

‘LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND THE DEPLETION OF NATURAL RESOURCES, A SMART PARTNERSHIP?’: AN APPRAISAL ON VARIMI VATSVA IN THE FORMER COMMERCIAL WHITE FARMS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the activities of varimi vatsva (new black farmers), who invaded and occupied the former white commercial farms through what has been dubbed as Third Chimurenga, that is, the land reform program. This study constitutes a specialised exposition of the experiences and responses of varimi vatsva in view of the shortcomings of the contentious land reform program in Zimbabwe. In the light of its findings, the paper posits that in general, it was one thing that varimi vatsva were allocated some pieces of land under the auspices of a reform program and in particular, another thing to achieve optimum agricultural returns. Whereas the restoration of land from the former white farmers to black ownership was a package of a theology of liberation and freedom, but without proper logistical planning, the whole agrarian reform movement has tended to be self-destructive. There has been an economic meltdown in Zimbabwe as a result of agricultural low output during the last ten years.

Keywords: Commercial White Farms; Depletion of Natural Resources; Sustainable Development; *Varimi Vatsva*

INTRODUCTION

The colonization of Zimbabwe by the British in 1890 resulted in significant changes in the ownership of land. The Colonial State appropriated the most fertile lands for whites and confined the majority of the indigenes to mostly barren areas, known as the reserves. These reserves were later branded as the Tribal Trust Lands (T.T.Ls). As Johnson (2000) has shown, the reserves were furthest located and removed from the modern infrastructure such as railways and roads that serviced the colonial economy. The black people lost vast pieces of arable land to the white settlers following the enactment of the Land Apportionment Act (hereinafter, LAA) in 1930. Land was alienated in such a way that; whereas 49% of prime land was allocated to a minority of white settlers who made up a population of 30,000 people, only 28.9% of land was allocated to majority of blacks who numbered more than a million people (Moyana, 2002). The principle of racial discrimination that was inherent in this land management measure was further entrenched by what was promulgated as the Land Husbandry Act of 1951 (Palmer, 1977). Through this piece of legislation, only educated Africans accepting Christianity and values of western civilisation were allowed to buy a few acres of land in the designated African Purchase Areas (APAs). This pattern of land ownership that was defined in terms of *fertile commercial land* for whites versus *arid community land* for blacks remained intact until the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 (Moyana, 2002).

Nevertheless, even after independence, the post- independent government failed to resolve the land question largely due to the technical limitations associated with the Lancaster House Constitution of 1979. For instance, western countries like

the U.S.A and U.K, who had pledged to compensate the white commercial farmers in the event of losing their land properties in post-independent Zimbabwe, failed to do so after 1980. Therefore, the new government of President Mugabe handled the land issue with caution and lukewarm approach until the late 1990s. The white settler farmers were not enthusiastic to release land under the basis of 'willing-seller and willing-buyer' (Bond & Manyanya, 2003). As the economy began to meltdown in the 1990s, the ruling Zanu (PF) government had to come up with some strategies for political survival. For instance, the government attempted to reform the economy through the introduction of what was billed as the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in 1991. The aim was to liberalise the economy but the results were negative. There was mass unemployment and inflation that rose causing goods to become expensive. The government failed to solve the riddle in matters of the national economy. Already by the end of 1999, an opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party was formed to supply an alternative government. ZANU (PF) politicians were scared by this development and initiated constitutional reform process. However, following the failure of a national Constitutional Referendum in January 2000, the ZANU (PF) government hurriedly unleashed the Fast Track Land Reform program in February 2000. Three critical aims of the Land Reform program were configured whilst the program was being implemented countrywide.

The first aim was declared to address and redress the historical imbalances of colonial era. ZANU (PF) politicians recounted, at various political meetings and rallies, that Africans were crammed in the ubiquitously reserves established by the colonial State in the dry communal areas on account of racial colonial policies. For instance, Gwaai and Shangani reserves in the Matabeleland province were arid and tsetse-fly infested. Therefore, in terms of agricultural potentialities, these reserves were poor in respect to the quantity of land and quality of soil texture (Auret, 1990). By far, the worst reserve in all Zimbabwe was Chikukwa, located in Chimanimani district in the eastern Manicaland province. Chikukwa reserve was largely mountainous yet it had a high population density (Moyana, 2002). Thus, the historical imbalance on the nature of the land distribution offered the justification for the Fast Track Land Reform program in 2000.

The second aim in launching the Land Reform program was to empower the black people economically. It must be noted that Zimbabwe's economy is largely based on agriculture. The designers of the Land Reform program argued that after twenty years of independence, it was time to transfer land, the chief means of the economy, to the indigenes in order to improve their social welfare. Land was regarded as constitutive of everything for Zimbabwe's existential life in its entirety. As Chung (2007) has indicated, land was perceived to be an agent of people's transformation. By 2008, the argument gathered force, as relatively successful *varimi vatsva* had begun to buy, say, some houses in towns or acquire cars, despite the fact that they were not brand new ones; it was a benchmark of social progress. It was what sovereignty must signify to other toiling peasants across the country. This was the new meaning of a theology of liberation in face of neo-colonialism (Gutierrez, 1971). ZANU (PF) politicians perceived 'land as the economy and the economy as land' (ZANUPF Manifesto, 2008). President Mugabe asserted that 'political power alone is meaningless unless people have land' (Ankomah, 2007). It was such a bold declaration that was intended to express the values of human dignity, pride, identity, and self-actualisation. These are existential values that are anchored in notions of a theology of liberation, invoked especially in the context of Zimbabwe's quest for sovereignty. For this reason, the indigenes were to have accessibility to land ownership with rapidity, irrespective of the mechanics of land acquisitions. Some peculiar happenings took place during the land invasions and acquisitions. For instance, the war veterans and the poor peasants evicted the white farmers using *jambanja* (physical force). Through parliament enactment, the government went on to pass

the Rural Land Occupation and Protection from Eviction Act 2001. This became a 'baptism of fire' that saw white farmers lose almost everything of their existence. The 'Rhodies' who resisted eviction were manhandled out of their 'little England' (rich farms) in order to pave way for the re-settlement of *mwana wevhu* (indigenous son of the soil). The white farmers fled Zimbabwe and became *émigrés* (displaced citizens) in Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Namibia, Nigeria, and Mozambique. In their place, the new black farmers, also known as *varimi vatsva* occupied the former white commercial farms. Linguistically, *varimi vatsva* is plural and *murimi mutsva* is singular. It must be noted that these black occupiers are regarded as new on the simple reason that they now own prime land for the first time, following the forcible flight of the white commercial farmers. The concept of *murimi mutsva* is part of political discourse in contemporary Zimbabwe, which is popularly used by Zanu (PF) politicians to assert economic resourcefulness and political self-determination (Mapara, 2010). The concept is being used to legitimise the whole process of land transfer from the former white commercial farmers to the black owners. In this process of land reform, there was euphoria to economically succeed, as every *murimi mutsva* had suddenly become a landowner. The realities on the ground however, tend to show different directions. This is why the study is significant, as it tries to expose the experiences of *varimi vatsva* in Kwekwe district in Zimbabwe.

The third aim of the Land Reform program was political in its explication. The Land Reform program was a political forum to advance the spirit of sovereignty and foster the mark of identity in the wake of international sanctions that were nagging Zimbabwe. Sanctions were perceived by Zanu (PF) politicians as targeted to effect 'regime change'. The talk of regime change was steadily spoiling Zimbabwe's diplomatic image in many influential Capital cities across the globe. Due to this, land Reform program was aggressively code-named, *Third Chimurenga*, or in other words, the struggle continues. It was a struggle to restore land to black ownership and through it asserting political independence. The wider ideological implications of the Land Reform program must be understood as a politico-ideological project that was meant to declare to the world that Zimbabwe's sovereignty is not negotiable at all. As President Mugabe has declared at various political meetings the true essence of liberation theology was succinctly pointed out thus, 'Zimbabwe will never be a colony again' (Ankomah, 2007).

In retrospective, however, a critical appraisal of the Fast Track Land reform program or *Third Chimurenga* shows that whereas it was a 'noble' exercise, with great potentialities to benefit the generality of Zimbabweans, it was flawed in a number of ways. Its broad vision was quite pragmatic but it must not be forgotten that it was carried out in a haphazard manner. Subsequent Shona political discourses after 2000 in Zimbabwe have captured such haphazard mechanics of land reform as, *jambanja*, or, excessive violence. There was spiral of violence everywhere: violence against the resisting white farmers, violence against farm workers, violence against the opposition MDC party supporters and violence against urbanites who did not want to be freely 'given' land to grow onions and tomatoes in the rural countryside. Yet, as things reflect in the former white commercial farms, not all the beneficiaries who received land were genuinely interested in farming. Some of the beneficiaries just accepted the land offer for one reason or the other. Some beneficiaries simply did not want to be labelled as enemies to the State of Zimbabwe. These wanted to survive physically because they were ideologically weak to challenge ZANU (PF) machinations. Others accepted land in order to advance politically, within the ranks of the ruling ZANU (PF) party structures. It is a regret that a good number of the land beneficiaries had very little farming experience or background needed to manage a sound agricultural development on a profitable ethic. Even worse, the rural peasants who had benefited had neither capital nor farming equipment to support commercial agriculture.

It was a regrettable fact that many of these peasants did not qualify to access the financial credit line facility because they lacked proper surety and technical expertise. It has remained a paradox that the war veterans and politicians who had spearheaded the armed struggle viewed the land reform programme as a reward for their participation during the 1970s *Second Chimurenga* (war of liberation that brought independence in 1980). Since no proper feasibility studies were carried out before the programme was embarked upon in 2000, a number of negative effects have emanated. It is interesting to note, once re-settled, some of the *varimi vatsva* have not engaged in any productive farming to a large extent. They were allocated various pieces of land but no proper but there is still no proper tillage going on. A good number of beneficiaries stay in towns as 'cell phone farmers'. As the study will show, those *varimi vatsva* who happen to stay in their allocated pegs of land are involved in other activities, outside the core business of farming. There is systematic destruction of infrastructure and natural resources in the former white farms. They sold the tractors, irrigation equipment, ploughs and harvesters they had grabbed or inherited from the former white commercial farmers. Some of the *varimi vatsva* are engaged in wanton cutting down of trees in search firewood for sale in towns. Hunting expeditions by *varimi vatsva* has also resulted in the indiscriminate killing of wildlife. It must be mentioned that the colonial State had exercised strict controls over hunting, while protecting the remaining animal herds in the game ranches, national parks, and individual white conservancies (Rasmussen & Rubert, 1990). Some *varimi vatsva* are involved in the illegal gold panning in the former white commercial farms. This is yielding catastrophic environmental degradation. It is now a truism that some of *varimi vatsva* are not really interested in farming. As the study will show, many of the land beneficiaries were propelled by the need to 'get rich quick' by any other means. As Berger (1966) has indicated, the old Machiavellian cliché that 'the end justifies the means' or rather, 'the means justifies the end', continues to ring true in our day when judged in the context of the experiences of *varimi vatsva* in the former white farms in Zimbabwe. In order to survive, *varimi vatsva* have resorted to unfriendly environmental practices. As a result, in retrospective, it can be argued that while the Fast Track Land Reform program could have been a positive development had it been adequately planned, it has resulted in severe detrimental environmental effects in the former white farms in Zimbabwe. The major flaw was that there was no professional planning before the land reform exercise could be implemented across the country. The present study therefore delineated Kwekwe district as a specialised case to clearly demonstrate the foregoing claims. The underlying premise was that this Kwekwe-based research supplies a microcosm of what is transpiring in some of the acquired former white commercial farms in Zimbabwe.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The aims of the study are guided by the following objectives:

- To highlight the aims and limitations of the contemporary land reform program in Zimbabwe.
- To expose the activities of *varimi vatsva* in the context of the depletion of resources in the former white commercial farms.
- To suggest some recommendations that can arrest environmental degradation.

With reference to the methodological issue, a holistic approach was adopted in which the phenomenological and active participant observation methods were used. Firstly, the phenomenological method was relevant because in principle it is concerned with evaluating a phenomenon in its proper context (Cox, 1992). In this particular study, the phenomena constituted the activities of *varimi vatsva* in the former white farmlands in Kwekwe district. This method provided the means for investigating the various ways in which *varimi vatsva* adopted as part of day-to-day means of their livelihood.

Secondly, the participant observation method that is anchored in the broad field of ethnology was also used for the study. By using the participant observation method, the research was positively shaped in three main ways:

- Fieldwork in general was done *in situ*, that is, in *varimi vatsva*'s existential context
- Our interaction with *varimi vatsva* was direct and it yielded first hand data.
- We gained understanding of *varimi vatsva*'s existentiality that helped us draw some findings about their perspectives on the utility (or exploitation) and management of natural resources in their specific environment (former white farmlands).

These two methods were fruitful especially when corroborated by integral interviewing as a technique of collecting data. Samples of interviews were carried out in newly created villages situated in the former white farms in Kwekwe district.

ACTIVITIES OF VARIMI VATSVA

In this section, a number of activities wrought by *varimi vatsva* will be illuminated in order to show and determine the extent of depletion of natural resources in the former white farms. The study will *inter alia* explore issues like illegal gold panning, tree cutting, veldt fires, and aquatic loss of life, land fragmentation, and animal poaching. These are critical resources because without their balanced utilization there would be ecological disaster that will ultimately endanger human life.

ILLEGAL GOLD PANNING

From the time of the farm invasions in 2000, *varimi vatsva* have been involved in unprecedented high levels of gold panning activities. Much of the panning is done at places like Bamhara, Totororo, Silobela, and Sherwood East Block. Mangezi (2010) has pointed out that illegal gold panning is carried out in and around closed mines. These mines were closed as a result of the economic meltdown that constituted part of the Zimbabwe crisis after 2000. The rampant illegal gold panning made the Member of Parliament for Silobela Constituency to lament that the continued 're-opening' of the abandoned mines by illegal gold miners was prejudicing the country of revenue through the sale of precious minerals on the black market (Matsikidze, 2010).

Many of our informants have blamed *varimi vatsva* for taking illegal gold panning activities as lucrative. This illegal mining is being regarded as the reason of their existence in the former white farming lands, especially at such closed mines like Gaika, Empress, Globe and Phoenix. Several reasons have been proffered to account for participation in illegal gold panning. First and foremost, Kwekwe district is located in the geographical area known as, Region 3. The area is hot and sandy along with receiving low rainfall. The area is generally suitable for large-scale cattle farming and the growing of some drought resistant crops such as sorghum, millet and rapoko. Maize, which is the staple food for the local Africans in Zimbabwe, does not grow well in the dry Region 3, unless there is the practice of irrigation agriculture. The majority of *varimi vatsva* are at a loss because maize production rarely gives substantial returns to them. This explains why the former white farmers specialised in cattle ranching and wild life management in Kwekwe district. Therefore, the participation in illegal gold panning by the new farmers is partly driven by the practical need to survive (Mhope, 2010). Secondly, Kwekwe district is located within a mineral-rich belt known as the Great Dyke. Before the advent of the Fast Track Land Reform programme in 2000, the alluvial gold rich farming areas of Kwekwe were inaccessible to gold panners. However, the Land Reform program has given unlimited access to *varimi vatsva* to the gold rich soils. The Machiavellian principle on the law of the jungle that nourishes on lawlessness seems to regulate human

life in most of the former white farms. For instance, each new black farmer is taking the law into his own hands by regarding his allocated plot of land as his own 'kingdom'. It is this laxity and the apparent lack of enthusiasm in farming which has led to *varimi vatsva* to engage in illegal gold panning. Nevertheless, *varimi vatsva* have continued to do illegal gold panning unabated. The reason being that gold panning is a means of survival given the fact that subsistence agriculture in the former white lands is not yielding anything solid to sustain their lives.

Apart from the afore-mentioned closed gold mines the district's major rivers namely Kwekwe, Mbembezani and Munyati have not been spared either by the foraging gold panners. There is a hive of activity along these rivers by the gold panners who are digging everywhere on the riverbanks in search of the precious stone. Nevertheless, the vital issue of siltation comes to the fore. River siltation is taking place with intensity. As a result, the quality of flowing water for both domestic and agricultural purposes is affected. The general negative impact includes soil compaction and accelerated deforestation along the riverbanks. Furthermore, the pits that are left uncovered in rivers have claimed the lives of both people and animals alike. As a number of informants testified, aquatic life is in serious danger as a result of lethal chemicals like sulphuric acid, borax and cyanide (Khahlamba, 2010). The illegal gold panners or scratchers use these chemicals in the process to remove impurities from the alluvial of gold. In response to the illegal gold panning activities, Mangezi (2010) commented "Kwekwe has experienced massive environmental degradation due to illegal mining activities that are taking place in these areas".

TREE CUTTING

In spite of the fact that the Land Reform program has posited some apparent successes in the particular provision of land as a source of livelihood for thousands of peasants who were previously landless, it is causing an almost unmitigated environmental disaster. It is a hard reality to note that *varimi vatsva* are involved in wanton tree cutting in resettled farmlands. Trees are disappearing at catastrophic rapidity. This is causing deforestation, an issue that is intrinsically linked to environmental degradation. Kwekwe town and its environs are fast turning into a desert. The reasons are not far to seek. The new farmers have occupied the adjacent former white commercial farming properties such as Congela, Dunlope Extension, Milsonia Ranch and Marivalle Ranch. The quality of the environment is deteriorating fast because trees are cut down indiscriminately. First and foremost, trees have been cut naturally as part of land preparation for agricultural tillage. Secondly, trees are being cut to get firewood for domestic energy. However, it must be mentioned that tree cutting in Zimbabwe today is linked to the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA)'s failure to supply adequate electricity to consumers across the country. The country has been facing power shortages since 2000. Huge ZESA power stations such as Hwange, Kariba, Gokwe-Senga, and Munyati constantly break down and need serious renovation. Most of these power stations have outlived their life span (Matsikidze, 2010). ZESA has therefore implemented load shedding as a strategy to reduce the consumption of electricity by users nationwide. This is the context under which deforestation in Kwekwe district in particular, and Zimbabwe in general, must be understood. In Kwekwe town, the study findings have revealed that some suburbs, especially some sections of Mbizo, have not been reticulated in the last ten years or so. For example, Mbizo's Extension 8, Sections 15, 17, and 20, have been without electricity since their completion (Mufakwadziya, 2010). Nevertheless, that ZESA failed to supply electricity to Mbizo suburb in Kwekwe town is not a thing of its own making. Rather, it is a result of the economic woes that affected the life of the whole country after 2000. The failure is part of what has been addressed as the 'Zimbabwe crisis', a collective and

complex socio-economic and political challenges which have posed internal existential shocks for majority of Zimbabweans and only helped to send some shockwaves internationally.

However *varimi vatsva* have capitalised on ZESA's failure to supply electricity adequately to residents of Kwekwe town. It is a common sight that people use wheelbarrows, scotch carts and trucks full of firewood taken from the neighbouring dotted former white farms like Congela, Dunlop Extension, Marivale Ranch and Sherwood Block. (Machingauta, 2010). The *varimi vatsva* sell a bundle of firewood for a price ranging from US\$ 2.00 to US\$ 5.00 to the residents of Kwekwe town. The selling of firewood is a lucrative business both in the re-settlement areas and in the town itself. Reacting to the environmental degradation, one informant remarked that "... the erratic supply of electricity in some urban areas of Kwekwe town has led to the indiscriminate cutting down of trees as an alternative source of energy" (Gomo, 2010). As the study findings have shown, the wanton destruction of trees has led to far reaching consequences. It is causing land degradation due to siltation of the aquatic ecosystems, formation of gullies and the severe reduction in the agricultural productivity of land. Furthermore, processes such as evapo-transpiration and water infiltration are reduced and surface run off is accelerated. This does not only culminate in reduced water vapour but also soil moisture, bacteriological activity and ultimately the soil lose its natural capacity to sustain plant life (Kwandayi, 2010) This awful state of affairs as regards the land degradation in the former white commercial farms is adversely affecting the rural environment (Gomo, 2010).

The study also noted that the wanton cutting down of trees in former white farmlands is due to tobacco growing. Despite the fact the growing of the 'golden leaf' (tobacco), is both capital and labour intensive, it remains popular with most *varimi vatsva* because of its high financial returns. However, the process of curing tobacco is done at the expense of the natural environment. Trees are used as the main source of energy to supply the heat in the barns when curing tobacco. In spite of the fact that the country is rich in coal and could easily substitute wood as a source of heat, most of *varimi vatsva* are reluctant to part with their hard earned money to buy coal (Chatsemuka, 2010). In fact, as Utete (2003) has stated, that there is a link between the massive destruction of trees and the production of tobacco in those former white commercial farms where it is grown in Zimbabwe.

VELDT FIRES

Apart from the indiscriminate cutting down of trees, *varimi vatsva* have been widely accused of causing veldt fires in the former white farmlands across the country. However, from the onset, it must be stated that the issue of who causes veldt fires is a contentious one. Firstly, it is alleged that communal peasants cause veldt fires. Fire outbreaks commonly occur during the dry season when conditions favour the spread of fire from one point to the other. The communal peasants move around and smoke out bees in search of honey from the veldt (Mandebvu, 2010). Secondly, some *varimi vatsva* incidentally cause veldt fires during land preparations (Masvosvire, 2010). Despite being motivated by the practical need to survive, *varimi vatsva* are the chief culprits in the sense that they are also involved in hunting animals for game meat in their newfound domains. Thirdly, some former commercial white farmers themselves have not been spared either in the spate of allegations on veldt fires. It is widely alleged that the former white farmers are responsible for causing the veldt fires because they want to tarnish the image of *varimi vatsva* and discredit the government for having unleashed the Fast Track Land Reform program that saw the white farmers being dispossessed of their prime land since 2000. For

instance, one former white commercial farmer was arrested in 2001 for allegedly setting fire on his former commercial farm (Tauro, 2001). The government regarded this as an act of sabotage.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that veldt burning has some beneficial effects if done properly such as the removal of moribund grass to facilitate the growing of new grass and killing parasites such as ticks, it is a source of an ecological disaster. Where fires have been prevented, trees and grass are keeping the environment in a balanced ecological state. The tree cover provides shade, which reduces solar radiation loading and evaporative stress as well as cooling soil temperatures. The study has also revealed that veldt fires are detrimental to the natural ecology. The ubiquitous occurrence of veldt fires in the former white lands is having devastating environmental disaster as animals, shrubs, trees and grass are destroyed. The result is the formation of gullies. This is how the natural landscape is literally 'left out naked' due to exposure to the agents of soil erosion such as wind and running water.

LAND FRAGMENTATION

Some concerns have been raised over the issue of land fragmentation in almost all the re-settled areas by *varimi vatsva* in Zimbabwe. It is repeatedly told that the re-settled *varimi vatsva* are sub-dividing their plots of land for purposes of accommodating relatives. Land is also being subdivided in order to rent out some portions of land to new tenants in the former white lands. Clearly, this is a re-surfacing of feudalism. It is tantamount to black-to-black exploitation in post-independent Zimbabwe. In principle, the original beneficiary becomes the automatic landlord overnight, whilst the new tenant becomes the automatic serf. How does this black landlord-serf relationship come into being in the former white farms? It must be realised that, starting in about 2000 when the contentious land reform began, plots of land were allocated to the needy families through their family heads. Those landless families were represented through the family heads, irrespective of the fact that many families were polygamous in nature. A head of a family could have two or more wives. This could translate to mean that an ideal family could have, say, fifteen to twenty individuals. The major limitation of the Fast Track Land Reform program was, therefore, that land was allocated to a family as an entity and not to people as individuals. It is a hard reality, that ten years down the line of land reform, there are many more people who are still landless. As much as the study can assert, in view of the enduring land fragmentation, poverty and agitation will prevail as 'smart partners' in the former white commercial areas in Zimbabwe.

It can be highlighted that the offspring of the original land beneficiaries are family heads by now. These need a fair re-allocation of land as well. For example, out of nine villages that were re-settled at Marivale ranch in 2000, there are sixty-three new households who are without land. A formal request for new land for these people was forwarded to the District Administrator in Kwekwe (Haisa, 2010). But, there was nothing forthcoming. In general, it must be noted that there is land shortage in some of the re-settled areas in Zimbabwe. The architects of the Fast Track Land Reform program did not reserve land for the future generations. One drawback of the land reform program was that a few beneficiaries are alleged to have hoarded large tracts of prime land at the expense of the genuine landless peasants. The beneficiaries of prime land were the alleged top government officials, top diplomatic corps, top military leaders, and some influential war veterans of the 1970s second Chimurenga that led to the independence of Zimbabwe. In order to survive, the peasants themselves have undertaken new directions. Accordingly, there is a fresh process of land re-division and sub-division in the former white lands today. As much as the study has discovered, there is the corrosion of the natural ecology of land and social frustration in the former white lands. Landlessness and poverty thrive as 'smart

partners' since peasants have been sacrificed on the 'altar' BY the current land reform exercise. This is in yet another 'ugly eye' of the land reform process in Zimbabwe after 2000. There is no room to practice crop rotation as the subdivided plots are continuously being utilised for the sole plantation of maize, which is a staple crop for majority of people in Zimbabwe.

ANIMAL POACHING

There have been increased reports of animal poaching in the game reserves by *varimi vatsva* who were resettled, either around the unoccupied ranches or on the conservancies that were gazetted for compulsory acquisition for re-settlement within Kwekwe district. This scenario has come to reflect a national crisis. However, since the Fast Track Land Reform program was not an outcome of a systematic long term planning, the conservancies were eventually invaded and occupied. For example, in Kwekwe district, such conservancies like Milsonia ranch, Marivale ranch, Congela ranch, and Oliphant ranch, the new farmers occupied Bobswift ranch and Dunlop Extension ranch. Game animals are being depleted through poaching. The former white farmers had preserved both cattle and game animals. Though periodically game animals were hunted and slaughtered to get game meat or to reduce their population size, the former white farmers did so with a sense of proper conservation. When the land invasions took place the white farmers either sold their cattle or took them to some safe places leaving game at the mercy of *varimi vatsva*. One farmer, Peter Barrow, the last white owner of Marivale ranch, only relocated big game animals and the rest were left behind (Haisa, 2010). The new black farmers have failed to live side by side with game animals as their white predecessors did. By using snares, veldt fires, bows and arrows *varimi vatsva* have killed almost all the animals that they inherited in the ranges and conservancies (Madanhire, 2010). The animal species that have almost disappeared are kudu, impala, elephants and eland. Again, the spate of animal hunting, better still, animal poaching began to be noticeable as early as in 2002 during the time of severe drought. Due to drought and the ensuing famine, *varimi vatsva* resorted to grave animal poaching as an alternative means of human survival. In April 2006, the report of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Public Accounts observed that there was an increase in poaching activities in the former white ranches and conservancies across the country. The lawmaker further stated that it was widely believed, by the general public, that some of *varimi vatsva* were responsible and almost had 'a field day' in poaching which had become a viable alternative form of economic activity.

Realising that the farm invasions had exposed the game animals to wanton killing by the new farmers the then Governor for Midlands Province bemoaned the lack of a National Policy on wildlife management. As Utete (2003) has affirmed, such envisioned National Policy would have given protection to the Conservancies. Though patrols are undertaken regularly to ensure that game is not endangered, *varimi vatsva* continue to sneak into the conservancies to poach and kill game animals (Maveza, 2010). It must be noted that the increased poaching activities are militated by high levels of poverty among the new black farmers. They make a living by poaching and selling game meat to residents of Kwekwe town (Munetsi, 2010). Although the sale of game meat is illegal, premised by the fact that poaching is illegal, it must be noted that game meat is popular with the town dwellers in Kwekwe, mainly because it is cheap (Choto, 2010). Unless some proactive measures are taken, the conservancies may lose everything to the poachers, because the sale of game meat has become a lucrative business upon which many families in the former white farms are surviving on since an open urban market continues to expand 'by day and night'. This is how the essence of liberation theology is ultimately correlated to the depletion of resources in the former white farms.

AQUATIC LIFE

Aquatic life in dams and rivers in the former white lands have not been spared by *varimi vatsva* either. Some notable big dams in Kwekwe district are Sebakwe and Mbembezani. The former white farmers had constructed these dams in their farmlands for three main reasons. Firstly, dams were sources for the provision of water for domestic use. Secondly, dams supported irrigation agriculture. Thirdly, dams were meant for fishing and a bit of canoeing. In our observation, Sebakwe dam is not vulnerable to serious poaching because game rangers provide vigilance to it. Mbembezani dam however, is susceptible to serious poaching by *varimi vatsva* because it was a syndicate dam owned by former commercial farmers. Nevertheless, game rangers do not protect it. *Varimi vatsva* illegally catch fish using mosquito nets. Those mosquito nets were donated by Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to save people from night mosquito bites. But, these beneficiaries have deliberately 'misappropriated' *mosquito nets* into *fishnets* (Matsikidze, 2010). The use of *mosquito nets* is a dangerous method because even the smallest unwanted fish are caught since fish move in a large group, known as a school (Chigonda, 2006). This school of small fish waddles near the surface or close to the riverbanks and so are vulnerable to depletion in the hands of reckless new black farmers unless new measures are undertaken, water bodies in former white farms, may suffer from irretrievable siltation and so will soon become ghost dams.

Another aquatic animal that is undergoing depletion is the hippopotamus (hereinafter, the hippo). The hippo is known in Shona language in Zimbabwe as *mvuu* 'the sea cow'. Once common throughout the country especially in the Zambezi and Limpopo river valleys, these amphibious animals are being depleted in the former commercial areas. In Kwekwe district, the hippos are found in large numbers in Sebakwe dam. During the night, the hippo is always out of water in search of food. As herbivores, the hippos feed on grass and crops. The new black farmers have invaded the traditional grazing grounds of the hippos. It must be noted that though hunting of animals like the hippos, elephants, and rhinoceroses is regulated in Zimbabwe, the hippos are being systematically slaughtered because they are a menace to crops. They destroy crops each time they get out of water. But, what also speeds up the raucous slaughter is the fact that the hippos are a source of edible flesh and hides that *varimi vatsva* want. *Varimi vatsva* as new black hunters, are determined to survive on the rough slaughter of the hippos because it has become a lucrative venture. Nevertheless, this uncalled for slaughtering will eventually extinct hippos. This is how human freedom becomes correlated with the depletion of aquatic resources

It must be mentioned that time and again reports on the menace of hippos have been made to the Department of Wild Life and Management. Some sanctioned 'commando' raids have been undertaken against the hippos resulting in careless killing of the hippos. Statistics available revealed that the 'commando' raids have resulted in the death of at least ten hippos in the last five years (Musinirwa, 2010). In their defence, *varimi vatsva* claim that the killing of the hippos has been done to reduce damage to the crops. Though crop destruction is not condoned *varimi vatsva* are to blame for the rapid depletion of the hippos in the former white farms in Zimbabwe. Looking in retrospect, the amount of depletion in contemporary times is not comparable. As much as it could be emphasised, even during the Stone Age and later Iron Age, hunting was the key means people got meat and animal skins for their day to day survival. Their basic needs as human beings were too limited to have a significant impact on the environment's game populations (Rasmussen & Rubert, 1990). With the invasions of the former white farmlands after 2000, *varimi vatsva* pegged their new farms in the traditional wild life grazing zones. Some *varimi vatsva* went to the extent of cultivating in the stream banks as well. To make matters

worse, the agricultural fields are not fenced or hedged. The fences that were inherited from the white commercial farmers were removed and either sold or used to make snares when hunting other wild animals (Mhlope, 2010). At the moment, therefore, the fields are literally 'open' to the foraging of the hippos and other nocturnal animals. It is a paradox however, to note that while the hippos threaten *varimi vatsva* with starvation, *varimi vatsva* themselves pose a major threat making the hippos extinct. It is a silent war of survival raging on in the former white commercial farmers. *Varimi vatsva* in the long run, are likely to emerge the victors.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that the issue of land is intricately correlated to political discourses in contemporary Zimbabwe. It was noted that land is an arsenal of everything that sustains the existentiality of the people. Zimbabwe is currently at a crossroads and the majority of the people are geared up for their transformation. In the wake of liberation theology, which is nurtured around the values of freedom, human rights, benevolent justice and sovereignty, it was made clear in the study that: to lose land becomes synonymous with losing one's identity (Ramose, 1999). Furthermore, land as a national asset is a prerequisite for social progress and by extension; it can be a safety valve towards sustainable development for the Zimbabwean society.

Nevertheless, it was also advanced in the study that whilst the broad objectives of the land reform process were noble, *varimi vatsva* are almost back-peddalling the spirit of the agrarian revolution in Zimbabwe. The new re-settled areas tend to simply provide a living space to thousands of the landless peasants who were drawn from the congested rural communities on account of the past racial colonial land management policies. Once the peasants moved into the former white owned farms, many of them are failing to live on the productivity of land itself. Agricultural production is currently not economical or financial feasible to sustain *varimi vatsva*. In other words, without sufficient technological, financial and logistical support from the government, *varimi vatsva* are finding it almost difficult to make ends meet. In the backdrop of these constraints, *varimi vatsva* have resorted to pillage alternative local resources in order to survive and justify their continued stay in their Newfoundland.

In the light of the study findings drawn from Kwekwe district, it was established that the Fast Track re-settlement program has turned out to be a boomerang. It was clear that *varimi vatsva* are haphazardly destroying some natural resources with impunity. It was shown how *varimi vatsva* have re-opened the closed mines and panning the rivers to get alluvial gold in ways that are illegal. In addition, the landscape in the former white farming areas is fast becoming degraded especially in view of the indiscriminate cutting down of trees. As things stand in Zimbabwe today, it has been established that tree felling is a lucrative business venture. The reason was recognised in view of the fact that wood is the key source of domestic energy in both the communal and urban areas in the backdrop of power cuts across the country. It is regrettable that terrestrial and aquatic life is being threatened with extinction in the former white commercial farms. Evidently, in the light of these findings, it is prudent to state the need to embark on another study that will focus on the 'balance sheet' in evaluating the Land Reform program in Zimbabwe, ten years down the line.

Nevertheless, it is not too late to prescribe mitigating measures. Accordingly, the study offers the following suggestions as part of its recommendations:

- The government should regulate and delegate the mining of minerals to registered syndicates. This will bring sanity in the informal sector because the government will have to monitor all the operations starting from the stage of production to that of marketing.
- The Department of Wildlife and Management, with current offices situated at National and Provincial levels, must continue to decentralise to District Offices. *Varimi vatsva* must be co-opted into the local structures as Board members. The responsibility of local Boards will ensure a systematic coordination in protecting, monitoring and the conservation local resources.
- There is an urgent need to arrest the environmental and ecological deterioration that is going on in the re-settled farmlands. Therefore, the government of Zimbabwe must create a Reforestation Agency, with logistical support delegated to two linked Ministries, namely: the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Environment and Tourism.

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