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## Zimbabwe's land reform: new political dynamics in the countryside

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The reconfiguration of land and economic opportunity following Zimbabwe's land reform from 2000 has resulted in a new politics of the countryside. This emerges from the processes of accumulation and differentiation set in train by the land reform. Yet these politics are contested: between the interests of new 'middle farmers' who are 'accumulating from below' and politically connected elites and large-scale capital who see different opportunities for land-based accumulation. These dynamics are being played out in different ways in different parts of the country, depending on the agroecological potential of the area, the way the land reform unfolded and local political actors and processes. Based on research over the past 14 years, this paper examines two areas in Masvingo province and develops a contrasting analysis of emerging political dynamics. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for the longer-term politics of agrarian change in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Zimbabwe; Masvingo; land reform; agriculture; politics; livelihoods

[La réforme foncière du Zimbabwe: les nouvelles dynamiques politiques en milieu rural.] La reconfiguration des opportunités économiques et foncières à la suite de la réforme foncière de 2000 a entraîné la formation d'une nouvelle politique en milieu rural. Cette dernière provient des processus d'accumulation et de différenciation découlant de la réforme foncière. Cette nouvelle dynamique politique est déjà contestée : entre les intérêts des nouveaux 'paysans moyens' qui 'accumulent en partant du bas de l'échelle' d'une part, et les élites politiquement connectées et du capital à grande échelle qui entrevoient différentes opportunités d'accumulation à partir du foncier d'autre part. Ces dynamiques se déroulent de manières différentes dans différentes régions du pays, en fonction du potentiel agro écologique de la zone, de la manière dont la réforme foncière s'est passée, et des processus et acteurs politiques locaux. A partir d'un travail de recherche sur 14 ans, cet article examine deux zones de la province de Masvingo et développe une analyse contrastée des dynamiques politiques émergentes. Cet article se conclut par une discussion sur les implications des changements agraires au Zimbabwe sur la politique à plus long terme.

**Mots-clés :** Zimbabwe ; Masvingo ; réforme foncière ; politique ; moyens de subsistance

### Introduction

Zimbabwe's land reform from 2000 has resulted in major changes in production, marketing and livelihoods (Scoones *et al.* 2010). These reconfigurations have had a dramatic influence on rural politics, creating new political dynamics in the countryside. This relationship between politics and economy is key for understanding longer-term trajectories of agrarian change and development.

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Through a mix of spontaneous invasions and orchestrated occupations, the net result of what came to be called the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) was that around 150,000 households were settled in smallholder areas (called A1 schemes in Zimbabwe), plus a further 30,000 households were allocated medium-scale so-called A2 farms. In addition there were many thousands of ‘informal’ settlers who claimed land but were not recognised by the state, and given registration documents (‘offer letters’).

The numbers remain rough, as a full audit has yet to be undertaken, but the scale is significant, representing well over a million people moving to new land, along with many labourers and other family members who have joined over time. This represented around eight million hectares, around one-fifth of the total land in the country. This was one of the largest land redistributions in the last 30 years; a period when land reform had largely gone off the policy agenda. This reform has had major implications for Zimbabwe – and its lessons are relevant to many other countries where skewed land distributions persist, especially in the southern African region.

The land reform has therefore resulted in a new agrarian structure (Table 1). Most farmers – over 90% – are smallholders, now on over 80% of land. But, as will be discussed below, these ‘new farmers’ are highly differentiated. According to official figures from 2010, 12% of all land holdings are A1 smallholder plots. There has been a significant shift from the large-scale farm and estate sector from 34% of land area to just over 10%, although many large commercial estates in particular, controlled by international capital, persist. There is also now a medium-scale farm sector (A2 farms), which is meant to focus on commercial production.

The aim of this paper is not to discuss the economic and livelihood characteristics of the new agrarian setting, as this has been discussed extensively elsewhere (see Moyo *et al.* 2009; Scoones *et al.* 2010; Cliffe *et al.* 2011; Matondi 2012).<sup>1</sup> Instead, the paper attempts a political reading of the new situation, something that reviews of earlier work suggested was missing (Rutherford 2012). The results of the July 2013 elections perhaps give a clue to some of the story, as, despite considerable irregularities, many commentators now agree that the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the ruling party and the backer of the land reform, won, and a new era is emerging (Raftopoulos 2013b; Tendi 2013).

In this paper, I argue that the reconfiguration of land and economic opportunity has resulted in a new politics of the countryside that emerges from the processes of accumulation and differentiation set in train by the land reform. Yet this politics is contested:

Table 1. Changing distributions of land and people in Zimbabwe, 2000–10 (Scoones *et al.* 2010; Moyo 2011a, 2011b).

	No. of households (000s)				Hectares (000s)			
	2000		2010		2000		2010	
	No.	%	No.	%	ha	%	Ha	%
Communal	1050	92.2	1100	81.2	16,400	50.1	16,400	49.8
Old resettlement	75	6.6	75	5.5	3667	11.2	3667	11.1
A1	–	–	146	10.8	–	–	4137	12.6
Small-scale commercial farms	8.5	0.7	8.5	0.6	1400	4.3	1400	4.3
Small A2	–	–	22.7	1.7	–	–	3000	9.1
Large-scale	4.7	0.4	1.4	0.1	7905.6	24.1	1156.9	3.5
Estates					3384	10.3	2401.6	7.3

between the interests of new ‘middle farmer’ accumulators and politically connected elites and large-scale capital. These dynamics are being played out in different ways in different parts of the country, depending on local political processes, the way land reform unfolded and the agroecological potential of the area. Based on a detailed longitudinal analysis, this paper examines two areas in Masvingo province: the ‘core’ land reform areas of Gutu and Masvingo districts, and the more ‘peripheral’ areas in Chiredzi and Mwenezi.

### Narratives of land reform

Over the last decade or so there have been many excellent studies on Zimbabwe’s land reform, providing a rich empirical picture of the impacts, consequences and outcomes of land reform. While there are important variations and nuances, there are many important convergences. Unfortunately, the wider debate about the politics of land reform has often been dislocated from this grounded, empirical reality. Instead this has been dominated by two broad narratives.

The first is a nationalist, populist perspective that emphasises ‘the people’ taking back the land through a bottom-up process (Hanlon *et al.* 2012). The land invasions were thus part of a rural popular, political movement (Moyo and Yeros 2005). For some this was the ‘third Chimurenga’, the culmination of the liberation struggle (Moyo and Yeros 2007a). The state and party appropriately backed this, as a response to a political will of the people, and so provided the legal and technocratic framework for redistributive reform as part of the FTLRP (Moyo and Chambati 2013).

The second is very different. This argues that the land reform was an orchestrated response to the outcomes of the referendum of 2000, and a panic within ZANU-PF, who saw its support leaching away to a growing opposition (Sachikonye 2002; Hammar, Raftopoulos, and Jensen 2003). ZANU-PF, and its political–business–security elite in particular, had become used to the benefits of corrupt state patronage, and was in danger of losing control (Bracking 2005; Raftopoulos 2009, 2013a). The move to take over land by force and with violence was a desperate response, but had all the hallmarks of the violent, racially defined nationalist politics of ZANU-PF, which emphasised exclusionary sovereignty over development, and violence and patronage over democracy (Moore 2012; Alexander and McGregor 2013). Some even referred to ‘the end of modernity’ (Worby 2003), and land reform, along with a range of practices in the post-2000 era, has been defined in terms of a patronage politics (Zamchiya 2013).

Neither of these narratives, however, hold up to any close scrutiny. The two narratives have of course been presented here in a rather simplistic and stereotypical form; and indeed all the authors quoted above nuance their arguments significantly, and none adhere to these overly neat renditions in their entirety and without qualification. Yet, nevertheless, division between these two narratives, and their multiple variations – described by Moyo and Yeros (2007b) in terms of ‘the two lefts’ – is clear in popular, political, media and academic discourse, and often reflects the political rhetoric of the major political formations in the country.

In this paper, I want to explore why these narratives are not useful, and what a more sophisticated assessment of rural politics might look like, more rooted in the empirical realities on the ground than the ideological grandstanding that has so polarised the debate on land in Zimbabwe since 2000. I will do this through reflections from Masvingo, where I have worked with colleagues over the past 14 years investigating the consequences of land reform.

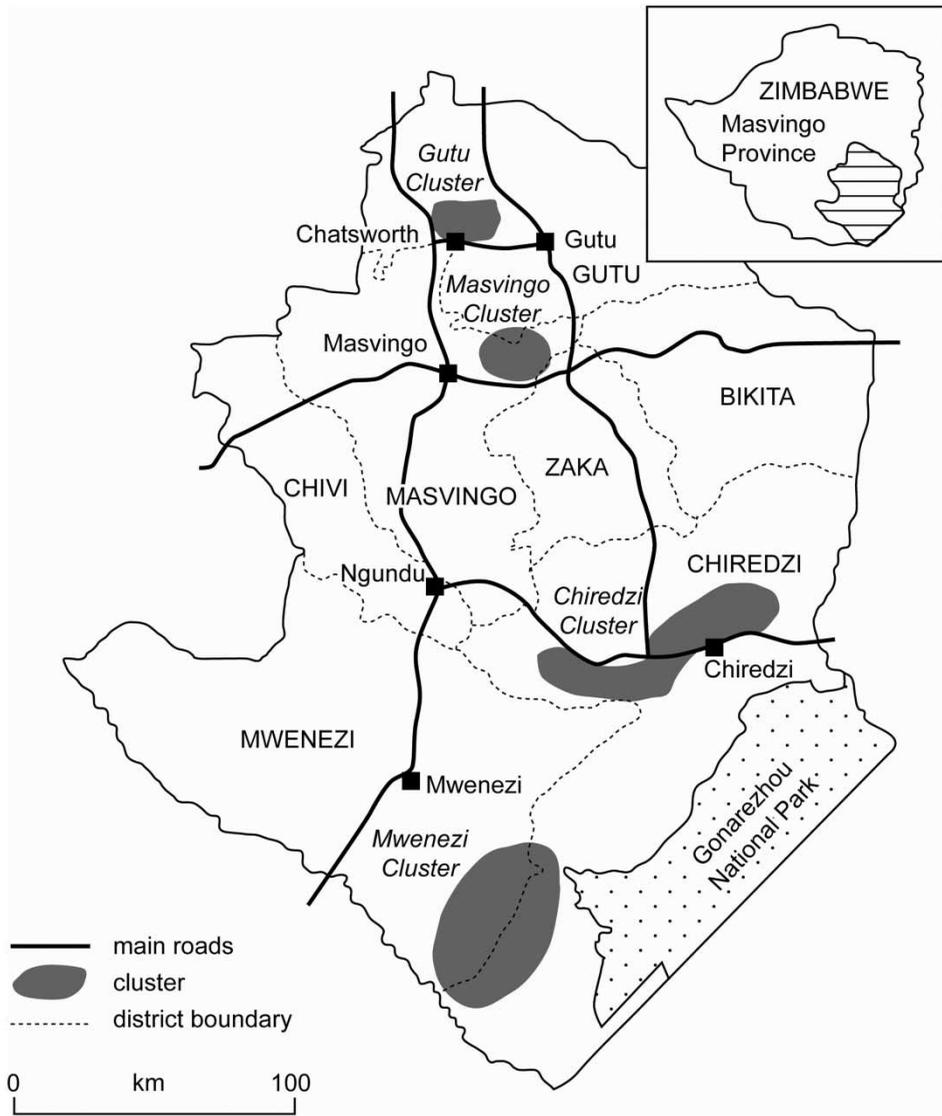


Figure 1. Map of the study area.

Since 2000, we have been tracking what has happened to around 400 households who got land in the early 2000s in 16 sites in Masvingo province, covering different agroecological zones and different resettlement models. I want to concentrate on the political dynamics in two areas in particular. These represent first what might be called the ‘core’ land reform areas. Here there are higher population densities, more resettlement areas, better-quality land and more formal planning of new resettlements, associated with greater state presence. In our study area this is represented by Gutu and Masvingo clusters to the north. The second area is what might be termed the ‘peripheral’ areas in the Lowveld. These are where land reform was much more contested, as land was taken over in state land, on the estates, and very often new settlements ended up not being confirmed by the FTLRP, at least for a long period. Being drier and more marginal, the agroecological potential is

lower, with implications for risks, returns and the dynamics of accumulation. In our study, these are represented by Chiredzi and Mwenzi clusters (Figure 1).

The contrasts explored below tell us about how locally specific political dynamics, alliances and resistances are important; and how outcomes are often contingent and unexpected. They tell us about how patterns of social differentiation have resulted in political dynamics that are always evolving, as some accumulate while others struggle. This results in changing class positions and shifting class relations, as some emerge as small-capitalist farmers, while others are more reliant on selling their labour. They tell us about how elites are important and capture, grabbing and expropriation of resources is a feature; but the cases also show how elites are not necessarily all-powerful, and how resistance can be important, and sometimes successful. And the analysis shows how the state operates in very different ways, even within one province, with the 'peripheral' areas being very much on the margins of state power, while formal bureaucratic and political authority is much more evident in the 'core' areas.

While our Masvingo studies are of course specific to the provincial context, and very much wrapped up in a particular Masvingo politics, the findings do however tell a broader story about agrarian change and politics, increasingly borne out by the wider set of studies that have now taken place across the country.

### A new rural politics?

Rural issues are important in Zimbabwean politics, both numerically and rhetorically. They always have been, and it is no surprise that the liberation war was fought from a rural base, with a rural constituency supporting the struggle (Ranger 1985). Rural issues are also important for urban voters, given the strong connections between town and countryside, and the patterns of migration that occur across a very blurred divide (Potts and Mutambirwa 1990).

A quick review of Table 1 shows the implications for electoral politics of the new agrarian configuration. Smallholder farmers dominate. Most are of course in the communal areas, but the links between the communal areas and the new resettlements are strong through kinship ties, economic links, labour sharing and aspirations for a better life that the land reform areas hold up.

As I will argue below, a new emergent middle farmer group centred on the new resettlements but extending beyond is potentially a key political force. In a rough calculation, this group represents about a quarter of the rural electorate, around a million voters.<sup>2</sup> It is this group indeed that may have shown its influence on 31 July 2013. Within and beyond this group are alliances between the rural population and a middle class with rural interests. This middle class, now many with land, have links to town, they often have other jobs, they are relatively asset rich and they have connections, both political and economic. They are very different to the earlier mass of rural people in the former 'reserves' (now communal areas), created in the colonial era as a labour pool and place for retirement where small amounts of poor-quality land provided some form of social security, in the absence of other state support (Arrighi 1970), although class divisions and development challenges remain similar (cf. Bush and Cliffe 1984; Cousins, Weiner, and Amin 1992).

Finally, Table 1 clearly shows that state and large-scale capitalist agriculture is still a feature of the Zimbabwean agrarian landscape, and the interests of capital, and what alliances these fractions forge, should not be forgotten in any analysis of agrarian trajectories (Moyo and Chambati 2013).

Key questions for a political analysis therefore centre on how the new ‘middle farmer’ class mobilises, across communal and resettlement areas, and whether this is feasible given the disparate origins. Further, it is important to ask who will such a group ally with – particularly the poor, women and the youth, who have benefited less from land reform but have aspirations. And also we need to know where the state will put its emphasis, and material and political resources. Ultimately, we must ask who will be backed? Will it be a politically connected elite demanding further patronage, or will the aspirations and demands of a new middle farmer class hold sway? And which political parties or factions across Zimbabwe’s political formations will back who? Of course the answers to these questions cannot yet be known. But an analysis of political dynamics, contrasting the core and peripheral areas of Masvingo, does throw some light, as I will show below.

### Land, social differentiation and patterns of accumulation in the core farming areas

Who got the land in our ‘core’ Masvingo and Gutu study areas? [Table 2](#) shows the data. The land reform beneficiaries were a mix. But, as already noted, they were very different to the communal area populations from where many originally came. Overall, those who got new land were younger, better educated, more connected to urban settings and had better access to even limited capital. The social mix was also different, with those who had off-farm jobs, businesses and political connections (for example, across our sample 9% were identified as ‘war veterans’, many having been civil servants, or retired in the communal areas).

[Table 2](#) offers a snapshot of the origins of the new settlers in the Gutu and ‘core’ Masvingo resettlement areas of our sample. But we have to understand the pattern of differentiation that has emerged since land reform to get a sense of the emergence of new classes, and how these intersect. An analysis of social differentiation therefore gives us a clue to an emerging political dynamic. From detailed household-level livelihood analysis across our full provincial sample of 400 households, we identified four broad groups, and a range of 15 livelihood strategies shown in [Table 3](#) (Scoones *et al.* 2010, 2012a).

From these data from across the province, three key points can be drawn out. First, a pattern of ‘accumulation from below’ (cf. Neocosmos 1993; Cousins 2010) is observed whereby there is a group of new petty commodity producers who regularly sell, continuously invest, and who are new farm-based entrepreneurs. This group are stepping up and out (cf. Dorward *et al.* 2009), and are involved in a range of farm and off-farm activities in combination. In [Table 3](#), the bold/italicised livelihood strategies represent 48% of the population, although those who are regularly accumulating are between 30% (in the drier

Table 2. Land reform beneficiaries (% households from ‘core’ Gutu/Masvingo sample only).

Origins	A1 – self-contained ( <i>N</i> = 75) %	A1 – villagised ( <i>N</i> = 142) %	A2 ( <i>N</i> = 18) %	Total ( <i>N</i> = 235) %
‘From nearby rural areas’	41	59	22	51
‘From nearby urban areas’	17	10	22	13
Civil servant	28	14	28	20
Business person	8	4	22	6
Former farm worker	1	10	6	7
Security services	4	4	0	3

Table 3. Livelihood groups and strategies.

Livelihood group	Livelihood strategy	Total	Livelihood description
Dropping out (10.0%)	Exits	4.4%	Those who have abandoned their plot, owing to deaths in the family, other commitments, or having been removed through administrative (land audit) or political means. No one living there currently.
	Chronically poor, destitute	3.3%	No assets, reliant on help from others, limited farming.
	Ill health	2.2%	As above, but suffering severe consequences of death or ill health of one or more family members.
Hanging in (33.6%)	Asset-poor farming	17.8%	Limited assets (of cattle, labour etc.), relying on others to help out with draught power etc.
	Keeping the plot	10.3%	The plot is being kept for the future – either for inheritance purposes or for later investments when conditions improve. A few relatives and/or workers occupy the plot.
	Straddling	5.6%	Maintaining multiple homes/farms/herds, both in the resettlement area and the communal land, but not producing much on new plot.
Stepping out (21.4%)	Survival diversification	2.8%	Border jumping, gold panning, <i>makorokoza</i> (dealing), sex work. Limited farm assets and low production, sufficient for household food security in only some years.
	Local off-farm activities	5.3%	Building, trading, craft activities etc. complement accumulation from farming, and offset production deficits in some years.
	Reliance on remittances from within Zimbabwe	5.0%	Teachers, civil servants and others, with a farming base and some remittance income, allowing investment and some accumulation on farm.
	Reliance on stable remittances from outside Zimbabwe	4.4%	Those receiving regular remittances from abroad, allowing more substantial investment in the resettlement home and farming, and a complement to farm-based accumulation.
	Cellphone farmers	3.9%	Those with other business interests/sources of income who fail to visit the farm regularly and are not really investing significantly. Workers and farm managers run the operation, while the plot holder lives and works elsewhere.
Stepping up (35.0%)	<i>Hurudza</i>	18.3%	The 'real farmers', accumulating through agriculture, as some in the communal areas did before. They sell regularly to a diversity of markets. Sufficient farm resources – cattle/draught, equipment etc. Often hire in significant labour.

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

Livelihood group	Livelihood strategy	Total	Livelihood description
	Part-time farmers	<b>10.6%</b>	Farming not the sole enterprise, but a core livelihood activity supported by off-farm work. Accumulation on farm significant, and assets sufficient for farming. May hire in labour through remittance income sources.
	New (semi-)commercial farmers	<b>4.7%</b>	Those with skills and resources who have a large plot (A2 or A1 self-contained). Investment into farm through off-farm businesses or employment paying in foreign exchange. They have started to farm productively, reinvesting in the plot.
	Farming from patronage	1.4%	Those who have received support from the state through various forms of patronage, who have been able to invest in the farm. Mostly A2 farmers. Production may be significant.

peripheral areas) and 40% (in the wetter, core areas). Second, there is a process of social differentiation going on. There are clear winners and losers. Those who are not accumulating are combining farming with labouring (farmer-workers), others are dropping out and joining a rural proletariat, or are engaged in survivalist coping strategies and ‘straddling’ livelihoods. Third, a pattern of elite capture is part of the story. This includes some of the ‘cellphone’ farmers and those we defined as ‘farming from patronage’. This amounts to around 5% of farmers. Such elite capture is far from dominant, contrary to the suggestions of some (cf. Zamchiya 2011), but in some A2 areas in particular we can observe patterns of ‘accumulation from above’, where patronage connections offer opportunities unavailable to others. While small in number, this group is disproportionately influential in social and political terms, and certainly cannot be ignored.

The significant point for this paper is that in the new resettlement areas, there is an important new ‘middle farmer’ group, rooted in petty commodity production and linked into successful accumulation from below. This may be 30–40% of the total population, even in the relatively dry areas of Masvingo province (we can expect this to be higher in the tobacco boom areas of the Highveld for example).<sup>3</sup> These new accumulators are especially evident in the A1 areas, particularly the ‘self-contained’ schemes, and they are regularly selling, investing and accumulating assets,<sup>4</sup> with production often linked to a cash crop such as vegetables or cotton and, in A2 outgrower areas in the Lowveld, sugar. Combined with similar accumulators in the communal areas (smaller in proportion, but overall large in number), this group is highly significant in the new politics of the countryside, and must be set alongside the new rural elite, often connected to the party-state through patronage, in any political analysis.

Why are the new accumulators important politically in these core areas? First is the connection between the food economy and politics. The new land reform areas are central to supplying food, particularly for urban consumers. While there are frequent debates about impending food shortages, there remains a poor understanding of the national food economy post land reform. In particular, the scale of food production from the new

resettlements is seriously underestimated, as the national aggregate figures simply do not match the reality on the ground.<sup>5</sup> Second, commercialised farm production links product markets with the core economy. Whole value chains, including links with input suppliers, distributors, aggregators, transporters, retailers, supermarkets and more, are reliant on successful producers. Third, farm employment is important for the livelihoods of many. In our Masvingo sites, 42% of A1 self-contained and 63% of A2 farmers hire temporary workers, while 16% and 78% hire permanent workers respectively (Scoones *et al.* 2010). This group, along with the workers across the value chains linked to farm production, are reliant on successful farm-based accumulators. Finally, the linkages to the communal areas remain important. The new resettlements are often adjacent to communal lands, and various kin, friendship, church-based and other connections tie people together in arrangements around cattle grazing/sharing/loaning, food relief/transfers and labour, with new land reform areas attracting new members to the resettlement households. A much wider group is reliant on and has connections with the new accumulators than the immediate household therefore. All these factors combine to re-emphasise the role of the new middle farmers in both economic and political terms.

But what about elite capture, party dominance and patronage? This has been the standard critique of land reform in Zimbabwe. While it is often based on spurious data on ‘crony’ capture<sup>6</sup> this does not mean that it is irrelevant. What is the story in our areas? Around 5% of farms, perhaps 10% of land, mostly A2, can be described as captured by a political–military connected elite. As noted, this group can be very influential in certain areas, and at certain times. Land reform areas certainly were no-go areas for the opposition, especially in the 2008 elections when violence erupted (although in Masvingo not in the same way as in certain parts of Mashonaland East, for example).<sup>7</sup> But this does not mean that people did not vote for the Movement for Democratic Change in the resettlements. In 2008 they did in numbers, but in 2013 they switched back to ZANU-PF, and with less violence and intimidation. Party affiliation, as Zamchiya (2013) argues, is important, but people are well practised at ‘performing ZANU-PF’ (Mkodzongi 2012). War veterans are important (9% of the beneficiaries in our areas), but there is rather a myth about this group of people. Most had not identified themselves as such for years. Many were communal area dwellers, low-paid employees in town or farm workers. They often led the invasions, and used their influence to get allocated better plots, but they often lost out to better-connected elites in contests over larger land areas in the A2 farms in particular.

Yet overall, the A2 farmers who were allocated the larger farms were by and large not classic elites; they were more a richer, middle-class group of (former) civil servants (lots of agricultural extension workers for example), business people and others (Table 2). Patronage was unquestionably important in some allocations (Marongwe 2011), but the A2 schemes certainly cannot be described only in terms of patronage-driven elite capture.

And indeed those who did ‘grab’ land, especially around the time of the 2008 elections, were widely resented, and often shunned by the more legitimate beneficiaries. Other forms of resistance have occurred too. The underutilised areas of A2 farms were often subject to secondary invasions. Many of course did not benefit from the land reform in 2000, particularly the youth, and a decade on demand for land was building up. Examples of land invasions in the core areas of Masvingo continue.<sup>8</sup> Some have occurred on remaining ‘white’ farms, but other black elites were targeted too. The outcomes are variable. Sometimes a land holder defends their farm against invaders, and uses their connections to get the police to remove people; in other cases invaders have been allowed to stay. The balance

of forces is not certain, as in the fickle politics of Masvingo people move in and out of favour with remarkable rapidity.

Therefore, in thinking about the emergent politics in the ‘core’ land reform areas of Masvingo, we have to disaggregate the so-called elite, and be realistic about what role ZANU-PF, war veterans and others actually played by looking at the process of farm invasion and acquisition in detail. This differed farm by farm, and generalisations are impossible. We also have to understand the patterns of differentiation, and recognise the relationships that are emerging between a significant group of ‘middle farmer’ accumulators and others, both in the resettlements but also in the communal areas, and up and down value chains to which they are connecting. It is in this highly dynamic livelihood setting within which an understanding of politics must be set.

### **Uncertainty, insecurity and resistance: the peripheral Lowveld areas**

In this section I turn to the more peripheral areas of the province further south in the Lowveld. Here we see a similar dynamic of social differentiation and class formation, as illustrated in Table 3, but with some important twists.

As mentioned earlier, these were areas where the new settlers invaded not only former white commercial farms, but often state land operated by parastatals or trusts (such as the Nuanetsi ranch controlled by the Development Trust of Zimbabwe [DTZ] on behalf of Joshua Nkomo’s estate); private wildlife conservancies and national parks (such as the Save Valley conservancies or Gonarezhou National Park) or private commercial estates controlled by international capital (Tongaat Hulett in the case of the sugar estates of Triangle and Hippo Valley).

These are areas where other politics are at play. The estates and the wildlife areas were largely protected from land reform, as high-level deals were struck and people were evicted if invasions took place. State farms similarly were areas that were deemed inappropriate for new settlement. But this did not mean that people took notice. For example, the northern edge of Nuanetsi was invaded, further south Gonarezhou National Park (or at least the veterinary corridor) was similarly settled, and the former large-scale outgrower areas of the sugar estates were in the end allocated as part of A2 settlements (Chaumba, Scoones, and Wolmer 2003; Scoones *et al.* 2012b). There have been intense contests over these areas over the last 14 years.

The case of Nuanetsi illustrates some of the dynamics. One of our study sites, designated when we started as ‘informal’, as land had not formally been allocated under the fast-track programme, was in Uswaushava area on the northern edge of the ranch. It became very quickly a booming cotton production zone. But the area was being eyed up by others. The DTZ had made alliances with potential Chinese investors (for sugar) and the notorious businessman Billy Rautenbach (again for sugar, but also for crocodile farming among other enterprises). Rumours abounded about political connections at the highest level.<sup>9</sup> The Chinese project never materialised, but the Rautenbach investment did – large centre pivots appeared, a huge investment in a crocodile farm was installed and land was cleared for planting sugar.

Not surprisingly, people in Uswaushava had other views, as they did not want to abandon their cotton production, now highly profitable and linked to a number of companies that had gins nearby (Scoones *et al.* 2010). They had previously tried to get their land recognised under the land reform programme, and had blocked the road between Ngundu and Chiredzi, setting fire to brushwood as part of a protest during 2001. They had petitioned

politicians in Masvingo and Harare continuously but to no avail. Wider political forces, they suspected, were at play.

Later, the DTZ and the investors tried to make a deal with the war veteran group at the centre of local political organisation in the area, offering them new houses, irrigated plots, electricity connections and more, if they abandoned their compatriots in the informal settlements. This attempt to buy off the local political leadership badly backfired, and a furious row broke out, with the government and DTZ officials held hostage for some hours before the situation was defused by a local politician.

Recognising that this was going to be a long and possibly impossible battle to win, Rautenbach withdrew, shifting his investment to Chisumbanje to the east, and contracting his operations in Nuanetsi to areas further south. The villagers had won – and soon after the authorities provided ‘offer letters’ for the 188 villages and *c.*5400 households across 150,000 hectares in Uswaushava. They could return to their cotton production with some level of security.

Similar standoffs have occurred in the wildlife areas, where again the land invaders eventually extracted concessions from the National Parks Authority after an extended dispute (Scoones *et al.* 2012b). Disputes have also flared in the sugar estates. Here there have been multiple conflicts between the estate owners, the South African conglomerate Tongaat Hulett, who tried for years to block out the new farmers through consistent undermining of their production and marketing operations (relatively easy since they had monopoly control of the mill), in the hope that they would give up and a more easy-to-manage, consolidated outgrower arrangement would return.

However, following the improvement in the economy after dollarisation in 2009, the A2 outgrowers returned to sugar production, and have persisted with remarkable success.<sup>10</sup> The estate owners have realised the land reform is not going away, and in fact relatively small growers can deliver high-quality cane, desperately needed by the faltering mill businesses. Thus an accommodation has been reached, at least for now, between large-scale international capital and the land reform outgrowers, with the backing of the state.

In the sugar areas, a further conflict has arisen between those allocated sugar farms under A2 schemes, and local Shangaan elites who mostly did not gain from the initial allocations, as this was an area where external civil servants – especially officials of the agriculture and lands ministries – and former estate officials gained (Scoones, Mavedzenge, and Murimbarimba 2014). Shangaan elites now argue that some form of ‘restitution’ to ‘original’ owners is required.<sup>11</sup> This was a tactic used successfully by the Sangwe invaders of Gonarezhou National Park (Chaumba, Scoones, and Wolmer 2003; Wolmer *et al.* 2004). However, restitution claims are very explicitly not part of government policy on land reform, so restitution claimants, despite the protests, find it difficult. Whether the restitution argument will gain traction will depend on the local politics of Masvingo and how Shangaan groupings influence the political factions in the province over time. No doubt, as in other cases, informal deals will be struck on occasions.

Given the different context for land reform in these peripheral areas of the Lowveld, and the more tenuous reach of the party and state, the nature of political contestation is different. Here land claimants were up against large, well-organised capitalist and state interests – in the commercial farming estates and wildlife areas – and not white commercial farmers, who were clearly not in favour politically in the post-2000 era.

While the dynamics of differentiation and class formation mirrors that seen in the core areas, with the emergence of a ‘middle farmer’ group of accumulators, the political impact of such a group, and its ability to form alliances, is tempered by a number of factors. First, the possibilities of accumulation outside the irrigated sugar estates is relatively limited owing to unfavourable agroecological conditions. This is a dry and marginal area where

extensive beef ranching and wildlife use previously dominated. A shift to small-scale crop farming has not always been successful, although the cotton farmers of Uswaushava prospered when the cotton price was high. Second, other factors have come into play that have prevented new farmers from establishing themselves. The 10-year struggle for recognition by the farmers of Uswaushava is witness to this. In this period, they suffered extreme insecurity and uncertainty. While ‘offer letters’ are not full guarantees of tenure security, they at least demonstrate a commitment by the state to the area as a smallholder farming zone. Third, the type of conflicts over land in the Lowveld is of a different type and order compared to the ‘core’ areas. Smallholders are pitted against very powerful interests. This is not just local elites with connections to the political hierarchy, but major corporations with international interests or big-time entrepreneurs with access to the very top of the political hierarchy. In the conflicts in the wildlife areas, international conservation interests are aligned with the state authorities against land invaders, again with very powerful backers.

As in the ‘core’ areas, the political dynamic is one between elite interests and those of a growing middle farmer group, but the contours of this struggle are different, as are the balance of forces. The ability of the new land reform beneficiaries to take on international capital or conservation interests is limited, yet in several cases, as discussed, they have been successful. This is in part due to a recognition that the political costs of shifting people from invaded land would be too high, even if the state could be convinced to do it. There have been tussles between the central and provincial state on such issues, with edicts coming down from on high that have been avoided or diverted by local state officials who knew the impossibility of implementing the proposed plans. In the case of conflicts with the sugar estates or the Rautenbach enterprises, in the end capital seeks its own profitable solution, and for sugar this has meant an accommodation with the new outgrowers, and on Nuanetsi an acceptance that expansion into settled areas is not feasible, and alternative land had to be sought.

## Conclusion

The simple narratives that have dominated discussion of the politics of land reform in Zimbabwe to date are insufficient. It is neither a story of an undifferentiated mass of peasants taking the land as part of a populist–nationalist struggle, nor solely a story of elite capture and political patronage. As with all narratives there are elements of truth in both, but the reality is far more complex.

What then are the new politics of the countryside post-land reform, at least in the areas of Masvingo that are the focus of this paper? An emphasis on processes of social differentiation – of the patterns of accumulation, dependency and the emergence of a labouring class – and socio-economic linkage – between, for example, resettlements and communal areas, and across value chains – offers insights into how a class of petty commodity producers, with a mix of origins – from the peasantry but also from the urban middle classes – business people and civil servants in particular – are emerging as a political and economic force. They are not the classic rural peasants of the populist pro-land reform imagination, nor are they the elite cronies of the critics of land reform. They are a new entrepreneurial, well-connected group of actors, with clear political demands that are not being responded to by any organised political party formation.

For over more than a decade, the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), largely ignored land and rural issues. They failed to articulate an effective alternative narrative on land and rural issues to ZANU-PF, and instead were too reliant on the framings of their backers from the white large-scale farming community. Coming from

urban, labour union and human rights backgrounds, the opposition focused instead on, admittedly highly important, rights and service provision issues, as well as macro-economic reform.<sup>12</sup> While gaining access to some rural areas was challenging owing to tight control by ZANU-PF, the lack of a convincing vision for agriculture and rural development damaged their credibility in many people's eyes. By contrast, ZANU-PF exploited its association with the land reform ruthlessly, deploying a nationalist political rhetoric that had wide popular appeal in the rural areas. This was a tactic that paid off in 2013. However, without a substantial commitment to post-land reform support for the new settlers, even 14 years on, many remain sceptical of the party and its leadership, as rhetoric does not translate into action.

Alongside the middle farmer accumulators, in small numbers on smaller land areas there is the military–business–party elite, well connected to ZANU-PF. They have been accumulating too, but not 'from below'. Extractive, corrupt and dependent on patrimonial relations, they are using land as one of a number of resources to extend their political-economic hold (along with mines, wildlife, business networks and so on). Yet their position is not at all certain. Examples of resistance – as seen in the Lowveld or on some A2 farms near Masvingo – are evident. Resistance has been both passive and more organised, including hostage-taking, road protests, invasions and so on. And successes have been possible, even when the alliances of the elite go to the highest level, and with significant financial backing from external investors. In the same way the Shangaan restitution campaign in the sugar estates and wildlife areas may yet have purchase, shifting patterns of elite control.

It is a volatile and dynamic context. The state – and the ruling party – do not have full control. The agency of particular coalitions of actors is substantial. And the processes of socio-economic differentiation are such that new political forces are fast emerging.

In the past decade or more, all political formations have misjudged these changes in the rural economy and politics, and have failed to analyse their implications. Most liberal academic commentary and political and civic opposition focused on exposing cronyism, but did not engage with understanding rural social differentiation, and the building of new alliances and constituencies. This in part contributed to failure in electoral terms. By contrast, the nationalist populists in ZANU-PF failed to engage with the new emergent entrepreneurial class of 'middle farmers', and continued to back a narrow elite who remain widely resented.

There is thus a struggle at the heart of countryside: between a small group of well-connected elites and domestic and international capital on one side, often in an uneasy alliance, and a variegated grouping of poorer smallholder farmers, farm labourers and a new class of 'middle farmer' petty commodity producers on the other. Electorally, if representative democracy is upheld, any party must rely on the latter to supply the votes, while the rich pickings of land and resources as patronage are to be gained by alliances with the former. As the Masvingo cases show, it is currently a fine balance.

What of the future? Will there be a capitulation to the elites and the alliance with fractions of (inter)national capital, and so a pushing aside of the emergent middle farmer class? This can only be achieved by the continuation of a non-democratic solution of obstructive, violent politics, especially given the electoral forces weighed against such an elite position. Given the track record of ZANU-PF and the embedded reliance on crony capitalism and of a growing dependent network, this is a firm possibility (Raftopoulos 2013a). Or can a more democratic and accountable state be rebuilt from below, forged by the new alliances of farmers and workers, including women, youth and others, who are

prepared to vote for a party that delivers on the demands of a new resurgent agrarian class, and its allies?

This latter option, given recent history, may be naively optimistic; but any political formation, no matter what its ideology or democratic traditions, cannot ignore the new politics of the countryside, and must garner support from a radically reconfigured set of interests and alliances. Inability to do so will result in electoral failure, as well as the sort of persistent and disruptive resistance we have seen in the Masvingo cases. As the 2018 election approaches, a deeper understanding of the changed dynamics of rural economy and politics will certainly be required.

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### Notes

1. See also multiple blog contributions at <http://www.zimbabweland.wordpress.com>.
2. Assuming that nationally rural 'accumulators' are found on 20% of communal area farms (Stanning 1989), 40% of A1 and old resettlement farms (see text), 50% of medium-scale A2 farms and 80% of remaining large-scale farms and farms in small-scale farming areas, this amounts to nearly two million people or approximately a quarter of the voting population. This calculation is based on Table 1, and the most recent national census and voter registration data, and is, as a result, only indicative, and probably an underestimate particularly in relation to new resettlement populations.
3. "The Golden Leaf: Boom Time in Zimbabwe." Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/2012/07/09/the-golden-leaf-boom-time-in-zimbabwe/>
4. See blog series "How Have the 'New Farmers' Fared? An Update on the Masvingo Study, Parts I–IV." Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/2014/04/21/1049/>
5. "Food Crisis in Zimbabwe: 2.2 Million at Risk. But Where Do the Figures Come from and What Do They Mean?" Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/2013/09/16/food-crisis-in-zimbabwe-2-2-million-a-risk-but-where-do-the-figures-come-from-and-what-do-they-mean/>
6. "Who Took the Land? More on the Crony Debate." Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/2012/06/18/who-took-the-land-more-on-the-crony-debate/>
7. "Geographies of Violence in Zimbabwe." Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/2012/10/15/geographies-of-violence/>
8. "Evicted Villagers Demand Land Report." *The Zimbabwean*, February 8, 2014. Accessed April 23, 2014. [http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit\\_evicted-villagers-demand-land-report/](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit_evicted-villagers-demand-land-report/)

9. "Nuanetsi Bio-diesel Project: 25 Families to Be Evicted." *The Zimbabwe Standard*, October 24, 2009. Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200910261325.html>
10. "The Sweet Smell of Success. The Revival of Zimbabwe's Sugar Industry." Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/2013/01/28/the-sweet-smell-of-success-the-revival-of-zimbabwes-sugar-industry/>; Scoones, Mavedzenge, and Murimbarimba (2014).
11. "Shangaan Speakers Invade Sugar Farms in Tribal War." Radio VOP, September 12, 2012. Accessed April 23, 2014. [http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/sep20\\_2012.html#Z14](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/sep20_2012.html#Z14)
12. "The MDC's Agenda for Real Transformation. Why the Land and Agriculture Sections Need More Thought." Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/2013/06/17/the-mdc-ts-agenda-for-real-transformation-art-why-the-land-and-agriculture-sections-need-more-thought/>

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