

Misleading Images: Propaganda and Racism in the Politics of Land in Post Colonial Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The revolution which saw the seizure of White 'owned' land by the landless Black Zimbabweans has generated unparalleled debates both in and outside Zimbabwe. Neo-colonialists, neo-conservatives and neo-liberals alike have labeled the land revolution as barbaric, destructive, violent and racial. These images, though misleading have been popularised by pro-Western media and have managed to attract sympathy for the former White farmers and at the same time it has managed to demonise the land revolution. This article advances the thesis that these half-baked, ahistorical, propagandistic and racist images have been crafted deliberately to trivialise an agenda which sought to redress the past socio-economic injustices. Secondly, the article argues that White farmers were not innocent bystanders as portrayed by the images, but were in complicit in the whole conflict. Finally, the article concludes that the violence which characterised the revolution was not because Blacks are violent by nurture or nature, but rather were acting within the confines of an environment characterised by negative peace from the unresolved past injustices.

Keywords: Land reform, Black people, Conflict, White farmers, Image, Government.

1. Introduction

Socio-economic and political reasons of egalitarianism validate the redistributive land reforms whereby land was seized from the rich to poor in post-colonial Zimbabwe. The overriding grievance why Zimbabweans took jointly to the barrel of a gun and to negotiations was the need to end the skewed land ownership which followed colonisation in 1890. However, despite of a bloody liberation war which led to the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, little did the majority of Black Zimbabweans know that they had only won the battle but lost the war. This was not peculiar to Zimbabwe, but such was the fate of many other countries in Africa.

In South Africa, seventeen years after apartheid, Blacks who constitute 80 percent of the population possess a mere 13 percent of the land. In Zimbabwe just prior to land revolution in year 2000, 4500 White commercial farmers controlled 85 percent of the commercially arable land (The Herald 2010). There is no doubt that such lopsided arrangements were unsustainable and could not be justified under any circumstances. However, those responsible for demonising the land revolution were dead silent when millions of Blacks remained in abject poverty and the congested communal areas. The majority of the White Zimbabweans who owned land saw nothing wrong in that skewed arrangement. It was business as usual notwithstanding their knowledge that Zimbabwe had gained independence at the end of a long and bitter struggle which claimed more than 30 000 lives. In addition, the rich few, whites were aware that the struggle was largely supported by a land hungry rural population.

Given this background one would have expected the whites to play a leading role in correcting this slanted land distribution. Amazingly, they did not do that, instead, they made frantic efforts towards protecting themselves by even hoarding land that they did not utilise under the pretext of setting up game ranges and animal conservancies. However, the interesting question is, given the centrality of land in Zimbabwean politics, how and why was such distorted and iniquitous arrangement perpetuated for a good twenty long years after independence? Possible answers are found in the country's historical background, especially the failure of the 1979 Lancaster House Constitutional talks to facilitate the creation of structures for equitable distribution of land, the failure of the reconciliation project after independence and finally the refusal by Whites to integrate fully in new Zimbabwe.

1.2 Historical background

The violent dispossession of land from Blacks by British settlers has always been at the core of Black Zimbabweans' political, economic and social underdevelopment. Disequilibrium in land distribution was deliberately created in the colonial period from 1890 -1980. The systematic dispossession of land and the inequities in the distribution of all resources were all perpetuated by racial politics practiced by successive White minority regimes of Rhodesia. Having defeated the Blacks in the anti colonialism struggles of 1893-4 (Anglo-Ndebele war) and 1896-97 (The First *Chimurenga/Umvukela*), more land was confiscated by the colonial regime. By 1914, White settlers numbering 23 730 owned 19 032 320 acres of land, while an estimated 752 000 Blacks occupied a total of 21 390 080 acres of land (Report of the Presidential review Committee 2003:13). After granting a 'responsible' government status to Southern Rhodesia in 1923 a new land policy was formulated under provisions and terms of reference of the Morris Carter Commission of 1925 (Report of the Presidential review Committee 2003:14). The concept of segregation informed the outcome of the Carter Commission and its recommendations were promulgated in the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. See table 1

An analysis of the figures will reveal that in essence when combined the Native Reserves land and Native Purchase area allocation the land available to Blacks was now 28 591 606 acres or 29.8 percent for a population estimated at 1 081 000 in 1930 (Palmer 1977:38-43). At the same time 51 percent of the best land was assigned to White settlers whose population was estimated to be 50 000. In essence this reduced the indigenous *Shona* and *Ndebele* agricultural economy to subsistence levels by late 1930s. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 can be well compared to the South Africa's Native Land Act of 1913 which dispossessed Blacks of their 80 percent land. More land was confiscated from Blacks especially after 1945, and this was particularly meant to accommodate new White settlers who were escaping from post Second World War poverty in Europe. By 1969 White domination over land was now under the auspices of the Land Tenure Act of 1969 which had replaced the 1930 Land Apportionment Act. The Land Tenure Act purported to have divided the land in half with 44.9 million acres allocated to each race (Moyo 1987:33-49). Nevertheless, the stark reality of this purported 'equal allocation' of land was that Blacks were given land in areas where no meaningful agriculture could take place while at the same time Whites occupied 80 percent of the prime agricultural land.

These measures led to overstocking, very high population densities, serious environmental destruction, reduced agricultural productivity and poverty in the Black communal areas. It was against this background that the main Black Nationalists parties Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) managed to mobilise millions of land hungry and poor peasants to wage a bloody liberation war against the racist Rhodesian government (Mamdani 2008:2). Land was one of the chief and main grievances that motivated the Blacks to launch the struggle against colonial domination in the 1960s (ibid). The use of the *Mwana wevhu/Umntwana womuhlabathi* (child of soil) concept by Black Nationalists which was a rallying call for indigenous Black people to unite and fight for their land, clearly indicated that the liberation struggle crystallized around the land issue. This also indicated that any future Government that was to rule the country had to deal effectively with the land issue. The land issue was clearly central to any initiatives and negotiations that were meant to resolve the conflict. Land was the main reason why all pre Lancaster House negotiations including the 1976 Geneva and 1978 Malta talks collapsed (Report of the Presidential review Committee 2003:10). The near collapse of the talks at Lancaster in 1979 which eventually gave way to independence was again due to land.

2. Winning the battle but losing the war at Lancaster.

When it became clear that the Rhodesian conflict was now heading towards the ultimate military defeat of the racist White minority regime, the newly elected Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher quickly intervened by proposing a negotiated settlement. The Nationalists were in a dilemma as they believed that military victory was so near.

Conversely, pressure from the frontline states subdued the Nationalists to attend the Lancaster House talks. As expected the land issue became a thorny issue as the Nationalists position clearly stipulated that the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe was precisely about the recovery of land which the Black people had been dispossessed. Thus, Nationalists anticipated a total recovery of land unconditionally.

The Chairman of the Lancaster House Conference, Lord Carrington refused to budge to these demands as he took the Conference as an opportunity to protect the economic interests of the White minority. Key features which protected the white minority interests were found in the provisions of the new constitution particularly section 16 :(1) which gave a ten year limitation on the future government's powers to acquire land compulsorily for the purpose of settling people (Kagoro 2004:236-37). There was also section 52 of the constitution on Declaration of Rights which stipulated that the constitution could not be amended for a period of ten years (ibid). This was a slap in the face of the Nationalists who despite having an upper hand militarily found themselves facing defeat at the negotiating table. Walking out and going back to the battlefield was one option available, but the Frontline States leaders who could no longer bear the brunt of more attacks and destruction on their infrastructure. They pushed the British to offer some assurances of assistance in terms of future land procurement. The British quickly seized the opportunity presented to them and went on to give vague and opaque promises which were not documented in the new constitution. In a statement issued by Lord Carrington on the 11th of October 1979, he indicated that:

We recognize that the future of Zimbabwe, whatever its political complexion, will wish to extend land ownership. The costs would be very substantial indeed well beyond the capacity, in our judgement of any donor country, and the British Government cannot commit itself at this stage to a specific share in them. We should, however, be ready to support the efforts of the Government of Independent Zimbabwe to obtain international assistance for these purposes (Report of the Presidential review Committee 2003:16).

Taking the White man for his word the Nationalists in response announced that:

We have now obtained assurances that...Britain, the United States of America and other countries will participate in a multinational donor effort to assist in land, agricultural and economic development programmes. These assurances go a long way in allaying the great concern we have over the whole land question arising from the great need our people have for land and our commitment to satisfy that need when in Government (Report of the Presidential review Committee 2003:17).

Believing these assurances was the cardinal mistake which was made by the Nationalists and this was the turning point where they lost the long war. The final agreement did not address the land question adequately as it was silent on the modalities upon which the so called assistance was to be rendered. More importantly, all these assurances were not constitutionalised, but rather were based on a gentlemen's agreement and any party of this vague agreement could easily renege the promise as it later became the case. Hence the Lancaster agreement was a great betrayal to the aspirations of the Black people. It placed much emphasis on peace and reconciliation while ignoring history and the misdeeds of the past. This was the great tragedy upon which the Republic of Zimbabwe was born out of.

In 1980 at independence, the agricultural sector was made up of three sub sectors. The large scale commercial farming sub sector of 6 000 white farmers who owned 15.5 million hectares which was located in the high rainfall ecological regions where agricultural productivity was at its highest (Mamdani 2008:2-6). The other sub sector comprised of the small scale commercial sector made up of 8 500 Black farmers who held 1.4 million hectares of agricultural land located in the drier agro-ecological regions. The final sub sector comprised of 4.3 million people who occupied 16.4 million hectares of agricultural land, 75 percent of which was located in the driest agro-ecological areas where soils were very poor (ibid). There was also a lot of land which was unutilized and underutilized, held by absentee landlords and was left derelict for speculative purposes by its White owners. There was nothing much that the new Government could do since its hands were tied by the Lancaster House constitution. Land could only be acquired under the willing seller and willing buyer basis. More importantly, the Government was now concentrating on reconciliation and not interested in frightening the White community fearing capital flight

2.1 Reconciliation, Race relations and the politics of land in post colonial Zimbabwe.

If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and an ally with the same interests, loyalty, rights and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me. The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten.*

(Huyse 2003:37).

*Inaugural Speech by Prime Minister Robert Mugabe in April 1980.

One of the most surprising things which not only the Whites, the Western world and most importantly the Black community was the olive branch extended to the White community after independence. While most people including both Blacks and Whites themselves expected 'Nuremberg' trials and retributive justice the new government of Zimbabwe did not do that. The Rhodesian perpetrators of human rights violations, violence and other heinous crimes were allowed to go unpunished in the name of reconciliation. Political and economic stability were at the centre of former liberation movement's leaders to be pragmatic about the post colonial order (Sachikonye 2004:5). The new Government was aware that inflexibility had caused chaotic economic challenges to Mozambique when thousands of qualified White people fled the country in a huff leaving unskilled Blacks to run the country.

The majority of the White population gracefully accepted the 1980 reconciliation on paper, especially the fact that it preserved the status quo; there was no enforced redistribution of land. While the Whites had every reason to be happy, the situation lulled them to have a false sense of security and they continued with the 'business as usual' attitude. This unfortunate situation was characterised by negative peace at the expense of positive peace and history has proved that where there are inequities in resource allocation the negative peace becomes a time bomb waiting to explode and such was the situation in post colonial Zimbabwe before land reform. This also became the tragedy of race relations in post colonial Zimbabwe (Mlambo 2010: 60-61). While the olive branch was extended to Whites, they did not do much to become part of future Zimbabwe in real sense. They remained in their economic laagers, racial cocoons and social enclaves yet surrounded by a sea of poor landless Blacks. Being White became synonymous with wealth; riches largely inherited from the misdeeds and criminal past of their ancestors. Whites were silently resented if not hated by the majority of poor Blacks. White Commercial farmers who were the major beneficiaries of reconciliation should have known that the 'good' old days Rhodesia were gone and gone forever. Their actions and inactions clearly manifested that they learnt nothing and forgot nothing. Instead of being pro active in finding solutions to the distorted land allocation they were pro active in complicating and obstructing the process of land re-distribution. The Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) which was an exclusively White farmers' union was the biggest culprit in ill advising some of the White farmers and vice versa.

There is no doubt that the reconciliation agenda by the Government had serious shortcomings especially in its inability to emphasise truth, justice and reparations for the damage inflicted to the Black people during the colonial era. If the new Government of Zimbabwe should be held responsible for imposing a weak form of reconciliation without historical, restorative or economic justice then equally the Whites should surely be held responsible of taking undue advantage to a new government which had after all extended an olive branch to them by avoiding the Nuremberg style of justice. Mugabe has been accused of manipulating the land question for his political advantage, yes indeed it is undeniable. However, as Muzondidya aptly pointed out:

Because of the unresolved colonial legacies of racial prejudice and inequalities... it was easier for the incumbent government to use both land and race for political mobilization and scapegoating when it found itself confronted by mounting popular pressure. ZANU (PF) successfully utilised the emotive issue of race (land) to mobilise support internally, regionally and internationally (Muzondidya 2010:06).

By perpetuating the ill gotten wealth of the past, and refusing to embrace reconciliation the Whites were creating the situation and the environment which later on engulfed them. For deliberately choosing that path they should surely not blame anyone except themselves. They had the golden opportunity to make things right but they did not take advantage of the situation and assumed that they were sacrosanct as the new Government showed signs that it was a bit naïve to do anything to upset an apple cart at that point in time. While the Government might have been naïve, but some ordinary Black people and war veterans in particular were certainly not naïve and it only became a question of time before negative peace relapsed into chaos. Last minute overtures and eleventh hour offers of land by CFU came too late and offered too little land to Black people who were now unfortunately convinced that only chaos and violence could end the politics of superciliousness which had been demonstrated by most White farmers since 1980. Thus the Whites played a part in the unfolding of the Zimbabwe land reform crisis, yet only Blacks are labeled as the villains.

3 Neo liberal debates on land seizures and the development of sadistic images.

The major popularized images of the land reform from the neo liberal perspective have painted a sorry state of affairs in post land reform Zimbabwe. Land reform was labeled as a violation of property rights concept. This property rights concept form the backbone of the neo liberal economic thinking. This line of thinking further asserts that Zimbabwe turned from being the 'bread basket of Southern Africa to a basket case' because land was given to people who neither have the means nor the capacity to make proper use of the land. By violating the property rights concept Zimbabwe clearly revealed that there was no rule of law in the country. Hence, Zimbabwe did set a terrible precedence to other African countries in Southern Africa like South Africa and Namibia that have problematic land tenure systems. The land reform should have been done in an orderly and legal manner in order to avoid disturbing production in farms.

The other popularised narrative is that Mugabe used the land reform as a political gimmick to spruce up his waning image as a political leader. The narrative further pose the question that if land was that important to the Mugabe why did he wait for twenty years? Thus land reform was nothing but a political gerrymandering move designed to hoodwink particularly the unsuspecting rural electorate (New Zimbabwe: 2010). Land was given to Mugabe's henchmen, political cronies and supporters. Hence, far from alleviating poverty, land reform exacerbated poverty and thousands of former farm workers were rendered jobless due to the violent seizures of land.

Innocent White farmers were killed. Agriculture equipment was vandalized and looted in some instances. Wildlife was destroyed including some endangered species like black rhinos. Reckless cutting down of trees is threatening the once flourishing White commercial farmlands and the once breath taking sights are fast becoming deserts because Blacks lack generic environmental knowledge. If normalcy does not return the entire nation will soon starve to death because Blacks have clearly demonstrated that they are incapable of feeding themselves and South Africa and Namibia should not dare to attempt doing things in the 'barbaric and chaotic Zimbabwean way'. Above all land reform was racist by nature and design. If the process was not racial Whites, Coloureds and Indians who are equally Zimbabwean according to the Zimbabwean laws should have been considered for land allocations, but this was not done.

The government did not take into cognizance the fact that the majority of commercial farmland was in the hands of White farmers who had paid for the land or had inherited it from the ancestors who had paid for the land as evidenced by the possession of title deeds. Thus the land had not been stolen from anyone. It was therefore a travesty of justice to seize land from those who had acquired it 'legally'. The assertions by neo liberal thinkers cannot be entirely dismissed as untrue, however, in the same vein the same views cannot entirely be accepted as the absolute truth. There are a lot of facts which have been ignored.

3.1 The past, truth, facts and peasants ignored.

- The concept of property rights was violated by the Government of Zimbabwe, yes indeed, but what other choice was available to the Government given the fact that White farmers had manipulated the very same concept of property rights to derail equitable distribution of land.
- How the White people did obtain the title deeds of the land which they possessed? The answer is simple, the land was stolen from the Blacks by the British South Africa Company (BSACo) and it therefore follows that any title deeds to the land were null, void and illegal in the eyes of the Black people.
- History tells us that during the early years of colonial occupation in Rhodesia, White settlers got their food from grain produced by Blacks. However, The BSACo intentionally destroyed Black agricultural entrepreneurship in an effort to promote the growth of White agriculture.
- It is true indeed that for the past decade food security has been a challenge to the majority of Zimbabweans. However, it is misleading to think that food security declined only because Blacks are incapable of feeding themselves. But, it is well known that in the entire African continent a White farmer is a manager and he does not practically grow crops himself because his Black workers do that for him since he owns the means of production.
- The fact that Mugabe used land reform to boost his political legitimacy cannot be denied, but this worked perfectly well for him and ZANU PF because the Whites presented a perfect opportunity for him to do so due to their arrogance. Had they cooperated way back surely such an opportunity would not have presented itself to Mugabe. Since they played into his hands, like any other politician he grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

- Thousands of Black farm workers lost their jobs, this indeed happened but these concerns are being raised by those with the mindset that for a Black man to survive he must work for someone who is White. Such paternalistic mentality disregarded the fact that Black farm workers were the least paid workers in the country. Despite all the donkey work the White farmer got the lion's share while Blacks languished in squalid housing not even fit for pigs in some instances.
- At national level over 145 000 small scale farms (A1) and over 16 000 large commercial farm units (A2) have been established benefiting and empowering millions of people in the process and this was a major step towards sustainable development. This is positive if compared to 4 500 White farmers who were in control of huge tracts of land to the detriment of Black peasants who were forced to eke a living the communal areas.
- Whites regarded themselves as Zimbabweans but history has proved that this was only on paper because in practice their actions and inactions were largely responsible for the failure of reconciliation. In any case a whole lot of them retained dual citizenship vacillating between being either Zimbabwean or British depending on what suits them most in the situation.
- The British offered £500 million to buy out the White farmers who owned much of the fertile land in Kenya, but in Zimbabwe the British offered £75 million for the payment of land owners and only £44 million had been spent when the Labour government abrogated the understanding. It clearly indicates that from the onset the British were determined to underfund Zimbabwe's land reform. If Britain, a developed country could not provide adequate funding to support the land reform then how could Zimbabwe, a developing country get the funds to compensate White farmers?
- Like other countries in Southern Africa Zimbabwe has suffered from recurrent droughts. The situation was worsened by the economic meltdown which saw very little funding being directed to the agricultural sector. The impact of HIV-AIDS at national level had implications to the agrarian revolution and this cannot be ignored.

There is no doubt that most of the neo liberal section of the world which vociferously attacked the land reform in Zimbabwe has chosen to ignore some crucial facts on the land in Zimbabwe. The West has dishonestly interpreted the land issue in Zimbabwe and it has presented a picture which shamelessly treat the White people as angels who did nothing wrong but were victims of blood thirsty and retrogressive Blacks.

3.2 The emerging empirical evidence on the land reform in Zimbabwe.

A recent research was conducted by Professor Ian Scoones of the University of Sussex England and a team of South African and Zimbabwean academics on the land reform produced empirical evidence which challenge the popular myth that Zimbabwe's land reform was a total failure. The new study was published in a book titled *Zimbabwe's Land Reform: Myths and realities*. The research took 10 years to conduct and was partly funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (New African: January 2011).

The research revealed that in one of Zimbabwe's province, Masvingo, 1.6 million hectares were distributed to more than 33 000 households (Scoones 2010). Interviews with the new settlers have revealed that a new and unique agrarian set up is emerging in Zimbabwe. Life has changed dramatically for some of the new settlers as they are now producing more than what they used to before settling in new fertile lands. This means that food security at household level has improved for most small scale producers. The 2010 season statistics released by Tobacco Marketing Board indicate that, small scale Black tobacco producers in the A1 model farms contributed 42 percent to national output of 123 million kilograms. The 2011 tobacco season saw more A1 farmers registering as tobacco farmers and they are likely to contribute more than 50 percent to the national output which has been pegged at more than 150 million kilograms. In the 2010 season 1.35 million tonnes of maize were realised and 70 percent of it was produced by small scale black producers. In the 2011 season more than 2 million tonnes are expected and again more than 70 percent will come from the small scale black producers.

While it is a reality that it will take time for the new Black farmers to surpass the records that were set by the former White commercial farmers the land reform has transformed the land tenure. It has introduced new players to the land, thus changing the outlook of the rural economy and livelihoods of its inhabitants. This is not just a big step in empowering the previously dis-empowered people but also a step towards sustainable development. The situation whereby 2 percent of the population was in control of 85 percent of the best land was untenable in terms of sustainable development (New African August /September 2006).

The only misfortune which befell Zimbabwe's land reform is:

Zimbabwe was trying to solve the intractable question of land at a time dominated by the aggressive and 'disciplining' forces of neo-liberalism and globalisation. Such forces have no sympathy for any form of radical defiance of the post-Cold War neo-liberalist ideology (Gatsheni 2006:3)

Conclusion

The story of Zimbabwe's land reform is too complex than what the pro Western narratives have generalized in the international media. However, it seems as if there is a deliberate conspiracy in the Western media to perpetuate the vilification and defamation of the African continent. Despite the challenges that still face most new Black farmers in Zimbabwe; in principle the land reform was a major step towards correcting the mess that was created by colonialism. Economic theory is very clear on the fact that a one- time redistribution of assets can in an environment of imperfect markets be associated with permanently higher levels of growth (Aghion et al 1999:1668). The fact that White farmers entered into new Zimbabwe unscathed did not mean that they were innocent or that they were lucky. What would have happened had they made some form of affirmative approach to Black land hungry peasants we will never know? Nonetheless, the reality of Zimbabwe's land reform is that it has created challenges and opportunities, winners and losers. It is therefore, impulsive, to believe the one sided misleading reports which regard land reform as an absolute failure, especially if such sentiments are being expressed by those who lost the land or those who are connected to them. The demonisation of the land reform in Zimbabwe is part of a well known anti African historiography which views Africa as nothing but:

...a region where nothing good happens, where no new ideas can develop and which is inhabited by rapacious politicians, blood sucking generals and a people addicted to blood and mayhem (Ihonvbere 1999:2-3).

Table 1: Land Apportionment in Southern Rhodesia in 1930.

Category	Acres	% of Country
European Area	49 149 174	51.0
Native Reserves	21 127 040	22.0
Unassigned Area	17 793 300	18.5
Native Purchase Area	7 464 566	7.8
Forest Area	590 500	0.6
Undetermined Area	88 540	0.1
Total	96 213 120	100

Source: Moyana

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