

The Land Occupation Movement and Democratisation in Zimbabwe: Contradictions of Neoliberalism

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The high profile land occupations in Zimbabwe from 1998 onwards are a manifestation of a much larger phenomenon currently underway across the South. In Latin America and Asia, as well as in other African countries, there has been a resurgence of mass land occupations.¹ While local and national differences may be observed, these movements share common grievances arising from unresolved agrarian questions; they share also a common location in the development dialogue as a problem of the 'rural poor' and as subject to welfarist 'rural development' programmes. And they share their effective exclusion from a 'civil society' that conforms to the 'proper' procedure and content of 'oppositional' politics in accordance with the liberal formula. This formula values 'independent' civic organisation, where 'independent' means dissociation from the state, not from private donors; 'multi-party democracy', at a time when political parties can no longer differ in their substantive (neoliberal) politics; and respect for the 'rule of law', defined by private property, 'independent' judiciary (meaning bourgeois), and 'free' press (meaning private). The liberal formula has gained ready worldwide adherence by national bourgeoisies and has co-opted organised working class politics. It should come as no surprise therefore that, along with deepening poverty and proliferating rural violence over the last two decades, there have emerged both organised and spontaneous rural movements, outside the 'civil' framework, seeking to transform inherited property regimes, as well as national policy making processes.²

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1. See James Petras, 'Latin America: The Resurgence of the Left', *New Left Review* 1, no. 223 (1997): 17-47; Satumino M. Borras, 'The Bibinka Strategy to Land Reform and Implementation: Autonomous Peasant Mobilizations and State Reformists in the Philippines', Working Paper Series, no. 274 (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1998); and Sam Moyo, Prosper Matondi, and Paris Yeros, eds., *Land Occupations in Southern Africa* (Harare: SAPES Books, forthcoming).

2. See Christóbal Kay, 'Conflict and Violence in Rural Latin America', Working Paper Series, no. 312 (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 2000) and Mats Berdal and David Keen, 'Violence and

The 'democratisation' debate in academic circles has itself been complicit in the exclusion of rural movements. In the 1980s, the liberal mainstream was preoccupied with demonstrating the 'urban biased', 'captured', and 'corrupt' nature of the indebted postcolonial state in order to justify the authoritarian implementation of economic liberalisation.³ Rural politics, and especially land politics, were thereby submerged.⁴ In the 1990s, the liberal mainstream repositioned itself to the realities of 'the lost decade', seeking to accommodate the rise of popular protest by fitting the latter into the mould of liberal democratic civility. Yet, rural politics continued to be brushed aside, for the new theory of 'democratisation' became synonymous with 'regime transition', defined as the replacement of the one party system with competitive multiparty elections.⁵ Indeed, throughout the quarter century, a negligible amount of liberal ink was spent on the diversity of rural politics, organised and unorganised, low or high profile, armed or unarmed. Whenever the question of land movements *was* taken into consideration, the discussion gravitated towards the 'civil' type,⁶ or tended to espouse the economic/welfare functions of the organisations that emerged to supplement the withdrawal of the state.⁷

Meanwhile, social movement theory proliferated. However under the banner of 'identity politics' it managed to displace class based movements, especially rural ones, from national and global politics, at best treating them as local cultural manifestations, subject to no 'grand theory', analytically unconnected, and politically unconnectable. Thus, James Scott, in one of the most important contributions to the study of rural politics, suggested that rural movements are destined to be localised and dispersed, exhibiting 'everyday forms of resistance', and avoiding open confrontations with wealthier classes and the state.⁸ Social movement theory at the 'global' level has not fared better; so far it has been oblivious to the political import of rural movements, even when it has set out to

Economic Agendas in Civil Wars: Policy Implications', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 26, no. 3 (1997): 795-818.

3. See Robert Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981); Deepak Lal, *The Poverty of 'Development Economics'* (London: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 1997); and Larry Diamond, 'Class Formation in the Swollen African State', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 4 (1987): 567-96.

4. Sam Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES Books, 1995) and Paris Yeros, 'Peasant Struggles for Land and Security: A Global Moral Economy at the Close of the 20th Century', *Monograph Series* (Harare: SAPES Trust, forthcoming).

5. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

6. Michael Bratton, 'Micro-Democracy? The Merger of Farmer Unions in Zimbabwe', *African Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (1994): 9-37.

7. Sam Moyo, 'Policy Dialogue, Improved Governance, and New Partnerships: Experiences from Southern Africa', in *New Partnerships for African Development: Issues and Parameters*, eds. Henock Kilfe, Adebayo Oluokoshi, and Lenmark Wohlgemuth (Uppsala: Nordiska Africainstitutet, 1999).

8. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985). For a critical discussion of rural social movement theory, see Tom Brass, 'Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements, and the Re-emergence of a (Post)Modernised (Middle) Peasant', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 18, no. 2 (1991): 173-205.

theorise working class politics.⁹ The few and notable exceptions have generally been penned by students of agrarian relations who engage with global issues.¹⁰ It is therefore necessary to recover the significance of the land question and to explain the 'sudden' emergence and import of extra legal rural politics as represented by land occupations. This paper will do so by reference to the Zimbabwean case.

Since the decolonisation of Zimbabwe in 1980, the debate surrounding the country's land question and attempts to resolve it by means of market instruments have failed to redress the colonial legacy of grossly inequitable land ownership. Despite broad consensus between the government of Zimbabwe and the international community that a major land problem exists in the country, resolution of the land question has remained elusive. The main reason for this is that the predominantly urban-led civil society, including the non-governmental organisation movement, has never prioritised the land reform agenda, while rural civil society has been formally excluded from the land debate due to enduring class based disadvantage. This disadvantage has circumscribed rural social movements to informal politics and has given precedence to more organised, middle class civic groups and policy organisations that typically advocate market based methods of land reform and liberal rights issues. The onset of structural adjustment, as well as 'democratisation' along the multiparty formula, has reinforced the liberal substance of the debate, for 'opposition' movements have accepted its neoliberal terms. In the process of transition to a liberal economy, informal rural politics—and land occupations in particular—have remained the primary source of advocacy for radical land reform and indeed have succeeded in maintaining land reform on the agenda.

Zimbabwe has not, historically, had an organised civil society that has made radical demands for land reform or land redistribution. Under colonial rule, the land cause was led by the liberation movement, and in the 1970s, was pursued by means of armed struggle.¹¹ In the postcolonial period, the civil society groupings that have existed have been predominantly middle class and with strong international aid linkages that have militated against radical land reform, while formal grassroots organisations have tended to be appendages of middle class

9. Mark E. Rupert, '(Re)Politicizing the Global Economy: Liberal Common Sense and Ideological Struggle in the US—NAFTA Debate', *Review of International Political Economy* 2, no. 4 (1995): 658-92; Robert Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium: Prospects for an Alternative World Order', *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 3-28; Ronaldo Munck and Peter Wateman, *Labour Worldwide in the Era of Globalization: Alternative Union Models in the New World Order* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999); and Robert O'Brien, Anne Marie Goetz, Jan Aart Scholte, and Marc Williams, *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

10. Henry Bernstein, "'The Peasantry'" in Global Capitalism: Who, Where and Why?', in *Socialist Register 2001: Working Classes, Global Realities*, eds. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (London: The Merlin Press, 2000), 25-51; and Philip McMichael, 'Rethinking Globalization: The Agrarian Question Revisited', *Review of International Political Economy* 4, no. 4 (1997): 630-62.

11. Knox T. Chitiyo, 'Land Violence and Compensation: Reconceptualising Zimbabwe's Land and War Veterans Debate', *Track Two* 9, no. 1 (2000): 1-14.

driven civil society organisations.¹² The rural operation of civil society within a neoliberal framework has been characterised by demands for funds for small-project 'development' aimed at a few selected beneficiaries.¹³ This state of affairs is evident throughout rural Africa, and in Zimbabwe in particular it has left a political and social vacuum in the leadership of the land reform agenda.¹⁴

It is within this strategic vacuum that the élite in the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), has interacted with land occupation movements since 1980. Historically, the government managed spontaneous occupations by insisting that it would address the land question on the people's behalf. It was however in 1997, when a shift in power occurred within the ruling party and the war veterans took the canter stage that the land redistribution initiative was brought back to the centre of the development debate, now couched in the more popular discourses of nationalism and liberation, using centralist models of redistribution.¹⁵

Yet, although elite demands for land within both the ruling and opposition parties have avoided the fundamental issues of economic restructuring and redistribution of resources, economic stagnation has enabled ZANU (PF) to maintain an emphasis on the historical injustice over land redistribution and through this to continue dominating the rural vote. The adoption of a centralised method of compulsory land acquisition on a massive scale was instigated in 1997 by war veterans who, while few in number, mobilised a broad rural backing. Thus, the land occupation movement that has emerged might be centrally instigated but it is differentiated by the many pulses driving it, including varied local interests of war veterans, traditional and other leaders, and informal community organisations. Within this context, land occupations have been an ongoing social phenomenon in both urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe, before and after the country's independence. They represent an unofficial or underground social pressure used to force land redistribution to be taken seriously. The 2000-2001 occupations mark the climax of a longer, less public, and dispersed struggle over land, under adverse economic conditions that have been exacerbated by the onset of liberal economic and political reform.

Zimbabwe's Neoliberal Experience in Perspective

The prospects for democratisation and egalitarian land reform in Zimbabwe diminished as a result of the change in the policy thrust from socialism to

12. Sam Moyo, 'Conceptualising Land Tenure in Southern Africa: The Case of Zimbabwe', *Southern Africa Political Economy Magazine* 7, no. 8 (1994): 39.

13. Sam Moyo and Y Katerere, *NGOs and Development: NGOs in Transition: An Assessment of Regional NGOs in the Development Process* (Harare: ZERO, 1991).

14. See Sam Moyo, 'Peasant Organisations and Rural Civil Society in Africa: An Introduction', in *Peasant Organisations and the Democratisation Process in Africa*, eds. Sam Moyo and Ben Rhomadhane (Dakar: CODESRIA, forthcoming).

15. The War veterans demanded to be paid Z\$ 50,000.00 pensions immediately and that the five million hectares targeted by the government be acquired at once.

neoliberalism. The imposition of structural adjustment programmes throughout Africa in the 1980s was rationalised on the grounds of a perceived political and economic 'crisis' in Africa. Various neoclassical economic and liberal political assumptions about the nature of African policy making processes were used to justify these policies. Moreover, the policy shift was adopted *without* consultations with the majority of the populace, especially labour, small farmers and small business.¹⁶ However, large business, white owners of large farms, and a nascent black bourgeoisie, represented by the Indigenous Business Development Centre (IBDC), supported the resultant policies, which were drafted with the active consultation of the World Bank. While the IBDC sought affirmative action for its members, little was offered by the government towards a far-reaching land redistribution programme. Neoliberal economic reform therefore entailed a balancing of various capitalist interests: external, local white, and aspiring indigenous.

For some time, the struggles between local white and black capital for public policy attention in the context of structural adjustment macroeconomic reforms overshadowed issues of redistribution and state intervention in land markets. However, black capital sought its place in a predominantly white elite business system, not least in commercial farming, where the 'indigenisation' project soon turned. Indeed, the first victim of the liberal policy shift was the land question itself. The indigenisation lobby appealed for the de-racialisation of the ownership base of commercial farmland. This intervention by black capital towards commercialising land reform was in fact supported by large white farmer organisations, technocrats, and many non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which together altered the eligibility criteria for access to land from 'landlessness' to those of 'capability' and 'productivity', in accordance with the neoliberal global development paradigm.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the economic reforms benefited mainly the current white large-scale landowners, as government policies offered little new investment to the black smallholder and did nothing to redistribute land, water, and infrastructure.¹⁸

The re-emergence of land reform on the developing world agenda in the mid-1990s and the relaunching of the resettlement programme in Zimbabwe mark the current phase of a dialectic relationship between peasants, government and global institutions. After the failure of structural adjustment to live up to its rural development promises, the land question has resurfaced as a legitimate item on the

16. Thandika Mkandawire, 'Home Grown Austerity Measures in Zimbabwe', in *Between Liberalisation and Oppression*, eds. Thandika Mkandawire and Adebayo Olukoshi (n.p.: Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies, 1984).

17. Andrew Vincent Ashworth, 'Agricultural Technology and the Communal Farm Sector', Background Paper to the World Bank Zimbabwe Agricultural Sector Memorandum (Harare: The World Bank, 1990); World Bank, *Zimbabwe Agricultural Sector Memorandum* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1995); and Mandivamba Rukuni and Carl K. Eicher, eds., *Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1994).

18. Sam Moyo, 'Land Reform under Structural Adjustment', in *Zimbabwe: Land Use Changes in the Mashonaland Provinces* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2000).

poverty reduction agenda of the World Bank while, at the national level, the same failure has made demands on the ruling party to redeem its liberation promise.¹⁹ Throughout the 1990s, Zimbabwe witnessed a political and economic crisis that led to a conflict between organised civil society and the government.²⁰ Following capital flight and the withholding of foreign funds as well as the cost of the intervention in the Congo conflict, the central government retreated in 1998-1999 from its neoliberal policy thrust.

Given Zimbabwe's colonial legacy, the long-standing conflicts over the land question translate into intense electoral political competition, which in turn is marked by polarisation between land reform radicalism and conservative land transfer strategies. Before the June 2000 parliamentary elections, ZANU (PF) leaders were calling for a speedy reclamation of land from the 'whites', and instigated as well as supported the land occupations, while the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leaders called for a transparent but not concretely defined market process of land acquisition. The 2000 campaign was the most highly contested and violence ridden in the electoral history of Zimbabwe. The ruling ZANU (PF) party campaigned with the slogan 'Land is the Economy, the Economy is Land'. The MDC focused on economic management and governance reforms. The ruling party argued that the opposition intended to reverse land reform, and were selling off to the former colonial masters, given their alleged receipt of financial assistance from white farmers and businesses, and from civil society organisations linked to donor funding. The MDC accused the ruling party of giving land to its cronies, and of making the land issue a monopoly of ZANU (PF) in spite of their alleged failure to resolve the problem in twenty years.²¹

The problem of the MDC alliances and their motives in relation to the campaign for 'change' ('*chinja*') needs careful analysis. The opposition movements that have emerged since the late 1980s in Zimbabwe have had very narrow political interests.²² All of them have made some valid demands for democratisation, within a liberal electoral and human rights framework, but no wider demands for redistribution of resources or economic restructuring. It was only the Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU) in the 1980s—which, along

19. Government of Zimbabwe, *Land Reform and Resettlement Programme: Phase 2*, Project Document, 1998.

20. These were led by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), but also independently, by middle class workers, in particular doctors and nurses. The latter were quite distinct from a whole range of other labour confrontations, for they spelled a break in the social contract between middle class workers and the ruling party. Paris Yeros, 'Labour Struggles for Alternative Economics in Zimbabwe: Trade Union Nationalism and Internationalism', *Monograph Series* (Harare: SAPES, forthcoming).

21. The land issue was alleged to be merely a campaign strategy for ZANU (PF) used in every election since 1980. It can be argued that the land issue in Zimbabwe will always be an electoral issue, until it is adequately resolved, and that opposition parties must keep land reform on the national agenda.

22. A series of black elite, middle class movements and opposition parties including ZUM, ZUD and the Forum Democratic Party in the 1990s, have failed to fill the void for social democratic demand for redistribution of resources, especially during the period when the land reform agenda waned (1986-96), and even during the crisis period from 1997.

with ZANU (PF)—was a player in the liberation struggle that had an underground radical land reform agenda. The collapse of the economy and the resultant opposition to ZANU (PF) has not as yet yielded a truly social democratic movement for political and redistributive social rights based on a more complex understanding of social movements. Rather, what has emerged is a protest movement focused on the urban areas, seeking to overthrow the President, and demanding less corruption and reversal of short-term economic problems, such as high prices for basic commodities. As such, ZANU (PF) has been able to continue to hold sway over the rural vote by maintaining an emphasis on correcting the colonial imbalances.

Importantly, the land debate has evolved rapidly in the postcolonial period. In the 1980s, the emphasis was on redressing past land alienation by promoting equal access to land for the majority of the indigenous people with the hope of creating political stability. At the same time, land reform was also aimed at achieving economic growth by broadening production through the landless, former refugees, war veterans, the poor and former commercial farm workers²³, as well as promoting national food security and optimal land productivity.²⁴

After an initial accelerated process of land reform in the 1980s, when three million hectares of the targeted eight million were redistributed to almost 70,000 families, the pace slowed down, targets were not met and the problems of equity and racial bias in capital and resource ownership markets once again became starkly obvious. By 1997, about 800 black commercial farmers, holding about ten percent of the large-scale commercial farmlands, had emerged, against 4000 whites, holding about ten million hectares. The government had expected to redistribute fifty percent of the white controlled land, but five million hectares of this remained to be transferred. Over the last twenty years, it has become clear that land reform is not an event, but a process that depends on the policy framework in use.

Furthermore, Britain's promise to pay for land acquisition was barely what was expected. In 1997, the newly elected British Labour government proposed that the new poverty oriented, development aid policy be used to guide support for Zimbabwe's land reform. The British government denied that it had any historic responsibility for land expropriation on the grounds that its members were not of the 'land owning stock'. The government of Zimbabwe under pressure from its radical wing responded to this with mass compulsory acquisitions. The differences over financing land transfers and the prescribed poverty reduction vis-à-vis the 'capable beneficiaries' approach, which emerged in the 1996 negotiations between the two governments, had contributed towards the hardening of the land reform strategy. Internal pressure by farmers unions, technocrats, and even academics had always encouraged a conservative position, until demands by war veterans in 1997

23. Sam Moyo, 'The Land Question', in *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-1986*, ed. Ibbo Mandaza (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1987) and Bill H. Kinsey, 'Emerging Policy Issues in Zimbabwe's Land Resettlement Programmes', *Development Policy Review* 1, no. 2 (1983): 163-96.

24. Ibid.

for the compulsory acquisition of 1.471 farms created new momentum for radical land reform.²⁵

The temporary reprieve from the radical demand for massive land transfers, which had arisen from the Donors' Conference in 1998, calling for a gradualist approach, entitled 'Inception Phase Framework Plan', was shaky, as it had no guarantees.²⁶ The opposition movement did not back the radical land reform agenda but instead reiterated donor calls for transparency, poverty reduction, rule of law and macro-economic stabilisation. This had the effect of further radicalising ZANU (PF) and the government of Zimbabwe, leading by 1998 to some rural communities taking direct action through farm occupations.

Formal Politics and the Evolution of Land Occupations

The rejection of the draft constitution in February 2000 was a precursor to the current land occupations in Zimbabwe. The government had introduced clauses into the draft, which reinforced the right to compulsory acquisition, and qualified the existing market criteria for compensation for the land, permitting it to pay only for any improvements.²⁷ The National Constitutional Assembly, the MDC and the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) campaigned heavily against the draft constitution, contributing to its defeat in the referendum. Shortly thereafter, twelve war veterans occupied farms in Masvingo decrying that the white farmers had connived to defeat the constitution in the referendum. The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association supported these occupations and called for further action as a way of demonstrating the need for land. When leaders of the war veterans association and the ruling party realised by the end of March that white farmers were actively campaigning for the MDC, and encouraging farm workers to do the same, farm occupations became violent, and were intertwined with the political campaign for the June parliamentary elections.

Before analysing the occupations in more detail it is important to comment on formal rural politics, since there is nothing essentially 'informal' in peasant politics. The representation of small farmers, the rural poor and the landless in land policy formulation is assumed to be organised mainly through constituency politics, which are dominated by the ruling party and the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU).²⁸ The ZFU claims to represent all black farmers who have historically been discriminated against by the state and continue to suffer from the deliberate policy biases and market distortions organic to Zimbabwe's bi-modal agrarian structure. However, the membership is also widely differentiated and

25. Land Tenure Commission, *Report of Enquiry into Agricultural and Land Tenure Systems in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Government Publications, 1994).

26. Government of Zimbabwe, *The Inception Phase Framework Plan of the Second Phase of Land Reform and Resettlement Programme* (Harare: Ministry of Land and Agriculture, 1999).

27. This was only in Mashonaland Central where the ruling party was supported heavily in the referendum, with a clean sweep in the 'YES' vote. Also, the former governor came in full support of the actions of the veterans.

28. Sam Moyo, *Land and Democracy in Zimbabwe*, Monograph Series (Harare: SAPES, 1999).

policy is dominated by an elite of 'capable' farmers whose demands are for freehold land for productive purposes and are far from representing the majority black farmer demands, which seems to be more realistically reflected in 'informal' land occupations.²⁹

At the same time, most NGOs grew out of the social welfare and emergency relief traditions and so did not address structural issues.³⁰ Middle class and racial minorities lead them, and focus on political and civil human rights, not on social and economic rights and social justice based upon redistribution. Underlying this tendency, there is a common middle class belief in the myth that the poor degrade land and that the large-scale commercial sectors use land efficiently. Their excessive focus on schemes to 'protect' land aim to 'educate' the peasantry on sustainable land use, rather than redistribute land.³¹ Generally, rural-based NGOs and wider society structures have been and remain a reactionary force rather than an agenda setting one.

Until a few years ago when the Women's Coalition and Women's Land Lobby Group (WLLG) emerged, there was no local NGO, besides ZERO, to campaign for land reform in Zimbabwe. Some NGOs have argued that it is complicated to be involved in land reform, given the state interest in it and its politics. Yet they could easily involve themselves in mobilising resources for settlers on government acquired farms or even negotiate land transfers with landowners at reasonable prices if they chose a conservative line; or mobilised for land expropriation, land restitution and reparations for the rural poor, if they were radical. However, at an ideological level, many local NGOs seem to be against land reform. The few truly Zimbabwean NGO proposals for land reform merely sought to train the resettled but hardly any sought to lead the demand for greater land transfers. Only recently have NGOs, such as the Inyika Trust and the National Development Assembly, agitated for land redistribution.³² The cutting edge of any involvement in land reform by civil society organisations at this stage must be in expanding the access and rights to land of the poor landless and disadvantaged sections of society, such as women and farm workers.

29. Sam Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES, 1994).

30. Ben Cousins sees a narrow political land card being played rather than the broader need for challenging the settler property rights regime. See his, 'Why Land Invasions Will Happen Here Too...' (London: Oxfam, 2001). Recently, however, the National Land Committee of South Africa in a coalition with a newly formed 'Landless Peoples Movement', the Rural Development Services Network and the South African NGO coalition have launched a campaign targeting first the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, and threatening to promote land occupation if extensive land redistribution is not undertaken. National Land Committee of South Africa, 'The Landless=Racism Campaign', Press Statement, 15 August 2001.

31. Ibid.

32. These organisations do have close links to groups of ZANU (PF) leaders.

The Land Occupation Movement

Land occupations in the Zimbabwean debate have been conceptualised in several ways. 'Land invasions' is the generic term used to denote a negative view of politically organised 'trespassing' of farms led by war veterans. Invasions involve temporary visits, lasting only few days, and sporadic visits that are repeated and do not entail extended stays.³³ Occasionally the term 'land' or 'illegal occupations' is used by those holding a benign view of them. In the past, land occupations were referred to in the Zimbabwean legal jargon as 'squatting'. The term 'land seizures' is generally used, especially in the media, to cover a variety of phenomena including outright repossession of land through armed liberation struggle and conquest. The terms 'land nationalisation' or 'expropriation without compensation' have not been commonly used in national debates, except in occasional international media reports with reference to compulsory land acquisition rather than land occupations.

Land seizures or even land 'grabs' however, tend to be used mainly by the independent media to emphasise the negative political action of the ZANU (PF) and the war veterans. On the contrary, the practice of 'land demonstrations' has been used by the government and/or the ZANU (PF) to emphasise the symbolic aspect of the transgressions and to underline that it is only the government, which has the legal right to acquire land.³⁴ There are also occupations by 'opportunists', which are not formally sanctioned. These are at times used to refer to isolated occupations by middle class and urban dwellers as well as criminal elements that seek personal access under the guise of the 'land revolution'. It is reported that some local politicians, businessmen and intellectuals may be cashing in on the land occupations, and even gaining access to land targeted for the poorer.³⁵

These conceptualisations of land occupation reflect broadening forms of participation and the emergence of a certain level of political allegiance between the state and various national and local level social forces spanning across class barriers in opposition to what is seen as international conditionalities, against land redistribution and in defence of narrow racial interests over land. The intensive land occupations that Zimbabwe is experiencing today are not generically new since they have consistently accompanied or influenced government efforts to acquire land in the past, whether this is through the market or through compulsory procedures.

The amendment of the Constitution and the Land Acquisition Act reflected a major formal effort to challenge the imposed rules on colonial land property rights,

33. Knox T. Chitiyo, 'Land Violence'.

34. This perspective is usually repeated in several newspapers, and has been formally stated by vice president Msika in various press statements. See, ZJRI Technical Team, 'Review of the Zimbabwe Joint Resettlement Initiative', presented to Vice President Msika, Harare, July 2001.

35. These 'opportunists', however, are to be distinguished from those urbanites applying for land under the now broadened Commercial Farm Settlement Scheme, the purpose of which is to build elite black commercial farm owners.

in response to the organic or popular pressures that land occupations have brought to the debate. Over the last twenty years land occupations have traversed various land tenure categories: white-owned, state-owned and communal land.³⁶ Land occupations also grew extensively during the late 1980s in the Zambezi valley frontier zones.³⁷ State land has remained a soft target for occupations for years especially in Matebeleland and in Manicaland where forest and parks are predominant. Thus, although land occupations are still on the national development and human rights agenda, civil society organisations and the private sector have paid scant attention to them.

Throughout the years, the character of the occupations has changed slightly but their essence has remained the same. The first phase of land occupations can be termed, 'low profile, high intensity'. These occurred throughout the country, from 1980 to 1985, while a parallel process of 'accelerated' land resettlement, financed mainly by British funds, was initiated to formalise some of the occupations, and to assuage parallel land pressures. These early land occupations were led by landless communities led by war veterans, the ZANU (PF), 'dissidents' (especially in Matebeleland), and by other traditional leaders, such as the spirit mediums. They were tacitly supported by ZANU (PF) and PF ZAPU structures albeit without the public flaming of the political basis of the mobilisation.

The period between 1985 and 1996 witnessed what we can call in relative terms 'normal low intensity occupations'. They took place in the context of dwindling resources for continued land resettlement and economic liberalisation, which resulted in many people losing their jobs in urban areas and the mines. During the 1990s, landless communities increased 'illegal' occupations and poaching of natural resources on private, state and 'communally' owned land, and in urban areas.³⁸ Local 'squatter' communities made themselves beneficiaries by occupying mainly abandoned and under utilised land, most of which was in the liberation war frontier zone of the Eastern Highlands. This 'community led' occupation approach resulted in a process of informal land identification. The central government purchased the occupied land at market prices, thereby formalising the occupations in what came to be known as 'normal intensive land reform'.

Thus, the occupations cannot be claimed to have been spontaneous. Zimbabwe hosts a facile debate, which oversimplifies the question of spontaneity of land occupations vis-à-vis politically mobilised occupants. Rarely in the past twenty years have occupations been spontaneous, since they were mostly planned through the liberation movement, local MPs or political party functionaries. While the intensity of political support to the occupants may differ in form, the substance has been similar. Even when the state practiced extensive evictions of 'squatters'

36. Moyo, *Land Reform under Structural*.

37. James Murombedzi, 'The Dynamics of Conflict in Environmental Management Policy in the Context of Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources Empowerment', Working Paper (Harare: Centre for Applied and Social Sciences, 1994).

38. See Moyo et al., *Land Occupations in Southern Africa*.

during the 1985-1993 period, the authorities turned a blind eye to many squatter cases.

However, the government has used forced evictions to restrain land occupations, especially during the transition to the liberalised economic policy framework. The brutality with which these evictions were carried out, both by police and farmers, were reminiscent of the colonial era.³⁹ This was coupled by an increase in the violent attacks against illegal occupants by property owners, particularly white farmers often operating with implicit or explicit state approval. Land 'self-provisioning' or popular struggles for land have been circumscribed by the government through its 'squatter policy', which entails regular promises of land redistribution and other agricultural support schemes intended to improve the intensity of communal area land use and returns *in situ*. However, 'squattling' as a concept is problematic and manipulable because the term gains meaning within a particular moral framework that is codified as 'law' by the state. Shiku points out that Rhodesian law defined as a squatter 'an African whose house happens to be situated in an area which has been declared European or is set apart for some other reason'.⁴⁰ In any case, the squatter policy failed to reduce land occupations, mainly because of legitimacy problems at the local level. Instead during the 1990s demands for land redistribution grew among the poor due to rising poverty and the retrenchment of workers, as well as among the wealthier who sought to accumulate capital by exploiting land and natural resource in order to expand in newly emerging markets.

The last phase of high intensity and high profile land occupations began in 1997, although many scholars, political analysts and some of the media, seem to conveniently forget it by focusing on the events that followed the constitutional referendum. In September 1997, the more high profile community-led land occupation approach re-emerged and isolated land occupations started to occur, with the explicit aim of redistributing land from white farmers to landless villagers and war veterans. These occupations reinforced existing low profile land occupations throughout the country. They came in waves, starting with just about thirty cases in 1997, mostly on farms, which had been identified for compulsory acquisition.⁴¹ The squatters later 'agreed' to 'wait' for their orderly resettlement and in some cases were evicted by the government in 1998. However, the scale and form of land occupations in Zimbabwe has been the subject of a propaganda war in the media and on the Internet.⁴² Furthermore the origins, as well as the control of the land occupations are also contested.

39. See Paris Yeros, 'The Moral Economy of Squatting and Squatter Control in Shamva District', in *Land Occupations in Southern Africa*.

40. Emmanuel Shiku, 'The Problem of Squatting in Zimbabwe: A Police Perspective', Mimeo (Harare: Southern Africa Regional Institute for Policy Studies, 2001).

41. Sam Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe* (Harare: UNDP, 1998)

42. See [www.dailynews.co.zw] (27 September 2001) and [www.samara.co.zw/cfu/] (27 September 2001).

The current round of land occupations can be analysed in terms of the various dimensions of their intended effects, which are pursued either individually or in combination. These varied intentions also reflect the perspectives and goals of different 'wings' of the ruling party: extremists seeking outright 'repossession' of the land by physical seizure and more 'liberal' middle of the road leaders seeking merely to demonstrate the right of Zimbabweans to compulsorily acquire the land.⁴³ Nonetheless these basic dimensions show the complexity of the process, which has firstly political (partisan and non-partisan, electoral and non-election orientated) framework and objectives, and secondly, which is then socially grounded by invoking existing sentiments in favour of land repossession based upon grievances over historic injustices.

At another level, the land occupations can be viewed as a mobilisation process of expanding the social constituency of land occupiers, and thus creating the political legitimacy for the formalisation of massive legal compulsory land acquisition. Indeed the purely political character of the land occupations has been transient. However, after the elections the government and the war veterans shifted the basis of targeting farms to include productively used land, subject to other policy criteria of multiple farm ownership, foreign ownership and contiguity to communal areas. In some cases, farms owned by black politicians or high profile individuals were occupied contrary to the radical ZANU (PF) indigenisation perspective. There also seemed to be some class alliances emerging either for or against the occupations. In certain cases, war veterans linked up with peasants and farm workers. Yet, in others, peasants refused to be cajoled into the occupations. Depending on the 'behaviour' of the farm owner, some farm workers and war veterans teamed up to remove the owners. Members of the urban petty bourgeoisie also joined in the land occupations. The majority of the urbanites were opposed to anarchy on the farms, rather than to the occupations *per se*.

The question of who is involved in the current occupations has been a subject of cynical debate in which the prime focus has been to minimise the importance of both the war veterans' leadership and their level of capacity to hold widespread occupations. Thus, the army and the government are attributed leadership on the one hand, while children, youth and women are said to have been cajoled, paid or even forced to join occupations. As a result, the occupations have been characterised as either contrived or farcical or narrowly instrumental for electioneering. However, the fact the farm workers and people from communal areas, including those on resettlement waiting lists, have joined the occupations to enhance their chances for resettlement has not been properly analysed. Thus, the organic and deep-seated local pressures for land reform, and even anger from past injustices and deprivation, are underestimated in this critique.

One of the major contestations in the Zimbabwe land occupations debate is the degree to which they have been led by a homogenous command structure under a

43. These remarks are the result of personal interviews with members of the Commercial Farmers Union, and political parties conducted from March 2000 to August 2000.

single ZANU (PF) leadership linked to military chiefs and the head of state. Empirical observations show that parallel to the many high profile, centrally orchestrated occupations of 2000, there were numerous occupations, which emerged from more diverse organisational formations and interests. Such interests would include some provincial governors who are seen to be more militant in terms of land reform, specific independent branches of the ZNLWA, individual MPs and other traditional leaders. In many cases it would appear that the ZNLWA came to hegemonise local initiatives.

There were other locally driven and differentiated occupations, in which members of war veterans associations took a leading role. Their involvement can be seen as having been antagonistic to a central command in terms of *which* land and *how* it should be occupied. This led to the formation of numerous semi-autonomous farmer associations comprising war veterans, community members and urbanites that originate from those regions. Also, there was a variety of locally differentiated land occupations that were community instigated and led only to be 'formalised' or 'legitimated' later by the procurement of war veterans to nominally lead the occupations. Different varieties of such occupations included those led by traditional leaders or notable persons and those driven by the desire for restitution of land with spiritual value and based on specific claims.⁴⁴

Another variant of such occupations includes those led by communities with grievances against farmers. Such cases include landowners with a history of opposition to the liberation movement or maltreatment of workers.⁴⁵ Some farmers were identified as being aligned to opposition politics during the 2000 elections. A number of community-led land occupations occurred within provinces and districts of predominantly MDC voters, such as Matebeleland, where it has been suspected that some alliance between opposition interests and war veterans has been struck in order to secure land. In addition, there are those occupations led by urban-based groups mobilising some elements of their communities, including war veterans and local bureaucrats in order to formalise the occupations. When these locally based veterans are pitted against those who are centrally organised, one finds there are important contradictions, contestations and negotiations in the occupation process and movement.

In some locations, we see land occupations, which were brought about by the associations' planned land uses, allocation, cropping regimes and beneficiaries, different from those presented by the local government. In many cases, we see the absorption of farm workers into the land reform process. Despite the perception of a largely non citizen farm workforce, eighty percent are Zimbabwean and have frequently joined the land occupation movement, contrary to suggestions that they

44. These observations are based on personal interviews with war veterans and some of their leadership during field trips to Mazowe, and Harare in 2001 and the field work done by research assistant, Nelson Marongwe, 'A Case Study of Land Occupations in Zimbabwe', Mimeo (Harare: ZERO, 2000).

45. Evidence from Wedza, Mazowe and also from other case studies show much of the same trends. See in particular Marongwe, *A Case Study of Land Occupations*.

are not involved and are always in confrontation with war veterans and marginalised by the state.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the fear by the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers' Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) that many farm workers have been rendered unemployed and homeless by the occupations. The problem is that much of the debate on this relates to the expectation of job losses through compulsory land acquisitions, which have so far not been completed. The data tends to be speculative more than actual.

We need to add to this complex evolution of the land occupation movement the pervasive criminal and opportunistic aspect, in which individuals, claiming to be war veterans or members of the ruling party leaders used the occupation movement to intimidate farmers to extort money, poach wildlife and firewood or assume sharecropping rights on farmers' crops or even used pieces of land for their own cropping activities.⁴⁷ This suggests that the 'movement' is less easily managed by the political parties. Within this context, the 'radical' elements of ZANU (PF), who have proactively supported land occupations, have the burden of justifying the movement in the context of sporadic and wanton violence and lawlessness.

We have seen in this context that both ZANU (PF) and the state have followed behind the social movement and tried to co-opt and contain it within the framework of the evolving land acquisition programme. Indeed, the act of gazetting over 3,000 farms for compulsory acquisition reflects not only a response to the anticipated farmer aggression but also, and importantly, an attempt to create physical space to accommodate the mushrooming land occupation movement, while negotiating international community support for Zimbabwe's land reform.

Implications for Democratisation

What can be learnt from Zimbabwe's recent experience concerning the importance of social movements that are differentiated is that, while their roles and actions might be contradictory, they can also provide the basis for a progressive movement on issues such as democratisation and land reform. However, they can also produce negative effects in the form of violence and abrogation of civil rights. In Zimbabwe, it can be expected that such effects will be relatively short term, compared to the long-term benefits of assuaging historical grievances and addressing a problem that has been neglected for twenty years by a model of reconciliation, which did not include justice or reparation.

One general lesson concerns how a formal policy can evolve and be refined in a very short period of time, after having been static over the longer term. There have

46. See Sarah Musungwa, *Beneficiary Selection in the Context of the Land Reform Programme*, (draft diss., Harare SARIPS, 2001) and Prisca Mandimika *The Indigenisation of the Large Scale Commercial Farming Sector: the Case of Coburn* (draft diss., Harare SARIPS, 2001). Magaramombe suggests that eight percent of settlers are farm workers. This may reflect a growing accommodation of farm workers, aiming at their political persuasion in favour of ZANU (PF). Godfrey Magaramombe, *Rural Poverty: Commercial Farm Workers and Land Reform in Zimbabwe* (London: Oxfam, 2001).

47. This was reported in personal interviews with police officers from Harare in March 2001. Also this was confirmed by evidence from fieldwork in Mazowe and Wedza.

been great shifts in Zimbabwe's land policy in the past five years, particularly the last two, which have seen political debates moving to more radical options because of the failure of negotiations and indeed, even shifts within this more radical policy movement.⁴⁸ The major implication is that most of the players are pushed to attempt land transfer within a legal framework of compulsory acquisition, even if this is done under threat of spontaneous and violent action. Such transfer is now being discussed in terms of a much larger scale and a faster pace.

There are a number of positive implications for the current land occupations. First, the delivery of land will increase the possibilities of participating in the economy for a wider range of rural and urban poor and the middle classes. The economic benefits will form the basis for more positive and participatory rural and agrarian policy formation. Second, land transfer will weaken the hegemony and segregation of the current advantaged white minority. It challenges the poor living and working conditions and inadequate rights of farm labourers, questions the injustices perpetrated against them by landowners, and raises the issue of their right to land.⁴⁹ The recognition of the need to address what happens to farm workers has brought to the fore the bogus defence of farm workers' rights by commercial farmers and some NGOs favouring the status quo, and exposed this form of enclave politics. Third, land transfer will make the agricultural sector more efficient by having many more people engaged in producing for the economy. Used concurrently with the downsizing of land holdings, land acquisition and resettlement will increase the current 4,500 commercial farmers and involve more indigenous blacks on smaller sized commercial farms. If all these commercial farmers adopt more efficient methods, they could produce more than in the past on the land available to them.⁵⁰

Fourth, the occupations have confronted bad past and present race relations by forcing intensive interaction and discussion between whites and blacks in different roles. The movement has also raised the issue of the different values placed on the deaths of blacks and whites, particularly as reflected in international media coverage, and challenged the notion of reconciliation without truth, justice and reparation. Fifth, there has been broad participation in the call for restitution, by traditional leaders, spirit mediums and others who are beginning to reclaim their historical rights to land and resources on the basis of its sacred or cultural value in

48. Government of Zimbabwe, *Fast Track Policy Paper* (Harare: Government of Zimbabwe, 2001)

49. Sam Moyo, Blair Rutherford, and Dede Amonr-Wilks, 'Farmworkers, Land Reform and Changing Social Relations for Farm Workers', *Review of African Political Economy* 27, no. 84 (2000): 181-202 and Dede Amonr-Wilks, *In Search of Hope: Zimbabwe's Farm Workers* (Harare: Dateline Southern Africa, 1995).

50. Small farmer productivity has been demonstrated through many studies, Sam Moyo, *The Land Question*; Mike Roth, *Analysis of Agrarian Structure and Land Use Patterns in Zimbabwe*, Background Paper (Wisconsin, MAD: Land Tenure Centre, 1992); World Bank Agriculture Sector Memorandum, no. 9429 (Washington: World Bank, 1991); Daniel Weiner, Sam Moyo, Barry Manslow, and Phil O'Keefe, 'Land Use and Agricultural Productivity in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1985): 251-84; and Peter Von Blackenburg, *Large Commercial Farmers and Land Reform in Africa*, (London: Ashgate, 1994).

addition to its productive potential.⁵¹ For example, in the Mazowe District, three out of the fifteen land occupations have been for the return of sacred places. Finally, the demands for land by the Zimbabwean population has been brought to the attention of the international community, including neoliberal NGOs. The media has been both a recipient and a source of such information, although their heightened interest at the moment has tended to increase the impression that this is a situation that has only just arisen. The confrontation has brought the role of the British into the spotlight and shifted the perception of land reform from a development to a restitution and justice issue.

In that respect, the Zimbabwean experience echoes that of the Chiapas in Latin America, who, through new types of informal movements have captured and maintained space for themselves in which they are recognised and able to undertake direct negotiations with farmers and the state.⁵² In Zimbabwe, such associations, which include the Nharira Association of traditional cultural leaders and the Nyabire Association, may have been mobilised by the war veterans but they have now taken on their own forms and are difficult for government to ignore. They involve urban and rural groups, including the poor, elites and traditional leaders, from districts where land has been designated for compulsory acquisition and/or is already occupied. They have developed rules such as focusing their activities on unused land, not stealing farmer's property and limiting violence. However, their ideology is commonly anti-colonial, against white racism and based on combining self-reliance with surplus production and sales. They seem to be gradually circumscribing traditional authorities as war veterans and urban workers hold key positions in such associations.

The positive outcomes outlined above are all necessary conditions for democratisation. However, they are not sufficient and there have also been some negative aspects. Past studies had all predicted that inadequate land delivery would precipitate violent confrontations in the future.⁵³ Policy makers and farmers did not take such predictions seriously as they continued their *laissez faire* attitude towards land reform. Notwithstanding this observation, the widespread occurrence of violence, including its impact on the 2000 parliamentary elections, has been the most negative effect, causing the abrogation of physical safety and threat to political participation. There has been an instrumentalisation of violence although the scale of it has been exaggerated and it has been wrongly made the focus of the whole land reform issue. In fact, compared to rural and urban violence in South Africa, Ireland or Brazil, the level in Zimbabwe has been quite low.⁵⁴ Violence has

51. Marongwe, *A Case Study of Land Occupations*.

52. See Petras, 'Latin America' and Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

53. Jeffry Herbst, *State and Politics in Zimbabwe* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press, 1990) and Jocelyn Alexander, 'The Unsettled Land: The Politics of Land Distribution in Matabeleland: 1980-1990', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 4 (1991): 581-610.

54. In South Africa, land occupations in peripheral urban areas have involved over three million people over the last ten years, while over two hundred farmers have been killed.

increased in response to economic decline and poverty, so that the land occupations cannot be seen as the main or only instigator. A more careful assessment of the exact scale and causality is needed.

One major offshoot has been opportunism comprising criminal acts such as cattle rustling, extortion and pilfering of farm produce, and work stoppages. This element is now recognised by the war veterans, the government and the farmers but the authorities have been unable to control it. The fact that the occupations have, in some cases, been violent needs to be understood in terms of the real animosity between the occupiers and those elements of government that are seen not to be serious about land reform. This is a longstanding and endemic grievance. There is no doubt that land occupations have generated, in certain localities, unwillingness to participate in the electoral process. There is also evidence that farmers and farm workers as well as opposition youth have been the source of some electoral violence in rural areas in which pitched battles have been waged sporadically.⁵⁵

The land occupations movement also has to be seen in the context of deep division in the ZANU (PF) over the strategy of land acquisition, with a growing segment rejecting not just market but also legalistic compulsory acquisition because of their history of failed implementation, in favour of land seizures and occupations as a strategy. In this vein, we have seen a different movement in which certain elements of the ruling party seek to halt occupations, preferring a focus on compulsory acquisition methods, in combination with negotiated land transfers based on dialogue with farm owners.⁵⁶ It is this divergence of views and split in the command structure that explains, to a large degree, some of the underground and uncontrolled violence and lawless aspects of the occupations which, as the evidence shows, have taken place in half of the provinces including Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East and Matebeleland North.

Some analysts and opposition leaders have suggested that the violence associated with the recent occupations, leading up to the 2000 election, have enabled the ruling party to maintain dominance over the rural electorate. This dominance has always existed in some rural areas but the mobilisation for land reform tended to countervail any mobilisation by the opposition. It has been argued that opposition party structures were undermined, but the degree to which these actually existed outside of small towns is yet to be fully demonstrated. The few existing studies tend, however, to underplay the strength of ZANU (PF) in most rural areas and appear to teleologically follow the post-referendum triumphalistic analysis, which

55. It was alleged at one time that farmers were training defence militias. The state reacted to this by deploying military and paramilitary elements as a security measure against an alleged or expected armed resistance 'to the land occupations' by farmers in collaboration with opposition parties. Farmers and their workers armed themselves for confrontation with the war veterans and peasants. See Chitiyo, 'Land Violence'.

56. For instance, major efforts were made by the Ministry of Home Affairs in April, the Vice President Joseph Msika in May 2000, and the Ministry of Local Government and National Housing to move occupiers off the land. These were contradicted by the President and challenged by his spokesmen. News Reporter, *The Herald*, May 2000.

overestimated the growth of the rural MDC structures in communal and farm areas. This is an area which calls for more rigorous research, however.

The land occupations have so far failed to correct the inherited injustices of the legal system and property laws in an orderly fashion. By encouraging, rather than evicting, the occupiers and by premature resettlement of people on farms where the legal processes of compulsory land acquisitions were not complete, the government has overridden, instead of correcting the legal system. However, the land occupations and 'fast track' resettlement, including the litigation that took place in the Supreme, Constitutional and administrative courts have highlighted the debate on the relevance of the existing property rights. The Supreme Court's judgment of December 2000, giving the government six months to resolve the land issue represents a recognition of the need for change and the injustice of the current situation. The changes to the Land Acquisition Act can be seen as signs of an attempt to find legal means of land reform, even though it is difficult for a neoliberal justice system to deal with such major problems of public interest. The introduction of the new Rural Occupiers Act of 2001, also shows the government effort to legalise the process of occupations, while the legal transfer of land proceeds.⁵⁷ The rushed legislative changes, which might appear democratically facile, have brought to the fore the importance of an historical jurisprudence problem over property rights which requires special legal activism for it to be resolved.

Conclusion

In countries such as Zimbabwe, where a large proportion of the mainly rural population depends on agriculture for their livelihood and employment, it is crucial to recognise that addressing the land question in terms of contemporary equity and social justice is one of the essential parameters within which broader political reform and democratisation questions must be addressed. It would appear to be almost impossible to focus on liberal political rights in contemporary democratic movements without understanding the deep-seated social and political enmity and contradictions contained in the land question. Most formal political organisations, be it among the ruling party or the opposition, have tended to neglect the deep-rooted demand for land reform and pretend that the simmering land occupation movement is unnecessarily forcing the land reform issue onto the political agenda.

It is self-evident that the neoliberal, developmental model of civil society, which is dominated both financially and technically by NGOs, has been unable to address the pressing problem of land reform because of its general disconnection from the informal rural and urban social movements that have, over the years, pursued land occupations, resource poaching and all sorts of underground strategies to gain access to natural resources and to establish economic and social, rather than

57. Government of Zimbabwe, 'Rural Land Occupiers (Protection from Eviction) Act', Cap 20:26, No. 13/2001.

political, rights. The result is that the land occupation movement has been hegemonised and controlled by war veterans and the ruling party, which has also demobilised it at various points in alliance with middle class interests within the state, opposition parties and NGOs; only to co-opt it as it re-emerged during the major post independence political and economic crisis which escalated in 1996 and 1997.

It is polarising and futile to simplify democratisation as a process of shifting governments, privileged over and above the content of change. The idea of physically restructuring land and property relations is one example in which the historical unfolding of the process might seem to force change in what appears to be authoritarian ways but which might yield a framework for future democratisation. Moreover, it is too simplistic to pin down the problem of achieving democratisation in Zimbabwe mainly on the tactics of the land occupation movement and the 2000 election. It is clear that the absence of a social and institutional infrastructure necessary for promoting true and widespread democratisation is a major bottleneck, which compounds the weak strategy of civil society and opposition movements. The lopsided racial access to information, education, physical resources and political experience in handling the contradictions of social democracy are yet to be redressed.

Therefore, much of the negative fallout from the occupations movement, including its use for short term political gain, has to be weighed more seriously against the longer term gains to the broader democratisation process, of creating space for awareness and participation in the basic social struggles hitherto dominated by formal state structures and urban civil society organisations. Indeed, one of the major lessons and experiences is that the neoliberal policy framework of land reform can be challenged.

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