

## The Land Question (Un)Resolved: An Essay Review

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### Introduction

Despite bold claims by Zanu(PF) and President Mugabe that the land question has been resolved in Zimbabwe, thanks to the controversial fast-track land-reform programme initiated in 2000, its contested authority and emotive capacity continue to play an influential role in Zimbabwean politics. This is evidenced by none other than Mugabe himself, who again played the land card in his recent electoral campaigns. With no hint of irony or remorse, Mugabe simultaneously called for the country's new farmers to consolidate the "gains of our land-reform programme", whilst adamantly proclaiming that this summer was going to be the "mother of all agricultural seasons" despite the fact that "there is hunger in the country and a shortage of food".<sup>1</sup> This seemingly contradictory rhetoric was accompanied by a massive vote-buying exercise involving the handing out of millions of dollars worth of agricultural equipment and inputs. As unsurprising as the employment of this tactic by Mugabe was, it shows that land and its troubled history still remains at the forefront of the country's political and social imagination and is far from being a problem of the past. The dramatic and devastating effects of the government's land-reform programme marked a significant shift in land politics up to that point and served to drastically reinvigorate, radicalise and fragment an already highly emotive and politicized debate. This essay review attempts to plot a course through the treacherous labyrinth of literature that has emerged on the land question in Zimbabwe since the start of the land reforms in 2000. By doing so, it hopes to highlight the major debates that have arisen, how analyses and points of focus have changed over time and why there has been an extraordinary loss of "the middle ground" in the ensuing debates.

On the most fundamental level, there are two different reactions to the land reforms of 2000: those against them and those for them. However, within these two camps, there are competing voices and approaches that warrant further investigation. This essay will start by looking at those who have criticised the land-reform programme and its management. Attention then turns to those who have written in support of the reforms, before moving on to discuss gaps in the literature and areas that need more research. By doing so, this essay builds on a recent overview of the "land question" written by Jocelyn Alexander.<sup>2</sup> While her review examined elements of the entire historiography on land in Zimbabwe, it supplied only a fleeting glimpse into the post-2000 literature on the topic. By contrast, this essay will show that there

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1. *Mail and Guardian Online*, 10 March 2008 ("Mugabe in massive vote-buying handout"), [http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=334239&area=/breaking\\_news/breaking\\_news\\_africa/](http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=334239&area=/breaking_news/breaking_news_africa/) [accessed 12 March 2008]; *Mail and Guardian Online*, 10 March 2008 ("Mugabe admits hunger exists in Zim"), [http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=334280&area=/breaking\\_news/breaking\\_news\\_africa/](http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=334280&area=/breaking_news/breaking_news_africa/) [accessed 12 March 2008].
2. J. Alexander, "The Historiography of Land in Zimbabwe: Strengths, Silences, and Questions", *Safundi*, 8, 2007, pp 183-198.

is a rich and diverse literature on the recent reforms, covering a wide range of views, beliefs and understandings.

### Critics

Although this camp has produced the overwhelming majority of the literature and scholarship on this topic since 2000, it is by no means homogeneous in its criticism or approach. As will become evident, there are a number of different, sometimes mutually exclusive, criticisms. They can be usefully sub-divided into two sections; “Horrorified Reactions and the White and Western World”, and “More Considered Responses”.

#### a. *Horrorified reactions and the White and Western World*

The most common form of literature that emerged with the start of the controversial reforms, tended to come from two sources; the farmers and white journalists affiliated with Western newspapers. These forms of writing had popular appeal in the West and a seemingly insatiable audience lapped up each new offering as it appeared. When the land invasions started in earnest after Zanu(PF)’s surprising constitutional referendum defeat in February 2000, they attracted a great deal of media attention. Both the local independent press and the Western international media seized on the reforms and castigated the entire process.<sup>3</sup> The increasingly violent nature of the invasions and chaotic manner in which they were carried out, supplied more than enough ammunition for those critical of the reforms. The loudest and shrillest of these voices were understandably the farmers themselves, who faced the very real prospect of losing everything they owned and had worked for. They were however joined by a sympathetic media in many parts of the world, particularly in Britain, the former colonial power. From the very beginning, the fate of the white farmers has had an unbelievably vast amount of representation in the British press.<sup>4</sup> Many of the journalists who wrote “from the front lines”, such as David Blair, Geoff Hill and Andrew Norman, went on to publish books about the land reform and the plight of Zimbabwe.<sup>5</sup> The titles of these books signal the message they carried and promoted: for example Blair’s *Degrees in Violence Robert Mugabe and the Struggle for Power in Zimbabwe*, and Norman’s *Robert Mugabe and the Betrayal of Zimbabwe*. In their eyes, Mugabe has single-handedly masterminded the demise of Zimbabwe and the persecution of its last white inhabitants. Occasionally, they blame the corruption of

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3. For Zimbabwean newspapers, see: *The Independent*, *The Standard*, and *The Daily News*. For international coverage across a wide range of political backgrounds, see: *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Financial Times*.

4. By means of simple quantification, a quick internet search looking for “white farmers” and “Zimbabwe” brought up over 827 000 hits from UK-based pages alone, whereas a search for “farm workers” and “Zimbabwe” only brought up 5 700 hits. Even “land reform” and “Zimbabwe” only finds just over 21 000 hits (all searches carried out on 25 March 2008).

5. D. Blair, *Degrees in Violence Robert Mugabe and the Struggle for Power in Zimbabwe* (Continuum, London, 2002); G. Hill, *The Battle for Zimbabwe The Final Countdown* (Zebra, Johannesburg, 2003); A. Norman, *Robert Mugabe and the Betrayal of Zimbabwe* (McFarland, Jefferson, 2004). For other journalistic accounts, see: C. Lamb, *House of Stone The True Story of a Family Divided in War-torn Zimbabwe* (Harper Press, London, 2006).

Zanu(PF) more generally, but the crisis in Zimbabwe remains a creation of the political elite.

For the most part, these accounts take the side of the now victimised white farmers. There is little investigation as to why calls for attacks on the farming community found such receptive audiences or who supported the land invasions, beyond looking at the “war vets”, or supposed hired thugs of Zanu(PF). There is no space allowed for genuine followers of the land invasions and those who did, were by and large naive and gullible fools lured in by the rhetoric of Mugabe and Zanu(PF). Furthermore, beyond the most cursory of glances, there is nothing in their books on the black farm labourers and the fate they have suffered. Others, like Andrew Meldrum and Martin Meredith have produced more nuanced books on these events.<sup>6</sup> Though still breathlessly journalistic, they are much more engaged with the processes that led to events of 2000, and they do not necessarily support the white farmers every step of the way. This said however, they subscribe to many of the points and failings mentioned above, particularly in seeing Mugabe as the root cause of Zimbabwe’s ills.<sup>7</sup>

The farmers have had other supporters in the West. The world’s foremost economic and monetary organisations have viewed the commercial farmers as a crucial element to Zimbabwe’s economic prosperity and maintained the opinion that without them, Zimbabwe would struggle to maintain any growth or prosperity. The most notable contribution of this nature comes from Craig Richardson.<sup>8</sup> In his book, *The Collapse of Zimbabwe in the Wake of the 2000-2003 Land Reforms*, Richardson claimed that the white commercial farmers were the only ones with the capital, equipment and sophisticated knowledge needed to “wrest a bounty of crops from an inherently difficult farming region”.<sup>9</sup> Black farmers, whose agricultural knowledge apparently only extended to “traditional” or “communal” farming techniques, had no idea how to farm properly and have only succeeded in ruining the fertile soils they have appropriated. Speaking to an orthodoxy established by Hernando de Soto in the 1990s, Richardson blames the ruin of Zimbabwe squarely on the government’s disregard for property right laws. This, as well as destroying the agricultural sector of the economy, led to uncertainty in other areas such as mining and international investment, and the eventual collapse of the country. This narrow and reductionist reading of the Zimbabwean situation has its limited merits, but more interestingly shows that this type of ahistorical reading of an economic implosion has its

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6. A. Meldrum, *Where We Have Hope A Memoir of Zimbabwe* (Grove Press, New York, 2006); M. Meredith, *Our Votes, Our Guns Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe* (Public Affairs, New York, 2002); M. Meredith, *Robert Mugabe Power, Plunder and Tyranny in Zimbabwe* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 2002).
  7. There have been a number of books published by white farmers themselves. For more insight into the content and nature of these books, see a forthcoming review by Pilosoff in *South African Historical Journal*.
  8. See: C. Richardson, “The Loss of Property Rights and the Collapse of Zimbabwe”, *CATO*, 25, 3, 2004, pp 541-565; C. Richardson, *The Collapse of Zimbabwe in the Wake of the 2000-2003 Land Reforms* (Edward Mellen, Lampeter, 2004); C. Richardson, “Learning from Failure: Property Rights, Land Reforms, and the Hidden Architecture of Capitalism”, *American Institute for Public Policy Research*, 2, 2006; C. Richardson, “How much did droughts matter? Linking rainfall and GDP growth in Zimbabwe”, *African Affairs*, 106, 424, 2007, pp 463-478.
  9. Richardson, *The Collapse of Zimbabwe*, p 41.

limitations.<sup>10</sup> Wholesale and widespread respect for property rights is not applicable to every situation, especially when the situation involves a colonial legacy that has not been adequately dealt with or resolved yet.<sup>11</sup>

Returning specifically to the white farmers, they have been remarkably absent from other forms scholarly attention. Although many of the works on events post-2000 mention what has happened to the farmers and their communities, there has been no specific focus on their experiences and understandings of the land reforms or their reactions to it. Only Angus Selby's PhD thesis of 2006 goes some way towards a historically grounded analysis of events between 2000 and 2005.<sup>12</sup> This is surprising, considering the amount of media attention they have received and the large body of literature they have produced themselves. That said, those seeking to champion the rights of the white farmers arguably had the easiest approach of all the works looked at in this essay. The illegality of the land invasions in terms of Zimbabwe's own laws, the accompanying violence, the lack of transparency over redistribution, the crassly self-serving political agenda of Zanu(PF) and Mugabe all gave an easy way in to those seeking to criticise the government. Although no outlets for their work has yet looked at the extent of the trials and tribulations of the white farmers, it would be interesting to see where this coverage was the greatest, why this was so and what form the coverage took in countries such as South Africa, Australia, the UK and USA. As time progressed however, the focus on white farmers alone soon gave way to broader analyses of the crisis affecting Zimbabwe. It is to these works this essay now turns.

**b. More Considered Responses**

Much of this scholarly literature takes into account not only the wide range of forces that have impacted on the land question, but also the various protagonists involved. Initially those works that appeared in the first few years after 2000 were cautious in their assessments. This was partly due to the difficulty of deciphering events on white farms in the immediate aftermath of the land invasions. It however was also because of the tense political climate in which violence and intimidation were rife. It was extremely difficult to gauge how many people freely supported the drive for radical land redistribution. Even so, a number of preliminary studies came out on the back of interviews carried out with farm workers, war veterans and other "invaders".<sup>13</sup>

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10. Jens Anderson levels this claim on Richardson in direct reference to his paper, "How much do droughts matter?", but it is failing of all his work. See: J.A. Anderson, "How much did property rights matter? Understanding food security in Zimbabwe: A critique of Richardson", *African Affairs*, 106, 425, 2007, pp 681-690. For a reply from Richardson, see: C. Richardson, "How much did the expropriation of commercial farms matter to food security in Zimbabwe? Rebuttal to Anderson", *African Affairs*, 106, 425, 2007, pp 691-696.
  11. A recent report by the Centre for Development and Enterprise raises these same concerns for the slow pace of the land reform process in South Africa. See: Centre for Development and Enterprise, "Land Reform in South Africa: Getting Back on Track", *CDE Research*, 16, May 2008.
  12. A. Selby, "Commercial Farmers and the State: Interest Group Politics and Land Reform in Zimbabwe". PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2006.
  13. The terminologies used to describe those who have taken up positions on land are all loaded terms. "Invaders" or "squatters" and similar terms are used mainly by those who are critical of the reforms, while those with more lenient views often employ the term "occupiers" or "settlers".

Often enough, these investigations were carried out by academics, who already had an interest in land politics in Zimbabwe. Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnne McGregor, Eric Worby and Blair Rutherford all contributed to a special edition of the *Journal of Agrarian Change*, published in 2001. In a detailed introduction to this special edition, Worby raised a number of questions over the land “revolution” and those involved in it, while Alexander and McGregor interviewed war veterans, other land invaders, supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and farm owners in Matabeleland. Their article revealed how the land invasions or occupation process in Matabeleland differed from what was happening in Mashonaland. At the same time they provided valuable insights into the motivations of those involved in the invasions and the dynamics of the process. Rutherford, after conducting over 50 interviews with farm workers in Goromozi, Hurungwe and Marondera in 2000, detailed their reactions to the land invasions. Their relations and interactions with war veterans, farmers and state officials were all covered. Of particular interest was Rutherford’s analysis of how farm workers had been politically constructed and represented by government and development organisations.<sup>14</sup> Later works also concentrated on the situation faced by farm workers. Noteworthy here is the study by Lloyd Sachikonye, pointing to a range of indicators that show the massively deteriorating situation of (ex)farm workers.<sup>15</sup> A sophisticated NGO literature, of which Sachikonye’s report is part, has added its weight to the condemnation of the fast-track land reforms. Much of this focuses on farm workers and the difficulties they have faced.<sup>16</sup>

Subsequently, McGregor focused on the war veterans and the role they played in disrupting the local state in North Matabeleland,<sup>17</sup> while Sachikonye sketched an overview of land debates throughout the independence years, in order to point out areas of concern and neglect in the current reforms.<sup>18</sup> Joseph Chaumba, Ian Scoones and William Wolmer looked at the make-up of new “settler”, that is African, communities in the Chiredzi district, how these communities were differentiated and new livelihoods and opportunities they encountered. There was clearly a wide range of individual motivations for supporting land reform. It was also obvious that these new settlements were highly politicised, new settlers having to work hard at negotiating with various patrons and contacts.<sup>19</sup> Between them, these works offer tantalizing glimpses of a range of topics and fields of research that need dramatic and consolidated attention. For now, though, such research opportunities do not exist.

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14. E. Worby, “A Redivided Land? New Agrarian Conflicts and Questions in Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 1, 4, 2001, pp 475-509; J. Alexander and J. McGregor, “Elections, Land and the Politics of Opposition in Matabeleland”, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 1, 4, 2001, pp 510-533; B. Rutherford, “Commercial Farm Workers and the Politics of (Dis)placement in Zimbabwe: Colonialism, Liberation and Democracy”, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 1, 4, 2001, pp 626-651.
  15. L.M. Sachikonye, *The Situation of Commercial Farm Workers after the Land reform in Zimbabwe* (Farm Community Development Trust, Harare, 2002).
  16. International Crisis Group, *Blood and Soil Land, Politics and Conflict Prevention in Zimbabwe and South Africa* (ICG, Brussels, 2004).
  17. J. McGregor, “The Politics of Disruption: War Veterans and the Local State in Zimbabwe”, *African Affairs*, 101, 402, 2002, pp 9-37.
  18. L.M. Sachikonye, “From ‘Growth with Equity’ to ‘Fast-Track’ Reform: Zimbabwe’s Land Question”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 30, 96, 2003, pp 227-240.
  19. J. Chaumba, I. Scoones and W. Wolmer, “New Politics, New Livelihoods: Agrarian Change in Zimbabwe”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 30, 98, December 2003, pp 585-608.

The year 2003 saw the publication of the most comprehensive accounts of the land invasions to date: *Twenty Years of Independence in Zimbabwe* edited by Staffan Darnolf and Liisa Laakso, and *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business* edited by Amanda Hammar, Brian Raftopoulos and Stig Jensen.<sup>20</sup> Although *Twenty Years of Independence* only covers events up to 2001, with many chapters looking at even earlier periods, its considered handling of the land question makes it a most valuable book. Contributions by Norma Kriger and by Laakso are of particular importance.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on her previous experience, Kriger focuses on the role and manipulation of war veterans after 2000. *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business* takes events up to 2003. In trying to understand the historical roots of the current land problem, it stresses throughout that the current crisis affecting Zimbabwe is not simply one about land. Rather it is a "complex set of historically specific, interrelated and mutually reinforcing crises that need to be unpacked and analysed in relation to one another".<sup>22</sup> Discussions of struggle in the countryside obviously must incorporate the political and social upheavals occurring in urban and national settings.<sup>23</sup> Yet where this volume may be weakest is in its failure to grapple with contested notions of liberation and why this has led to Mugabe utilising a nationalist discourse to promote the land reforms and the continuation of Zanu(PF)'s leadership.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, for anyone wanting to understand the current crises in Zimbabwe, there is no better starting point.

The next special journal issue to appear, was the online *African Studies Quarterly* in 2003. Amongst several contributions were those supplied by Susan Booysen and David Moore.<sup>25</sup> Relations between the state and the peasantry

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20. S. Darnolf and L. Laakso (eds), *Twenty Years of Independence in Zimbabwe From Liberation to Authoritarianism* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003); A. Hammar, B. Raftopoulos and S. Jensen (eds), *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business Rethinking land, state and nation in the context of crisis* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2003).
  21. L. Laakso, "Research Debates in Zimbabwe: From Analysis to Practice", in Darnolf & Laakso (eds), *Twenty Years of Independence*; N.J. Kriger, "Zimbabwe's War Veteran's and the Ruling Party: Continuities in Political Dynamics," in Darnolf & Laakso (eds), *Twenty Years of Independence*.
  22. A. Hammar and B. Raftopoulos, "Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation," in Hammar, Raftopoulos & Jensen (eds), *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business*, p 3.
  23. E. Worby, "The End of Modernity in Zimbabwe? Passages from Development to Sovereignty", in Hammar, Raftopoulos & Jensen (eds), *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business*, pp 49-82. In the same volume, see: J. Alexander, "'Squatters', Veterans and the State in Zimbabwe", pp 83-118; N. Marongwe, "Farm Occupation and Occupiers in the New Politics of Land in Zimbabwe", pp 155-190; B. Rutherford, "Belonging to the Farm(er): Farm Workers, Farmers, and the Shifting Politics of Citizenship", pp 191-216; M. Rukuni and S. Jensen, "Land, Growth and Governance: Tenure Reform and Visions of Progress in Zimbabwe", pp 243-262.
  24. I. Phimister, "'Rambai makashinga (Continue to endure)': Zimbabwe's Unending Crisis", *South African Historical Journal*, 54, 2005, pp 120.
  25. S. Booysen, "The Dualities of Contemporary Zimbabwean Politics: Constitutionalism Versus the Law of Power and the Land, 1999-2002", *African Studies Quarterly*, 7, 2-3, 2003, <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i2al.htm> [accessed 18 March 2008]. In the same volume, see: S. Chiremba and W. Masters, "The Experience of Resettled Farmers in Zimbabwe"; D. Moore, "Zimbabwe's triple crisis: Primitive accumulation, nation-state formation and democratisation in the age of neo-liberal globalisation"; B. Sithole, B. Campbell, D. Doré and W. Kozanayi, "Narratives on Land: State-Peasant Relations Over Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe".

over land issues and laws again loom large in these studies. The following year, *World Development* also devoted an entire issue to the land question in Zimbabwe. Predictably, most of the papers in this collection were concerned with analysing development indicators. A variety of approaches attempted to assess the impact of the land reforms on rural livelihoods and how these communities had responded to events around them. At the forefront of most of these articles were competing relations between state and peasantry over the land and political authority. Perhaps the most interesting article, however, was Wendy Willems' article on representations of land invaders in the local press. She illustrates how the coverage they received in the state-owned media was very different to that of the privately owned press.<sup>26</sup>

The year 2004 saw the publication of two more edited collections on the Zimbabwean situation, each of which contained chapters directly related to the land question: *Zimbabwe Injustice and Political Reconciliation* and *Zimbabwe The Past is the Future*.<sup>27</sup> In the former, Sachikonye examined the development of the land question, in the course of which he put forward various explanations for the progression to violence and possible solutions to the current land crisis.<sup>28</sup> Of particular interest about *The Past is the Future*, is the diversity of opinions it carries. Not only does it contain contributions from well-known authors such as Raftopoulos and Sachikonye, who question the wisdom and motivation of the current land reforms, but there are also contributions from war veterans, journalists and academics, who support the present government. The strength of this collection lies less in the individual offerings, than in highlighting the different voices and intellectual struggles over land and politics in Zimbabwe.<sup>29</sup> As some of the contributions to *The Past is the*

26. See A. Barr, "Forging Effective New Communities: The Evolution of Civil Society in Zimbabwean Resettlement Villages", *World Development*, 32, 10, October 2004, pp 1753-1766. In the same volume, see: M. Dekker, "Sustainability and Resourcefulness: Support Networks During Periods of Stress", pp 1735-1751; A. Hellum and B. Derman, "Land Reform and Human Rights in Contemporary Zimbabwe: Balancing Individual and Social Justice Through an Integrated Human Rights Framework", pp 1785-1805; B.H. Kinsey, "Zimbabwe's Land Reform Program: Underinvestment in Post-Conflict Transformation", pp 1669-1696; T. Owens, "External Support During the Transition Phase: Roles for Humanitarian Aid and Development Assistance from a Village Perspective", pp 1711-1733; W. Willems, "Peasant Demonstrators, Violent Invaders: Representations of Land in the Zimbabwean Press", pp 1767-1783.
27. B. Raftopoulos and T. Savage (eds), *Zimbabwe Injustice and Political Reconciliation* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2004); D. Harold-Barry (ed), *Zimbabwe The Past Is The Future* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2004).
28. L.M. Sachikonye, "The Promised Land: From Expropriation to reconciliation and Jambanja", in Raftopoulos & Savage (eds), *Zimbabwe Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, pp 1-18.
29. *The Past is the Future* also contains a piece on the environmental impacts of the fast-track land reform process. See: E. Manzungu, "The environmental impacts of the fast-track land reform programme: a livelihoods perspective". Environment and wildlife protection have been key areas of focus for those opposed to the reforms. Images of environmental destruction and slaughtered wildlife have often been bandied about in press releases. Many academics have also talked about the threats posed to nature reserves, the commons and the environment as a whole, due to the lack of control and organisation over the current reforms. This area of research though, has also suffered from an unfavourable research environment and is in need of a great deal of attention. See: R.L. Hegan, G. Hauer and M.K. Luckert, "Is the

*Future* make clear, the actions of Mugabe and Zanu(PF) have not been without supporters, locally, regionally and internationally. This essay will now focus on two of the land reforms' most passionate supporters.

### The Supporters

Two of the most prominent of these academic voices are Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros. Moyo has long written on the land question in Zimbabwe and the region; indeed his work in the 1990s was widely claimed to be some of the best produced on the topic. His *The Land Question in Zimbabwe* is standard reading for anyone looking to understand the land politics in independent Zimbabwe. His insightful analysis of how the structural adjustment programme adopted by the Zimbabwean government in the early 1990s impacted on land concerns, especially when combined with increasing land pressures in the rural areas at precisely the moment that land hungry nature conservancies and horticultural activities were making themselves felt, is masterful.<sup>30</sup> Convinced of the urgent need for dramatic land reforms, Moyo is an ardent supporter of events since 2000.

Together with Paris Yeros, he has argued in recent years that movements by the peasantry to resolve the land question were "fundamentally progressive", and were mainly a continuation of earlier rural land movements witnessed in the 1980s and 1990s. Moyo and Yeros make a great show of the numbers of people who have benefited from the reforms and claim that this forms part of a "national democratic revolution" initiated by the peasantry with such effect that the government and state had to act upon it.<sup>31</sup> They find fault in other "once progressive" authors on the left whose writings they insist have stagnated over petty issues such as identity, belonging and human rights and, in so doing, have subscribed to imperialists' visions of the crisis in Zimbabwe. Singling out *Unfinished Business* for most of their criticism, they refute concerns and allegations of state violence and dismiss calls for human, political

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Tragedy of the Commons Likely? Factors Preventing the Dissipation of Fuelwood Rents in Zimbabwe", *Land Economics*, 79, 2, May 2003, pp 181-197; W. Wolmer, "Transboundary Conservation: The Politics of Ecological Integrity in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1, March 2003, pp 261-278; W. Wolmer, "Wilderness gained, wilderness lost: wildlife management and land occupations in Zimbabwe's southeast lowveld", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 31, 2, April 2005, pp 260-280; R.C. Fox, E. Chigumira and K.M. Rowntree, "On the Fast Track to Land Degradation? A case study of the impact of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Kadoma District, Zimbabwe", *Geography*, 92, 2007, pp 208-220.

30. S. Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe* (SAPES, Harare, 1995).

31. See: S. Moyo, "Land and Natural Resource Redistribution in Zimbabwe: Access, Equity and Conflict", *African and Asian Studies*, 4, 1, 2005, pp 187-224; S. Moyo, "Land Policy, Poverty Reduction and Public Action in Zimbabwe", ISS/UNDP conference on Land Reform and Poverty Reduction, The Hague, The Netherlands (2005); S. Moyo, "The Radicalised State: Zimbabwe's Interrupted Revolution", *Review of African Political Economy*, 34, 111, 2007, pp 103-121; S. Moyo and P. Yeros, "Land Occupations and Land Reform in Zimbabwe: Towards the National Democratic Revolution", in S. Moyo and P. Yeros (eds) *Reclaiming the Land The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2005), pp 165-208; S. Moyo and P. Yeros, "Intervention the Zimbabwe question and the Two Lefts", *Historical Materialism*, 15, 3, 2007, pp 171-204.



and civil rights as “part of an illegitimate imperial and (neo)liberal agenda”.<sup>32</sup> Moyo and Yeros believe that the land has gone to the people and the benefits of this, if these gains are protected, mark such an important revolution that individual rights are unimportant. Violence of one form or another was inevitable, they argue, especially once the opposition movements in Zimbabwe was co-opted by the imperialist powers and land-owning whites who sought to thwart and destabilise the government and the land movement in Zimbabwe.

However, for all that this message of anti-imperialism has “more than an element of truth in it”,<sup>33</sup> it would seem not to be a significant explanation for recent events in Zimbabwe. Amongst the flaws in Moyo and Yeros’ work, is their dubious claim as to the number of people who have benefited from land redistribution.<sup>34</sup> Much of this has to do with who actually owns or resides on the land now. Here the NGO literature mentioned earlier has been extremely useful in revealing that large numbers of farms have found their way into the hands of Zanu(PF) politicians, government ministers, army personnel and policemen, rather than landless peasants. For example, under pressure from opposition MP Margret Dongo, the government supplied a list in 2002 of farms bought under the willing-buyer willing-seller land-reform model, but which were now occupied by government officials and supporters.<sup>35</sup> This list, known as the Dongo List, was enhanced upon by Justice for Agriculture (JAG) who later in 2002 released a working paper that listed over a thousand farms now in the hands of prominent state officials and party members. More recently, JAG, in coordination with the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, have produced a number of reports on the abuses suffered by white farmers and politicians, policemen and army personnel involved.<sup>36</sup>

Besides these empirical problems, however, there are two further concerns raised by Moyo and Yeros’ work. The first is their notion of a single, solvable land question. As many of the works mentioned above attest, there are any number of competing claims to land and authority. The second is their questionable assessment of the state and government of Zanu(PF). The coercive measures it has utilised have been in place since the liberation war. They made themselves obvious throughout the independence years and the peasantry have not escaped those frameworks, but rather, are working inside them. Alexander and Marongwe have shown that the state and its considerations played a much more important role in the land occupations than those

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32. Moyo & Yeros, “Land Occupations and Land Reform in Zimbabwe”, pp 165-166.

33. Phimister, “Rambai makashinga”.

34. For a number of critical responses to Moyo and Yeros, see: D. Moore, “Marxism and Marxist Intellectuals in Schizophrenic Zimbabwe: How Many Rights for Zimbabwe’s Left? A Comment”, *Historical Materialism*, 12, 4, 2004, pp 405-425; B. Raftopoulos and I. Phimister, “Zimbabwe Now: The Political Economy of Crisis and Coercion”, *Historical Materialism*, 12, 4, 2004, pp 355-382.

35. This list is available online, plus a brief introduction by Margaret Dongo at <http://www.zwnews.com/dongolist.cfm> [accessed 20 March 2008].

36. Justice for Agriculture, Confirmed VIP Land Beneficiaries (Justice for Agriculture, Harare, 2002), available online at <http://www.zwnews.com/issuefull.cfm?ArticleID=5088> [accessed 24 March 2008]; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum and Justice for Agriculture Trust, *Adding insult to injury. A Preliminary Report on Human Rights Violations on Commercial Farms, 2000 to 2005* (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, Harare, 2007), available online at <http://www.zwnews.com/issuefull.cfm?ArticleID=16845> [accessed 24 March 2008].

of the peasantry.<sup>37</sup> This does not deny that there was rural and popular involvement, but what is worrying, is the nature, motivation and aim of these movements and the role of the state behind them.<sup>38</sup> Those who have chosen to defend the land reforms, have chosen by far the most difficult position to uphold precisely because of the role the government has played in the reforms and the tools of the state it has employed to ensure that results of the land reforms suit its ends above anyone else's.

### Conclusions

Despite all that has been written to date, significant gaps remain in the literature. Some of these, noted above, include the need for studies of the complexities of the white farming community, the new land occupiers and how they view the old owners, the state and the new situation. There however are other gaps that are no less surprising. No systematic mapping exercises of the fast-track reforms have been attempted. None of the acquisition lists have been tabulated, mapped or analysed in relation to specific targets areas or regions. Attempts to map where and when invasions took place, might establish correlations between them and areas where there had been extreme land pressures due to overcrowded communal areas or massive land holdings taken up by farms or nature and wildlife conservancies. Such exercises might also reveal links between the invasions and earlier squatter movements in independent Zimbabwe. Perhaps invasions occurred in areas from which people had been forcibly removed in the past. Indeed, this mapping could be taken further: the land invasions might be plotted with reference to other factors such as major roads or police stations, thereby giving some indications of the alleged spontaneity and unplanned chaos of the invasions. Of course, this is something that could also be gained from interviews, but that obviously must wait on an improvement in the political and research climate. For now, though, this kind of research is impossible to carry out.

Already a highly politicised and complicated debate, the controversial events since 2000 have further radicalised and fragmented discussions on the topic. Occurring as they have done within a hyperbole of political, economic and social crisis, has only added to the confusion. As Phimister notes:

Such has been the pace and scale of the crisis that it has far outstripped the ability of most commentators either to anticipate its trajectory, or to develop an historically grounded critique of its dynamics. Virtually every book, article or position paper produced ... has been stuck by the enormity of Zimbabwe's predicament, but only a handful have been able to see beyond its immediate causes.<sup>39</sup>

Collections such as *Unfinished Business* and individual authors like Alexander, Hammar, Kriger and Sachikonye, have gone a long way towards producing the considered and contextualised studies needed to understand the land question in Zimbabwe. Other studies, however, have been less helpful. With the land question as far from resolution as ever, the safest conclusion is that there is still much to be written and debated about this period, which has already had such a dramatic impact on Zimbabwe.

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37. Alexander, "Squatters, Veterans and the State in Zimbabwe"; Marongwe, "Farm Occupations and Occupiers".

38. Raftopoulos & Phimister, "Zimbabwe Now".

39. Phimister, "Rambai makashinga".