

The Politics of Land in Zimbabwe's Communal and Resettlement Areas: A Case Study of Gutu District, Zimbabwe

Nicholas Govo, Patrick Dzimiri** and Richard Rachidi Molapo**

University of Venda, South Africa

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ABSTRACT The discourse of land, power and politics in Zimbabwe has caused polemic and counter-polemic debates and the contestation between traditional leaders and local government structures remains a grey area. Communal and resettlement areas have been characterized by conflicts with the major area of contestation being, control of land and other natural resources. It can be argued that the conflict between traditional institutions and the local government is basically over control of land, hegemony and recognition; hence a struggle of accumulation and power. Despite improved relations between traditional leaders and the state in the post-independence phase, traditional leaders continue to be manipulated by the state for political ends, undermining their precolonial role as custodians and guardians of the land. By the same token, it is argued that the perpetual manipulation of traditional leaders by the state have rendered them powerless in land issues distorting their meaningful contributions to the development of their communities. Such a development brings into question the legitimacy of traditional leaders who were imposed on their communities by the colonial and postcolonial state for political reasons, without embracing the customs of the land in the appointment and installation of traditional authorities. On the other hand, it can be noted that the power and influence of traditional authorities is such that politicians seeking elected office compete with them at their peril. Thus the influence of traditional leaders, either as objects of manipulation or as beneficiaries of a manipulative system should not be underestimated in understanding political developments in Zimbabwe. Gutu District has been taken as a test or experiment to find explanations about the socio-political trajectories of land, power and politics in Zimbabwe's communal and resettlement areas.

INTRODUCTION

The discourse of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe has been subjected to polemic and counter-polemic arguments and two questions need to be addressed. Firstly, how can development in rural areas be achieved when traditional leaders lack 'real' power, especially in the administration of land, which is the niche of livelihood in Zimbabwe's rural communities? Secondly, should modernization be the issue of discarding traditional institutions and values; 'Throwing away the baby with bathwater' (Yaw 2006), or there is a need to accommodate and retain some of the desirable elements of indigenous African systems to eliminate friction, especially in land ownership and utilization in communal and resettlement areas. Whilst the colonial regimes across Africa viewed African indigenous

political systems with contempt, it must be noted that postcolonial African leaders were no better. Soon after independence, little was done to correct the distortions left by the colonial legacy on land, power and politics in rural areas. Most nationalist leaders who took over governments in Africa at independence had received Western education and they viewed tradition as anachronistic and antithetical to progress (Davidson 1992). In Zimbabwe, the traditional land tenure systems were not given deserving attention and this has resulted in conflicts on matters relating to land ownership in communal and resettlement areas. Traditional leaders have shown that they could not be easily thrown out of rural politics, especially on matters relating to land which they continue to see as their source of power and legitimacy and rural communities are different from urban areas in that they still practice and believe in the hereditary powers of the traditional leaders.

Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, the element of totems, kinship and clans is still highly regarded as it gives the rural societies a sense of oneness, unity and belonging. Given that the institution of traditional authority is deep-rooted in kinship, totems and clans, traditional lead-

*Nicholas Govo has just completed a MA (Africa Studies) in the Department of Development Studies at the University of Venda. This paper is an extract from his MA Thesis titled: The Conflict between Tradition and Modernity: The History of the Relationship between the State and Traditional Leaders in Gutu district, Zimbabwe, 1960 to 2010.

**These are the co-authors who supervised this Thesis.

ers continue to influence the social, political and economic life of rural communities. The Zimbabwean constitution also recognizes the existence of traditional leaders as indicated in the Traditional Leaders Act of 2000. On the other hand, the local government, through its elected councilors and village committees represents modern and democratic systems which also have the blessings of the government as provided by the constitution. Such a scenario widens the rift between the two institutions. The state as the agent of social and political control becomes the principle focus of this conflict. The continuing dialectical clash between the forces of modernity, especially the local government reforms and the persistent strength of traditional leadership is an issue in many African countries. The source of the problem is that traditional authority constitutes a form of local government in terms of indigenous laws. With the establishment of colonialism and modern forms of government, most of what used to be the prerogatives of the traditional leaders were taken by the state organs. The local government, through its municipalities took over the land rights and allocation powers, creating a myriad of problems in the administration of rural communities.

The overall assumption for the paper is that the contestation between traditional authority and modern governance structures is a result of the perpetuation of the colonial legacy of exploiting traditional systems for political ends. This paper, therefore, argues that as long as traditional leaders do not own land, they are likely to influence their communities not to cooperate with the local government and other development agencies, making it difficult to develop rural areas. The paper also posits that a return to the traditional land tenure system, when traditional institutions once prevailed, will empower communities to manage land and other resources more sustainably. The implicit assumption being that traditional land tenure systems were characterized by collective action and common property management regimes for the common good of the community.

Methodologically, a qualitative approach was used because this is about feelings, interactions, attitudes and aspirations of the people. Issues relating to chieftaincy and government are complex and sensitive and as such, a qualitative research method is appropriate when dealing with such issues.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The discourse of land, power and politics in Zimbabwe's communal areas and resettlements needs to be placed in the historical context of the precolonial land tenure system and the impact of the colonial and postcolonial state's policies on the politics of land. Scholars do acknowledge that Africans across Africa had political systems which served their social, economic and religious needs from as late as the Iron Age to date, (Ayittey 1992; Davidson 1992; Mandela 1994; Ndlovu-Gatshehi 2008). Such systems were deeprooted in the African culture. Atim et al. (1996), note that, no people lived without a recognized authority which protected land, performed rituals, negotiated peace and resolved conflicts. Studies by Beach (1984), on the Shona speaking people of Zimbabwe, notes that as in many African communities, ultimate political control resided in the ownership of land, which was vested in the guardian spirits (*mhondoro*) of ancestors, who pass it to chiefs and other traditional leaders as its custodians. Political authority was wielded by a chief who was the leading member of a patrilineal lineage that claimed descent from the spirits who sanctioned all rituals. Certainly, a traditional leader could not exist without land and a tribe, and land was the major basis of economic power (Beach 1984). Traditional leaders were the 'custodians' or 'guardians' of the land and land was the property of the ancestors, parceled to the people who owned it and a traditional leader held it in trust on behalf of the people (Bourdillon 1979). Custom and tradition were clear in the indigenous law that a traditional leader be in control of the land as the link between the sacred (spiritual world) and the people.

The striking point in this paper is that the traditional land tenure system gave the land to the traditional leaders who in turn oversaw its allocation and use in a way that every household had access to this 'niche' of the political economy. Indeed, the traditional land tenure system stressed communal activity in agriculture, with some of the hardest work during the year being done by working parties (*Nhimbe*) in the fields of each household in succession. Grazing lands and hunting grounds were also communally owned, giving each member of the community a responsibility in conservation and sustainable environmental management. To that

effect, the capitalist political economy did not only undermine traditional authority over land issues, but it also robbed Africans of their rich indigenous environmental knowledge. Underneath, resources like minerals were mined by all members of the community, but with strict control by the traditional leaders. Whilst some traditional leaders exploited much of the minerals compared to the ordinary people, control measures demonstrate a reservoir of African indigenous knowledge geared for sustainability. It was the duty of the traditional leader to administer the allocation and use of land with agreement with his councilors who enjoyed the trust of the members of the community and land formed the backbone of any traditional authority. As such, the ownership, control, allocation and management of land was an important issue, just like how the land issue continue to be a pertinent matter in present day politics.

Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, the traditional ruler was and is still given clods of the earth at his installation and this symbolizes his trusteeship over land grants and his right to grant or cede land from an individual or a group of people under his jurisdiction. He was/is also given a hoe which symbolizes his right to work the land, including digging minerals. There was a well-established hierarchy where the king granted land to territorial chiefs, who in turn granted land to the headmen, who also gave the village heads some powers to allocate land to individual households. This assured that every household had a share of land. Among the Karanga of the southern parts of Zimbabwe, the installation ceremony of a chief and headman still follows the traditional system described above, but constitutionally, the District Administrator (DA) through the local government and the Rural District Council (RDC) claims authority over land ownership and use.

The African traditional land tenure system was subsequently changed by the advent of colonialism. Colonialism and its 'modern' system of administration subdued the century's established African traditional authority, and in land matters, the white settlers became the *de jure* land authorities. The Order in Council of 1894 gave the British Crown sovereignty over all land in Zimbabwe and this conflicted with the African communal ownership which had traditional leaders as the custodians of the land and the supreme land allocators. In the process,

colonial legal codes attempted to regulate land rights on the basis of private ownership that often mixed uneasily with traditional practices that allowed indigenous groups access without ensuring ownership or title. It can be argued that the codification of the racial division of land through the Land Apportionment Act (1931) safeguarded the interests of the minority white farming community. The racial bias of the colonial state's land allocation became the source of conflict throughout the colonial period. Traditional leaders continued to allocate land, but the colonial government had the power to force them out of their traditional land once the land was earmarked for either commercial farming or other capitalist purposes.

The Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1951 was based on the premise that production in African reserves would be boosted through a system of private ownership of land rather than the communal or customary rights to land that existed hitherto. Its implementation which included reducing the size of land units and the number of cattle that individuals could hold, undermined the power of the chief's control over the land (the source of their power), as well as various conservation measures such as contour-ridging antagonized the African rural population and provided a fertile recruiting ground for the nationalist movements. The attempts at changing the African land tenure systems through the privatization of land ownership failed to address the problems of overcrowding and landlessness in the rural areas. The NLHA as noted by Moyana (1999) was a 'leap in the wrong direction' as it was 'a wrong prescription for the wrong illness'; because what the Africans in rural areas needed were not contour-ridges, but more land to settle the African population which was ever-increasing. By 1960, the traditional land tenure system was effectively destroyed. Accordingly, landlessness and overcrowding in the native reserves made it difficult for the traditional land tenure system to suffice. In the process, traditional leaders were rendered powerless in land matters, subsequently eroding their legitimacy in the eyes of their people.

After independence, the new government of Zimbabwe inherited a bifurcated land tenure system based on racially skewed colonial policies that divided commercial (largely White) and communal (largely Black) areas. In its modernization drive, the postcolonial state has failed

considerably to mitigate the role of traditional leaders and local government in matters of land ownership and management in communal and resettlement areas. The ZANU-PF led government sidelined traditional leaders on land matters by enacting various laws. The Communal Lands Act (1982) gave the District Councils power over land administration and allocation. The Rural District Act (1988) also created a local government that excluded the traditional leaders the management of land. The Chiefs and Headmen Act (1988) did not recognize the institution of the village head. This shows how the post-colonial state trembled over the powers of the traditional leaders during the first decade of independence. Makumbe (1998) argues that all these legal enactments were part of the process of disempowerment of traditional institutions, a measure purportedly designed to punish them for their pre-independence role as functionaries of colonial oppression.

It is however important to note that there was tension between the newly appointed RDCs as most chiefs, headmen and village heads defied the laws and continued to allocate land to the people and to preside over community courts. Villagers continued to refer land matters and village disputes to the traditional leaders, exacerbating the tension between the inherent privileges of traditional leaders as the custodians and chief allocators of land and the acquired privileges of the government's RDCs. Consequently, chieftaincy and its role over land ownership and allocation equation have thrown communal and resettlement areas into the melting pot. The sharp turn which was taken by the government towards re-empowerment of traditional leaders after 1997 has confounded many, and as such its explanation presents problems. A government which started by circumscribing the powers of the traditional leaders suddenly started to give them more powers and it has been argued that this was a strategy employed by the ZANU-PF government to curtail the influence of the MDC in rural areas (Makumbe 1998). Mugabe's government increasingly engaged in brinkmanship and demagoguery that kept ZANU-PF in power through hook and crook and this time around, land and its connectivity to traditional leaders was used as the triumph card. No wonder why traditional leaders were found in the forefront in the reclamation of and restitution to ancestral lands during the Fast Track

Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). However, a new struggle for power emerged especially between ZANU-PF politicians and war veterans on one hand and traditional leaders on the other land reform would take. The latter stressed restitution while the former emphasised on land redistribution without necessarily denoting to going back to original 'ancestral lands'.

It is against this historical backdrop, beginning from the racially skewed and demographically impractical land tenure systems brought by colonialism and partly maintained by the post-colonial government that the present-day conflicts in both communal and resettlement areas can be epitomized as a 'crisis of land management'. Traditional and modern land tenure systems could not mix well in Zimbabwe's rural areas where the people still practice and acknowledge traditional authority and its land tenure systems. That land has been used as a manipulative tool for political expediency, especially in rural areas makes the discourse of land, power and politics in Zimbabwe's communal and resettlement areas an open one.

SITUATING THE POLITICS OF LAND, BELONGING AND POWER IN ZIMBABWE'S COMMUNAL AREAS

In Zimbabwe, as in other former colonies, land is a highly emotive and politicized issue (Sims 2011). The major problem in Zimbabwe's communal and resettlement area is the incompatible relationship between democratically elected organs of government and traditional (mainly hereditary) structures of social order. The two institutions derive their power and legitimacy from totally different angles and sources, with traditional leaders using traditional laws of the land and customary laws while local government organs claim their power from elections and the constitution and this has provided a surface for conflict. Rural communities are still largely in the hands of traditional leaders who are viewed by their communities as the custodians of the land and other resources according to custom and tradition. With the establishment of local government boards, land rights were transferred to the local municipalities who assumed a new role of Rural District Council (RDC) which made the RDC the *de jure* land authorities in communal and resettlement areas. Friction over the ownership and allocation of land between the

RDCs and the traditional leaders became visible as the later viewed land as their birthright. District Councils, which are represented by elected councilors, become irrelevant in this equation of kinship and this brings problems in the administration of land in rural areas. People in communal and resettlement areas configure the trajectories of belonging when approaching the land issue. By taking land as a benchmark in negotiating the politics of belonging, the conflation of people from different areas and different traditional authorities engendered new politics of belonging which has widened the divisions between those who see themselves as autochthons or the owners of the land and those viewed as outsiders (Mujere 2010). Using the discourse of old homes (*matongo*) and ancestral burial places (*mapa*), chiefs and headmen have sought to reconfigure their traditional boundaries and return to their lost ancestral lands, every time when land reform takes place (Mujere 2010).

This problem has been evidenced by how chiefs, headmen and village heads have continued to allocate land to the people, even though they are not the 'legal owners' according to laws like the RDC Act (1988) Communal Lands Act (1982) which transferred powers over land to Rural District Councils. According to the Communal Lands Act (1982), for example, traditional leaders should only have power in communal areas and the Act makes the resettlement areas out of bounds for traditional leaders. Even during FTLRP, the war veterans wielded more power in allocating land to the landless peasants, yet this was supposedly a prerogative of the chiefs. Whilst the traditional leaders took the FTLRP as an opportunity to reclaim ancestral land lost during colonialism, the government and other socio-political forces like war veterans do not view the land reform from a restitution angle.

The perpetual manipulation and politicization of land and traditional leadership in Zimbabwe presents a problem. Sims (2011) notes that the land issue has been abused as ZANU-PF struggled to retain its political power and legitimacy. During the 2000 parliamentary elections, for example, ZANU-PF slogan was, "Land is the economy, and economy is land". In such a way, land was politicized and racialized to the effect of opening up the wounds of the Second Chimurenga. Consequently, the FTLRP assumed the name "Third Chimurenga" in the same man-

ner as the war for liberation of the 1970s was directed against the Whites. Land has also been used as the platform for indigenization and the Black empowerment discourse without necessarily following the restitution and reclamation angle. To this effect, land has been used as a political gimmick or as a triumph card for the ruling party. Traditional leaders have been and are still being reduced to the level of political agents for political leaders and this is diluting their mandate of serving rural communities in a non-partisan manner. The stipends and salaries the chiefs are getting have made some to side with the state even if some of the policies are detrimental to their communities. A new culture has emerged where chiefs who are supposed to owe allegiance to spirit mediums and ancestors were leading lives that revolved around the dollar orbit defused by those in political power and this trend is problematic in as far as the chiefs may be induced not to challenge some government decisions (The Zimbabwean 2013). From the late 1990s to the present, traditional leaders have been manipulated by the ZANU-PF government for political expediency and in some cases they pursued undemocratic principles in their areas. This has compromised the position of the African traditional authorities since the erosion of their powers translates into loss of legitimacy.

The Politics of Land in Zimbabwe from 1980-1999

Local government reform measures adopted by the new government of Zimbabwe at independence in 1980 were largely inspired by the state's modernization initiatives which sought to undermine the authority of traditional institutions in judicial and land issues. The decentralization process increased the control of the central government on local communities, undermining and distorting the powers and roles of traditional leaders. Although the traditional leaders were not removed, their powers of adjudication and land allocation were transferred to the district councils. The local government was made into an extension of the state (central government) with the RDC placed under direct supervision of the minister of local government. The failure by the new government to co-opt traditional leaders into formal state mechanism in the first two decades of independence lies at

the heart of the confusion surrounding local government and land administration in communal areas.

A study by Ncube (2011) shows that the post-colonial government of Zimbabwe borrowed much from its predecessors in as far as the treatment of the African traditional leaders and their role over the land issue is concerned. While retaining the appearances of indigenous authority, many chiefs were effectively coerced into becoming agents of the state with little or no power over the land. Makumbe (1998) also shows that soon after independence, little was done to correct the distortions left by the colonial legacy and in its efforts to establish a one-party state on the Marxist-Leninist Socialist models; the ZANU-PF government relegated traditional leaders to the periphery. The Village Development Committee (VIDCO) and the Ward Development Committee (WADCO) took the center stage in mobilizing the rural communities towards a Socialist state and members of these committees were drawn mainly from ZANU-PF Youth and Women's Leagues. They became de facto community heads, relegating the traditional leaders as ZANU-PF craved to create a 'strong state' and a 'weak society' to pave way for one-party state. In this way the state penetrated right away to the village level.

The Chiefs and Headmen Act (1982) stipulated that chiefs and headmen could only exercise authority in communal areas, meaning that farms and resettlement areas were out of bounds for the traditional leaders. The act also excluded the traditional leaders in land administration and did not recognize the institution of the village head. Furthermore, the Act did much to undermine the position of traditional leaders in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Mandondo (2000) notes that the Communal Lands Act (1982) took away the powers of the chiefs to allocate land, a prerogative vested in them by the Smith Regime during the 1960s through the Tribal Trust Land Act of 1967.

Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2009) showed that the Communal Lands Development Plan (1988) left the traditional leaders with little more than a spiritual function as they were not made part of the planning of communal lands. It is important to note that the roles of traditional leaders as spiritual leaders also contest with the Church, trimming their influence in rural areas. The RDC Act (1988) established a local government that

excluded the traditional leaders and the RDCs were made the legal authorities of land in communal areas. Chapter 29 (13) also provides for the powers and functions of the Rural District Council (RDC) and their committees. Item 25 of the Act, which is on allocation of communal land states that the District Administrator (DA)'s office prepares the land use plan for the village and issues a settlement permit to the head of each household in the village. The RDC and the DA shall keep an accurate record of all settlement permits issued to each household. Item 26 states that no land shall be allocated except with the approval of the appropriate RDC, which shall be the administrative authority with overall control over the use and allocation of all communal land.

The Land Tenure Commission (1994) recommended that traditional leaders be re-empowered but the Traditional Leaders Act (2000) did little to empower traditional leaders on land matters. Although chiefs became direct appointees of the president, they only retained the power to oversee collection of rates and levies for the RDC. Their power over land is still problematic as Section 26 (1) states that no land shall be allocated except with the approval of the appropriate District Council while Section 26 (4) states that no inhabitant shall dispose communal land by himself without the approval of the village head. There is also lack of clarity on the administration of resettlement areas. The Traditional Leaders Act (2000), Section 5, stipulates that the chief shall be responsible for taking traditional and related administrative matters in resettlement areas, including nominating persons for appointment as headmen by the minister. According to the Act, the minister has the power to authorize a chief to exercise authority over certain resettlement areas provided that the declared area is a single resettlement ward and does not fall under the authority of more than one chief. By sidelining traditional leaders from the management of resettlement areas, a gulf in the management of these areas was created and according to Ncube (2011), this precipitated a crisis of management in resettlement areas.

Chapter 29:17 of the Traditional Leaders Act (2000) states that the president shall appoint chiefs to preside over communities inhabiting communal land and resettlement areas using the prevailing customary principles of succession, if any, applicable to the community over which

the chief is to preside. The president may, where he is of the opinion that good cause exists, remove a chief from office. The section also provides for the payment of such salary, allowances, gratuities and pensions as the president may fix from time to time. This according to Ncube (2011) was a political courtship of traditional leaders by the state after the formation of a formidable opposition party—the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. The way the ZANU-PF government made a U-turn and started to give cosmetic powers to traditional leaders when confronted by the opposition MDC highlighted how traditional powers continue to be pawns in the political survival strategy of governments facing political challenges.

The Traditional Leaders Act (2000) went on to put the traditional leaders under the direct control of the president and the minister of local government who is also an appointee of the President. The Act also gives the President, who through the minister could dissolve any RDC and could dismiss a chief to pursue ‘public interest’. It can therefore be argued that the modernization drive and the decentralization process failed to empower traditional institutions in the running of rural communities. The traditional institutions are continuously at a loss as it was put under direct control of the state, leaving little room for customary initiatives to suffice.

However, despite the efforts by the government to clip the powers of traditional leaders over land issues, there is evidence in Gutu District that traditional leadership is still powerful in rural areas and in practice, chiefs, headmen and village heads allocate land to the people, a function that legally belongs to the district councils. Traditional leaders in the district, as in other parts of the country are defiant to most of the Acts passed by the government since independence. The Communal Land Act (1982) which vested control over land in the President and the RDCs was ignored by most traditional leaders who in practice continued to allocate land to their people on the basis of their tradition.

Village heads Dhumukwa, Mashate and Madzivanyika shared among themselves an area which used to be a water chain and allocated it to landless newly-weds in their villages in 1985. Dhumukwa explained how they went about it and the argument as he put it was as follows:

This land used to be the fields of our forefathers before the colonial period and we do not

see any sense in keeping it as a water chain while our children need land to plough.

It can be noted that whilst the formal resettlement programme was taking its shape during the early years of the 1980s, there was also informal resettlement which was going on in the villages, mainly as a way of reversing the much-hated NLHA of the 1950s and address landlessness in the rural areas. What makes it even more interesting is that even the newly established pro-government VIDCOs were at some points working together with the village heads in allocating land unofficially. The acts by the village heads in continuing to allocate land during the 1980s was also unstoppable as almost everyone thought that the end of the war meant that all the land which was vacant outside the commercial farms and which was made water chains by the NLHA was now up for grabs. It also needs to be remembered that by giving the RDCs land rights, the new government was failing to fulfill the promises it made during the war of liberation. The land issue was well-articulated at every political gathering (*pungwe*) for it was indeed the rallying point during the second *chimurenga*, and the masses thought that the end of the war signifies the rectification of the NLHA. This situation gave birth to a plethora of problems and conflicts between the traditional perspective of land and belonging and the new government’s modernization drive. Even when the Chiefs and Headmen Act (1988) excluded the traditional leaders in land administration, the inhabitants of the communal areas continued to refer most land matters and requests to the traditional leaders. The same Act also failed to recognize the position of the institution of the village head, but village heads continued to assume their duties in land allocation and they were encouraged by the chiefs and headmen.

An elder who is a member of the Gumbo clan in Mutero village under chief Nyamandi said that they were not even intimidated about the banning of the institution of the village head. He said,

We were village heads and we still remain village heads no matter what comes. Governments come and go, but our right to lead this village was bestowed upon us by our foregone fathers.

Such sentiments show how gravitated is the conflict between traditional and modern systems of government in rural politics. As shown above,

in the past, the chiefs, headmen and village heads crafted defiance as a tactic to resist the modernization process and this on its own had devastating effects in the development and transformation of rural areas.

VIDCOs and WADCOs who took over much of the planning and mobilization in rural areas soon after independence were mainly former political commissars and ZANU-PF combatants. However, despite VIDCOs and WADCO's history during the liberation struggles, they still found it difficult to dislodge the traditional leaders from rural politics. They were viewed as illegitimate structures by communities and in most cases they gave up. The District Administrators who replaced the District Commissioners were not accountable to local communities but to central government and as a result the government's top-down approach was often resisted by rural communities and their traditional leaders, who sometimes failed to cooperate with civil servants deployed to their areas without local consultation. This created conflicts and confusion in the administration of rural areas, retarding development.

However, despite the confusion over land ownership and administration, traditional leaders have proved indispensable to the ZANU-PF's survival strategies. As both the state and the ruling party's legitimacy began to slip during the late 1990s, ZANU-PF sought to consolidate its power in the rural areas. The government moved to rekindle its alliance with chiefs and reasserted chiefly authority over rural populations. Traditional leaders were now supposed to play an important role in consolidating what Mamdani (1996) have described as 'decentralized despotism'. This was a clear throwback to the colonial era during the 1960s. Political courtship of traditional leaders by the state further continued post-1999 after the formation of a formidable opposition party: MDC. The Traditional Leaders Act (2000) made chiefs very powerful actors in Zimbabwe's political landscape, usurping that role from the elected councilors. Chiefs at some points (especially during the run to elections) received untaxed allowances, 15 times higher than the elected councilors in addition to benefits from rural electrification schemes and subsidized vehicles (Ncube 2011). The effect has been to elevate the status of chiefs above that of elected councilors who mostly belonged to the opposition MDC. Thus, the struggle for po-

litical space in rural areas, deliberately constructed by ZANU-PF exacerbated the tension between elected councilors and the traditional leaders.

The Traditional Leaders Act (2000) restored the jurisdiction of the traditional leaders in aspects relating to rural communities, most of which have been removed in 1982 through the Communal Lands Act. The Traditional Leaders Act (2000) purports to have completed the so-called re-empowerment of the traditional leaders in judicial and land issues in the communal areas. It is however important to mention at this juncture that the Act was a mere political courtship of traditional leaders by the ZANU-PF-led government, without giving them 'real power' in land matters. Lack of clarity on the duties of the two institutions made land ownership and allocation a contentious issue. Section 26 (1) states that, 'no land shall be allocated except with the approval of the appropriate District Council'. Section 26 (4) states that, 'no inhabitant shall dispose communal land used by him without the approval of the village head'. Section 9 (19) provides for the chiefs and headmen to have a role in land allocation. Munro (1998) notes,

Many years after independence, the question of who controls the land in Zimbabwe's rural areas—the state or the people, individual or community, RDC or traditional leader—remained complex, conflictual and unresolved.

It can be argued that in many cases the roles conferred on chiefs by this Act were a replica of the colonial roles of chiefs. The Act also pitted the traditional leaders against the elected councilors who were mainly from the opposition MDC party. By keeping and maintaining population records from the village level and by influencing the day-to-day lives of their communities, the traditional leaders were made to play a role in twisting voters towards ZANU-PF and they became 'vote banks' for the ruling party.

Traditional leaders who supported the MDC were under constant threats from the security organs of the state. Some were either dethroned or had their privileges withdrawn. As noted by Ncube (2011),

Such developments underline a serious adulteration that the institution of chieftaincy has undergone in the post-colonial period. In the process, chiefs have lost their historical role as custodians of the land and culture, and become political agents and puppets of the post-colo-

nial state. Instead of protecting their subjects, they often participate in their oppression.

This is a sad and perhaps one of the greatest betrayals of the people by their traditional leaders and the state after independence. Perhaps, Gluckman's (1963) argument that in African political life, men were rebels and never revolutionaries, holds water. According to this school of thought, there was no meaningful overthrow of an old socio-political order in favour of new socio-political structures and values. In Zimbabwe, as noted by Scholz (2005),

Despite the rhetoric of a glorious socialist revolution brought about by the armed struggle, the colonial structures and Rhodesian way of life persists. Up until post-2000 era, the post-colonial period did not resemble a revolution.

The Tribal Trust Lands (TTL), for example, were renamed the Communal Lands and African Purchase Areas became small-scale commercial farms, but the colonial structure and administration pattern of land remained largely intact. Furthermore, the manipulation of traditional leaders in both the colonial and post-colonial states has continued to undermine traditional authority, eroding their roles over land administration.

Land and Politics During the FTLRP and Beyond

There is a never-ending debate on what really prompted the land invasions in Zimbabwe. What is clear however, is by the beginning of the 1990s, it was clear that the country faced a crisis over land use and allocation (Muzondidya 2009). By 1987, the population in the country's Communal Lands had risen to 5.1 million and the national average population density was 36 people per square kilometer, up from 3.9 million and 27 in 1982 (Muzondidya 2009). The failure of the government to deliver land in the wake of continued land hunger posed a challenge to national stability as peasants and traditional leaders became more militant in their demands. During the 1990s, land occupations expanded in form of content, as peasants, sometimes led by chiefs and local war veterans sporadically invaded not only private land but also state land (Moyo 2000). This exacerbated the already strained relations over land ownership and administration between traditional leaders and RDCs. This time around, a third factor, namely the war veterans emerged as a formidable force and source of authority over land matters.

The problem became more acute because of the difference between traditional leaders and other social forces on the angle of the resettlement programme. For many traditional leaders and landless peasants, the FTLRP was an opportunity to reclaim their traditional land alienated during the colonial period. Traditional leaders wanted the process to take the restitution angle which would see them reestablishing their traditional boundaries which existed prior to colonialism. This was in contrast with the policymakers and war veterans who saw the FTLRP as a way of giving landless people land to correct the imbalance created by colonialism. They did not attach the traditional claims of belonging and land was to be given to anyone in need of it without necessarily relating to the claims of ancestral land. As a result, resettlement areas have become a melting pot as traditional leaders and war veterans are fighting for space to administer and control the resettlement areas. The lack of a clear policy on how resettlement areas should be administered also contributes to the conflict between traditional leaders, war veterans and the RDC's Lands Committees as will be shown in the discussion below.

It has to be noted that the farm invasions were started by Chief Svosve of Hwedza when he led his people into white-owned farms around Marondera District, marking the land invasions immature. The case of Chief Svosve and his people shows the vital yet neglected trajectory of the role of traditional leaders and their angle of restitution and return to the ancestral lands in the land reform discourse. Traditional leaders around the country followed suit and to them, the FTLRP was reclamation of the land of their ancestors lost during the colonial era. The issue of belonging is central to the land issue in many societies across Africa. In traditional Africa, belonging is linked to the traditional attachment or connection of an individual or clan to the ancestral graves. Ancestral graves and other traditional sacred places provide stages where belonging and boundaries are negotiated. The Shona cosmos strongly believes in the living dead, who form a part and parcel of the functioning of the family and the clan. Graves are the symbolic focal point of human attachment to a place: the living and the dead, the social and the material all connect 'here'. The matrix of land and belonging is shaped by a sense of origin which is rooted in the location where ancestors

were buried and propitiated. The desire to return to the traditional land alienated during the colonial period was one of the major factors that fuelled land occupations and to traditional leaders the FTLRP took the angle of reclamation and restitution of ancestral land (Mujere 2010). This was in direct conflict with what the policymakers, war veterans and other socio-political forces practically wanted.

Whilst the traditional leaders took the restitution angle in the FTLRP, President Robert Mugabe and most war veterans saw the land reform as the 'Third Chimurenga', where they were in a real war with the enemy and this time around the enemy was the MDCs and its so-called Western sponsors. All those who differed with such sentiments were dubbed 'enemies of the state'. Local government officials considered to be opposition supporters were dismissed by local war veteran committees (Raftopoulos 2009). Traditional leaders who were suspected to side with the opposition were not spared the axe and some were dethroned. War veterans asserted their leadership over the implementation of the FTLRP, sidelining local development structures of the RDCs and traditional leaders. In the process, the land reform process started by traditional leaders was hijacked by the war veterans and some ZANU-PF youths. During the fast track process, the role of traditional leaders in beneficiary selection was dramatically overridden by war veterans who, together with many other landless people, saw the FTLRP as a way of simply giving land to the landless Zimbabweans without necessarily embracing the issue of restitution (Moyo and Yeros 2007).

On the other hand, the FTLRP provided traditional authorities with the opportunity to pursue an agenda akin to land restitution as they have been making a number of claims both substantiated and unsubstantiated over the new resettlements which they viewed as their *matongo* (old homes). The FTLRP provided the traditional leaders who are the custodians of cultural heritage places with the opportunity to reclaim lost ancestral lands and sacred places and in some instances demand restitution. As Chakanyuka (2007) puts it;

For the government, FTLRP was meant to return land to the dispossessed indigenous people; yet, for most rural communities it was not only access to fertile land but also restorations of cultural links with the land of the ancestors.

Hence from the beginning, the FTLRP was accompanied by claims based on ancestral links to the land.

Traditional leaders have genuine reasons for reclaiming the sacred place of their ancestors as the Traditional Leaders Act (2000) gives them that mandate as the custodians of the cultural heritage of the nation. One of the aims of the traditional leaders as outlined in the Act is to promote and uphold cultural values, particularly the preservation of extended family and the promotion of traditional life. Thus the non-recognition of such claims by the policymakers on the one hand and the war veterans on the other brewed conflicts.

Formerly, the government through the Communal Lands Act (1982) and the Chiefs and Headmen Act (1982) stipulated that traditional leaders could only exercise authority in communal areas meaning that farms and resettlement areas are out of bounds for the traditional leaders. Even the Traditional Leaders Act (2000) is not very clear on the position of traditional leaders in resettlement areas. The Act emphasizes on traditional leaders to ensure that communal land is allocated in terms of the Communal Land Act (Chapter 20:04). This limits the powers of traditional leaders to communal areas and is in direct conflict with the new trajectory brought by the FTLRP, where traditional leaders seek restitution and want to recast their authority in those formerly alienated lands.

The FTLRP has led to the general marginalization of traditional leaders as the management of the newly resettlement areas has been the responsibility of Village and District Committees as well as war veterans and Base Commanders and the government seems to have continued with its policy of sidelining traditional leaders in the actual administration of resettlement areas, choosing to work with the elected village committees and councilors. Traditional leaders have had to compete for space with the elected committees and councilors, making the resettlement areas a melting pot in as far as tradition and modern forms of land administration is concerned. The supreme land authority in the resettlement farms is the District Lands Committee which is chaired by the DA. The committee has the responsibility of identifying land and allocating it to other beneficiaries without relating to any customary law. It also has the power to withdraw offer letters given to plot holders in

the event of the violation of the offer conditions or absenteeism from the plot. The new village committees in the resettlement areas strongly resemble the VIDCOs created during the early 1980s.

What is important to note is that the elected committees work with almost complete disregard for traditional authorities and this has heightened the tension between traditional leaders and the elected organs. A committee member in the Mazare resettlement area which is directly under the jurisdiction of Chief Makore explained their relationship with the traditional leaders as follows:

... We are an elected body mandated by the government through the District Lands Committee to manage this resettlement area. Chiefs and headmen must not forget that their powers are confined to the communal areas where authority is hereditary and lineage based...

This shows the severity of the conflict between the traditional leaders and the elected organs in the resettlement areas.

The other source of conflict in resettlement areas is over the appointment of village heads. Traditional authorities are pushing for the establishment of village heads (*maSabhuku*) in the resettlement areas that would be answerable to the chiefs and headmen and would ensure that the authority of traditional leaders is not neutralized by that of the village committees. At the moment, though no village heads have been legally appointed in the resettlement area of Velosi in Gutu west, headmen Mutema and Musara appointed representatives in the villages as designates who work towards the allocation of land to new farmers and ensuring that traditional customs such as sacred holidays and sacred places are respected. The headmen see this as the precursor to the appointment of substantive village heads under their authority. There are heated problems especially between Headman Mutema and Headman Musara over the control of Velosi resettlement. The duo makes claims of the area with Musara arguing that the area is in Masvingo District and not Gutu according to the delimitation exercise undertaken by the government between 2003 and 2005. Mutema maintains that the area is under his jurisdiction because the delimitation exercise was only a recent issue which also failed to respect his official precolonial and boundaries. This has witnessed bad blood being drawn between the two

headmen. Putting Headman Mutema's claims into consideration, it can be noted that the government had little respect on the precolonial boundaries of traditional leaders and this illustrates how the state always trembles on the powers of traditional leaders. This is also a throw-back to the actions of the Delineation Officers who had little respect for traditional leaders during the 1960s, conveying the argument that in many ways, the postcolonial state is a replica of the colonial state in so far as the undermining of the powers of traditional leaders over land is concerned.

In many instances, war veterans, prominent ZANU-PF activists and members of the ZANU-PF Youth and Women's League largely dominate the village committees and they combine their political clout and the authority they have as elected members to command respect in villages and determine policy. In the process, they manage to sideline the traditional leaders in the whole administration of the resettlement areas. In fact, they have become chiefs and headmen in their own right, assuming all the duties of the chief, headman and the village head. What makes the whole scenario more complex are the continual agitations by the traditional leaders for the reestablishment of the traditional boundaries that existed prior to colonization as a means to outmaneuver war veterans in the control of resettlement areas.

The Ministry of Lands and Resettlement disempowered the traditional leaders in a similar fashion as the 1980s when they were often portrayed as the 'conservative guard' of the old and 'unproductive' system in the communal areas. This time around the major reason for sidelining the traditional leaders was to reward the war veterans and ZANU-PF activists for successfully carrying the banner of land reform in line with the party's indigenization philosophy which has seen the party managing to recover its support base in the rural areas. It becomes clear therefore that the government was not keen to involve the traditional authorities in the agrarian reform. This also explains why the government was reluctant to give the land reform a restitution angle which would have created political space for traditional leaders as the legitimate claimants of the ancestral lands lost during the colonial period. The divergence of policy, imagination and interests provided a surface of friction between traditional leaders, war veterans,

politicians and other government organs further retarding meaningful development of rural and resettlement communities.

As shown in the paper, lack of clear policy and the politics of manipulation and patronage have led to conflicts between traditional leaders, RDCs, Land Committees and elected councilors in the administration and development of rural areas, making one argue that the development of underdevelopment in rural areas is partly a result of the perpetual manipulation and marginalization of traditional leaders. The way traditional leaders have been lured and sometimes coerced to work for the state has left a dent on their legitimacy and instead of maintaining the tradition of overseeing the well-being of their societies, they have worked for the oppression of their communities. Thus, the communal and resettlement areas became the center stage of ZANU-PF's political activities since 2000, with the traditional leaders and war veterans championing the path for the ruling party, but for different reasons. The relationship between the state and traditional leaders unfolds characteristically with even serious ambiguities during the FTLRP; with the ZANU-PF government attempting to satisfy both war veterans and traditional leaders but failing to clarify their roles in the land reform process and in sustainable land management after land reform.

CONCLUSION

Traditional leaders have been reduced to civil servants and in the process they have been politicized, undermining their power over land. After being used as instruments of control and coercion by the colonial and postcolonial states, the roles of traditional leaders have not materialized and their inputs in developing rural communities have been rubbed off. Both the colonial and postcolonial states have done little to modernize the institution of traditional authority, especially over land. Instead, the governments have manipulated the traditional leaders in a way that strip off their power over land. It can be noted that the relationship between traditional leaders and the state has been characterized by collaboration, conflict, exclusion, accommodation and manipulation. However, on the whole, traditional authority lost its value and significance on more important issues like land ownership and allocation. The state has been using

traditional leaders to build its power and legitimacy on the one hand while traditional leaders also used the state which they often serve on partisan lines to claim for preferential access to state resources like electrified rural homesteads, cars, salaries and farm mechanization implements. As the institution of traditional authority and local government claimed its influence and legitimacy from totally different angles, it has proved to be difficult to create functionary chemistry between traditional leadership and local government. A local government institutional system with an integrated development methodology promoting people-centered local development and a clear clarification of the roles of traditional leaders has proved difficult to attain. As part of concluding remarks, authors' proffers that political participation should encompass osmosis from modernity as well as from traditional good sense. By the same token, this paper recommends that there is a need to stop the politicization of traditional leaders so that they can deliver their duties fairly, impartially and in a non-partisan manner for the benefit of rural communities. If chiefs are to have real power, they should retain the power over land and other resources in their jurisdictions. Traditional land tenure should be allowed to suffice, as it is based on participation of the community as drivers of development. On the whole, the paper managed to justify its assumption that colonial and postcolonial states embraced the panacea of the state's quest for hegemony and how it appealed to institutions such as that of traditional authority to accomplish its goals. There is a persistent tendency of the authoritarian nature of the state in local government, making traditional leaders semi-autonomous players in local politics.

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