

Land Reform Politics in Zimbabwe and South Africa: A State-Society Analysis.

By

Sizwebanzi Mark Mngomezulu

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Mehmet Tabak



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Advisor Names and Signatures

*“There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it.” - Alan Paton, in Cry The Beloved Country.*

## DEDICATION

For my parents. My mother who taught me the alphabet. And my father who taught me that writing is a long journey.

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## ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to answer the question why the land reform trajectory in post-independence Zimbabwe resulted in radical land redistribution in 2000, while post-independence South Africa's land reform has not. It argues that the trajectory of land reform in the two countries is a product of interaction between political elite, white commercial farmers, and landless peasants over time, within the context of regime type. The findings are that Zimbabwe's radical redistribution of land occurred because of a falling-out between the political elite and white commercial farmers in the context of an authoritarian regime. Whereas in South Africa's democratic regime, the elite alliance between political elite and white agricultural and capitalist class formed before independence has shown no real signs of failure. Thus the possibility of radical land redistribution is unlikely.

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# **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION, AND CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

## **1.1 General Introduction**

Land reform has been one of the most contentious issues in post-colonial Africa. This is because land is a “principal form of wealth and the main source of economic and political power,” and is an important resource for human sustenance (Zarin and Bujan, 1994, p.9). Consequently, its use and distribution is highly contested in every country. Nowhere else has land reform politics dominated political discourse than it has, both in South Africa and Zimbabwe, since the days of independence in 1980 and 1994, respectively.

On account of the importance of land on the various aspects of life, especially for the rural poor (Manjengwa, Hanlon and Smart, 2014), stems the idea of land reform policies. These policies recognize that land is unequally distributed among groups of people—in these two cases, mainly between blacks and whites—as a result of centuries of dispossession of black people. And so these policies aim to redress that imbalance.

To understand the extent of dispossession, spanning over three centuries in South Africa, Hall (2010) gives us the statistics: “... by 1990...13 percent of land [was] reserved for [the] black population, and the remainder in so-called white South Africa, dominated by commercial farms covering 70 per cent of the country’s area.” (p. 19). The numbers are not that different for Zimbabwe where also about 70 per cent of arable land by independence in 1980 was owned by large-scale white commercial farmers (Mlambo, 2005).



A closer look at the trajectory of reform in both countries reveals similarities and differences. One similarity is that from their respective dates of independence, the new governments followed a circumspect approach in tackling the issue of landlessness among the black majority. That is to say, small portions of land were transferred to disadvantaged groups in both countries, in comparison to the promises made at independence. However, the land-grabs in Zimbabwe, starting in 2000, signaled a sharp turning point in land politics in that country. South Africa, on the other hand, has continued with its relatively peaceful and conservative land distribution reforms.

It is in accounting for this difference that the thesis will primarily attempt to deal with. The main question to be answered is, why has land reform followed a radical path in Zimbabwe while in South Africa it has not? The paper will argue that it is the role of political elites, white agricultural elites and the dispossessed within the context of regime type—the latter democratic, and the former authoritarian—help us to understand land reform in both states more clearly. Also, the relative importance of agriculture and industry within both countries has had an influence in the types of elite pacts that have been struck after independence. Zimbabwe has always had an economy highly dependent on white-dominated commercial agriculture, thus the elite pact formed at independence was mainly between political elites and white agricultural commercial farmers. On the other hand, South Africa's economy has been heavily dependent on industry, and so the elite pact that ushered in democracy was between a new political elite and a broader agro-industrial class to which commercial farmers belonged. The longevity of these elite pacts must be interpreted within the context of regime type.

Concretely, radical land redistribution was possible in Zimbabwe because the political elite acting within an authoritarian system were able to override the interests of the white landed class

in favor of black peasants. This was because little or no constraints existed to curb its power or influence. While on the other hand, the constraints imposed by a democratic system in South Africa (constraints such as the importance of the willing buyer willing seller rule, respect for property) meant that land reform and or redistribution was to be undertaken under this environment. This unwittingly benefitted landed interests to the detriment of the dispossessed. In each case the relationship between these groups will be considered as dynamic and shifting overtime.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

Land reform seeks to remedy unbalanced land distribution among different groups in society. Consequently, “although definitions of land reform vary, most share one often-stated end: the reduction of rural poverty by transferring the control of farm-land to the poor.” (Albertus, 2015, p.4). This process is inherently linked with restructuring land usage from both an economic and social justice seeking standpoint. On the specifics, Zarin and Bujang (1994) suggest that the process has two underlying themes: “it is invariably a more or less direct, publicly controlled change in the existing land ownerships [and] it normally attempts a diffusion of wealth, income or productive capacity throughout the society.” (p.10). This means that at the core of land reform is the role of the state—to varying degrees—and other stakeholders.

Indeed successful land reform fundamentally changes the relations of groups within society. It restructures “the relationship between rural inhabitants and landlords, [it] enhances social inclusion, converting the poor into more equal citizens with greater political clout.” (Albertus, 2015, p.4). Hence that is the reason it is a highly contested process. Fay and James (2010) add that it “appears in contexts of disjuncture and social change that provide space for demands to redress past injustices, often themselves products of social rupture.” (pp. 42, 43). Such

has been the case in the African context where the clamor for land reform mostly arose at independence, seeking to redress centuries of land dispossession.

To speak of land reform is to speak of changing land tenure structures. Land tenure is “the system of institutions or rules of land ownership, use, and management, obligations, responsibilities and constraints on how land is used and owned.” (Obeng-Odoom, 2012, p. 162). Land tenure systems in Africa have largely been shaped by the history of the continent, especially colonialism. With colonialism began the process of drawing of new boundaries and the attempt at codification of rules pertaining to land use (Berry 2002).

Accompanying this process, Peters (2009) argues, were debates centered on the viability of individual land tenure systems or customary tenure. The former tenure system was what the colonial officers and many anthropologists in the dawn of the colonial project, understood to be superior, as opposed to customary tenure which emphasized a collective approach to land ownership. And so the idea became that customary tenure was insecure because it inherently lacked a guarantee of ownership to the individual, and thus threatened productivity (Peters, 2009).

Of course such a view was based on simplistic understanding of communal tenure in many African societies. A later generation of anthropologists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century “have shown that individual rights are neither automatically excluded nor necessarily insecure in African systems of land-holding labelled communal or customary by outsiders.” (Peters, 2009, p.1318). Although land may be held in common in most African societies, it does not necessarily mean that anyone can till any piece of land or harvest where he has not planted. The ownership is usually “layered” (Gluckman, 1965, p.101).

The subsequent championing of individual tenure in the colonial era, understood from a Western perspective, was invariably tied to a process of dispossession of land from blacks to white colonial settlers. (Pallotti and Tornimbeni, 2015). One of the outgrowths of this was that Africans could ordinarily occupy land governed by “native law and custom” which provided for collective ownership, while non-Africans owned it as private property (Berry, 2002).

This historical reality continues to influence post-colonial governments’ battles with reforming land tenures in Africa. Upon capturing state power, with their actions on land reform curtailed by international partners and other realities on the ground, independence governments largely left the structure of tenure unchanged. Others have argued though, that the new elite was actively in favor of retaining the existing tenure (Berry 2002). Whatever the real motivations may have been, one thing was clear, if there was to be any reform that was to take place in favor of the poor, it was to be implemented with a respect of individual land tenure. However, there were other competing views. Below is a brief elaboration of different approaches to land reform and its implications.

The most common approach to land reform, especially in post-colonial Africa, is steeped in the neo-liberal tradition. Individualism and the right of the individual to private property is its driving logic (Balibar, 2002). It is “often referred to [especially in policy circles] as Market-Led Agrarian Reform or MLAR.” (Wolford, 2007, p.550). It argues that land reform must necessarily deal with ownership; that is, giving poor people “individual titles to land (which) can be used to access credit [thereby] escap[ing] the problems of poverty.” (Obeng-Odoom, 2012, p. 162).

This approach emphasizes the principles of the market, such as the willing buyer willing seller principle, and argues that “if there is a need for land reform, it is because the market is insufficiently developed and has not yet incorporated some portion of the...poor”. Any problems

relating to land and its use involve market imperfections (Atkins, 1988). Consequently, the state is “an important institutional actor...primarily to buttress the actions of the market.” (Wolford, 2007, p.552).

Criticism of this approach include that land unproductivity (its main concern) is not necessarily connected to customary or traditional land tenure systems than it is to “broader social and political-economic conditions...and international levels.” (Peters, 2009, p.1318). As is the case in Southern Africa, land tenure must be situated within the broader context of the history of dispossession of certain peoples in favor of others. Thus, resorting to enforcing individual rights systems does not necessarily address the disproportionate distribution of land. Indeed in practice, “the market-friendly’ approach specifying a willing buyer willing seller has not been successful” (Peters, 2009, p.1319) in meeting the needs, or demand of land from the dispossessed.

On the other hand is the “populist” approach which states that “existing land tenure regimes—and therefore the whole concept of land ownership—are illegitimate because land was not historically acquired through honest means.” (Wolford, 2007, p.558). This view is linked to left-leaning regimes which are usually connected to organizations that represent the poor and landless (Wolford, 2007). Here, land reform policy usually involves appropriation of land with compensation not reflecting market value, or no compensation, and redistribution of that land to the poor, in a bid to right the wrongs of the past. This has been the most controversial approach to land reformation, although it has resulted in the largest transfers of land to the poor by far.

A critique of the populist model is that it results in gross economic inefficiencies where land is given to people who cannot efficiently work it, and that appropriation violates property rights. It is also argued that communities are characterized by historical inequalities (Peters, 2009) and transferring land to communities will not directly address the problems of land inequality in

favor of the poor. Therefore such transfers may well benefit those in the community who are in positions of privilege (i.e. traditional leaders and wealthy rural farmers). This is the argument that has been made in assessment of the post-2000 Fast-Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe. Farm production fell at rapid rates, and this inadvertently sent the agricultural reliant economy into the doldrums, with inflation rising to a meteoric thousandth per cent.

In spite of the different merits and shortcomings of either of these land reform models discussed above, states' choosing them is often a result of political realities beyond theoretical merits or demerits of either. This will be clear in the empirical section where MLAR or radical land reform in Zimbabwe and South Africa was resorted to based on a wide range of socio-economic and political factors that were not connected to what the theoretical discussions suggest.

As King (1977) suggests, motives influencing contemporary land reform and redistribution are either, political, social and economic. While these categories are not mutually exclusive and all are fairly important, it is the political considerations that determine how much and the direction that land redistribution takes. And this further highlights the salience of land in the politics of the Third World. As Berry (2002 pp.1, 2) notes, land redistribution has a profound impact on “power and legitimacy” of states.

Another important point is that while the two theoretical approaches envisage a different role for the state in land reformation, in practice it is often at the center of the process and often plays a more or less similar role. It “both play[s] the game and mak[es] the rules.” (Fay and James, 2010, p.43). The reasons for this are often clear enough. Albertus (2015, p.4) opines that “land is...a fertile ground for contentious politics...” which increases the risk of conflict, especially in countries with huge disparities in land distribution. Consequently, its management either makes or breaks a state. It is especially so in the post-independence era in Africa, where the state or

government must balance the social, economic and political consideration of land reform. This is a dynamic process and is influenced by conditions on the ground.

In light of this, can it be said that there is a link between regime type and the trajectory of land reform? There are two main schools of thought that attempt to answer the question of regime type and redistribution of resources in general, and land in particular. One school argues that democratic regimes are better equipped in distributing resources, including land. The other perspective argues that in practice, authoritarian regimes have redistributed more resources towards the general population, especially land. Scholars like Acemoglu and Robinson (2001) support the former view. Democratic regimes are those “where the majority of the population is allowed to vote and express their preferences [without fear or intimidation] about policies, and the government is supposed to represent the whole population.” (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006, p.16). They argue that democratic regimes perform better on the score of redistributing resources equitably in society because they have stronger institutions on which to base equalizing policies or strategies.

This view is based on social conflict theory. The idea is that choices among different groups in a society are at odds with each other. Elites are usually wealthy, and favor tax cuts and are against any radical progressive taxation. While on the other hand, citizens who are usually less well-off support policies that would result in resources flowing towards them (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). The result of such conflict will be conservative and circumspect economic policies over time which will benefit more citizens, as opposed to authoritarian or autocracies where economic policy is volatile and is affected by the whims of those in power at the time. (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001).

Thus even though the trickle-down effect within a democratic dispensation seems to be slow-going, it is more guaranteed because democracy is seen as striving for “political equality and characterized by its relatively pro-majority policies. [And] often, pro-majority policies coincide with pro-poor positions, especially a great tendency to redistribute income away from the rich towards the poor.” (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006, p.19).

To put this perspective in context, the assumption is that whatever economic gains made by the people within a democratic dispensation—delayed as they may seem—are safer than those made under authoritarian regimes because the common people have a say in policy formulation. Therefore this view assumes that land will be one of those resources which will be eventually be distributed equitably among all people because the government is responsive to their needs. However in authoritarian regimes, it argues, distribution of resources in authoritarian regimes occurs in times of crisis. Elites only capitulate to the demands of the common people only as a strategy for retaining political power. And, whatever the gains made by the people are not safe because they can be reversed any time by the unaccountable government.

Other supporters of this school of thought like Ansell and Samuels (2010) also argue that equality or equitable distribution of resources has a greater chance in democracies, while inequality thrives in autocracies or authoritarian regimes. Focusing specifically on land, they argue that redistribution of land in democratic regimes occurs within a purview of the respect of property rights, a case which hardly exists in most authoritarian regimes. Indeed, the record of authoritarian regimes on respect of property rights, argues Olson (1993) is dismal. He opines that “history provides not even a single example of a long and uninterrupted sequence of absolute rulers who continuously respected the property rights of their subjects” (p.572), while in established democracies respect for property rights and contracts is taken for granted.



On the other hand, scholars who hold the view that authoritarian regimes have a more positive effect on redistribution argue that the positive correlation between democracy and redistribution hardly exists in practice. They state that when it comes to sheer numbers of redistribution, especially of land, authoritarian regimes outdo democracies. It is precisely because of the lack of accountability and transparency in non-democratic regimes, that political elites are able to override the interests of other contending elite, to execute radical redistribution policies. (Albertus, 2015).

The case of land reform in Latin America gives us a sense of the numbers. “A total of 128 million hectares...of land was expropriated and redistributed...from 1930 to 2008. There were 37 million hectares transferred through compensated land negotiations.” (Albertus, 2015, p.8) The former statistic corresponds with the methods used by authoritarian or autocratic regimes, and the latter by those used by democratic regimes.

One of the common criticisms to this view is that this process is highly controversial, and the gains made through it are unlikely to persist for long because these regimes do not guarantee individual property rights. However, scholars in support of this view, such as Lipton (2009), have argued convincingly that historic changes giving land to the poor must not be written off because they fail to attain stipulated goals. The foregoing is important because both democratic regimes and authoritarian regimes are often guilty of not meeting the expectations they create regarding the reformation and distribution of land. So none is innocent of not fulfilling expectations of the masses.

Another criticism is that land acquired under autocratic regimes which no respect for property rights in general, risks being taken away from people. The rebuttal to this charge is that “even if reforms...are subsequently undone or undermined...even if they do not yield long-

standing or widespread changes; the unravelling of reform may occur because of factors distinct from those that led to the reform in the first place.” (Albertus, 2015, p.7).

Essentially, this view does not argue that authoritarian regimes are more egalitarian than democratic regimes. Nor is it submitting that authoritarian regimes are better equipped to redistribute land more effectively than democratic regimes. Indeed this paper would not agree with such an assertion. However, I argue that one of the reasons for widespread land redistribution in authoritarian regimes hinges in their relative ability of mass mobilization in the rural areas which gives these regimes a democratic potency. Consequently, when they undertake redistribution of resources in general, and land in particular, it is more widespread and socially revolutionary than in democracies.

Albertus (2015) argues that it is “intra-elite conflict and institutional constraints to rule largely determine where and where reforms occur.” (p.2). Simply put, a falling-out between the two main elite groups—political and landed elites—coupled with weak governance structures to prevent radical policy initiatives, determine to a large extent where land will be radically redistributed. Such a falling out occurs more in autocratic or authoritarian regimes than democratic regimes because political elites in autocratic regimes put survival at the core of political strategy, and land is a potent weapon with which to counter landed elites.

Does this argument have any utility in Africa? Indeed it does, and this paper will borrow it in order to understand land reform policy of Zimbabwe in the post-independence period, up to 2000, when radical land redistribution occurred, in contrast with South African land reform policy, post-1994 onward. This paper will argue that Zimbabwe’s 2000 Fast-Track Land Reform was possible mainly because relations between the political elite, white agricultural elite, and the black dispossessed occurring within an authoritarian regime, allowed political elites to trump interests

of landed elites in favor of radical redistributive land policy. In turn, it will argue that in the democratic regime of South Africa, such a development did not occur largely because of its democratic dispensation which has managed to curtail the extent to which political elites can roughshod the interests of other stakeholders in society. And, as Albertus (2015, p.1) pithily notes, “democracy has not been an infrequent friend and savior to large land owners.”

However, unlike Albertus (2015) who tests this thesis on multiple case studies in Latin America, relying heavily on quantitative data; this paper will use a comparative historical approach on the cases of Zimbabwe and South Africa. In doing so, it will open up the ‘black box’ of regime type and consider internal dynamics within these two cases; that is, how political elites, landed white elites and the landless influenced land reform overtime within each state. This approach allows for richer detail of the two cases under study.

The dynamism of this of the argument gives pride of place to interaction of different groups in a state, the relations which are in turn affected by regime type configuration. As Samatar and Samatar (2002) states, the state is “fluid... [and] primarily conditioned by contending social forces.” (p.6). The relationship between these groups is not one way (i.e. the state or political elites shaping society absolutely), but multi-way. All groups have agency but it is shared disproportionately among the actors, and in each different regime type. The relative power of the political elite—who often represent state interests—explains why it sometimes overrides the interests of other groups to protect its own—political survival, and or economic gains.

What is left is to define key terms to be used in this study. ‘Land reform’ entails redistribution of land from one group of people to another in a country. ‘Land reform policy’ means government-sanctioned laws guiding this process. ‘Conservative land reform’ involves land redistribution that follows market principles of willing buyer willing seller, and compensation and

market rates. ‘Radical land reform’ involves land redistribution with compensation below market rates, and at times without compensation.

Definitions for the groups in consideration in this analysis are as follows. The ‘political elite’ are those in the high echelons of government (politicians and high-ranking bureaucrats) who act in the interest of the state. Many of them will be associated with the two ruling parties in each country—the African Nation Congress in South Africa, and the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in Zimbabwe. ‘White agricultural capitalist and capitalist groups’ are those associations purporting to represent the interests of this collective, and/or individuals who associate. They will also be called landed interests within this study. The black ‘peasants’ are non-state actors comprising village associations, or individuals of African descent not associated with the other groups herein defined. This group will also be referred to as the dispossessed, or the landless.

### **1.3 Research Design**

This study is a qualitative-based research project which will combine the case-study and comparative historical analysis methods. Generally, the case study approach is a “detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode” (George and Bennett, 2004, p.5), and “focuses on causal analysis, on processes over time, and the use of systematic and contextualized comparison.” (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003, p.10)

The merits of this approach—the case study and comparative blend—Collier (1993) argues, are that it provides “a framework in which the scholar with modest time and resources can generate what may potentially be useful data on a particular case...[and] permits intensive examination of cases even with limited resources.” (pp. 106, 107) A combination of these two

methods also suits the main objective of the study which is to examine the cases “in order to highlight how different they are [in explaining the outcome], thus establishing a framework for interpreting how parallel processes of change are played out in different ways within each context.” (Collier, 1993, p. 108) Such an approach is important because, as Collier notes again. “it evaluates each case over time with an appreciation of historical context and [contributes] to an effort to ‘historicize the social sciences.’”

Although such an approach is often criticized for its lack of generalizability across a universe of cases—a genuine concern—it is important to note that not all social science research has as its main goal to develop a theory that applies to a wide range of cases. And as such, because such studies hardly aim to achieve that end, they ought to be evaluated on the basis of what they seek to achieve. Namely, a richer understanding of particular processes overtime, and their impact—or lack thereof—on an outcome, or phenomenon. Also they make a heuristic contribution to the understanding of phenomena, aiding in the generation of rival hypotheses—leading to a growth of knowledge in that specific field (George and Bennett, 2004).

The two cases under consideration here—South Africa and Zimbabwe—were selected using J.S Mill’s method of difference—similar conditions, different outcomes. Mahoney (2003) summarizes this method as follows, “...the outcome is present in some cases and not present in others. Hence, any hypothesized cause that is shared by all cases cannot by itself be sufficient for the outcome, since not all cases with the hypothesized cause experience the outcome of interest.” (p. 342)

This method pans itself out in the cases under consideration as follows. South Africa and Zimbabwe share similar conditions which allow for a good comparison, but subsequently fail to adequately explain the outcome of radical land reform in the latter, and non-occurrence in the

former. Both countries have had a fairly long colonial history characterized, among other things, by a substantial white population living there. In both countries, people of European descent were encouraged by colonial authorities to settle, resulting in a substantially higher population of this demographic than in other colonies.

Also, as a result of this policy, the systematic dispossession of land from indigenous peoples, spanning at least over a century in each case, meant that land distribution in both states was fairly comparable. About 70 per cent of land was reserved for the white minority and 30 per cent for blacks in both countries, at independence. And, most of the fertile land was reserved for the former group, while the latter was confined to barren reserves, or so-called homelands.

Lastly, both countries had active insurgency movements that had among their goals, the fair redistribution of land to the poor and the dispossessed. And the parties that rose to power at independence were connected to these insurgency movements. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU)—its military wing known as Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA)—rose to power in 1980, and the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa—its insurgency arm known as *uMkhonto weSizwe* (MK)—came to power in 1994.

Against this backdrop, this paper will seek to answer the main question—why land reform took a radical turn in Zimbabwe and not in South Africa—by tracing a set of causal processes. That is, the role of ruling political elite, the white agricultural and capitalist class, and black peasants within the context of regime types, in shaping the trajectory of land reform in these two countries.

To that end, the paper will rely on process-tracing, “an analytical tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence—often understood as part of

a temporal sequence of events or phenomenon” (Collier, 2011, p. 824) to explain the land reform trajectory in both countries. These aforementioned processes will act as necessary and sufficient causes in answering the main question.

As is the case with arguments that rely on process-tracing, the argument is to a certain extent, path dependent. Mahoney (2000) defines path dependence as “historical sequences which contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties.” (p.507). In this method, “the overall chain of events [over time] can be seen as a path leading to the final outcome.” (Mahoney, 2000, p.509). So, the role of the newly-emergent black political elite, white agriculturalists, and black peasants over-time will create a path which explains the divergent outcome in both case studies.

Since there are countless ways of explaining social phenomena, and not one approach can ever adequately account for occurrence, or non-occurrence in the social world, the contribution of this study ought to be considered with the following caveats in mind. The study holds certain factors constants and traces other processes already stipulated above to contribute to a better understanding of land reformation in these two countries. The puzzle it will piece together may or may not apply to other cases. A trade of between parsimony and detail cannot be avoided in social science research, and this study favors the latter at the expense of the former. Another limitation of this study will be its heavy reliance on secondary sources. This will inevitably affect the findings since each secondary source is a specific interpretation of the issues on the ground. Where possible, the paper has made use of primary sources such as legal documents, declarations, and interviews

## **EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY SECTION**

### **CHAPTER 2: Zimbabwe and the Radical Land Reform of 2000: A Historical Analysis.**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will begin with a truncated history Zimbabwe's colonial period, from the early days of white settlement up to the days of independence. It will focus specifically on those episodes where land was forcibly taken from the natives either by physical force or by law. It will show that because of the salience of land in the minds of many Zimbabweans, and as a key reason for the liberation war of the 1970s, post-independence politics was to be invariably dominated by the question of land redistribution, more than it would in South Africa.

Relatedly, this section will argue that transition to majority rule in Zimbabwe was achieved through a patchwork guide based on the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979, a document whose chief purpose had been to end violence between the ruling white renegade government led by Ian Smith and the various guerilla movements that had emerged since the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. Thus, a democratic dispensation was not part of its main goals, as it became the case in South Africa whose constitution is often touted as the most liberal in the world.

The post-independence period therefore consisted of the ruling ZANU-PF consolidating its powerbase among the black majority and fending off other contending African parties. Also, the new ruling elite in the first few years of independence collaborated with landed elites in ensuring that the country's agricultural dependent economy stayed afloat. This strategy was influenced a great deal by clauses in the Lancaster Agreement that protected existing land rights on a willing-buyer willing seller principle. The lapse of the agreement around 1990, the growing clarion call of the landless and liberation war veterans for land to be returned to its 'rightful



owners', and the landed classes lending support for rival political movements changed the ruling political elite's calculus. ZANU-PF which had been hostile to farm occupations by the landless in the past now turned a blind eye, and later established laws that legalized these actions.

## **2.2 Historical Background: Land and the Liberation Struggle.**

The loss of land by natives in what is now called Zimbabwe<sup>1</sup> can be traced to the height of colonialism in the country in the mid-to late 1800s. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) states that although Zimbabwe was for some time hotly contested by three colonial powers—the Portuguese, Afrikaners and the British—the British emerged victorious in around the 1890s.

The victory of the British brought with it a steady growth of white farms in which Africans were seen as the natural workers in them than owners of their own land. In order to incorporate some as workers, they were driven off productive land, taxes imposed on them and their domestic animals (Mlambo, 2005). And thus ensued a process of resistance from many African people; the main episodes being the Anglo-Ndebele War of 1893 and the Ndebele-Shona uprisings of 1896 - 1897 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009; Mlambo, 2005). African resistance to these unreasonable laws were thwarted because the colonial authorities possessed superior weapons. Some scholars, and the black elite that rose to power in 1980 have called these episodes as the “First *Chimurenga*”<sup>2</sup>, the earliest known struggle for land against alien powers (Ndlovu-Gtsheni, 2009).

It was through the British South Africa Company (BSAC) that British colonial rule was first furthered in what it called Rhodesia, until a “responsible government [was established] in 1893.” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, p. 58). The BSAC aided by a Council issued by the Queen, created native reserves which were designated as land fit to be inhabited by indigenous people. African

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Rhodesia was the colonial name for Zimbabwe from 1895 to 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Chimurenga is a Shona term that can be loosely translated to “Unprising.”

peoples occupied the most arid parts of the country and the European minority, most fertile and temperate areas. (Hanlon, Manjengwa and Smart, 2013). The consequences of such developments are reflected in the following: “Prior to the conquest, the Ndebele occupied 21 million hectares, but by 1894, they had been pushed to only 2 reserves that measured 1 million hectares.” (Moyana, 2002, p.4).

From this period onwards the disproportionate distribution of land between natives and whites in Rhodesia only worsened. Palmer (1977) states that when World War I started, 752 000 Africans occupied 21 390 080 acres of land, and whites had annexed 19 032 320 acres of the land. Legal instruments supporting white people’s ownership of land effectively left the black population at the mercy of the colonizer. The Natives Reserves Commission of 1914-15 recommended further expropriation of land from Africans and the final nail to the coffin was the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 (Mlambo 2005). This act “defined that half of the country with the best water was European and could not be sold to non-whites.” (Hanlon et al., 2013).

What was most distressing about the situation was that most of the land that by law now belonged to white citizens of Rhodesia was under-utilized, unoccupied or left fallow for speculative purposes. As Floyd (1959) notes, land inequality was palpable to indigenous people since their barren land was often close to fallow land reserved for white citizens. Such ordinary reminders of the injustices of the ruling authorities revived a resistance against such practices especially in the period between the 1930s leading to the 1960s. However, the organization of many black organizations at this time lacked the capacity to outmaneuver the colonial authorities and effect positive change for the majority black people.

Around the early 1960s when the British government hinted on a self-government of Rhodesia based on majority rule, the settler authorities put on a strong resistance. The result was

that the governing Rhodesian Front, led by Ian Smith, severed ties from the metropole in the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965. Unintentionally perhaps, the UDI precipitated the liberation war because of the pressure it put on African farmers and families because the new government promulgated more severe laws connected to land ownership. (Hanlon et al., 2013).

And so when the armed liberation struggle waged by the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwean African Patriotic Union (ZAPU) began in the 1960s, its chief concern was not only to overthrow the Smith renegade government but to return the land to the vast black majority. These two groups had guerilla armies that sporadically clashed with the Rhodesian government troops. Black people who had been sympathetic to the liberation forces were harassed and tortured by Smith's government's forces. And although poorly organized, the guerrilla forces' change of tactics to attacking farmers and other ordinary white civilians in the country around 1972 to 1979 levelled the playing field between it and the white Rhodesian government (Bratton, 2014).

This stalemate between government troops and the liberation movement forces facilitated steps towards dialogue between them. The talks initiated in the 1970s had mixed results. For example, the Lusaka Accord of 1974 were rejected by Africans because they did not significantly deal with "government policy on land education and black advancement." (Bourne, 2011, p.66). Also noteworthy during this period was the divided nature of the liberation movement, a legacy that deeply affected post-colonial Zimbabwean politics. The movement was essentially divided between those who led the guerilla movement from rear bases in neighboring states, of which Robert Mugabe was part of, and those who ran the movement within the country. Complicating things even further was the undemocratic nature of ZANU and ZAPU in selecting leaders and

strategy. In fact, Robert Mugabe's rise to the helm of ZANU during this period was nothing short of a coup within his party, overthrowing Ndabaningi Sithole who had been the leader (Bourne, 2011).

Of the series of negotiations that were held between the different fighting groups in the country, the Internal Settlement of 1978 managed to establish a parliamentary system which shared power between both blacks and whites. However, it quickly became clear that this was only a strategy to appease a section of the majority while not returning real power to the people (Bratton, 2014). The beginning of a more inclusive dialogue at Lancaster in 1979 occurred within the context of exhaustion from fighting on all sides, from the fighting, even though a deep mistrust for the other lingered. Mlambo (2005) notes that the talks almost broke down on numerous occasions because of the "way in which the land question would be dealt with and were only saved when the British indicated that they would mobilize resources to enable the independence government to acquire land for re-distribution." (p.8).

Ultimately, the 1980 independence constitution was based on this agreement. It granted Africans universal suffrage, and created a parliament where whites held a 20 per cent proportion of the 100 seats in the lower house. Liberation forces were to be consolidated into the national army. While land—contrary to the views of ZANU-PF's desire of confiscation without compensation—was to be distributed between willing buyers and willing sellers, "a fundamental problem that would later come back to haunt the country." (Bratton, 2014, p.52).

## **2.3 Independence and the Culmination of the Liberation Struggle.**

### **2.3.1 Juggling Promises and Political Realities: Black Elites in Power.**

As alluded to early in this chapter, the rise of ZANU-PF to power in the 1980 election was hardly a smooth process; what with the in-fighting within the party and the challenge posed by the Joshua Nkomo-led ZAPU party. However, ZANU managed to secure majority votes relying on its substantial Shona base in the rural areas.

In spite of the change of leadership, a culture of violence and undemocratic policies was inherited by the new ruling black elite as ZANU-PF “saw itself as the only entity entitled to rule Zimbabwe.” (Bratton, 2014, p.51). Although ZANU drew from other opposition groups such as ZAPU into its initial ruling elite, the alliance effectively broke down with the insurrections by ZAPU affiliated guerillas in Matebeleland in 1982 to 1984 (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009; Bourne, 2011).

An alliance that was to last longer was between the ruling party and white farmers, especially those affiliated with the Commercial Farmer’s Union (CFU). To back track a little, the rise of ZANU under Mugabe had been met with decidedly cold feelings from most in the CFU. Mr. Mugabe had been avowedly for land confiscation without compensation in his speeches in the late years of pre-independence negotiations. He had been quoted in an interview during the liberation war to have said “not one of the white exploiters [would be] allowed to keep a single acre of their land.” (Pilosof, 2012).

However, Mr. Mugabe’s and his party’s ascendance to power was marked by an extremely conciliatory tone towards the white commercial agricultural class. Untypical of the Mugabe most knew, he said in his independence speech, “If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have

become my friend and ally...if yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you.” (Mugabe, 1980).

Most scholars pin this conciliatory and circumspect approach of the new elite in these first years of independence to the stringent clauses in the Lancaster Agreement and the country’s constitution (Mlambo, 2005; Muzondiya, 2009). They argue that if the government was to secure some of the funding it needed for land agrarian reform from Western donors, it had to abide by the spirit and the letter contained in this agreement.

Section C, subsection V, clause 1 of the Lancaster House Agreement (1979), dealing with *Freedom from Deprivation of Property* reads as follows:

Every person will be protected from having his property compulsorily acquired... When property is wanted for one of these purposes, its acquisition will be lawful only on condition that the law provides for the prompt payment of adequate compensation and, where the acquisition is contested, that a court order is obtained.

At the heart of the foregoing was the protection of the white agricultural class from uncompensated confiscation of land by the new elite in power. However, I argue that this clause did not necessarily advocate for an elite alliance between this new governing class and the white agricultural class. Its emergence was a conscious marriage of convenience in which either class was to benefit from it accordingly. Thus instead of expropriation, the government increased taxes on export revenues of commercial farmers and used that money to fund other important sectors of the economy in which were in dire need of finance—the social services and health sector (Bratton, 2014).

In dealing with the land question, which to most people had been the primary reason for the liberation war, “in 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe announced a target of settling 18 000 households on 1 million hectares of land. By 1983 it had acquired more than the target area—2.2

million hectares.” (Cliffe, 2000, pp.37 – 38). However, of the land that the government had purchased by the 1990s—3.8 million hectares—most of it had been acquired in the early years of independence, and the government had largely fell short of its target of resettling families and the amount of land needed (Cliffe, 2000).

On the reasons of this short fall, Mlambo (2005) opines that the ghost of Lancaster still haunted the new elite’s efforts. The willing buyer willing seller principle enshrined therein, and the reluctance of farmers to sell, made it difficult for the government to carry out an effective land resettlement process. Thus “only 52 000 families had been settled by 1990, a far cry from the original target of 162000” (p.9). Also finances pledged by the British government to support this process almost always fell short of what was needed.

Notwithstanding these constraints placed by the independence constitution, the ruling elite were not utterly helpless. They made calculations that would suit their own immediate agenda—consolidation of power and survival. Alden and Anseeuw (2009) argue that the new black elite had inherited a relatively sound economy reliant on agriculture, and it thus made sense not to significantly alter things in that quarter. Statistics indicate that, “mining provided the core income export earnings, making a 20 per cent contribution to GDP and employing 50 per cent of labour force while commercial agriculture, which contributed 18.6 per cent to GDP and constituted 19 per cent of export, employed 20 per cent of the country’s labour.” (p.50). It became clear to the elites that agrarian reform was more complex than they had imagined it to be, especially if it was to be undertaken “without threatening an important source of state revenue.” (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009, p. 51).

Thus the period of 1980s to about 1990 was characterized only by mere rhetoric of radical land reform than its practice. Apart from the stringent conditions in the constitution, Herbst (1989)

argues that the elite lacked a futuristic view of land and agrarian reform, hence it seemed practical to approach from a traditional perspective that lacked creativity. Certainly, Mlambo (2005) supports this view because he thinks that even within this environment there was a decided shift towards cooperation with landed elites than focusing on the majority poor and their need for land.

The government showed active support of white landed economic elites when rural populations spontaneously settled on white-owned land. They argued that the people were disturbing order and peace (Mlambo 2005; Alden and Anseeuw 2009). And even within the normal process of land resettlement it turned out that prime land had been transferred to party elites and other hangers-on, while the land to which peasants were resettled had poor soils and the temperatures extremely hot.

The lapse of the Lancaster Agreement in April 1990 provided a watershed in the policy approach towards land by ruling political elites in Zimbabwe. The tell-tale signs of an impending falling-out between the political elite and the CFU could be seen as early as 1986, when the government, through a constitutional amendment scraped off the clause reserving 20 seats for the white minority in parliament (Bratton, 2014). This period uncannily coincided with an economic decline and a drought that hit the rural people hard (Muzondiya, 2009). The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which Zimbabwe had since contracted into with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1991 saw “average economic growth decline from 4 per cent to 0.9 per cent, recovering to only 2.9 per cent in 1998/99.” (Kanyeze, 2003, p. 15). And within this situation white farmers continued to prosper at the expense of black peasant farmers (Pilosof, 2012).

Also population growth in Communal Areas (CAs) where most of the rural poor resided had exploded in the first decade after independence and put pressure on the government to find a solution to the problem (Muzondiya, 2009). The general disgruntlement of the rural peasants



highlighted a failure in solving land demand, even though the political elites depended on this rural constituency for their votes.

Consequently, in the beginning of the 1990s three legislations passed as law, and their crux was to allow the government to speed up the land reform process by confiscating land from white farmers compulsorily and with compensation below market rates. These legislations were “the Constitutional Amendment No.11 of 1990, a redrafted Land Acquisition Act in 1992, and the Constitutional Amendment No.12 in 1993.” (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009, p58). When the CFU protested against such policies, especially the Land Acquisition Act, the political elite cited this as an obvious sign of reluctance by white farmers towards redressing land disparities in the country. It is in this period that the government began to increase its racist rhetoric against all white farmers, even though they had openly cooperated in the past decade.

The torrent of forces which had unleashed on the rather smooth road the government had traipsed in dealing with land redistribution necessitated this change. Displaying the historical continuity of the importance of race in post-colonial discourse, it became easy to scapegoat whites as the problem stalling effective land policies. And having declared itself a one-party state in the mid-1980s, the ruling elite possessed the means of breaking their elite pact with the CFU without much fear of repercussions from other sectors of society. This maneuver diffused pressure from the masses and a growing democratic movement that was coalescing and threatening to overthrow them in power. And the fact that some leading white farmers were implicated in funding the opposition worked in favor of ZANU (Alden and Anseeuw 2009; Bratton 2014).

Thus when another episode of landless rural people occupying white farms occurred in 1998, the government took it as an opportunity to side with the masses. The so-called war-veterans who had coordinated the land take overs in 2000 began to act in collaboration with governing

elites. The government legitimized these take overs with legal statutes claiming the victory as their own, and in the process flouting all high court rulings favoring white farmers (Mlambo, 2014).

### **2.3.2 Glory and Subsequent Fall: Whites and the Commercial Farmer's Union (CFU)**

The CFU had always enjoyed significant influence on government since its formation in 1905 because the Rhodesian/ Zimbabwean economy had always been heavily dependent on agriculture (Bratton, 1987). So when independence came in 1980, white farmers were anxious as to what kind of policies the new government would pursue vis-à-vis land redistribution. And in a rather fortunate development for them—in part of the Lancaster Agreement and the *real politik* approach of the new government—their means of production, and their relative wealth was largely retained. Thus they too adjusted their attitudes accordingly in support of the emergent political class.

White farmers' official view towards agrarian and land reform was “to represent, protect and advance the interests of its members and to further the development of an economically viable and sustainable agriculture.” (CFU, 1997). Accordingly they supported land reform in which the economic well-being of the country and property rights would not be jeopardized. Land redistribution was supported to improve agricultural outcomes, not to redress social injustices (Bowyer-Bower, 2000).

In the first decade of independence some white farmers “often contributed to ZANU-PF election campaigns either in money or in kind—providing transport and food for meetings held on their farms or nearby (Compagnon, 2011, p. 171). Since the Minister of Agriculture from 1980 – 1985 was a member of the CFU, white farmers had a direct channel for lobbying for their interests especially in the prices of maize in this early period. Although the ruling elites and CFU did not

necessarily agree on all the issues relating to agriculture, there was a general consensus on keeping agricultural output especially in commercial farms at its maximum in order to feed the rest of the population (Bratton, 1987).

Although, some of the lobbying by the CFU occurred in secret, most of the time they used their representatives in parliament to disabuse the ruling elite from thorough-going redistribution, arguing that it would threaten the stability of agriculture. They also managed to influence the new elites to keep price controls which stabilized the Zimbabwean agricultural sector aiding in economic growth during this period (Jenkins, 1997). Their power was also exemplified in that some of the members of the CFU accompanied Mr. Mugabe and his ministers to overseas trips (Palmer, 1990). Indeed it is reported that one white farmer said that “Mugabe’s government was the best government for farmers that this country has seen.” (Herald, 1983).

This elite pact led white farmers to further invest in agriculture, increasing the share of profit from this sector. Pilosof (2012, p.27) provides the following figures: “In 1980 major crop sales from commercial farms amounted to Z\$350 million (US\$580 million). By 1985 this figure had risen to Z\$850 million (US\$765 million) and by the end of the decade it stood at Z\$1,650 million (US\$1,155 million).”

It would seem that white farmers’ commitment to ZANU rule was more than economic, as most of them supported harsh government reaction in the early to mid-1980s, to the disturbances in Matebeleland led by ex-ZIPRA fighters, a guerilla army allied with ZAPU. These dissidents in Matebeleland and other parts of the countryside had murdered white farmers, and so it was vital to ally with the state which had so far protected their property and lives. Allied with the nationalist project most farmers interpreted government atrocities in Matebeleland as restoring peace (Pilosof, 2012).

It was the promulgation of various laws in the 1990s which advocated for radical redistribution (as discussed in the previous section) that signaled the beginning of confrontational relations between the two elite groups. White farmers were taken by surprise, and they hardly had any support in the broader society besides themselves. Because of their prosperity, they had withdrawn from the wider society forming a social elitist enclave, whose visible skin color made them an easy target for scapegoating by the ruling elites (Mlambo 2005; Bratton 2014). In the following years the “government gazetted 130 farms for compulsory acquisition (which) was challenged in the courts and acquisition orders overturned.” (Pilosof, 2012, p. 30).

The resistance of white farmers to the compulsory acquisition of farms was spun by the elites as a clear indication of their unwillingness to cooperate with the national goal of land redistribution. This in spite that a few years before, both commercial farmers and high-ranking government officials had collaborated in denouncing the ‘squatter’ problem in the country (Bratton 2014; Alden and Anseew, 2009).

In an attempt to salvage this working relationship between these groups, an international donor conference was convened in 1998 to map a way forward on the land redistribution problem. Meanwhile the government had continued its program of compulsorily purchasing property from white farmers. This, the government’s involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, its increase in racist rhetoric and the pulling out of Britain in funding its existing land reform project scuppered any hopes of repairing the relations between these two elite groups (Mlambo, 2005; Alden and Answew, 2009).

The failure of this donor conference left the CFU without support from the international community, and it accordingly had to fend for itself. In its attempt to recover losses, it aligned itself with the nascent mass movement against the ruling party, which made its situation even

worse from a public relations point of view. The ruling elite labelled them as traitors allying with imperialist forces bent to ruin the country. Such rhetoric resonated with most of ZANU's rural constituency. Consequently, the wave of invasions in 2000, most of them coordinated by the government-allied war veterans was a culmination of forces that had been at play since independence; a trajectory which the farmers themselves had helped to shape.

### **2.3.3 The Elusive Dream of Land Ownership among the Poor.**

The singular way in which peasants and the landless have influenced the post-independence land reform project was through land occupations or "squatting" on white farms, or government-owned land throughout the first two decades after independence. This was an indication that the ordinary people were not satisfied with the progress of land reform in the country. Although the unholy alliance between ZANU-PF and CFU elites sought to crush this movement, it became part of the reason of ZANU-PF's about-turn on land policy, especially in the late 1990s.

Although scholars disagree on whether war veterans should constitute part of the landless, or in fact the "peasantry", this analysis agrees with the view of Moyo (2001) and Sadomba (2013) that war veterans are, broadly speaking, part of the landless, and played a huge role in the late 1990s in knocking down the elite citadel manned by ZANU and white agricultural elites.

To return to a point mentioned earlier, the extent of landlessness among the poor was as follows. Bratton (1987) argues that of the targeted 162 000 households to be relocated to different land, only 32 000 households had been moved by the targeted 1985, and that was on only 11 per cent of commercial farm land. This was a glaring shortfall on government's commitment, and because there wasn't any decisive pressure on the government to own up to its commitment, the

program remained slow-paced. Pilosof (2012) suggests that the general tolerance amongst many people of this slow-going reform process was because peasant agriculture in both communal areas and small-holding farms had experienced a boom; “production of maize increased from 41 000 tonnes in 1980/81 to 480 000 in 1985/86. The value of these outputs rose from... (US\$ 6 million) to almost... (US\$ 77.4 million.” (p.27).

However, this rise in income and farm production was accompanied by a growing pressure on land especially among the majority rural poor who lived in the communal areas (CAs). Alden and Anseuw (2009) say “the black population had increased from 3.9 million in 1982 to 5.1 million in 1988.” (p.55). This, seen in light with the slow-going process of official land redistribution, later inspired a series of land occupations by the poor who were desperate for land on which to farm and live.

In the early 1980s many individuals or groups moved into abandoned property or government owned land (Pilosof 2012; Mlambo 2005). These occupations (1980 – 1985) are characterized by Moyo (2001) as:

Low intensity high profile....occurring simultaneously with the British funded neo-liberal land reform project. These early land occupations were led by landless communities led by war veterans, the ZANU (PF), ‘dissidents’ (especially in Matebelelan [sic]), and by other traditional leaders, such as the spirit mediums.

The involvement of war veterans at this early stages of land occupations dispels claims by some scholars who only emphasize their salience as government’s tool in the 2000 land occupations.

Consequently, in the late 1980s Mashonaland West and Manicaland Provinces had squatter populations of over 35 000 people (Alexander, 1993, p. 198). Moyo (2001) suggests that these occupations received some sympathy from some ZANU officials as some of these

occupations were regularized especially those occurring in “under-utilized land, most of which was in the liberation war frontier zone of the Eastern Highlands.” (p. 321). However, Pilosof (2012) argues that “in 1985 Squatter Control Committees were established to manage squatters” (p.28), effectively dealing harshly with squatting black people. This also displays a continuity with Rhodesian policy which also dealt severely with ‘squatters’.

This official reaction of ZANU elites spells clearly its alliance with the white agricultural class and its concern for respect of property and emphasis on agricultural output, rather than the social justice component of land redistribution. And the landless were not oblivious to the existing status quo. The following words from a peasant, quoted in Sithole (2003) show a clear understanding of the existing political situation relating to land redistribution:

The government treats us like dogs. You know how a hunter treats his dogs? When the dogs catch the prey, the hunter chases the dogs away...That is how the government treats us. During the war we were promised that we would live happily after attaining independence but tell me, is this good life? Where is the good life? I cannot buy any of its programmes.

Clearly, land occupations stemmed from a source of frustration with the ruling elite and lack of adequate land redistribution. The irony was that ruling elites depended on the votes of the rural poor during elections. In fact, rhetoric on redistribution was usually increased during election time.

Although at first seemingly futile, occupations mounted serious pressure on the government especially beginning in the 1990s as land occupations intensified. Muzindoya (2009) argues that economic decline in these years brought to the fore “social tensions that had not been solved in the first decade of independence, such as those concerning racial inequalities and ownership.” (p. 189). The state imposed controls on how the resettled poor were to use their land,

and also insecure title to ownership persisted. The result of this was a disengagement from the official land redistribution process by many rural poor, preferring to do things in their own way (Moyo 2001; Bratton 1987).

Intense land occupations by the landless and war veterans began around 1997, and this—in conjunction with other factors—tipped the scale towards a falling-out between ruling ZANU elites and the white commercial agricultural class. These occupations were now more systematic in nature, and the first 30 occupations occurred in those white commercial farms that the government had identified for acquisition, in which, however, the owners had challenged the decision in the courts. (Moyo, 2001). With the war veterans, a key constituency of the ruling ZANU, playing a major role, these occupations were confrontational, used liberation war idioms in organizing the landless, and highlighted as best as it could they existing class antagonisms in the country (Sadomba, 2013).

The political elites realized that the poor could no longer be pacified with empty radical redistribution rhetoric. As Sadomba (2013) eloquently puts it “ZANU-PF elites had become more and more isolated, with forces from within (e.g., war veterans and peasants) and from without (e.g., opposition civil society movements) converging to attack the ruling oligarchy.” Thus, the only way ZANU elites were to extricate themselves from this apparent political *cul-de-sac* was to break their elite alliance with the CFU which they had so cautiously guarded over the years. They then turned to support the rural poor by legitimizing their actions. It is in this light that we can consider those highly publicized land grabs of 2000.



## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that from the early days of independence there emerged an unholy and rather convenient marriage between ZANU and white commercial farmers in the country. This alliance was sustained by a desire to keep the Zimbabwean economy afloat and a belief that radical land redistribution would send the country's economy to the doldrums. And so ZANU elite paradoxically protected its former political nemesis at the expense of the ordinary people who had supported the liberation struggle.

The growing restlessness of the people over the years, coupled with the authoritarian tendencies of the ruling regime, ZANU elites had to make a choice: lose its core constituency to a growing democratic force against it and risk losing power, or break ties with the CFU, from whom they had benefited economically. Because authoritarian regimes prioritize political survival above all, ZANU elites denounced the CFU and initiated a land redistribution program that ruined white commercial farmers. In the following South African case we will see a further deepening of the bond in the elite alliance overtime with minimal chances of its rupture a-la the Zimbabwean case.

## **CHAPTER 3: South Africa and the post-1994 Market-Led Agrarian Reform Agenda**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to show that land reformation in South Africa has been entrenched in the neo-liberal reform agenda established a few years before independence. Consequently, the triumph of democracy in 1994 was anchored in this system which entailed a compromise between the nascent black political elite and white capital, the latter which included those who owned most of the arable land. Also, the relative less importance of agriculture in South Africa's economy, explains the less interest the state has shown in reforming it. Job creation and economic growth have received disproportionate attention compared to agrarian reform. So from the beginning, the landless were in a weak position of influence in the large scheme of social transformation in South Africa.

In order to provide a clear and satisfactory demonstration of the above argument, this chapter will proceed as follows. It will begin with a brief history of South Africa, emphasizing those episodes that exacerbated land disparity among racial groups over the centuries. Thereafter the paper will consider the role of the political elite, the white agricultural elite and the landless in the post-apartheid period.

### **3.2 Historical Background**

The space called the Republic of South Africa is a recent creation established by the Union of South Africa Act of 1910, which united Afrikaner republics and British territory. However, as Ross (2008) notes, "in political and constitutional terms, the modern South Africa is the lineal descendant" of the Jan Van Riebeeck-led Dutch East India Company's settlement in the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 (p.22).

As the colony grew with the arrival of more settlers from Europe, the Dutch East India Company assumed the right to distribute land among the new settlers. Acting on the basis of a misguided principle that land was unoccupied, alienation of land from the Khoikhoi—the earliest known people living in that area—began (Yanou, 2009). Many wars and skirmishes ensued over the years but the Khoisan often could not match the military power of the settlers.

Almost a century later, the British captured the Cape colony in 1795 “as part of their campaign to secure their hegemony over the world’s seas” (Ross, 2008, p. 37). Supplanting the power of the Dutch East India Company, they also vigorously pursued a policy, “which revolved on control of land” and this policy hinged on three factors; “dispossession by fraud...dispossession by squatting... [and]...dispossession by proclamation.” (Yanou, 2009, p.12-14).

The consequence of British domination in the Cape eventually led to the Great Trek of Afrikaners, mainly descendants of the early settlers (dated around 1820 – 1830s). And, as Ross (2008) notes, the Trek was significant because it signaled “a massive increase in the extent of that proportion of modern South Africa dominated by people of European descent.” (p. 42).

The land inequality that had been achieved through centuries of forceful removal and arbitrary settlements was finally legalized and codified in the Union of South Africa Act of 1910, when the British finally achieved control of the modern South Africa. The Natives Land Act No. 27 of 1913, the Natives Trust and Land Act 18 of 1936 and the Group Areas Act No. 36 of 1966 became the key legislations that further alienated land from black in the post-190 period (Yanou, 2009). For one, the Natives Land Act land classified land into white and black categories, and no black person could access white designated land, vice versa. It designated “87 per cent of the country... [as] white land, and the African reserves constituted initially only 7 per cent, increasing to 13 per cent in 1936.” (Ross, 2008, p.96). Lastly, the Group Areas Act of 1966 legislated during

apartheid designated land ownership within a color bar; whites, Africans, Indians and/or Asiatic and Coloured (Yanou, 2009). Such a state of affairs effectively relegated most black people in the rural areas to a life of squalor and labor supply for new white-owned farms.

The result of cramming a majority population into a tiny piece of land relegated blacks to serve as labor for white capital projects both in agriculture and in the mining and industrial sectors. And so inequality cut through different spheres of African life: they were deprived of land, and condemned to low-paying jobs in white-owned farms and industries. Indeed, the South African economy prospered under this status-quo.

However, the late 1970s saw a growing challenge to the apartheid state. Student protests and strikes in key industries crippled an already vulnerable economy. These protests centered on the dismantling of the apartheid project. There was also growing international pressure to deracialize South Africa. These conditions, coupled with the growing strength of the liberation United Democratic Movement (UDF), and the failure of the government to stem it resulted in a stalemate that forced the two sides to the negotiation table (Wordern 1994; McCusker, Moseley and Ramutsindela, 2016). Subsequently a new powerful voice emerged in the Nationalist Party whose main concern was to find “an acceptable formula that protected property rights and group rights in areas such as education.” (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009, p.82).

The shift of the balance of power within the Nationalist Party was confirmed in President F.W de Klerk’s surprising parliamentary opening statement on 2 February 1990, where he announced “the unbanning of the African National Congress, PAC [Pan-African Congress] and South African Communist Party, and in the following weeks released many political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela.” (Worden, 1994, p.137). These organizations had been formally outlawed on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1960 by the government. President de Klerk’s move finally forced the

different sectors of South African society to the negotiation table. However, instead of representing a broad-range of interests, these talks included mainly elites on the different ends of the political spectrum. The main players were ANC elites representing the liberation front and Nationalist Party affiliated businessmen. Although there were also other players from various organizations, they hardly possessed the clout of these two (Bond, 2000).

The result of this was a new “dominant ruling bloc...coalesced around a single idea” of neoliberalism “having ‘demonstrated’ the absence of any competing narrative.” (McCusker et al., 2016, p.91). As an act of goodwill the NP had abolished the key pieces of legislation that had sustained unequal distribution of land over the decades; the land Acts of 1913 and 1936, “and passed the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act of 1993” (Worden, 1994; Alden and Aseeuw, 2009, p. 87). This new act also got rid of “a total of 189 sections and acts that had supported racial discrimination in respect of land legislation regarding rural areas.” (OMalley, n.d).

So during the lengthy transition talks, question on land distribution also involved elite representatives of the different groups; the “ANC’s National Land Commission, the Nationalist Party, the World Bank, (and) civil society organizations and representatives of white commercial agriculture, like the South African Agricultural Union,” without any representation from the peasantry (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009, p. 87). And, the ANC “settled for a view that land reform could only be undertaken if it was designed to promote economic efficiency and investment” (McCusker et al., 2016, p.76) as opposed social-justice oriented restitution. The radical stance in the Freedom Charter<sup>3</sup> was effectively discarded. Subsequently, “a kind of ‘coerced hegemony’

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<sup>3</sup> Freedom Charter (1955) was one of the guiding documents of the African National Congress. It called for, among other things, the end of a racially stratified society in the country, the nationalization of resources and the return of land to the black majority. See: <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=72>

[was] imposed upon the broader society, especially the landless and poor” (Bond 2000). That was the general environment in which independence was achieved in the country in 27 April 1994.

### **3.3 Dismantled Apartheid and Fixing the Past.**

#### **3.3.1 Owning up to Promises: the African National Congress (ANC) in Power**

The ANC’s ascendance to power signaled great hope for the poor and landless, in a country where poverty and squalor could be roughly corresponded with people’s skin color (Thwala and Khosa, 2008). There was an urgent need to engage in a project of social transformation—to redress the inequalities that the apartheid project had exacerbated in the past 45 years or so. On the question of land specifically, President Nelson Mandela and his party had inherited the legacy of distribution based along “economic and social lines.” (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009).

According to Alden and Anseeuw (2009) land distribution at independence was as follows:

Approximately 60 000 white farmers owned 87 million hectares of commercial farmland which contributed for 95 per cent of South Africa’s total agricultural production and assured the country’s sufficiency in most of agricultural products...Commercial agriculture’s contribution to the South African export markets was 5 per cent in value...On the other side, blacks eked out a living in the former Bantustans and reserves, occupying 13 per cent of South Africa’s land, that is 13 million hectares.

With this serious challenge at hand, the ruling party devised strategies with which to deal with the problem of landlessness among the majority. The interim constitution of 1993 and the 1996 constitution had clearly affirmed the sanctity of private property, and so the government’s path of land reform was already clear. Section 28(1) of the 1993 interim constitution and Section 25 of the 1996 constitution dealt with the question private property and specified the conditions within which people could be legally dispossessed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the provisions of Section 25, see: The Constitution of The Republic of South Africa, 1996. Available at: <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng.pdf>

As a result, the land reform program that the ANC elite followed reflected the ideas of a market-based land reform that had also guided Zimbabwe in the early to mid-years of its independence. Apart from the constitutional stipulations, South Africa, like Zimbabwe had “a highly commercialized...agriculture...a well-developed market and...commitment to neo-liberal principles.” (Lahiff, 2007, p. 1578). Weideman (2004) argues that the World Bank had also wiggled its way into the negotiation process preceding independence and had used its clout to influence the political elite to endorse market-led agrarian reform.

South Africa’s land reform policy was however, slightly more complicated than that of Zimbabwe, reflecting the balance of elite interests which had ushered in the nascent democracy. It was divided into three parts: land restitution, land redistribution and land tenure reform. Land restitution, guided by the Restitution of Land Rights Act, provided that people dispossessed of their land after the 1913 Native Land Act were eligible to make claims on land or a financial compensation. On the other hand land redistribution was to make up for the population that technically could not qualify for land restitution through providing subsidies for land and funding community schemes. Lastly, land tenure reform was aimed at clearing legal ambiguities in land ownership by developing a systematized way of understanding land tenure in the country (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009).

The general consensus among scholars is that the land reform program fell well below its official targets. This in spite of the fact that the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which guided the Mandela-led government development policy was seen by many as poor in bent. Ntsebeza (n.d) submits that “by 1999, the end of the first five years, barely one per cent of land had been transferred from white to black hands...a far cry from the 1994 target of

transferring 30 per cent of agricultural land.” (p.7). Of the 63 455 cases lodged for restitution, only 41 of those had been resolved, and most of those were urban claims (Hall, 2004).

Surprisingly, a clear shift towards a more neo-liberal economic policy was seen in 1996 with the initiation of a new development plan; the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan. This plan, and the rise of Thabo Mbeki to the presidency in 1999—a London School of Economics and Political Science trained economist—emphasized that the government was doubling down on its neo-liberal outlook. Invariably, land reform was affected.

Implementation of land reform policies in an increasingly neo-liberal context meant that the needs of the poor were largely sidelined. GEAR’s emphasis on redistribution shifted its main focus was on job creation which is linked to the industrial sector in the South African economy (Hall, 2004). Also, under Mr. Mbeki’s presidency land reform came to focus more on promoting commercial agriculture in an emerging black agricultural class. In 2000, the government issued a stop to restitution cases pending the approval of a new policy document and further reaffirmed its commitment to redistribute 30 per cent of the land by 2004. However, with government’s failure to meet its commitment to redistribute 30 per cent pf land by 2004, it further shifted the target to 2014 (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009; Hall, 2004).

What has confused many is that even though the ANC elite visibly leaned towards a conservative land reform policy without the prospect of better results, it continued to affirm its position of commitment to land redistribution as an important means of strengthening the democratic project. How can this be explained? One of the key answers is that the ANC’s rhetorical commitment to redistribution is informed by that the land question is not as not as politically explosive as it is in Zimbabwe. Indeed, “almost 60 per cent of the South Africa’s population is urbanized (compared to Zimbabwe, where nearly 70 per cent live in the country side).” (UNICEF,



2003). Whereas the liberation movement had as its clear focus the return of land the Zimbabwe, in South Africa it was subsumed under the calls of dismantling the apartheid project. Lodge (2002) states that while most people think that “the issue of land [is] important for the local people, the central issue for most people is job creation.” (p.79)

Another important aspect is that although agriculture is important in South Africa, it has a small share in the economy. According to recent statistics, commercial “agriculture as a percentage of GDP has decreased over past four decades, currently contributing around 2 %.”<sup>5</sup> The real driver of the economy is manufacturing and industry, especially mining. According to a KPMG report (2013, para. 4) “mining sector contribut[es] 18% of GDP and over 50% in foreign exchange earnings. The sector brings in an annual income exceeding R330 billion and accounts for 20% of all investment in the country.” The numbers explain the general tilt of South African economic policy towards sectors other than agriculture. This has resulted in the government renegeing on land redistribution; an important factor in sustaining the country’s democracy.

Others have argued that the state faces real constraints on land reform beyond their control. Of these, Section 25 of the constitution is quoted as militating against the government pursuing an aggressive redistribution program. One important view emerges here. Hall (2004) argues that this section must not be used to explain away government failure. The ANC government could improve the results of land redistribution within the current program because the constitution has a clause which allows expropriation with compensation; an avenue which the government has

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<sup>5</sup> See more on the value of agriculture in the South African economy at:  
[http://www.southafrica.info/business/economy/sectors/agricultural-sector.htm#.VvR4S\\_krLIU#ixzz43rlelNtK](http://www.southafrica.info/business/economy/sectors/agricultural-sector.htm#.VvR4S_krLIU#ixzz43rlelNtK)

hardly made use of. So to blame the existing legal provisions is not a fair assessment of the situation.

This view by Hall substantiates the idea proposed in this paper that the laxity of land redistribution in the country is really a product of maintaining an elite balance in the country: political elites do not want to alienate those who hold the strings of the purse (white agricultural and industrial class). This in turn affects their attitude towards the poor. Thorough-going land reform is compensated for using promises of job creation within a neo-liberal democratic setting. As Bond (2000) has noted, to achieve democracy in South Africa, the political elite has followed the old advice of Ghana's first black president Kwame Nkrumah: to seek ye the political kingdom first.

An interesting development which we would be remiss to leave out is how the Fast-Track Land Reform (FTLR) which happened in Zimbabwe in 2000 has had an impact on South African land reform politics. The ruling party hailed Zimbabwe's confiscation without compensation as a worthy development in the political economy of that country. Also, after a land summit held in 2005 involving a series of stakeholders, most ANC leaders came out to denounce the willing buyer willing seller approach that has dominated the land reform practice thus far (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009). Indeed, the Deputy President of the party, Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka declared, "On agrarian and land reform, South Africa should learn some lessons from Zimbabwe- how to do it fast." (Dyer, 2005).

Be that as it may, and in conclusion, South Africa's political elite has so far showed no signs of inclination towards a radical distribution a-la Zimbabwe in 2000 moving forward. Their approach is at best confused, yet continuing to tread on that neo-liberal track on which was the basis of the elite compromise in 1994.

### **3.3.2 White Farmer's Influence of Land Politics**

By way of introduction, it must be noted that just like in Zimbabwe prior to independence, white farmers in South Africa enjoyed political and economic support from the white minority regime. For example, the Nationalist Party that ruled South Africa from 1948 until the independence negotiations, drew most of its support from this constituency. And because white farmers virtually dominated the commercial agricultural sector, “they enjoyed government subsidies, protection from international competition, and labour market policies that helped [them] secure access to a supply of cheap labour.” (Fraser, 2008, p.28). Consequently, their interests—the protection of private property through a market-based land reform approach—were reflected in the negotiations preceding independence, where the outgoing Nationalist Party represented them. In a sense, the inclusion of the property clause in the interim and post-independence constitution served to protect these farmers, who as a group owned a bulk of the country's arable land.

In the post-independence period white farmers mostly affiliated with AgriSA (formerly South African Agricultural Union) have lobbied for land reform based on MLAR in which land is transferred to competent black farmers (Weideman, 2004). This meant that they agreed in principle that some ‘their’ land had to be transferred to black farmers (Ntsebeza, n.d). As in the case of Zimbabwe, the view of white farmers towards land reform is neo-liberal, and is further reflected in this AgriSA report (2014). The report argues that if land reform is to be successful, it must “comply with the guidelines of the Constitution..., give full recognition to economic and market realities, not necessarily be dependent on state support, [while] utilizing the potential of private-public partnerships as far as possible.” The foregoing reflects a similarity of interests between the

ruling ANC government and AgriSA, wherein the social justice component of land reformation is downplayed in favor of increasing economic output.

Some scholars have argued that influence of white farmers' association in the post-1994 South African project is not necessarily direct but comes mainly from their ties with the agro-industry sector, the latter which employs a significant number of blacks in low-paying jobs. This sector desires to maintain the agro-industry business under the neo-liberal framework and has significant influence over government (Thwala and Khosa, 2008). As Capps (2000) states, there are "various political and economic blocs, such as white farmers... and the huge industrial concerns [that are] interested in, maintaining existing patterns of agri-business under conditions of liberalisation." (p.3).

Interestingly, there are other white farmers' organizations which are against any type of land reformation programme in the country. Among these is the Transvaal Agricultural Union (TAU) whose view is that even expropriation of land under the existing legal routes threatens property relations. This group has threatened to use violence if any of their affiliated farmers lose land (Fraser, 2008).

The foregoing reveals the tensions that still simmer below the surface between the formerly privileged white farmers and the state. Weideman (2004) argues that as white farmers' power has waned over the years, many have resorted to political disengagement, which has contributed to the worsening of conditions for black rural farm dwellers (Human Rights Watch, 2003; Fraser, 2008). Notably, the Human Rights Watch Report (2001) states that black farm dwellers have been victims of assaults and evictions in the hands of white farmers and their managers. For their part, some white farmers are concerned that the ANC elite is part of a conspiracy with the landless to wipe them out, in light of rising deaths of white farmers in the rural areas (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009).

In conclusion, what transpires is a rather ambivalent role played by white farmers in South African land reform. It is clear that they do not wield as much power as their Zimbabwean counterparts because white economic power in South Africa lies mainly with industry. That said, their lobbying for market-friendly land reform is in tune with what the powers that, and this has so far secured their position. However, land occupations and farm murders show that white farmers' position rests on a rather rickety foundation. Also, the developments in Zimbabwe have meant that their position is not as secure as it may have been in 1994, as some landless people have taken cue from Zimbabwean developments. The biggest threat seems not to be government policy but physical violence inflicted on them by people in the broader society

### **3.3.3 The Voice of the Subaltern: The Landless**

The landless in post-independence South Africa have generally been represented by two groups. First are non-governmental organizations, some of which pre-date independence. Working simultaneously with these, have been unorganized land occupations by the poor who may not necessarily affiliate with any of these organizations. This section begin with the former strand and its impact on land reformation, and then it will go on to detail spontaneous land occupations in the country. Thereafter it will move on to discuss the challenges that have faced the landless in effecting change on the country's land reformation process. What will be clear is that thus far, the landless have had little impact in stemming the neo-liberal tide of land reform policy, and that most of these organizations have preferred to engage with the government within the democratic process.

To begin, the National Land Committee (NLC) which has its roots in the apartheid era where it helped poor people who were evicted from land, was one of the important organizations that were present in the negotiations prior to independence. In 1994 it published a charter in which

it argued that the best way to effect lasting change in land distribution in the country would be expropriation without compensation. It also allied itself with other grassroots movements that protested the clause in the constitution that protected private property (Thwala and Khosa, 2008). Needless to say that most of the NLC's calls in the charter went unheeded by the government.

Notwithstanding that, Ntsebeza (2007) argues that the post-independence period brought hope to many of landless people and organizations representing them. They were hopeful that the ANC would achieve successful redistribution of land, even within the set constitutional parameters. Indeed, Ntsebeza further states that even though the NLC failed to convince the government to adopt a radical distribution in the early years, a corporatist relationship developed between it and the Department of Land Affairs, even within the context of a deepening neo-liberal reform. As a result, "the NLC resolved to support the ANC-led government in its efforts to formulate and implement the land reform program. Some members resigned from their organizations and joined the Department of Land Affairs (DLA)." (p.37). The foregoing reflects an important difference in the general approach to landlessness in South Africa, compared to Zimbabwe, These organizations and networks preferred to engage the government within the democratic process to effect change in land distribution.

This move by the NLC to support the government on its neo-liberal land policy eventually resulted in rifts within the organization, especially in the late 1990s when it became clear that government policy was failing to deliver on its targets. In fact, the move to cooperate with government had been deeply influenced by donor agencies who only wanted to channel finances to activities that complemented those of the government. (Ntsebeza, 2007; Ntsebeza, n.d).

The rifts within the NLC resulted in the formation of a new organization, the Landless People's Movement (LPM) in 2001. This organization had ties with other rural social movements

in the country, and its rallying cry was radical redistribution of land (Thwala and Khosa, 2008).

Among other things, its charter declared:

We are the people who have borne the brunt of apartheid, of forced removals from our fields and homes, of poverty in the rural areas, of oppression on the farms and of starvation, neglect and disease in the Bantustans... We have seen our land dry up and blow away in the wind because we have been forced into smaller and smaller places.

LPM formation was a clear indication that the approach of the NLC and the government had not worked. It was also influenced by the events in Zimbabwe, and hoped that something mirroring that would occur in South Africa. This movement was important in the events of post-apartheid agrarian policy in that some of its members were drawn directly from the landless and poor. The efforts of this movement culminated in the land summit hosted by the government in 2005 (Ntsebeza, 2007).

Meanwhile, the tensions that brewed between the new LPM and NLC resulted in the official disbandment of the NLC in 2004. Also, other powerful factors within the ruling ANC tripartite alliance, notably the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) were against the activities of LPM, and branded them chaotic (Ntsebeza, n.d; Ntsebeza 2007). COSATU, in spite of that it portrays itself as radical, is concerned about the repercussions expropriation without compensation would have on its affiliate unions in the commercial agricultural sector.

Despite its noble goals, the LPM has not had much positive impact on land distribution in South Africa. Among the reasons for its failures, Ntsebeza (2007) argues that it is not clear what movements like it are for, and who must run them. For example, there needs to be serious engagement on whether the landless themselves ought to run these organizations, or rely on seasoned NGO strategists who have better skills at negotiating and dealing with the government.

Another question is how much change can they effect if they engage the state within the democratic process, as opposed to using extra-legal means.

This naturally brings the discussions to various efforts of unorganized landless people who have occupied state and private land throughout the country's post-independence period. To capture the general frustration of the landless, this interviewee, quoted in Alden and Anseeuw (2009) had this to say on government's land reform process since independence: "We want our land back. This was our land. But government is so slow. The entire process started now more than four years ago. Most of us do not have any income. We really need this land" (p.105).

And although government statistics state that 70 per cent of rural population have access to land, over 50 per cent of those live on land less than one hectare, making it difficult to farm (Sihlongonyane, 2005). Thus it would not be a stretch that the opinion of this interviewee mirrors that of a large section of the rural population.

In reaction to harsh conditions especially in the rural areas, people have spontaneously risen against government and white farmers, occupying both private and state land (Thwala and Khosa, 2008). According to the Institute for Security Studies (2003) there have been 1500 white murders in rural farms from 1994 up to 2002, and this is has been interpreted in some quarters as a clear frustration among the poor with the slow redistribution process. Authorities however, have argued that these deaths are purely criminal and have nothing to do with the slow-pace of government service delivery in the rural areas (Alden and Anseeuw, 2009).

The general failure of South Africa's landless to effect change on land redistribution hinges on several factors. For one, they are up against a state that seems to be wholly committed to the MLAR approach, and its agreement on this point with powerful entities such as the World Bank,



white commercial agriculture, and the mining-industrial complex severely weakens the impact that the landless can have in changing in policy direction. Also, the fact that ties between the landless and the organizations that represent them are ambiguous, coupled with the wide geographic spread of the landless, impinges a united voice representing this specific group. As a result this has contributed to a general disarticulation of the views of the rural poor. Lastly, the democratic dispensation of post-1994 has meant that most movements representing the poor want to work within the bounds of the law in lobbying against government policy. The state also emphasizes the use of available legal channels when citizens engage it, so that anything outside that is considered illegal and a threat to the nascent neo-liberal democratic project.

### **3.4 Conclusion.**

This chapter has shown that unlike the Zimbabwean case, the elite pact between ruling political elites and economic elites in South Africa has shown no significant signs of a falling out. One explanation could be that this pact is based on a broader constituency than just the commercial agricultural sector. It crucially includes the powerful mining and industry complex; the backbone of the country's economy. Also the relative less importance of land in the views of many explains the lackluster approach of government. Thus ANC elites have sunken in deeper into the neo-liberal project as the years have gone by. The image of South Africa as a working democracy is treasured by the ruling elites, thus they have settled for transformation focusing on private sector growth and job-creation. It is debatable whether as the years go by, the elites will resort to radical redistribution mirroring Zimbabwe, and such a futuristic question is beyond this scope of the paper.

## **CHAPTER 4: Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper has argued that radical distribution of land in Zimbabwe in 2000, and its non-occurrence in South Africa since independence can be understood by tracing the role of three groups (the political elite, white agricultural class, and the peasantry) within the context of regime type. It submitted that radical land redistribution is usually a result of a falling-out between political elites and landed interests, and that this falling out is common within authoritarian regimes.

This argument is based on the theoretical assumption found in regime type and resource distribution literature which argues that when it comes to quantity of land, authoritarian regimes redistribute more than democratic regimes. It is argued that because ruling elites in authoritarian regimes face less institutional constraints in policy making, they are able to push for radical land distribution policy, overriding the interests of landed elites. Such a push usually occurs when the political elites' grip on power is threatened. On the other hand, the political elite in democratic regimes face real constraints to policy options they can pursue vis-à-vis land reform. These include emphasis on the rule of law, and the respect of private property rights for all its citizens. As a result land reform policy tends to be circumspect, emphasizing steady redistribution overtime.

The paper then applied this argument within the two case studies of Zimbabwe and South Africa, the former an authoritarian regime, and the latter a democratic regime. It traced the role of political elite, white commercial farmers, and peasants after overtime, in shaping the land policy trajectory in both countries, beginning on respective independence dates.

The results show that starting at independence the political elite in both countries allied themselves with white commercial agricultural interests and followed a conservative land reform program. In Zimbabwe white farmers enjoyed direct influence on the government to the extent

that in the early years of independence some farmers served in high positions within the ZANU government. On the other hand white farmers in South Africa did not have as direct influence as their Zimbabwean counterparts. Their influence stemmed mainly from that their interests coincided with those of the powerful business and mining-industrial complex, who had played an instrumental role in ushering the democratic dispensation in the country in 1994.

The foregoing also highlights the relative importance of agriculture and land in the economies of the two countries, and in the minds of its citizens. This is an important piece of the puzzle. In Zimbabwe, commercial agriculture was the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy, and the liberation war had been waged for the explicit return of the land. Such a status quo provided for a contentious politics on the land question in the post-independence period. While in South Africa, the liberation movement was concerned primarily with the dismantling of the apartheid project, and consequently the land question was subsumed under this bigger project. Additionally, the country's economy is highly dependent on mineral extraction, so that agrarian reform has largely given way to job creation under a deepening neo-liberal project.

Whereas the relations between the political elites and the white commercial agricultural class began to sour in the mid-to late 1990s in Zimbabwe, South Africa, five years after independence deepened its neo-liberal agenda, invariably undermining any chances for implementing radical land reform in the country. Also, what has transpired is that the Zimbabwean peasantry showed more militancy than South African landless. This is on account of the influence of war veterans on land occupations, an aspect totally absent in the South African landless movement. Consequently, the landless' extra-legal land occupations and squatting over the course of independence proved extremely important in the influencing the ruling elite's calculus in the late 1990s, when the latter faced a threat to its power to rule the country. This, coupled with

disagreements within the long-standing political and white commercial agricultural class elite propelled the former to legitimize illegal land occupations through promulgation of radical land reform laws beginning in 2000.

On the other hand, South Africa's landless movement, under the auspices of the National Land Committee (NLC), engaged with the government within a corporatist structure. Most of those who had advocated for the landless joined the independence government Department of Land Affairs and worked to regain land within the legal bounds. Moreover, although the landless in South Africa have occupied land illegally, these efforts have been continuously thwarted by the state and have remained uncoordinated.

Thus the interaction of these three groups overtime in both countries gives us a balanced view in understanding the land reform trajectory in these two states. It seems that elite pacts within democratic regimes are much more robust than in authoritarian governments. And therefore, it is within reason to assume that S.A policy within the existing conditions will not result in a Zimbabwean-looking experience.

That said, this study has its shortcomings. For one, it has relied disproportionately on secondary sources, and so its findings must be understood within that context. Undoubtedly, the use of primary data in the form of interviews with commercial farmers and the landless in both countries would substantiate (or for that matter disprove) the argument presented herein. Also, on account of its design, the study has eschewed other variables that could conceivably be important in understanding the phenomenon of land reform and regime type. For one, the role of the international environment in influencing land reform is key, and has only considered herein briefly. This presents a worthy avenue for further research especially in the South African case which gained its independence during the so-called 'democratization decade' in Africa, with the

concomitant rise of neo-liberal policies globally. As briefly noted herein, this dynamic has had an influence in the manner in which elites have looked at land agrarian policy, but it deserves further attention as to the extent international financial institutions influence governments' and non-governmental organizations' approach to land policy, and the implications therein.

Lastly, while this analysis provides a rich and detailed analysis of the cases, it does not conclusively (nor indeed attempts to) prove that radical land reform is always a case of falling-out between elite groups within the context of regime type for a broader universe of cases. So its contribution ought to be viewed as heuristic—a contribution to theory testing.

Notwithstanding these qualifications, there is a wider value in the structure of the methodology. It could be applied to other colonial settler states in Africa such as Kenya to see if corresponding results follow. Also, the historical role of the groups traced here could be substituted for others which may seem more important in other case studies. That would help expand our knowledge in the way specific interests groups shape policy in general and land agrarian policy in particular. For example there still exists another avenue of research as to how the powerful trade union movement in South Africa has unwittingly contributed in slowing down land reform in the country. These and other processes are undoubtedly important in understanding land agrarian policy and have been dealt with in passing in this paper on account of its design and goals. Other researchers can shed light on the role of these processes.

In conclusion, it has been the preoccupation of some scholars to study the consequences of the post-2000 radical land redistribution in Zimbabwe and whether it has had positive outcomes especially for the poor. Indeed it would also be interesting to study shift in the influences of groups on agrarian policy in the country. On the other hand, whether South Africa's land policy will

experience any significant change is a matter of opinion. Such avenues of study, evidently important, are however, beyond the scope of this study.

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