

RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY CROSS-ROADS IN A POST-ZANU (PF) ERA!

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ABSTRACT

While recent political events have brought hope for socio-political and economic normalcy in Zimbabwe, there are rural development policy challenges for the new Government of National Unity. Zanu (PF) embarked on a process of peasantization - remolding the rural sector into peasant societies, ignoring the semi-proletariat culture that had emerged over time, in the process. This paper problematizes the post-colonial state's peasantization project and argues that rural reality in Zimbabwe departs from these state simplifications. Emerging evidence from semi-arid Matabeleland reveals a complex set of processes that were shaped by policy and nature. Although rural households would demand and hold onto land, they live a worker-peasant existence, and agriculture is unreliable and a supplementary activity to remittances. The paper concludes that rural development policy in the country requires a revisit - a complete departure from Zanu (PF)'s rural vision. Policy should maintain what households have long valued and now view as part of their culture.

Key words: Zimbabwe, Land reform, Semi-proletariat

INTRODUCTION

Maxwell's Six characters (and a few more) in search of an author: How to rescue rural development before it is too late?, was published half a decade ago (Maxwell, 2005), coinciding with the fifth anniversary of Zimbabwe's peasantization project, cloaked in the robe of land reform and resettlement program (LRRP). Maxwell's article represented a rallying call to rescue a sector which, over the years, has lacked a 'convincing narrative', was 'stuck' and in need of a rescue package (Ashley & Maxwell, 2001). Such a narrative should recognize the 'rapid pace of change in rural areas', and acknowledge the 'need for diversification out of agriculture' (Maxwell 2005). This is a theme that this paper adopts. Although Maxwell's call was rather generalized, half a decade down the line, his appeal has come back to haunt a post-Zanu (PF) administration, formed between Zanu (PF) and the two MDC formations on 13 February 2009 in Zimbabwe.

While political developments in the Southern African country have given the citizenry and other stakeholders hope for a new era - an era of economic recovery and political stability, rural development policy direction in the new era poses new challenges. Scoones (2008) views land and agriculture as critical to any debate on the

country's future, but there are challenges, which can be summarized in three of Ashley's & Maxwell's (2001) six sticking points: whether agriculture can be an engine of rural growth; whether small farms can survive; and whether the rural non-farm economy can take up the slack.

The paradox of colonial Rhodesia's economic success was that it was achieved by concentrating resources on an extensive capitalist agricultural sector with support from the mining and manufacturing sectors; and through the implementation of policies of institutionalized racial segregation and land expropriation that allowed the denigration of indigenous traditional agriculture (Page & Page, 1991). It was through these policies that a rural semi-proletariat, which sustained the rural economy, was born (Arrighi, 1970; Bush & Cliffe, 1984). Over time, the migrant labor system became an integral part of capitalist accumulation, with rural farm production left to the young and 'farmer-housewives' (Potts, 2000). While later attempts by the colonial state to destroy the worker-peasantry were disappointingly unsuccessful (Bush & Cliffe 1984), the post-colonial state has spent decades attempting to resurrect the 'colonial "master farmer" yeoman's ideal' (Moore, 2001) - remolding the rural sector, creating and incorporating peasant households into the capitalist mode of production, through 'translocation resettlement' and 'internal resettlement' (O'Flaherty, 1998).

The colonial agrarian policies have played an important part in molding the rural landscape, and have left legacies that continue to shape rural livelihoods and households' behavior today. In the context of the above, any policy geared at creating a rural peasantry may not be sustainable. Yet, state attempts at 'peasantization' of the countryside have never been questioned. While this paper does not intend to prescribe a rural development policy direction to the new government, it argues that it is now time to answer the following set of questions: What cultural practices have shaped the livelihoods of rural households in semi-arid Zimbabwe, both pre and post-independence? Are these practices reflected in the post-colonial state's rural peasantization project? If a post-Zanu (PF) government abandons the peasantization project, what direction should the new rural development policy take?

The paper rests on secondary material on the country's agrarian and capitalist formation, but also draws on data from an extended study of cultural, agrarian, and livelihood practices in the Gwayi Valley area in north-eastern Zimbabwe. Secondary sources included colonial literature on the colonial process, colonial policies, and their legacies on the rural economy; and the post-colonial state's grapple with this colonial legacy. The case study was ethnographic, involving one year of continuous residence and interaction with the community. Such a long term engagement was geared at what Worby (2001) refers to as understanding the community on its own terms. The study was grounded on life-histories of 107 households and observations of community processes. Household visits took the form of extended discussions, which although directed by an interview guide, were open and allowed respondents to cover a range of issues. Based on the data, the paper problematizes any blanket policy directed at creating a peasantry and argues that the post-Zanu (PF)

government will need a policy departure – a new policy direction that accommodates rural people’s lives and cultural practices, what this paper refers to as rural reality.

THE BIRTH OF A RURAL SEMI-PROLETARIAT

Since the colonial conquest, agriculture has been central to the economic development of the territory now called Zimbabwe (Bush & Cliffe, 1984; Eicher, 1995; Johnson, 1992). As a consequence, Zimbabwe adopted its place as Southern Africa’s breadbasket, and after its independence in 1980, the country was entrusted with the Food Security portfolio by the then Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). Yet, although agriculture came to be the mainstay of the colonial economy, it came as a coincidence. The colonization of the territory by the British South African Company (BSAC) was initially spurred by gold discoveries in the rand (Lebert, 2006; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Sibanda, 2005). However, while gold was indeed discovered in the territory, it was not sufficient to sustain the economy. The company encouraged white-settler farming as an alternative means to sustain the colony, and thus began the land expropriation process (Lebert, 2006; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Sibanda, 2005; Worby, 2001).

Land Theft and Colonial Policy

The dual agrarian economy, which became a central component of the colonial agrarian economy, was born out of military conquest and passage of legislative instruments that sought to legitimate what Zimbabweans now believe were land thefts (Mlambo, 2005). The basis for land theft were the terms of conditions of service against the Ndebele state in 1893 (Sibanda, 2005), cruelly executed by the 18 July 1894 Matabeleland Order-In Council, whose Section 49 provided for the establishment of a Land Commission with responsibility to assign land to Africans (Chigora & Guzura, 2008). The designation of two barren reserves, characterized by Kalahari sands to the Ndebele in 1894, was a precursor to subsequent land deprivations in other regions of the country after the passage of the Native Reserves Act (1899), while their land was occupied by the victorious white-settlers (Moyana, 1984; Jennings, 1935). The Land Apportionment Act (1930), the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951, and the Land Tenure Act (1969), merely consolidated land gains by the white-settler farmers and ensured that Africans legally remained confined to unproductive land (Eicher, 1995). These legislative instruments effectively divided the country into two: white owned areas, comprising of the best endowed agricultural land in the country, most of which was located in the central arable highlands (Stoneman & Cliffe, 1989) and black occupied reserves, located in agro-ecological low potential regions, which were characterized by semi-arid climatic conditions (Bush & Cliffe, 1984; Lebert, 2006; Jennings, 1935). By the end of this process, the minority whites controlled about half of the country’s agricultural land, while indigenous people completely lost their land rights.

While, initially, European agriculture had benefited from what was called ‘kaffir farming’ (Worby, 2001), it proved difficult to attract the labor of Africans in the reserves (Stoneman & Cliffe, 1989; Johnson, 1992). Attempts to address labor problems in settler farms by the colonial state, including the introduction of extra

economic (per capita taxes) and political forms of coercion, and abolishing of tenant farming proved unsuccessful (Arrighi, 1966; Johnson, 1992; Worby 2001). Africans resisted these measures by taking up urban jobs, and in extreme cases, enrolling for jobs in South Africa, where wages were higher (Johnson, 1992; Lebert, 2006). Farm labor was, therefore, recruited from neighboring countries, particularly Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia (Worby, 2001). The process of capitalist development in the then Southern Rhodesia led to the birth of a rural semi-proletariat, with households combining what Cordell, Gregory & Piche (1996) termed as 'wage' and 'hoe'. Men became Houghton (1973)'s 'Men of Two Worlds', oscillating between the rural and the urban sectors.

In the context of a suppressed reserve agricultural sector, labor-migration became the only way that African households could pay the numerous taxes that were levied on them (Arrighi, 1966). As more men migrated to the cities and mines, women became Potts (2000)'s farmer-housewives, engaging only in subsistence production. By the 1930s, the semi-proletarianization of the rural economy was almost complete, as discriminatory policies enacted to protect settler farmers from competition against African products destroyed the smallholder agricultural sector in regions like Mashonaland, where smallholder agriculture had initially flourished (Page & Page, 1991; Worby, 2001). These legislative instruments further pushed Africans into the formal wage sector in the towns (Bush & Cliffe, 1984).

Initially, the reserves were treated as a labor reservoir, and were subjected to state neglect, with households allowed to exercise freedom of occupation and cropping (Alexander, McGregor & Ranger, 2000). But two occurrences at national level and in the reserves contributed to a policy rethink. First, there was continuing overcrowding and land degradation in the reserves, leading to demands for more land (Wolmer & Scoones, 2000). Secondly, Southern Rhodesia lost self-sufficiency in food production during the war years, plunging the colony into a serious food crisis. The crisis was exacerbated by reluctance by white farmers to move out of tobacco production and commit resources to crop production (Bush & Cliffe, 1984; Thompson, 2004). Due to the power they wielded, the state could not compel them, and instead, turned its attention to the reserves (Thompson, 2004).

The agrarian policies of the 1930s and 1940s had been to placate white settler concerns by ensuring that African farmers should not compete fairly in the market. Instead two-tier pricing policies were developed, thereby protecting the inefficient white farmers. Such a policy, although suiting the settlers, was not conducive to stable, profitable industrial development. The cost of food to feed workers in the towns was too high. Large quantities of foodstuffs had to be imported at inflated international prices . . . Industrial capital recognized that the reserves would have to be able to produce more foodstuffs for market . . . (Bush & Cliffe, 1984: 80).

State pre-occupation with the reserve economy took a highly interventionist and punitive form with the enactment of the 1951 Native Land Apportionment Act (Thompson, 2004 & 2007; Worby, 2001). While these interventions were political but cloaked in an environmental package, they were also geared at the peasantization of the countryside through the creation of a rural peasantry on one hand and an urban proletariat on the other (Bush & Cliffe, 1984). Politically, the measures were designed to stave off demand for more and better land by the indigenous people (Page & Page, 1991; Wolmer & Scoones, 2000), and to bring about compliance and 'political discipline' in the reserves (Alexander et al. 2000). These measures were vigorously and successfully resisted (Phimister, 1993; Thompson, 2004 & 2007), and those in the reserves continued to plough along river valleys and on edges of the gusu (Alexander et al. 2000) and they did what they could to avoid what they interpreted as cattle culling, a process that interfered with their main means of livelihood (Thompson, 2004).

The Creation of a Rural Peasantry

The colonial era witnessed the growth of a heavily subsidized and protected capitalist agricultural sector, which was supported by vibrant industrial, manufacturing, and mining sectors. The industrial sector, in particular, flourished due to the creation of the migrant-labor system (Johnson, 1992; Thompson, 2004). While only a token attempt was made to develop African agriculture, the African reserves, ideologically, remained and were treated as a labor reservoir for the industrial sector (Duggan, 1990). Further complicating the situation in the reserves were the activities of South African Recruitment Companies, which offered better packages, making cross-border migration attractive (Johnson, 1992; Lebert, 2006).

While the post-colonial state maintained the dual agrarian economy and, according to Alexander (1994), failed to challenge 'the beliefs and practices which had informed technical development', through state-led land reform and resettlement, attempts were made to address African smallholder agriculture in rural Zimbabwe. Not least, the First Five Year Plan of 1986, proposed agrarian reform through 'translocation resettlement' and 'internal resettlement' (O'Flaherty, 1998). While the former was part of the Land Reform and Resettlement Program and was governed by the Land Acquisition Act, internal resettlement involved re-organizing land-use in communal areas. Thus, the program acquired a triple purpose: decolonization, the creation of a peasant class, and increasing the production of cash crops (O'Flaherty, 1998).

At the onset, the post-colonial state had ambitions to turn 162,000 families into peasant households in five years, a target that failed due to a restrictive framework (Rugube, Roth & Chambati, 2003) and exorbitant farm prices (Palmer, 1990). Initially, resettlement was geared at creating productive farmers rather than a worker-peasantry (Chimhowu & Hulme, 2006). The state aimed to 'transform peasant agriculture, to re-mold society and discourage any attempts to revert back to traditional methods and systems of agriculture and administration' (Geza, 1986).

In corroboration, Moore argued:

. . . post-1980 land reform policies were more often aimed at resurrecting the colonial ‘master farmer’ yeoman’s ideal than the poor (Moyo, et al., 2000), that academic justification for pursuit of small-scale farmer-oriented reform is based on the assertion that small commercial farmers are more productive than their large-scale commercial farmer adversaries (Kinsey, 1999; Moyo, 2000), and that many ‘customary’ agrarian relations rely on commodity production and individualistic patterns of transfer (Cheater, 1990; Cousins, 1993) . . . (Moore, 2001: 257).

By 1990, 71,000 households were resettled, of which 93 percent were peasant households, which were resettled under the Model A scheme (Masiwa, 2005; Moyo, 1995 & 2000). The post-colonial state intervened extensively in communal area agriculture by putting in place prime movers necessary for an agricultural take-off, to serve smallholder farmers (Eicher, 1995; Rukuni, 1994b). These included the setting up of parastatals marketing boards for agricultural products (cotton, dairy, and grain); access to extension services; easy loan facilities; and free seeds and fertilizers (Chiremba and Masters, 2003; Rukuni, 1994b). The newly established marketing boards and the extension department encouraged both resettled and communal area households to adopt improved seeds and chemical fertilizers, while tractors were made available to both sets of households (Chiremba and Masters, 2003; Eicher, 1995). These reforms, combined, led to a mini-agricultural miracle (Eicher, 1995; Rukuni, 1994a). Smallholder farmers accounted for 60 per cent of the maize and about 90 per cent of the cotton produced in the country during the first decade of the post-colonial period (Cloud, 1999; Eicher, 1995). This was in sharp contrast to the situation at independence when the commercial sector produced 90 per cent of ‘marketed food requirements as well as a significant part of exports and supplies to the manufacturing sector’ (Alexander, 1994).

The paradox of the agricultural miracle was that, while the country experienced a national surplus, households in marginal agro-ecological regions, some resettled farmers and farm workers, faced severe food insecurity (Stack, 1994; Stanning, 1989). Climatic conditions in marginal agro-ecological regions are challenging and soils are poor, yet households prefer to produce maize (Andersson, 2007; Thebe, 2009). But, in the absence of irrigation infrastructure and heavy inputs of chemical fertilizers, maize production is risky and unsustainable. Also, the miracle did not last. It was undermined by subsequent droughts in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The 1990s were characterized by a policy shift in favor of creating an indigenous black commercial farming class (Sachikonye, 2003 & 2005). This came on the background of 1) the slow pace of land reforms in the 1990s; and 2) class interests that began to emerge within the ruling party and government, leading to the ‘Land Grab’ scandal of the 1990s (Moyo, 1995). One narrative circulating in Zimbabwe is that, despite rhetoric to transfer land to smallholders, the Zanu (PF) hierarchy placed a lot of emphasis on the

'indispensability' of the commercial farming sector (Alexander, 1994). But the government has also been accused of lacking political will in land redistribution (Maposa, 1995; Mhishi, 1995).

Initiatives to redistribute land to peasant households continued in 1998, and emphasis were placed on a 'particular sort of background and technical knowledge, in order to create a particular sort of farming community on the new resettlement areas' (Chaumba, Scoones & Wolmer, 2003). In a typical Zanu (PF) style administration, an ambitious resettlement target of 91,000 households to be resettled in a five year period was set, but the economic and political situation changed drastically in 2000, thereby throwing these initiatives into jeopardy (Rugube et al. 2003, World Bank, 2004). While the joint initiative initially took off, it was overtaken by the accelerated program, which envisaged a comprehensive redistribution of land. When it ended in 2003, 11 million hectares of commercial land had been transferred to 52,000 black commercial farmers and 300,000 peasant households (Sachikonye, 2003). Ironically, these new farmers have since failed to feed themselves, let alone the nation (Thebe, 2010). Since 2000, the country has faced severe grain deficits, yet countrywide, allocated farm land lies idle, begging for utilization.

THE MAKING OF A WORKER-PEASANTRY

The Gwayi River Valley is a typical rural area, and epitomizes Wiggins and Proctor's (2001) picturesque: human settlements and infrastructure only occupy patches of landscape, which is mostly dominated by fields, pastures, woodlands, and forests. Settlements are sandwiched by two forests: the forest south of settlements extends across the Gwayi River into the Sotane Safari Ranch, while the one to the northeast spreads across the Bulawayo/Victoria highway towards the Shangani Valley. While the territory is characterized by Kalahari sands, some land is the richer heavy cotton or mixed soils, regarded as good for the production of maize and sorghum. Agro-ecologically, the valley is classified under region IV, and based on the Penman (1948) formula, has an annual effective rainfall of between 9 and 14 inches and a growing season of 75 - 95 days. The growing season is characterized by excessive dry spells, but drought resistant crops can be produced with some success. The region is suitable for semi-extensive livestock production.

Despite the picturesque, the territory is well connected to important towns and cities via the Victoria Falls/Bulawayo highway and this has assisted livelihood diversification outside the agriculture sector. Households, therefore, live a semi-proletariat existence. Although the valley was initially home to a community of hunter-gathering san lineages, it is also a colonial legacy – a destination for Ndebele households, evicted from areas around Bulawayo and gold mines in Matabeleland by the colonial state.

LAND HOLDERS, PART-TIME AND MARGINAL FARMERS

The Importance and Use of Household Land

Using the arrival of Ndebele households as a starting point, one could identify communal tenure as the land ownership model in the territory. But in practice, the behavior of households portrays the dynamism inherent

in the communal tenure system. Households' behavior corroborate Chimhowu and Woodhouse (2006)'s argument that 'vernacular land sales and rental markets' are operational under communal tenure regimes. Land allocated for individual household use is usually treated by recipients as individual property, while the headman's authority is confined to the commons.

Ideally, authority over land has under gone a number of changes since the 1940s, but, in practice, the headmen have played custodian roles over land. They would allocate residential plots, reserve land for future allocations, and settle land disputes. Land was usually allocated to male heads of households who, in turn, would exercise the freedom of utilization and disposal. Once the land was allocated to a household, it was treated as household property and the land beneficiary could allocate or lease it to other people without seeking permission from the headman. Moreover, households' land claims were not limited to the residential plots and fields that were allocated for cultivation by the headman, but extended to cover any arable land in the vicinity of the fields and residential plots. Such claims, therefore, depended on the distance between the household and its neighbors, and the household's cropping fields and neighboring fields. Given the above, households' land claims have varied from household to household, and households never used it in the same way.

While some households have owned the same land since they were established, others acquired additional land after relatives left and others redistributed their land to other household members and outsiders. Landholders, including beneficiaries from intra-household land redistribution, would abandon parts of their fields and clear arable land for fields without consulting the headman. However, they would still maintain their claims over the abandoned fields and protect them against re-allocation. Richer landholders would fence-off their abandoned fields to prevent unauthorized grazing and would vigorously protect arable land from exploitation by neighbors. Although no physical demarcations separate one household land from another, the boundaries are known to everyone in the community.

Households would allow land to fallow or abandon large parts of their fields, but still maintain claims over it. In the recent past, households have been abandoning whole fields and clearing garden plots instead. Such behavior results from resource constraints (productive assets and labor) and changing climatic conditions. Although natural climatic conditions affect the whole community, reduced areas cropped are prominent among worker-peasants, particularly households occupying richer, heavy soils, which require lots of moisture. Labor constraints have always been the main handicap for worker-peasants due to out-migration and school attendances. But worker-peasant households, which are by far the majority, have secure livelihoods outside agriculture, and over the years, demonstrated lack of interest in farming and expressed the view that crop production was a cultural practice rather than an income-earning activity. For these households, agriculture remained a supplementary activity to remittances from the formal wage sector.

Marginal and Part-time Farmers

Nevertheless, these households still considered themselves as farmers. They have practiced agriculture since they were established, owned agricultural equipments, including ploughs, and every rain season, they would purchase bags of improved seeds for their fields. They also own livestock, which they graze in the commons, and since the war of liberation, they would poach-graze their livestock in the richer Sotane Ranch. Yet these households agree that although they practice agriculture and hold on to the land allocated to them, their land has always had little cropping value due to poor climatic conditions. In these semi-arid communities, even years of average rains are characterized by long dry spells during the month of January. While the dry periods destroy the early crops, crops planted in February are generally considered late crops and, at times, fail to mature, thereby compromising households' food security.

Table 1: Households' assets over two periods

Assets	Households (pre-1992)	Households (Time of research)
Less than 20 cattle	57	71
More than 20 cattle	34	5
No cattle	13	31
Goats	95	102
Donkeys	36	63
Ploughs	91	89
Scotch carts	29	58

Sources: Adapted from Field data (2005)

Cattle mortality is common in these communities, and since the late 1980s households have lost their cattle herds, and for some, entire herds were wiped out by the 1992 drought (see Table 1). In the context of the disintegration of extended households, death of the heads, and with their death, a demise of their power, households have struggled to rebuild their herds. Instead, donkeys and goats have become popular among households - a shift attributed not only to droughts, but also to a change of preferences by households. Worker-peasants have the resources to rebuild the herds, but preferences appear to have shifted to ownership of assets other than cattle. In these households, individuals with the financial resources are a new generation (sons and daughters) who no longer see cattle as a symbol of status. This new generation sees status in education and the possession of luxury assets, both of which increased in the community during the post-1990 period, partly due to increases in cross-border migration to South Africa.

Despite challenges to agriculture production, all households still involve in crop production, producing sorghum, millet, melons, sweet reeds, beans, and pumpkins, and, what in other communities would be considered as cash crops (maize, groundnuts and monkey nuts). Prior to the 1992 drought, extended households owned large tracts of land and livestock (cattle, donkeys, and goats), and had extensive social networks. But none of these households depended entirely on their own farm production. These households produced a grain surplus and sold groundnuts, beans, monkey nuts, and millet, during good to moderate rainy seasons but, in the context of frequent droughts, the maize grain was reserved for emergencies - stored as security against drought the following year. Despite owning assets and resources to purchase inputs, it was normal for worker-peasants to experience perennial grain deficits and would supplement proceeds from the farm through purchases of grain and maize-meal.

During the past decade or so, households that were self-sufficient in grain production during earlier years have retreated into subsistence production. They have struggled to produce enough for their own consumption and have been supplementing their grain supplies through grain purchases. Grain deficits are attributed to both social and natural factors. First, the collapse of the kinship system was characterized by the disintegration of extended households and a demise of their power. In general, households face chronic labor shortages due to an increase in out-migration and school attendances, leading to reduced areas put under cultivation. Secondly, climatic conditions deteriorated markedly from 1990 and became worse after the turn of the 21st century.

Farming Practices: Methods of Traction and Use of Inputs

Despite various attempts by successive governments to create a rural farmer who utilized modern methods of farming, households' preferences have always been for traditional farming methods. The most popular method of farm production over the years has been animal traction. These were either owned by individual households or accessed through social networking - pooling resources together, either in the form of material or labor. Due to social networks, even resource-poor households could access productive assets by offering their labor to resource-rich households.

While the scheme is generally seen as advantageous, it could degenerate into an exploitative relationship. The relationship is not automatically mutually beneficial since resource-rich households often abuse the relationship, and resource-poor households are often enslaved. The terms of interaction are determined by resource-rich households, and some households would treat their partners as substitutes for hired labor. On the other hand, the system can also lead to an overload of the cultivation roster and reduced days in one's fields. Furthermore, the system only caters for cultivation and not other agriculture related tasks, and therefore, cannot be relied upon as substitution for out-migration. Far from being a perfect solution to resource constraints, the system curtails agricultural productivity.

Nevertheless, the scheme has remained popular in this community, particularly the type where related households pool resources together or alternatively, kin utilize resources from a related household. These resources either belong to the main household or splinter households. Splinter households are usually headed by males who hold formal jobs and, therefore, have the resources to accumulate assets, while, in the majority of cases, resources from the main household are redistributed after the death of the male household head. Such an exchange is mutually beneficiary to all concerned. Kin members utilize resources from a kin household for their livelihoods, at the same time they look after assets, family, and interests, including land claims of absentee kin. However, in terms of agricultural productivity, such a system remains a constraint. As climatic conditions worsened, these households have struggled to put large parts of their fields under cultivation, thereby leaving large parts lying fallow.

Manure vis-à-vis Chemical Fertilizers

The stumbling block to state attempts to modernize smallholder agriculture, however, is the general preference by households for the application of manure and ash in their fields, instead of chemical fertilizers. Largely because these were readily available and even extension officials have encouraged the application of manure over many years. Households would apply ash, chicken, goat, or cattle manure in some parts of their fields, usually the parts where maize was produced. But households' preference for applying manure appeared to fly straight at state attempts to commercialize communal area agriculture. Since independence households have benefited from free fertilizer packs from either the government or donors, they either stored the packs or exchanged them for grain with farmers outside the region. It was always going to be a challenge for households to adopt chemical fertilizers, given the chronic lack of moisture and labor. But more importantly, households' decision to blackout the use of chemical fertilizers represented a pronouncement about their agricultural practices. They were more comfortable with their traditional farming practices.

Use of Hybrid Seeds and Traditional Varieties

When compared to the reluctance to adopt chemical fertilizers, the adoption of hybrid seeds was impressive. However, over the years, households have resisted the production of drought resistant sorghum, promoted by the Department of Agriculture and Extension Services, preferring, instead, to produce millet and their traditional sorghum variety, that take time to mature. Seeds for these varieties were usually selected from the previous harvest and, through social networking, seed varieties were exchanged among households. Traditional farming households also preserved a traditional maize variety, and often produced it on the best and well manured soils. During earlier years, traditional farming households would select the biggest cobs for display at Agricultural Shows.

ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS

In spite of their behavior towards their land (the demand for and holding onto land), households are worker-peasants – a culture developed at their places of origin, while indigenous san used their knowledge of the

terrain to claim jobs at the local Sotane Ranch and the Forestry Commission. Furthermore, the connection of the community through road infrastructure to major towns have assisted income diversification and diverted livelihoods from entirely depending on agriculture. Regardless of the rate of agriculture activity, all households had individuals with a history in the formal sector, including cross-border labor migration. Labor migration in the community followed a south-ward trend, with Bulawayo as a popular destination, although some men started venturing into the South African labor market as early as the colonial era. What was unique about labor migration to cities in this community was that it cut across the gender divide and involved both male heads of households and other household members, including women.

Labor Migration

On post-war, Ndebele evictees to the Shangani Reserves. Alexander et al. (2000) observed that they were 'people of the school and of the store and of the market', a consequence of their interaction with Europeans. Through that interaction, they underwent a process of acculturation and embraced European education, Christianity, and engaged in the formal job sector. Ndebele evictees originated from areas around Bulawayo, the country's second city, where employment opportunities were available and, from their places of origin, they had created social networks that were critical for livelihood decisions after eviction.

This history helps to explain households' livelihood behaviour, and their attitudes towards agriculture in the new areas. In general, the formal sector was important to households' decisions to accumulate assets, some of which made the performance of farm-related tasks easier. This point is corroborated by Worby (2001) in his argument that the stipulation that land reform beneficiaries were to be full-time farmers, ' . . . ignored the fundamental role of wage remittances land in providing timely sources of investment for the historically most successful communal area farmer, as well as protecting all farmers against the periodic shedding of assets, occasioned by drought'.

In the wake of the semi-proletariat culture of households, male members were oscillatory, spending most of their time in the urban areas and paying occasional visits to the rural home. But the most common practice was to send remittances to the rural home. Remittances and visits to the rural homes were also strategies to protect land claims. Although married men had secure claims to land, since wives and children resided in the rural home, single migrants needed land for fields and homes after marriage. The absence of men gave women the status of 'farmer-house wives' - overburdening them with household decisions and agricultural production.

Table 2: Status of households at occupation

Households (time of occupation)	Total
Headed by men	71
Headed by de facto females	57
Headed by de jure females	0
Headed by non-working men	14
Status of non-working men	retired workers

Source: Adapted from field data (2005/06)

Scholarship has emphasized on the struggles for farm land and decisions on crops to be produced between women and men in other communities, but among worker-peasants such struggles were not common. In fact, distinctions, like cash crops for men and crops regarded as other for women, remained foreign. Women, children, and hired helpers worked the land, and men provided the financial support. Women could also organize Community Work and Eat parties (ilima) to augment labour. But the men did not fall in the 'lazy men' category portrayed by colonial scholarship (Whitehead, 1999) as their contributions to household livelihoods were immeasurable. Cash remittances from the formal sector were not used only to supplement grain, but also to hire labour and for human development (investment in the education of children). It would seem that investment in children's education was further boosted by ownership of dual homes, and the city home was particularly important for children to further their education at high school level. But the urban home was also important for other kin in their search for livelihoods.

While members of Ndebele households held jobs in the cities and in South Africa and initially appeared to shun local jobs, members of the san households took up local jobs, and over time, appeared to monopolize jobs at the Sotane Ranch and the Forestry Commission. Through proceeds from these jobs, san households managed to accumulate assets (livestock and ploughs), but appeared to shun education, particularly before the country's independence. Data revealed that all children of san origin failed to complete primary level education before 1980 and, at the time of research, none of the san had attained a tertiary qualification.

Remittances and Social Stratification

Before the job squeeze of the 1990s, Ndebele households would shun local jobs, but their attitudes appeared to change during later years, and their members also took up jobs at the Sotane Safari Ranch and the two Saw Mills plants during the late 1990s. The 1990s was also characterized by an increase in out-migration to the cities and South Africa, and circular cross-border trading to Botswana, South Africa and Zambia (see Table 3). Cross-border migration has led to social stratification and has emerged as a new status symbol. In the context of chronic grain deficits and a countrywide economic slide, households now depend on support from members working in South Africa and Botswana, either for food or assets.

Table 3: Households non-farm livelihoods activities

Livelihood activity	pre-1990	1990 – 2005
	(No. of households)	No. of households %)
Cross-border migrants	23	93
Cities & Towns	107	67
Local employment	17	43
Entrepreneurs	6	19
Cross-border traders	3	29
Informal sector (local)	41	84
Informal sector (cities)	11	63

Source: Adapted from field data (2005/06)

Note: Households are involved in more than one livelihood activity, although poorer households depended more on the local informal sector.

Although remittances have always been important in households' livelihoods in the past, they appear to have acquired a new importance. Households that invested in human development and those with female members who migrated to South Africa appeared to be reaping benefits from their investments. In a situation of commodity shortages in the whole country, the children, some of whom held well paying jobs in South Africa constantly remitted food through the cross-border cargo transport system (omalayisha). Female cross-border migrants, some of whom left children in the care of their parents, were particularly supportive to their rural homes. These female migrants had also invested in smaller animals and other material assets for their children. Their households have remained food secure, despite the countrywide food crisis, and have also become important in the community as employers and owners of assets.

CONCLUSIONS

The process of redistributing land from large-scale commercial farmers and international agro-businesses to indigenous people in former Southern African settler-colonies, including Zimbabwe, has often been justified as a necessary process of decolonization. In Zimbabwe, the perception among local politicians and other international stakeholders was that land distribution in the country was a colonial legacy, was unsustainable, and represented a failed decolonization process. The centrality of this colonial legacy in the country's agrarian formation has meant that the large-scale sub-division of commercial land was never questioned. This paper sought to fill this gap and problematized the post-colonial state's peasantization project vis-à-vis the reality existing in the majority of rural areas in the country. Taking from Ashley & Maxwell (2001) and Maxwell (2005), this paper argued that such a project misrepresented rural reality. Rural communities have transformed overtime and depart from the public transcripts, conceived and imposed by visionary leaders.

Emerging evidence from the case study has portrayed households as landholders with a semi-proletariat culture. Instead of leaning heavily on the productivity of the land they occupy, agriculture has remained a supplementary activity, performed by women and children. Households' livelihoods have diversified outside agriculture, and are highly dependent on the formal and informal sectors of the economy. The semi-proletarianization of the rural economy was a direct result of colonial policies, capitalisation efforts, and uncertain weather conditions. The Shangani Reserves were created mainly as labour reserves, not as farming regions. They were, therefore, waterless regions where agricultural production was unsustainable.

But the evidence does not disprove the state narrative that there were demands for land by people previously disenfranchised by the colonial state. Such demands did not amount to demands for livelihoods from land by households, although land remained valuable. Households would acquire land and only put part of it under cultivation, extend their land as they wished, allow land to fallow, or abandon it altogether, but they would still protect their land claims. However, Zanu (PF) manipulated such demands, the colonial history, and the agricultural revolution of the 1980s to push a political agenda, which culminated in wholesome acquisition of commercial farms and the creation of an excess of 300,000 peasant households by October 2003.

It is the argument of this paper that based on the Gwayi Valley case, the post-colonial state's peasantization project did not reflect reality in the majority of rural communities in the country. It was a project justified by history, but it was also a social engineering project that was geared at remolding rural Zimbabwe along a very popular rural vision among administrators in the country and post-colonial administrators in the continent. In Zimbabwe, the narrative that has gained support from the political elites and development practitioners alike is that small-family farming can be a springboard for rural-based economic processes of development. The so-called 'agricultural miracle' of the 1980s has been used as evidence in support of this narrative, and has given some legitimacy to agriculture-based rural development interventions in the country. But the agricultural

success was not a national phenomenon. While there was a national surplus, semi-arid and arid regions faced grain shortages.

As events in the country since February 2009 bring about hope of a new dawn and normalcy in the economy and human life, rural areas and rural development policy demand the attention of the new government. While agriculture remains a key economic activity, continuity in rural development policy in a post-Zanu (PF) era will require extensive investment in harvesting water for irrigation and provision of other agricultural related services. Such a policy however, is not feasible, as the majority of rural areas face considerable problems of water availability. The majority of rivers are dry and the underground water tap is too far, to be tapped up for irrigation. It is the conclusion of this paper that the new government needs to re-visit rural development policy. The rural development policy needs to move away from populism and address issues that affect rural people. These issues revolve around rural livelihoods - giving rural households sustainable livelihoods and at the same time, maintaining what they have long valued, and what they now view as part of their culture. The rural development policy should, therefore, be shaped by processes of rural people, reflecting much on cultural practices shaped by history. More importantly, the policy needs to reflect the importance that rural households attach to remittances and investment, both in material and human resources.

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