

ZIMBABWE'S LAND CONTESTATIONS AND HER POLITICO-ECONOMIC CRISES: A PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE

Dennis Masaka

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Great Zimbabwe University

ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the extent to which land contestations in Zimbabwe have impacted on the nascent political and economic developments in the country since independence from colonial rule in 1980. It grounds the discussions on the land contestations in Zimbabwe within the context of the Afrocentric theory and Utilitarianism. The paper presents a trajectory of land contestations in Zimbabwe and how such contestations have compromised the sustainable development of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector, which is the backbone of her economy. It also situates the cataclysmic fall of Zimbabwe's economy to the politicization of land and adoption of questionable economic and political decisions by the pre-Government of National Unity (GNU) administration in Zimbabwe. Finally, it probes into how the GNU has tried to democratize the country's economy and the political space that had assumed a pariah state tag because of endemic political and economic crises.

Keywords: Zimbabwe; Land Contestations; Politics; Economy; Development

INTRODUCTION

The colonization of Zimbabwe and the rest of the African continent was predicated on a treacherous basis of trying to improve the lives of the people of Africa when in fact it spelt doom to the personhood of Africans and the resource dispossession that impoverished people that had managed to survive within their means prior to the advent of colonialism. Alexander (2006) rightly noted that "the establishment of settler rule in Zimbabwe rested on violent dispossession" that was predicated on the myth that the Africans were not able to sustainably use the natural resources at their disposal to improve their lot, thereby necessitating the need to colonize Zimbabwe and Africa, in general, in order manage the Africans and their resources. Gil Scott-Heron (Moore, 2005) confirmed this myth when he noted that, "First, white folks discovered Africa and claimed it fair and square. Cecil Rhodes couldn't have been robbing nobody 'cause he said there was nobody there", thereby confirming the colonial settler myth that the African was not able to sustainably use his resources prior to the advent of colonialism. Such colonial settlers' perceptions of Africa influenced the geography of land dispossessions in Zimbabwe where they saw themselves as a burdened by a responsibility to administer "...both nature and natives in the tropics; [because] both were resources to be managed, improved, and developed for the benefit of metropole and colony" (Moore, 2005). However, available evidence has shown that by the middle ages (Stoneman, 1981a), that is:

“...about the eleventh or twelfth centuries AD, Zimbabwe was becoming the centre of one of Africa’s largest empires...[and] this civilization [probably centered at Great Zimbabwe] grew rich and powerful on mining-of copper and coal, but above all of gold. Trade with countries as far afield as China is evidenced from the remains found in the ruins, but despite the lure of its gold mines, the empire was powerful enough to repel both Arab and Portuguese encroachments.”

Thus, it is a truism that pre-colonial Zimbabwean societies had the means and ways to engage in productive activities that helped in meeting their needs and wants. The colonial conquest of Zimbabwe that begun in 1890 involved, among others, massive land dispossessions, forced labour and confiscation of indigenous people’s livestock. This historical event created a disproportionate resource distribution between the indigenous people of Zimbabwe and colonial settlers whose ramifications are even felt today. When white settlers arrived in 1890, they found traditional agriculture that had been in existence for some 2,000 years while “livestock was a major activity by AD 1000 and native Zimbabweans owned about 500,000 cattle at the time of colonization” (Rukuni, 2006). However, colonial settlers denied the fact that Africans were capable of sustainably exploiting their resources. For example, land rotation was administered in order to main soil fertility. The indigenous people of Zimbabwe faced evictions from their homes and farms, much of which were fertile. Such land was given to the settlers while Africans were forced into some unproductive pieces of land.

This massive appropriation of arable and mineral rich land angered the indigenous people and provided the impetus for “...a brutal war against 200,000 white-settler colonial Rhodesians (with 40,000 black casualties)...” (Bond, 2001). The simmering anger against white colonial settlers’ scandalous and forceful expropriation of indigenous people’s land and other resources provided the impetus for a war against white colonial settlers in order to end years of white political and economic subjugation. Such morally repugnant land resource distribution disequilibria that grossly favored white settlers at the expense of the indigenous black people of Zimbabwe worsened the fragmentation of Rhodesia along racial lines (Rukuni, 2006). It compromised the indigenous people’s sources of livelihood thereby leading to unprecedented poverty levels among them from colonial times up to 2000, when a chaotic land redistribution exercise took place. Thus, “...black farmers were converted from successful and enterprising people growing a surplus of food, and preserving their independence from the demeaning status of working for whites (particularly white farmers), into impoverished subsistence farmers in overcrowded reserves, practicing supposedly traditional (but in fact imposed and inefficient) agricultural techniques, and being obliged to work in large numbers for the white economy, and in particular the appallingly badly paid agricultural sector...” (Stoneman, 1981b) that shockingly employed a large chunk of Zimbabwe’s black workforce. Such colonial tactics of total disempowerment of the indigenous black people incapacitated them to maintain their agricultural successes in arid, inhabitable, and overcrowded pockets of Zimbabwe that they were settle in. Therefore, the thirst to reclaim the land that was unfairly taken away from the black people by white settlers continued to inhere among them into the post-colonial period, when the government aided by veterans of Zimbabwe’s liberation war, and the citizenry carried out a largely violent and disorderly program to reclaim the lost land.

Colonial legacy of scandalous land resource distribution disparities between the indigenous people of Zimbabwe and the white colonial settlers during the colonial era has had a direct bearing on the contemporary developmental challenges of postcolonial Zimbabwe. Given that Zimbabwe's economy is agro-based, perennial land related disputes between the post-colonial government in Zimbabwe and the white farmers has created a sad geography of violence that has been internationalized and radicalized to the detriment of Zimbabwe's economic development and political stability. In this regard, Raftopoulos (2009) rightly noted that the:

“...long-term legacies of colonial resource inequalities, narrow forms of capital accumulation that failed to build a broader productive base, a labor reproduction system based on low wages and migrant labor, and problematic development strategies in both the “welfarist” 1980s and the neoliberal 1990s provide a schematic historical backdrop to the crisis that unfolded between 1998 and 2008.”

At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe's diversified economy was touted as a beacon for Africa's future and exuded with promising signs of vibrancy (Sachikonye, 2002) that testified to the emerging economic giant of Southern Africa. However, such a promising economy was jeopardized by, among others, political and economic miscalculations (Tarisayi, 2009) on the part of government, the half-baked implementation, and the sponsorship of the Bretton Woods engineered and financed economic structural reforms for the greater part of the second decade after independence. Such political and economic miscalculations have haunted Zimbabwe's political space and economy up to this day. The cataclysmic meltdown of Zimbabwe economy (Tarisayi, 2009; Makochekanwa & Kwaramba, 2009) since the turn of the new millennium cannot be legitimately divorced from the prevailing political undercurrents and the highly contentious land resource and attempts to redress land ownership imbalances so that it reflects the numerical superiority of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. The advent of independence ushered in new hopes and aspirations with regard to a fair distribution of economic resources, such as land and other natural resources, particularly within the ranks of the indigenous black people of Zimbabwe given close to a century of colonial subjugation. For Masaka (2010a) “similarly, the white population felt a sense of security and belonging when the incoming Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, preached the gospel of nation-building predicated on reconciliation between past political protagonists.” However, the anger over the loss of ancestral lands to settlers through brutal use of force continued to simmer even after political independence from Britain culminating in the highly controversial land seizures that gained momentum in 2000. Thus, there is a sense in which the unending land contestations in Zimbabwe have impacted on the otherwise promising political and economic developments in the country since independence from colonial rule in 1980.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded on the theories of Afrocentricism and Utilitarianism in its justification of Zimbabwe's land reform program that aims at redressing serious land ownership disparities between the indigenous black people of Zimbabwe and the white settlers. The land resource is a very vital aspect of any human race because it embodies

people's sense of belonging, humanhood and livelihood. Afrocentric theory is a theory of social change that was proffered by Asante (1987, 1988, 1990) and it is aimed at questioning all forms of degradation and dehumanization of black people by whites as a result of racism manifested in colonialism and imperialism. Its key objective is to decisively question eurocentric perceptions about Africans and argue a case for the need for African issues to be seen from the African standpoint. Thus, for Masaka, Gwaravanda, & Mukusha (2010), Afrocentric theory "...is an intellectual perspective deriving its name from the centrality of African people and phenomena in the interpretation of data" as opposed to the dominant Eurocentric view that saw African people as a primitive race that were objects and not subjects in human history. Afrocentricity is, therefore, a critique of European domination and supposed supremacy (Asante, 1990). Thus, white colonial settler's first reaction upon reaching Africa was that "...of pity for what he believed an inferior race and a desire to help uplift the people with whom he came into contact and to bring them a new way of life" (Gelfand, 1968; Gelfand, 1981) – a feeling that was heavily influenced by warped beliefs about the level of civilization of Africans. Afrocentrists commonly contend that this initial Eurocentrism has led to the subsequent neglect or denial of the contributions of indigenous African people to the betterment of themselves. For Masaka, Gwaravanda, & Mukusha (2010), "to condone the definition of Africans as marginal and fringe people in the historical processes of the world, including the African world, is to abandon all hope of reversing the degradation of the oppressed" that they have endured for over a century of colonial subjugation.

Thus, the colonial myths about the African's inability to sustainably use the resources available to him in order to improve his life and to justified the need to colonize the African so that he, himself, plus his resources could be managed and controlled. During the colonial period, Europeans encountered Africans living with relatively elementary technology and "so low on the ladder of civilization was the African held in the nineteenth century that Europe looked upon him not only as an inferior to be pitied, but often as well with a feeling of disgust" (Gelfand, 1968). Based on their self-appraisal of the value of technology, industrialization, Western-type infrastructure, and Western-type culture, these European nations assumed themselves to be superior to the peoples and cultures they encountered in Africa, thereby justifying the manner in which they related to Africans. Thus, on the basis of "...a superior attitude based practically entirely on first impressions" (Gelfand, 1968), the African's personhood and sustainable use of natural resources were severely questioned. For Gelfand (1968), "when the European found none of the obvious material and mechanical advantages he had known for many years, it is not surprising that he jumped to the conclusion that these people were primitive and perhaps subnormal." Therefore, the forcible recovery of land that had initially been violently taken away from the local people by white settlers was not only an open indictment of the white settlers' lack of respect of the indigenous people's ability to sustainably use their own resources for their own good, but also a retributive stance towards a group of people that had earlier dispossessed them of their land resource in a violent and insensitive manner.

Utilitarianism is a major position in normative ethics, stemming from the late 18th and 19th century philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. It proffers that an act is morally right if it brings about the greatest net happiness among available alternative courses of action to the greatest number of people affected by that given

action. Utilitarianism has an important influence on decision making with respect to the economy, whereby those actions that ought to be pursued are those that bring about the greatest net happiness among the available alternative actions to the greatest number of people affected by such actions. Mill popularized utilitarianism and, like his predecessors, the basis of his version of utilitarianism is the Greatest Happiness Principle which states that, “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (Shaw, 1993). Our actions ought to be geared at promoting the total balance of good over wrong for all the people affected by the given action. Contrary to the deontological approach to ethics that perceives morality as a duty or a moral rule that has to be followed, utilitarianism is a form of teleological ethics focusing on the consequences of actions (Velasquez, 1997), meaning that the moral value of an action is solely determined by its results. Thus, an action is considered right if it tends to produce happiness and wrong if it brings about unhappiness. In this regard, Zimbabwe’s land reform program could be rationalized as ethically appropriate because of its utility to the generality of Zimbabwe who, by historical misfortune, find themselves crowded in inhabitable and agriculturally unproductive parts of Zimbabwe.

Thus, based on the common characterization of utilitarianism that morally right acts are those that bring about the greatest net utility for the greatest number of people affected by given actions, the paper posits that Zimbabwe’s land reform can be morally justified, not only because it brought back ancestral land that had been violently taken away from them since 1890 albeit similarly in a violent and controversial way, but also that land redistribution has brought about happiness to the generality of the landless people of Zimbabwe. However, it is an actuality that two major events in land contestations in Zimbabwe, namely the controversial land seizures from the indigenous people of Zimbabwe by white settlers and the equally controversial land reform program that gained momentum in 2000, all but spelt doom to the right to ownership of private property and the productive use of land for the benefit of individual land owners and the country as a whole. In the long run, Zimbabwe’s land contestations, as reflected in the fast track land invasions, have proved to be a disaster, given the widespread hunger that was occasioned by this economically ill-conceived policy shift on land ownership in the country. Thus, even though Zimbabwe’s land reform program has, in the short run, proved to be a panacea to arable and productive land hunger among the generality of black Zimbabweans, in the long run, it has brought less utility to the greatest number of people affected by it primarily because it has caused lawlessness in Zimbabwe’s body politic, monumental fall of Zimbabwe’s agricultural production capacity thereby causing widespread hunger, collapse of an agro-based economy, and heightened state fragility.

BACKGROUND TO LAND CONTESTATIONS IN ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe got its political independence in 1980 after ninety years of colonial rule that began with the recruitment of white settlers who were “promised gold claims and 3,000 acres [of land] each” (Moore, 2005). Grouped under the banner of ‘Pioneer Column’, that later became the British South Africa Company (BSAC), white settlers thought that they could discover huge gold deposits in Zimbabwe similar to the ones they discovered in Transvaal, South Africa. The BSAC was granted the right to occupy and govern Zimbabwe by the Queen of Britain “...following a

sham deal with a local African leader” (Bond & Manyanya, 2002), Lobengula, who unnecessarily falsified and bloated the territories under his jurisdiction in order to claim a false sense of influence in the eyes of would-be settler representatives. However, prospects of mining success in Zimbabwe proved to be a mirage. Focus was turned to agriculture, thereby, occasioning serious land alienation as large tracts of land were confiscated from the indigenous black people. Particularly, “...the country’s highveld, the agro-ecological zone with the highest rains, most fertile soils and the largest agricultural potential” (Wolmer, 2007) were designated European territory, thereby disempowering the indigenous people’s ability to sustainably use the land resource in order to meet their needs and wants. The simmering anger against white colonial settlers’ scandalous and forceful theft of indigenous people’s land and other resources provided the impetus for a war against white colonial settlers (Bond, 2001) in order to end years of white political and economic subjugation.

Such morally repugnant land resource distribution disequilibria that grossly favored white settlers worsened the fragmentation of Rhodesia along racial lines. The greatest grievance of the Ndebele and other territories that Lobengula claimed to be in control over was the raiding of their cattle by the Native Affairs Department on the pretext that all cattle belonged to Lobengula (Parsons, 1982) and since they had not only duped him into signing a scandalous deal, but also defeated him in battle, all cattle were now owned by the white victors. It compromised the indigenous people’s sources of livelihood, thereby leading to unprecedented poverty levels among indigenous people of Zimbabwe from colonial times up to the year 2000, when a chaotic land redistribution exercise took place. The thirst to reclaim the land that was unfairly taken away from indigenous people of Zimbabwe continued to inhere among them into the post colonial period when the government, aided by veterans of Zimbabwe’s liberation war, and the citizenry carried out a largely violent program to reclaim the lost land and redress the uneven development between white settlers and the indigenous black people as a result of the unfair distribution of economic resources, such as the land, a vast number of minerals that inhere in them. In addition, the huge inflow of financial capital that could not be profitably invested in Western markets found its way to Southern Africa during and after the 1980s, and such availability of capital increased the quest and thirst of white settlers to grab more land and other resources from the indigenous people.

The chief architect behind the colonization of Zimbabwe, Cecil John Rhodes, had extraordinary ambitions for power and, therefore, his dream to colonize Zimbabwe and the rest of Africa (Needham, Mashingaidze, & Bhebe, 1974) was informed by such grandiose wishes. The BSA Company that he formed as a commercial company to colonize Zimbabwe and was promised large tracts of land and mineral claims upon arrival, claimed a significant chunk of Zimbabwe’s arable land and mineral resources to the detriment of the indigenous black population. The Ndebele people who occupied the Western part of the pre-colonial Zimbabwean state and the Shona people who occupied the greater part of Zimbabwe’s territory were angered by colonial settlers’ moves to deprive them of their treasured land and other natural resources. Both the Ndebele and Shona ethnic groupings all but lost their claims to land, thereby occasioning some uprisings in the 1890s in order to chase away white colonial settlers from their land. However, such uprisings were brutally crushed and the indigenous land was taken away. Thus, “through brutal means - land and

cattle expropriation, various taxes, cattle-dipping and grazing fees, debt peonage...the colonists then began forcing African peasants off their land and into mines, commercial farms and nascent factories” (Bond & Manyanya, 2002), thereby creating an “...uneven geography of agrarian injustice” (Moore, 2005), where Zimbabwe’s Highveld that is agriculturally productive and rich in minerals became legally defined as European areas. Such uncouth white settler practices stirred up the emotions of the indigenous black people to fight off the white settler government through the armed struggle and it is precisely because of the widespread discontent against white settler rule that a black nationalist political party (Bond & Manyanya, 2002), Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), won the 1980 plebiscite.

Since Mashonaland and Matabeleland (Stoneman, 1981b) were colonized by whites principally for their supposed abundant mineral deposits, “the mainly agrarian Mashona and the mainly pastoral Ndebele responded with considerable success to the new markets provided by the miners and other colonists” thereby arousing the ire of the colonizers because the self-sufficiency of the black population not only posed a threat to the availability of cheap labor force to work on white farms and mines, but also their farming prowess caused great uneasiness on the market given the actuality of fierce competition from black farmers. The black people’s motivation to grow sufficient food was motivated by the need to remain “...independent as possible of the new conquerors, who already were instituting taxes in efforts to force them down the mines” (Stoneman, 1981b). The white settler administration devised means and ways of frustrating the indigenous people into surrendering themselves to cheap labor in the mines and farms through depriving them of arable farming land and forcibly making them to pay, among others, some punitive hut and dog taxes. Thus, the Rhodesian colony “...was built up more steadily during the early twentieth century, with less reliance upon gold extraction and more upon the colony’s extreme class, race, and gender apartheid” (Bond & Manyanya, 2002). These and other deliberate measures to demoralize the indigenous people produced the desired results because they started to seek refuge in mines and farms in order to get employment so that they could manage to pay off the mandatory taxes and to fend for their families.

The whites realized that the indigenous people were quite hardworking and competitive, contrary to the common myth that black people are, by nature, lazy leading the white settlers to implement protectionist measures that sought to safeguard their interests while impoverishing the indigenous people. For Stoneman (1981a), “the response of the whites [to the black people’s fierce competition in the market] was the separation of the races by land alienation and reservation, discriminatory marketing regulations, and the development of infrastructural, institutional and financial back-up to the white economy”, thereby causing an extreme poverty and overcrowding of blacks in the Native Reserves. As a result, myths were invented in order to authenticate and validate the scandalous policies that helped to sustain the unjust new order, such as “...the settlers’ view of the ‘lazy inefficient native’ whose problems were self-inflicted through overpopulation, who was incapable of reacting appropriately to economic incentives (so justifying their denial), who only gradually could be brought towards ‘civilization’, and whose welfare, in the meantime, depended on the supposed job-creating propensities of white immigrants and the white economy, in general” (Stoneman, 1981b). In fact, early white farmers’ efforts to supply food and tobacco to mining settlements

“...was largely unsuccessful because of the competition of black farmers, who proved (contrary to later myths) to be efficient and flexible enough to respond to the widening market” (Stoneman, 1981a), thereby prompting the settler administration to frustrate the farming prowess of the indigenous black farmers by unethical means. Via such uncouth practices by the white regime, the previously productive black farmers were condemned to the demeaning status of semi-slave workers for whites and miserable subsistence farmers in the badly overcrowded reserves. Such a sad scenario of uneven development and land resource distribution disequilibria impoverished the ‘Native Reserves’ “...culminating in the present situation in which food grown in the white areas has become essential as a supplement to the production from the black areas” (Stoneman, 1981a). In addition, the unpopular destocking exercises (Mlambo, 2009), meant to maintain sustainable numbers of livestock among the indigenous people of Zimbabwe, also angered the indigenous black people. Livestock destocking purportedly done to contain rinderpest, angered the indigenous people because it was their source and show of wealth. The indigenous people were greatly offended by losing out their ancestral land to strangers who surprisingly were intend on changing the indigenous ways of life, through a well calculated strategy to estrange them through, among others, land dispossession, and a cocktail of constitutional clauses that disadvantaged the indigenous people.

21ST CENTURY LAND POLITICS IN ZIMBABWE

The fast-track and chaotic agrarian reforms in Zimbabwe that were initiated in 2000 with the politically motivated and radicalized invasion of largely white owned productive farms (Moore, 2005; McGregor, 2009) and the subsequent disturbance of farming activities and vandalization of expensive and difficult to replace farm equipment worsened Zimbabwe’s economic meltdown. The economic problems that were brought about by the half-baked implementation and financing of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and Zimbabwe Programme for Economic Transformation (ZIMPREST) had serious political effects that saw the emergence of a labor engineered and dominated political opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The MDC provided a formidable challenge to ZANU (PF)’s political hegemony (Kaulem, 2004; Masaka, 2010c) in Zimbabwe’s body politic since independence from colonial settler rule. However, its emergence on Zimbabwe’s political scene sent shock waves within the ZANU (PF) party because MDC had a strong white capital backing and a significant support from the disgruntled labor force and general populace over ZANU (PF)’s poor governance as exemplified by, among others, the ill-fated land reform program, its penchant to cause lawlessness in the country thereof, and Zimbabwe’s costly military adventures in the jungles of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to support the crumbling government of Laurent Joseph Desire Kabila where “the cost of involvement in the DRC added to the failures of the structural adjustment program by the end of 1990s” (Raftopoulos, 2009).

Zimbabwe’s land reform, very much a façade and motivated by political, as opposed genuine, economic motives to increase productivity on the land, has, up to this day, proved to be a monumental failure as it has sadly transformed the country’s breadbasket of Southern Africa status to a sorry state of a basket case of the region. Although, the causes of Zimbabwe’s disorderly land reform program are many-headed, there is a sense in which political expedience as opposed to economic acumen ran supreme during this sad chapter of Zimbabwe’s contagious land

politics. Angered by the 2000 constitution referendum whereby the government driven proposed constitution was rejected by the people, and with the white people's vote allegedly against the proposed constitution, the government suspected an evil scheme between the white population and their indigenous 'stooges' to scuttle the land reform program thereby maintaining the matrix of white control and domination of the land resource. MDC and one of its civic ally, National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), openly lobbied against voting for the ZANU (PF) government's proposed constitution that made provision for massive expropriation of largely white-owned farms. As a result, the proposed constitution was rejected. In order to hit back at those who had canvassed support against the proposed constitution, especially the white farmers, the "...government [immediately] backed invasions of commercial farms as an alternative approach to redressing the land issue, as retribution against those who were perceived to have supported the opposition and to divert attention away from the declining economic situation" (Mapedza, 2007; Dore, n.d.). The cataclysmic results of these farm invasions included, among others, a catastrophic drop in agricultural output and exports, heightened the fiscal pressures on the government, worsening state fragility and a flight of experienced farmers, capital and foreign investors, and unprecedented inflation.

Interestingly, the white vote against the proposed constitution was quite visible, presumably because the white population did not want this draft constitution to be ratified into law because it contained a clause that empowered the government to compulsorily acquire large, white-owned farms without paying any compensation, except for the infrastructural developments that were done on these farms. The land resource was turned into a political tool that ZANU (PF) believed would make them win the coming June 2000 parliamentary elections against an emerging political opposition, the MDC. Thus, in order to disturb MDC's vortex of political and financial support, the ZANU (PF) government strategically decided to allow land invasions of mainly white owned farmlands. Even though such an exercise appeared noble as it sought to rationalize land resource disequilibria between white settlers and the indigenous people of Zimbabwe, it lacked international support and economic prudence because it destroyed one of the most productive farming sectors in Southern Africa.

The colonial settlers' morally scandalous stranglehold on the economy and the land resource control strained race relations in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The Rhodesian administration created and maintained the impoverishment and vulnerability of black people through, among others, (Cliffe, 1981):

...*The Land Apportionment Act*, which divided the land into racial blocks, giving the whites exclusive right to the better half, and involving, over a long period, the shifting of blacks to 'reserves', *The Grain Marketing and Maize Controls Acts* which biased the (controlled) price of staple food crops against the black peasant farmers and subsidised the white farmer; *The Master and Servant Act* and numerous *Native Labour* enactments which put African black workers firmly in their place; the operation of *Pass Laws* and of *Native Labour Boards* which kept a good proportion of black workers in the *migrant* category, further denying them rights...

Consequently, such unjustified resource ownership disequilibria between colonial settlers and the indigenous people of Zimbabwe has always been foremost objective of Zimbabwe’s war of liberation and has persisted to be so after the country’s political independence in 1980. Even though the land reform was heavily manipulated by the then ZANU (PF) Zimbabwean government, for political expediency in the face of waning political and economic fortunes, and a formidable electoral challenge from the MDC, regaining the land resource from colonial settlers’ grip has always been seen as the hallmark of independence. In this regard, the President of Zimbabwe, Mr R.G. Mugabe (Moore, 2005) remarked that land reform is “the last colonial question heavily qualifying our sovereignty”, given Britain’s alleged underhand backing of white farmers’ stranglehold on the land and her failure to respect her commitment as contained in the Lancaster House Constitution to bankroll Zimbabwe’s land reform program.

The Lancaster House Constitution, initially the Lancaster House Agreement, was put in place as part of the deal between Zimbabwe’s liberation movements and the colonial government in 1979. This deal, which was brokered by Britain at the Lancaster House conference, involved a number of compromises over majority rights and the land resource ownership in the country. Such a deal, unfortunately, “...protected the existing authoritarian bureaucracy and protected private property, thus limiting the scope of distribution” (Muzondidya, 2009), thereby extending, for a decade, colonial consolidation of their wealth as well as the morally, questionable resource distribution disequilibria. The willing-buyer and willing-seller clause in the Lancaster House Constitution prevented the government of Zimbabwe to implement a meaningful land reform program. This, constitutionally, guaranteed racial protection of the land resource, which meant that one of the key objectives of the struggle for liberation remained a pipe dream, at least for the first ten years after independence.

Table 1. Racial inequality in 1960’s Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)

	European	African
Population Density	1/square mile	46/square mile
Average Wages	£1,200/month	£110/month
Educational Expenditure	£340/month	£30/child

Source: *Lebert (n.d.)*

Although the colonial settler stranglehold on the land and the economy was, to a larger extent, responsible for high poverty levels among the indigenous people of Zimbabwe before and after independence, the manner in which the land redistribution exercise was conducted occasioned a sustained political and economic crisis that has severely battered her agrarian economy. For Masaka (2010b), “though redressing land imbalances in Zimbabwe was morally justified, the means of executing it is still mired in controversy” primarily because it was executed in a chaotic manner and took a racial dimension. Zimbabwe’s land wrangles have also negatively affected the country’s formerly vibrant community-based natural resource management sector. As a result, there has been an increase in cases of political interferences in local environmental governance, invasion of protected forests, and state lands that have

severely undermined the otherwise successful natural resource “...management initiatives, like CAMPFIRE, which use devolved management institutions and clearly demarcated financial benefits to facilitate sustainable wildlife management by local people” (Mapedza, 2007). As a result of such cases of suicidal political interventions on resource management at local and national levels, the communities that benefited from these community programs lost a reliable source of revenue. With reference to a chaotic and rushed land reform exercise, the then member of the Natural Resources Board, Lance Smith (Moyana, 2002,) noted that:

Making political capital out of the land issue...without ensuring that sustained agricultural production would be safeguarded could have disastrous consequences...Countries which were once at least self-sufficient in food are importers, even beggars with populations, either starving or facing starvation...The need for land will be compounded by anyone attempting to capitalize politically through rash promises of land redistribution. They must first face the realities of necessary development and sustained yield or they will condemn us all to a future of abject poverty.

Thus, the land question remains the most sensitive aspect of Zimbabwe’s chequered history since the coming of colonial settlers in 1890 because of the manner in which it was violently taken away from the indigenous people and how it was reclaimed since 2000 through a largely racialized and violent land reform exercise. ZANU (PF) government’s impatience with the white farmers and white population, in general, reached a crisis proportion when some white farmers were filmed making donations to the MDC leadership (The Sunday Mail, 2010), which included Morgan Tsvangirai in 2000.

The apparently marriage of convenience (Sibanda & Masaka, 2010) between the labor-backed party, headed by the former Zimbabwe Council of Trade Unions (ZCTU) secretary general, Morgan Tsvangirai, and the white farmers who, after having felt a sure threat to their stranglehold on the contentious land resource through a clause of the proposed government engineered constitutional reform process that gave government the legal basis to repossess land without compensation for land per se, could have further rattled the ZANU (PF) government. The government had become accustomed to the mortal combats between the labor body and employers that were coincidentally dominated by white owners of capital (Masaka, 2010*a*). It is, therefore, not surprising that the MDC, with visible support from Zimbabwe’s largely white farmers, managed to hand ZANU (PF) its first electoral defeat since independence in 1980, when they rallied people to vote against the proposed new constitution in the 2000 referendum. Such a union of supposedly strange bed fellows (Sibanda and Masaka, 2010) gave rise to a number of disparaging myths ranging from the accusations that the MDC was a party of sell-outs who were bent on reversing the gains of independence by supporting the white population’s stranglehold on the land resource, that it is foreign sponsored and, therefore, a stooge of Western interests. Such myths appear to have been the basis of ZANU (PF)’s heavy-handed response to MDC’s entrance into Zimbabwe’s political arena through successive violent elections and alleged politically motivated arrests and detentions of its members and sympathizers since its formation in 1999.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CRISES IN ZIMBABWE

During the early 1990s, Zimbabwe adopted an economic blueprint that sought to re-align a largely socialist-oriented economy to a market-driven economy in order to spur economic growth in the country. For Wolmer (2007), the neoliberal era of ESAP had some significant implications on the government's prospect of redistributing land to the generality of Zimbabweans. Among the key attributes of the market-driven economy was the need to predicate land transfers on the willing seller/willing buyer principle, rather than the allegedly despotic compulsory acquisition of land, the need to gear the economy towards increasing exports, liberalize the economy, and the exchange rate devaluation and privatization. Consequently, "together, these [measures] had the effect of further entrenching the inequitable land ownership structure, restraining the land redistribution agenda and encouraging land use conversions towards wildlife management, horticulture and livestock" (Wolmer, 2007), thereby maintaining an uneven geography of land ownership between white settlers and the indigenous black people of Zimbabwe. Thus, for Wolmer (2007) the, "ESAP exacerbated inequality, unemployment and poverty. The increasing lack of alternatives to land and natural resource-based livelihood strategies exacerbated land hunger and contributed to mounting frustration at the slow pace of land reform-keeping the land reform a political agenda." In light of these setbacks to Zimbabwe government's efforts to redistribute the land to the generality of its citizenry, the question remained a time bomb whose opportune time to explode into a crisis situation with an international dimension came about when ZANU (PF) used it as a political tool to bolster its waning fortunes during and after the 2000 plebiscites. ZANU (PF) capitalized "...on the deep-seated grievances on the emotive land issue...and fought the election under the slogan 'land is the economy and the economy is land'" (Wolmer, 2007), thereby trivializing the need to maintain and increase productivity on the farms. The resettled farmers were severely ill-equipped financially, materially, and in terms of requisite farming knowledge, thereby making a mockery of the once revered farming sector that, in the past, prided itself as the backbone of Zimbabwe's economy.

The emergence of a formidable opposition party, MDC, in 1999 added another interesting dimension to land politics in Zimbabwe. MDC was seen as a stooge of Western interest and the open show of solidarity between the MDC and white farmers, particularly, confirmed ZANU (PF)'s suspicion that MDC was formed in order to reverse the gains of independence by frustrating ZANU (PF) government's efforts to fully consummate the objectives of Zimbabwe's liberation war, such as land redistribution (Masaka, 2010a). ZANU (PF)'s pre-occupation with dealing with the threat of the MDC to its political stranglehold gave rise to unprecedented economic meltdown given that economic acumen gave way to political expediency, as shown by the economically, costly, chaotic land reform program. However, such apparent economic and political blunderings by the Zimbabwe government were blamed on the MDC that was accused of working in cahoots with some Western governments to cause the country's economic downfall. As a result, the period between 1998 and 2008 saw a rare shift in Zimbabwean politics whereby "...the state was reconfigured in more authoritarian nationalist terms..." (Raftopoulos & Mlambo, 2009), whereby abuse of the state institutions and laws led to the politics of exclusion. For Raftopoulos and Mlambo (2009),

A key element of this state restructuring was a revived nationalist discourse located around a number of themes, namely the centrality of the land, a selective rendition of the history of

liberation, and the collective branding of whites, the West, the Movement for Democratic Change, and the civic movement and their supporters as 'enemies of the state' and outsiders to the nation.

In the context of these political contestations, the ZANU (PF) government shouldered all the blame for the country's economic misfortunes on white owners of capital and their Western host countries' clandestine scheme to remove them from power and replace them with the MDC government that would be pliable to Western hegemony on Zimbabwe's treasured land and other economic resources. It is for this reason, therefore, that Zimbabwe's government blames external plots to destabilize and effect regime changes in the country as the rational cause of the country's economic woes. With reference to such governmental claims, Clemens and Moss (2005) note that "the government's frequent claims of external plots to destabilize Zimbabwe encompass a long and increasingly irrational list of saboteurs, such the International Monetary Fund, the British government, and an international gay conspiracy" betrays "...occasional bouts of official schizophrenia..." that even go to the extent of accusing the USA and the UK of manipulating and controlling the weather in order to cause a drought in Zimbabwe.

THE GNU AND ITS RESPONSES TO ECONOMIC AND LAND CRISES

Land and the economy in Zimbabwe do not admit a clinical distinction because the Zimbabwean economy is, by and large, agro-based. Thus, land related crises in Zimbabwe have cascaded down to the perilous state of her economy, as reflected by increased state fragility. When Zimbabwe became independent in 1980 "...decolonization was not accompanied, as one might have expected, by radical land reform incorporating large-scale redistribution, restitution or reparation. Rather, the colonial status quo was legalized in the Lancaster House Constitution..." (Wolmer, 2007), where land transfer was predicated of the willing seller/willing buyer formula, stipulating that the buyer has to pay full compensation for the farm that was bought. Such a strict legal framework that guided land transfers in post-colonial Zimbabwe made it impossible for government to affect significant land reforms in the country. Even though there were sporadic land invasions throughout the 1980s, these legal impediments and lack of commitment by donors explained the slow pace at which the government moved towards redressing colonial land ownership imbalances between colonial settlers and the indigenous black people.

Zimbabwe's GNU is a culmination of the SADC brokered power sharing deal, the Global Political Agreement (GPA) that was agreed by major political gladiators, ZANU (PF), Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and Movement for Democratic Change-Mutambara (MDC-M). It is an agreement which pits political parties that have visibly different ideological orientations. As a result, there is legitimate skepticism whether such a coalition government would work well for the common good of the politically and economically haunted citizens of Zimbabwe. The all-inclusive government was borne out of intense negotiations in both Zimbabwe and South Africa with the aim of providing a solution not only to a multiplicity of problems that the Zimbabwean people have endured for close to a decade, but also to the inconclusive 2008 presidential elections. Among the major issues that the GNU is expected to address is the highly contentious land resource distribution disequilibria between the white community and the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. According to Article V (Global Political Agreement, 2008) of

the Global Political Agreement (GPA), political parties in the GPA agreed on the need to recognize "...that colonial racist land ownership patterns established during the colonial conquest of Zimbabwe and largely maintained in the post independence period were not only unsustainable, but against the national interest, equity and justice" and, therefore, in need of a serious redress to reflect Zimbabwe's territorial sovereignty. However, there was no agreement among these major political parties with regard to the methodology of acquisition and redistribution of land, thereby fomenting land contestations. A close analysis of Article V shows that, though there is consensus on the irreversibility of the land acquisition and redistribution program and the need to ensure that productivity is restored in the farmlands, Zimbabwe's land reforms still lack international acceptance, especially from the powerful blocks, such as the European Union and the USA, primarily because of its lawless nature and its affront on human and property rights. As a result, such earthshaking reforms have not received the requisite backing and financial support from international lending institutions and donor communities, thereby compromising its eventual success. Since Zimbabwe's economy is, by and large, agro-based, land contestations that have lately taken an international dimension would always provide a serious challenge to the efforts to bring back Zimbabwe's battered economy to full recovery. Therefore, there is a need for transparency and respect of property and human rights in a manner in which the land reform program is dealt with so that no one receives large tracts of land that he or she cannot sustainably use to enhance agricultural productivity. Former land owners are adequately compensated for their land that would have been taken away for redistribution because not all white farmers in Zimbabwe were inheritors of the stolen land. Quite a number of white farmers bought these farms using their personal savings. It would be an open negation of the free market system for the GNU to ignore the need to fully compensate those farmers who invested their monies in the Zimbabwe's farm lands, who have no traceable colonial connections.

However, current developments in the economy following the formation of the GNU testify to the actuality that a return to the fundamentals of a free market system is the panacea to Zimbabwe's decade long of economic freefall. The democratization of the market could also be extended to the agricultural sector whereby the land acquired ought to be compensated for in order to instill some form of credibility and orderliness in this otherwise noble exercise. According to the International Monetary Fund (Country Report No. 09/139, 2009), a raft of positive changes in the management of Zimbabwe's economy have breathed life into the economy and have given some confidence to otherwise highly skeptical investors with respect to the ability of the transitional government to stop and reverse a decade-long of economic meltdown that was largely caused by flawed economic and political decisions by the pre-GNU political establishment. Thus, partial freeing of the economy has testified to the fact that a free market, as opposed to a command economy, brings about the greatest utility (Mill, 1993) and is more desirable because of its utility.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper focused on land contestations in Zimbabwe and noted that inconclusive resolution of the land question has had cataclysmic consequences to an economy that is, by and large, sustained by agricultural sector. The study has noted that the controversial land contestations in Zimbabwe have compromised the sustainable development of

Zimbabwe's agricultural sector given that the resettled farmers are technically and financially ill-equipped to fully utilize the precious land resource in order to maintain or at most increase the productive capacity of the formerly white-owned farm lands. Even though it is true that pre-colonial Zimbabwean societies were able to sustainably use their land resource not only in order to produce enough for their sustenance but also for the benefit of posterity, years of land deprivations might have compromised their capacity to fully exploit the land resource for the benefit of humanity. The paper located the cataclysmic fall of Zimbabwe's economy to the politicization of land and adoption of questionable economic and political decisions by the pre-GNU government of Zimbabwe. Predicated on the Afrocentric theory and Utilitarianism, the paper argued a case for an orderly redistribution of Zimbabwe's land resource in order to effect sustainable development of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector. Thus, there is need for the Zimbabwean government to put in place requisite technical and financial support in order to ensure that her land resource is used in manner that would enhance productivity and food self-sufficiency.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, J. (2006). *The Unsettled Land: State-making & the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893 – 2003*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Asante, M.K. (1987). *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Asante, M.K. (1988). *Afrocentricity*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Asante, M.K. (1990). *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Bond, P. (2001). Radical Rhetoric and the Working Class during Zimbabwean Nationalism's Dying Days. In B. Raftopoulos & L. Sachikonye (Eds.), *Striking Back: The Labour Movement and the Post-Colonial State in Zimbabwe 1980-2000* (pp. 25-52). Harare: Weaver Press.
- Bond, P. & Manyanya, M. (2002). *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Clemens, M. & Moss, T. (2005). *Costs and Causes of Zimbabwe's Crisis*. Washington: Center for Global Development, pp. 1-4.
- Cliffe, I. (1981). Zimbabwe's Political Inheritance. In C. Stoneman (Ed.), *Zimbabwe's Inheritance*, (pp. 8-35). London and Basingstoke: The College Press (Pvt) Ltd.
- Dore, D. (n.d.) Transforming Traditional Institutions for Sustainable Natural Resource Management: History, Narratives and Evidence from Zimbabwe's Communal Areas. *African Studies Quarterly*, 5(3). Retrieved from, <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v5/v5i3a1.htm>, on 3 April 2010.
- Gelfand, M. (1981). *Ukama: Reflections on Shona and Western Cultures in Zimbabwe*. Gwelo: Mambo Press.
- Gelfand, M. (1968). *African Crucible: An ethico-religious study with special reference to the Shona-speaking people*. Cape Town: Juta and Company, Limited.
- Global Political Agreement*. (2008). Harare: The Ministry of Constitutional & Parliamentary Affairs, 15 September 2008.

- International Monetary Fund. (2009). *Zimbabwe: 2009 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report; Public Information Notice on the Executive Board Discussion; and Statement by the Executive Director for Zimbabwe*. Washington: International Monetary Fund Publication Services, IMF Country Report No. 09/139,1-49.
- Kaulem, D. (2004). The Culture of Party Politics and the Concept of the State. In D. Harold- Barry (Ed.), *Zimbabwe: The Past is the Future*, (pp. 77-86). Harare: Weaver Press.
- Lebert, T. (n.d.). *An Introduction to Land and Agrarian Reform in Zimbabwe*. Johannesburg: National Lands Committee. Retrieved from <http://www.landaction.org/gallery/Zim%20Bckgrndr-bested%20completed.pdf>, on 8 April 2010.
- Masaka, D. (2010a). *Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity: A Panacea to an Economy in a State of Crisis?* Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Masaka, D. (2010b). *Virtue as a Corrective to Malpractices in Zimbabwe's Business Sector* (Unpublished).
- Masaka, D. (2010c). *Moral Paralysis in Zimbabwe's Economy : A Challenge to the Government of National Unity (GNU)* (Unpublished).
- Masaka, D., Gwaravanda, E.T., & Mukusha, J. (2010). 'Nicknaming as a Mode of Black Resistance': *Reflections on Black Indigenous People's Nicknaming of Colonial White Farmers in Zimbabwe* (Unpublished).
- McGregor, J. (2009). *Crossing the Zambezi: The Politics of Landscape on a Central African Frontier*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Mill, J.S. (1993). Utilitarianism. In W.H. Shaw (Ed.), *Social and Personal Ethics*, (pp. 50-57). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Mlambo, A.S. (2009). From the Second World War to UDI, 1940-1965. In B. Raftopoulos & A. Mlambo (Eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*, (pp. 75-114). Harare: Weaver Press.
- Makochehanwa, A. & Kwaramba, M. (2009). *State Fragility: Zimbabwe's horrific journey in the new millennium*. A Research Paper Presented at the European Report on Development's (ERD), Accra.
- Mapedza, E. (2007). *Keeping CAMPFIRE going: Political uncertainty and Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.
- Moore, D.S. (2005). *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Moyana, H.V. (2002). *The Political Economy of Land in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Muzondidya, J. (2009). From Buoyancy to Crisis, 1980-1997. In B. Raftopoulos & A. Mlambo (Eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*, (pp. 167-200). Harare: Weaver Press.
- Needham, D.E., Mashingaidze, E.K., & Bhebe, N. (1974). *From Iron Age to Independence: A History of Central Africa*. London: Longman.
- Parsons, N. (1982). *A New History of Southern Africa*. Harare: The College Press.
- Raftopoulos, B. (2009). The Crisis in Zimbabwe, 1998-2008. In B. Raftopoulos & A. Mlambo (Eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*. (pp. 201-232), Harare: Weaver Press.

- Raftopoulos, B. & Mlambo, A. (2009). Introduction: The Hard Road to Becoming National. In B. Raftopoulos & A. Mlambo (Eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*, (pp. 17-34). Harare: Weaver Press.
- Rukuni, M. (2006). The Evolution of Agriculture Policy: 1890-1990. In M. Rukuni, P. Tawonezvi, C. Eicher, M. Munyuki-Hungwe, & P. Matondi (Eds.), *Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution Revisited*. (pp. 29-61). Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.
- Sachikonye, L.M. (2002). Whither Zimbabwe? Crisis & Democratisation. *Review of African Political Economy*, 91(29), 13-20.
- Sibanda, F. & Masaka, D. (2010). *Marriage of Convenience: Theological and Philosophical Reflections on Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity (GNU)* (Unpublished).
- Stoneman, C. (1981B). Agriculture. In C. Stoneman (Ed.), *Zimbabwe's Inheritance*, (pp. 127-150). London and Basingstoke: The College Press (Pvt) Ltd.
- Stoneman, C. (1981A). Introduction. In C. Stoneman (Ed.), *Zimbabwe's Inheritance*, (pp. 1-7). London and Basingstoke: The College Press (Pvt) Ltd.
- Tarisayi, E. (2009). Voting in Despair: The Economic & Social Context. In E.V. Masunungure (Ed.), *Defying the Winds of Change: Zimbabwe's 2008 Elections*, (pp.11-24). Harare: Weaver Press.
- The Sunday Mail. (2010). Harare: Zimpapers, August 29.
- Velasquez, M.G. (1997). Ethical Principles in Business. In K.A. Getz (Ed.), *Business, Ethics and Society*, (pp. 19-72). Needham Heights: Simon & Schuster Education Group.
- Wolmer, W. (2007). *From Wilderness Vision to Farm Invasions: Conservation & Development in Zimbabwe's Southeast Lowveld*. Harare: Weaver Press.

ABOUT AUTHOR:

Dennis Masaka: Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe.