the only way out was to create conditions that would at best regain ZANU's popularity, and, at worse, allow for intimidation and political pressure to make the outcome good.

As the shrewd player he is, Mugabe produced his trump card, the land redistribution to the black majority. This strategy had previously proved efficient to rekindle the spirit of the struggle and refresh ZANU's claim to legitimacy. Mugabe would fit once again the garb of the leader of the guerrilla movement, which defeated on the ground the hated Rhodesians. To explain why so little had been done in the matter of land redistribution, in spite of reiterated promises, the blame could be (not completely unfairly) apportioned to the British and the local White community - whose reactions, as a matter of fact, did everything to fit the role.

To implement unimpeded a land redistribution program, Constitutional changes were in order. In a bid meant to regain also initiative on the political scene, ZANU hastily put to a referendum a draft Constitution, the most popularized provision of which specifically allowed for the acquisition of white-owned commercial farms without compensation for land, which was ascribed to the former colonial power. Alas! The draft was rejected - even though the "no" vote emanated mainly from the city dwellers, the rural population having largely abstained. It appeared clearly, as is usually the case in such votes, that the rejection was a rejection of 20 years of Mugabe and ZANU, rather than of any specific issue.

That was a bitter pill, which acted as an eye-opener. Mugabe perceived that ZANU had lost its grip on the electorate. But the analysis of the results delineated a survival strategy: reclaim, one way or another, the rural vote, as the rural constituencies contained the majority and had not clearly shown they were gained to the opposition.... This rendered land an even more crucial issue: it is the one thing that Government could still possibly deliver, after other promises had been foiled in part by imposed policies; it also remained an acceptable ideological option after the demise of socialism. So land redistribution must be.

Mugabe, in a move incredibly contemptuous of the democratic process, hastened to pass a bill that would give Government the latitude to designate farms without compensation - very much the same clause as was in the draft Constitution.

### *The farm invasions*

---

<sup>13</sup> Apart from Zimbabwe, which has in March 2001 given citizenship to former Ethiopian dictator, Mengistu.

From February 2000, ahead of the electoral campaign, initiated the wave of farm invasions conducted by the so-called veterans of the Liberation war led by the peculiar figure of Chenjerai Hunzvi<sup>14</sup>. At a variance from previous ones, these had a clear agenda: to twist the coming elections. Planned by the CIO, the army and the police<sup>15</sup>, they targeted initially farms whose owners had shown support for the MDC. The invaders would erect temporary shelters and ransom the farm managers for food and commodities, and confront them, sometimes violently. After they had settled in a farm, they would move to another, leaving a small group behind; they did not seem to be prepared to plough the fields, being more set to labour the minds. They resorted to the tactics of the liberation war: holding night-long political sessions which the farm-workers and neighbouring peasants had no alternative but to attend for fear of being beaten, during which they would resuscitate the anti-colonial propaganda, assimilating the MDC to sell-outs, etc. A number of violent incidents occurred, including the death of farm-workers and farmers.

The police stood by in spite of repeated court orders.

Thus, in the last two to three months run to the elections, the war-veterans, from their camps in occupied farms were controlling most commercial-farming areas and adjacent communal land, which had become virtual no-go areas for the opposition and the independent press. A majority of the rural population was subjected to intimidation and fear.

This strategy proved politically effective: Zanu returned a thin majority thanks to the rural Mashona provinces, the focus point of farm invasions. Zanu could claim it had won the elections, although, if we add to this the other tricks that a party in government for 20 years has had time to perfect, it is undeniable that it stole its victory<sup>16</sup>.

### *Lessons from the elections*

Naturally, the results also defined the strategy for the future.

With growing popular dissatisfaction, obvious even to ZANU staunch supporters, ZANU did not stand a chance if the presidential elections due within a year time were to be fair. Conditions could not improve in the short term in any significant way - to the contrary, it is acknowledged that in rural areas and poor suburbs living conditions were already reaching a level inferior to pre-Independence<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> The President of the war-veterans does not seem to have taken part in person in the struggle, as he was studying medicine in Poland; he has been elected MP, whilst under suspicion of mishandling of funds; factions in the association are occasionally questioning his role.

<sup>15</sup> There is little doubt that the President participated in the planning.

<sup>16</sup> See Makumbe & Compagnon: 2000 for a detailed study of Zimbabwe rigging devices. No international mission of observers has expressed satisfaction at the way it was conducted.

<sup>17</sup> Per capita income is quoted at 740 US in 1980, 710 in 1990, with a drop to 540 in 2000 (Breytenbach: 2001)

A hard stance was taken. The only way to ensure that ZANU would stay in power was the implementation of an encompassing land reform. Nothing short of the resettlement of dozens of thousands in a dramatic, conflictual fashion could affect the political setting: not only to gain some belly-support, but by the subsequent withdrawal of most white farmers, if not of the white community, MDC was bound to loose its logistical support and the population would remain at ZANU's mercy. The exercise was conveniently scheduled to terminate by the end of 2001, a few months before the polls.

However, the peasants had so far proved reluctant to follow the veterans purporting to act in their interest. To convince them that time had eventually come, land had to be distributed.

### *The conflict with the judiciary*

The conflict with the judiciary follows suite.

The judges who always maintained their Independence had always been a pain in the neck for Mugabe, but he had so far managed to circumvent them or bear with them. However the immediate distribution of land had become vital, and could not suffer delay. The judges had to be sidelined.

However, one should keep in mind that laws enforcing property rights are part of the colonial legacy; their essential function was to protect settlers rights. In requesting the courts to "restore order", which is basically the colonial order, the farmers placed the judiciary in an uncomfortable stand: the judges in wig could easily be portrayed as stooges of the colonial order, especially as they were up in arms for white farmers against the majority government<sup>18</sup>... this contributed to widen the social and racial gap, playing in Mugabe's hands.

In the whole, it seems, the Executive had the upper hand: it gave Mugabe the long-sought for opportunity to undermine their status and thwart a counter-power, with the substitution of the Supreme Court president.

\* \* \* \*

We hope to have shown so far that the crisis in Zimbabwe is not of the making of Mugabe and ZANU alone.

Structural adjustment policies share responsibility in the deterioration of the living conditions, and therefore, of human rights delivery by the Government<sup>19</sup>. The emphasis that Mugabe placed on the land issue could

---

<sup>18</sup> The conflictual stance taken by the CFU has been criticized by a group of farmers who suggest halting resorting to courts and putting forth a bargain over the handing of over 2/3 of commercial land... It seems the idea is being considered by the CFU.

<sup>19</sup> That there is a linkage between a country's economic fare and the state of human rights is self evident; human rights cannot be reduced to "free and fair" elections once every so many

be expected, as it was his only survival strategy when others had been denied him. Besides, the fact that a colonial land apportionment prevails 20 years after Independence offered a golden opportunity: the President naturally manipulated the situation to coin a strategy likely to allow him to remain in power.

We can turn now briefly to the land redistribution itself, before suggesting strategies out.

#### **IV The land distribution**

##### *Land resettlement under way.*

In a great confusion and haste, farms are seized and distributed. Various bodies are involved, with sometimes conflicting attributions. Court orders result only in delays, complicating matters further and antagonizing the parties. The policy as to the type of farming, land ownership, etc is not clearly defined; traditional leaders are sometimes called in, sometimes not, depending on local politics.

In spite of all this the movement takes momentum, and has probably the potential to overcome its opportunistic inception. Not only rural masses register for reallocation, but also a number of city-dwellers leave the townships to take advantage of the opportunity, in a time where industrial employment is in crisis.

It is estimated that 46 000 families, close to one millions persons, have been relocated up to the beginning of 2001 on more than 2 millions and a half ha<sup>20</sup>.

Still lack of international support increases the risk of disaster. It is obvious that, in any circumstance, a change of such magnitude in land distribution is freight with at least short-term risks, but, in a situation where the government cannot ensure necessary support to farmers as for seeds, fertilizers, implement, ploughing, etc, aggravated by shortage of fuel and parts, it is even worse.

Some already predict a food shortage, as the acreage under cultivation has shrunk, due to the feeling of uncertainty on part of both commercial farmers and reallocated peasants, further complicated by lack of capital and, as it were, by poor rainfalls in most areas<sup>21</sup>.

But pressure will not halt the process.

If Mugabe remains fit enough to reign, one can assume that land

---

years; they include a modicum of economic and social conditions. Mugabe's government denial of free elections comes long after IMF policies deprived effectively Zimbabwe's underprivileged of their right to education and health... but this was not denounced, and the blame for it put squarely to the ZANU government.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by J Msika for the period June to Dec 2000

<sup>21</sup> Banks are understandingly reluctant to lend money to commercial farmers, whereas communal ones depend on government.

distribution will proceed to its end. In the event of his stepping down<sup>22</sup>, the removal of already resettled peasants is unlikely, even if MDC takes over, so as not to risk to further destabilize the country<sup>23</sup>. Indeed, as long as the population increases, with no industrial jobs on offer neither emigration, the pressure will mount on any latifundium especially in the hand of a racial minority.

### *The need for agreement with the International Community*

The pace and modalities of the resettlement exercise are probably still amenable should an agreement be reached between the Zimbabwean government and the International community. It seems all parties now realize that such is unavoidable and urgent. Only through external support could Zimbabwe's capacity of high-input agricultural production be at least partially retained, and the risk of hunger in the short term, reduced; it would also allow the full potentiality of the process to emerge. Moreover, to penalize the masses in order to prevail on the leaders is a selfish strategy, even more so since resettlement is now a fait accompli. Indeed, discussions are in progress (mid-march) with South Africa in order to broker a way out, at a time when the Zimbabwe Commercial Farmers Union seem prepared to a more open approach. To underplay the necessity of a land reform in Zimbabwe because the President used it as an electoral strategy makes as little sense as taking all cues from him.

How to overcome the blockages?

To clear the air the International community could first and foremost acknowledge that the Zimbabwe government, as a sovereign state, is fully entitled to dispose of its land as it pleases, with no conditions, and that colonial dispossessions, as a matter of principle, cannot to this day grant any right to anyone. The removal of the legal barriers that still protect white-owned land as such is clearly part of the decolonization process; Mugabe's contention that land distribution is a political problem, not a legal issue, is, we feel, amply warranted<sup>24</sup>. Whites should come to term with the initial violence through which the land they claim as theirs was acquired.

All private claims on agricultural land - lease, title deeds, etc - would

---

<sup>22</sup> There are rumours in mid March of his health deteriorating.

<sup>23</sup> The support the MDC receives from the white community, including the farmers, shed doubt on its commitment to a meaningful land reform as the objective contradictions have not been resolved. The call for an orderly redistribution was previously used to postpone indefinitely any move.

<sup>24</sup> Some communities recently submitted applications for redress against colonial dispossession: if the judiciary rejects them, it will prove conclusively their biases - or that the law needs be revisited; if they consider them the farmers will per force become less vocal on their own rights ... Note that in South-Africa, land-claim commissions may pronounce expropriation of private land, acting on claims put forth by communities.

then cease to exist, and the land would formally be vested in the Zimbabwe government in the name of the communities organized through the chieftaincies, a formal return to pre-Independence situation.

That would go a long way to improve the climate with the Judiciary.

A new, more amenable and evenly discussed, social contract between commercial farmers and the communities should then come to the fore.

The farmers wishing to remain should seek the approval of the communities whose land they are and/or plan to be, tilling, explaining what they intend to do, and what the communities would gain, as opposed to their direct exploitation of the same. It would be an opportunity for the farmers to question their own relevance to the community, and seek integration into it. They should be prepared to reduce their acreage and share their knowledge, equipment, etc; further, they should become reasonably knowledgeable of the local culture, mix freely, try and become accepted as children of the land, albeit with a different cultural heritage.

All possibilities are technically open: free lease or rent, that the farmers would pay the community in money, kind or services - development fund for projects (education, health, transport, road, etc<sup>25</sup>) - out-growers schemes, share in the profit, etc, not to mention more decent conditions for the workers.

Of course, such agreements would reflect the natural conditions, the type of culture and the very parties involved and cannot be standard. NGOs, churches or other civil bodies could help strengthen the communities bargaining capacity. The agreements reached would have to be approved by a state body. Obviously, any compensation for the farmers not allowed to remain, or not wishing to, would not be at the cost of the Zimbabwean government<sup>26</sup>.

This redistribution of wealth would probably entail a reduction of the farmers's standards of living, which would put to test their claim to belong in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, gaining durable acceptance like never before, as they would truly be set on the path to become one with the indigenous population, the farmers would eventually be rewarded by a lasting security.

Support for the resettled peasants on land made available would follow set lines - long term and short term, from infrastructure, training, implements and seeds, etc. It would be channelled by various independent agencies, if possible up to the beneficiaries themselves and in nature; obviously the use of funds and reality of delivery would be closely monitored by the donors.

---

<sup>25</sup> The facilities - schools, hospitals, beer halls - should not be segregated, viz., the farmers and their families should use them as well, as a guarantee of standards.

<sup>26</sup> The UK should certainly feel concerned, but an international fund could be set by well wishers, whether countries or private donors.

There should not be anticipation as to the type of agriculture and tenure to be promoted. Firstly, this is not a question to be dictated upon by outsiders. Secondly, once the huge farms are broken down, there is space for various types of ownership and production. A return of part of the land to communal ownership, still largely the reference for resettled families<sup>27</sup>, should not be seen as catastrophic - in the thirties, African agriculture competed so well with European farms that the colonial government had to impose limits on the marketing of its products to protect European farming ... The vicious effects of global agriculture, both in terms of health and environmental hazards and extra costs make locally rooted production, relying on labour rather than inputs, and catering primarily for the local market a viable option, not only for the peasants' family but for the country as a whole<sup>28</sup>.

\* \* \*

The farm invasions in Zimbabwe, which evolved from a loaded political agenda to question the country social fabric, may thus lead to a renaissance, reinventing the relations between the races and setting the tune for a new social contract between them<sup>29</sup>. A lesson that would not be lost on other developing countries, especially as it integrates the growing opposition to the dictates of globalization, and advocates a more self-centred approach to development. Another reason why the experience deserves full support.

## References

- Blackenburg, Peter von: 1994, Large commercial farmers and Land Reform in Africa: the case of Zimbabwe, Avebury
- Breytenbach Willie, 2001, The end of Mugabe ?, Africa Insight, Jan, p 45-50
- Makumbe, John & Compagnon, Daniel: 2000, Behind the smoke screen, the politics of Zimbabwe's 1995 general elections, Univ. of Zimb. Press.
- Moyo Sam, 1995 The Land Question in Zimbabwe, Harare Sapes, 333p
- 2000, The Political Economy of Land Acquisition and Redistribution in Zimbabwe 1990-1999, Jrnal of Sthern African Studies, vol 26, n 1, march
- Mwanza A. 2000: Zimbabwe, the folly of Orthodox policy, in Southern

---

<sup>27</sup> In spite of ZANU's refusal to re-establish chiefs prerogatives on land after Independence.

<sup>28</sup> Further, environment-wise, chiefs and spirits mediums have often been more successful than the state - see the case of "sacred forests".

<sup>29</sup> The claim for a fair racial distribution in all organized bodies appears far reaching: already the Zimbabwe Cricket Union has been put to task to give preference to black players whenever possible (march 2001)...

Michel Lafon

African Economist, vol 13 no 12, sept/oct, pp 25-27

Rangers, Terence: 2000, Voice from the Rocks: nature, culture and history in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe, J Currey, 305p