



“I Would Rather Have My Land Back”
**Subaltern Voices and Corporate/State Land Grab in
the Save Valley**

E. Kushinga Makombe

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Abstract

The history of the Save Valley in south-eastern Manicaland provides an intriguing account of peasant encounters with the state apparatus dating back to the 1920s. However, the process currently underway, where an obscure 20-year deal involving a public-private partnership between the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) and Macdom and Rating Investments for 50 000 hectares of land represents what is perhaps the highest level of the state's coercive apparatus at work; as many as 250 000 communal farmers stand to lose or have already lost their lands and livelihoods. The case shows many features demonstrated in the wider literature on 'land grabs' and as with many cases of other 'grabs', this case centres on state land which has been also used by local people. It highlights the way the politics of relationships between the state, investors and local communities are played out. This paper seeks to capture and historicise the subjective subaltern voices in light of the current corporate and state-centric landgrabbing being experienced in the Save Valley. It captures the experiences arising out of the land deal which has curtailed the community's access to land and other livelihood alternatives. Contests over land, and ambiguous claims over land rights, as well as arguments that the land is underutilized, are central to this case. This paper in particular delves into the historical origins of these competing claims of rights of use and ownership of land at the centre of land disputes thrown up by new land deals, and points to the importance of understanding the long-term claim-making process, and its contested and ambiguous nature. Neat legal documents associated with investment contracts always have to encounter this layered and disputed history, and need to take more cognisance of such histories of land use and rights claims by different actors, if the sort of disputes and conflicts that arise, as in this case, are to be avoided.

About the Author

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1 Introduction: The Land Deal and Competing Land Claims

In 2007 the government of Zimbabwe, during the tenure of the then Agriculture Minister Rugare Gumbo, signed a 20-year agreement under what is known as a build-operate-transfer (BOT) arrangement on lands owned by the quasi-state parastatal, i.e. the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA), in Chisumbanje and Middle Sabi with Ratings Investments and Macdom Investments which are controlled by business mogul Billy Rautenbach. According to the memorandum of understanding, Rautenbach's companies hold a 70 percent stake while ARDA holds the remainder. Additionally ARDA receives 10 percent as management fees from Rautenbach's companies and it is also entitled to an 8 percent share of the revenue generated from the annual production. When fully completed, 40 000 hectares in Chisumbanje and 10,000 hectares in Middle Sabi were expected to come under the sugarcane-ethanol project, making a total of 50,000 hectares (Portfolio Committee Report 2010, *News Day* 18/10/2011).

The finer details of this particular deal remain shrouded in secrecy and a Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Water and Resettlement, under the chairmanship of Moses Jiri, tasked to pursue this has been locked in a game of cat and mouse with the incumbent Minister of Agriculture Mechanization and Irrigation Development, Joseph Made, together with his permanent secretary, Ngoni Masoka, and ARDA chairperson, Basil Nyabadza, for several years now (*News Day* 18/10/2011). The little information about the terms of the BOT land transaction that has come into the public realm is invariably often partial and the result of local resistance and investigative journalism, plus a few research studies (Matondi 2010; Mutopo 2012). In any case, this particular land deal is merely part of a new wave of deals on public lands and land held under communal tenure in the sub-region that typically involve the leasing or other concessions (rather than sale) of large areas of land (Hall, 2010; Borrás et al 2011).¹

The current land conflict in Chisumbanje emanates from the fact that when Ratings entered into the agreement, it was believed that ARDA would provide 40,000 hectares for the project, but it was later realized that the ARDA boundaries only had 5,112 hectares, hence the company's decision to immediately "acquire" additional land from the adjoining communal lands in a desperate bid to make up the deficit and in the process displacing thousands of villagers (New Zimbabwe 30/08/12). To use my informant's analogy, "they [Ratings] just came like we are seated on this bench here and told us to get off – then you had to find what next to do on your own – no notice, no nothing!"² By 2010 the total land area under irrigation at Chisumbanje stood at 15,000 hectares of sugarcane and the project was planned to expand at a rate of 5,000 hectares annually in the following eight years, displacing approximately 250,000 surrounding communal farmers in the process. This was, however, halted as the community's outcry forced Ratings to suspend this plan.

The case of Chisumbanje demonstrates powerfully the ambiguous and overlapping nature of the property regimes in Africa and the multiple claims on this land that, although negotiated over time, often lack clarity. Nyabadza, the ARDA Chairman, is of the opinion that ARDA had in fact permitted the displaced peasants to stay on the land out of ARDA's benevolence or sufferance arguing that:

ARDA has always retained ownership of 40,000 hectares of land within the Chisumbanje area and up to 10,000 hectares in the Middle Sabi area. But because we had not been utilising that land for years these villagers were allowed to move in, not permanently, but just so that they could grow some crops. So you have villagers who had been using between 10-20 hectares knowing fully [sic] well that they were on ARDA land and that

¹ Please also refer to the LDPI working paper series on the LDPI website: www.iss.nl/ldpi.

² Interview, displaced villager, Checheche Business Centre, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 4 September 2012.

ARDA was just not in a position to fully utilise it. They also knew that when ARDA was going to assume its right over the land, they would have to move.

New Zimbabwe 5/9/12

My fieldwork interviews discovered that even within the Chisumbanje community the younger generations partially agree with Nyabadza's argument and one such informant even alerted me to an ARDA peg that was somewhere in the middle of lands in the Manzvire area.³ (However, even in pointing this out, my younger informants still opposed the corporate and statist land takeover on the principle of social justice). The older villagers nonetheless insist that ARDA's boundaries are confined to the 5,112 hectares it had been using all along and they view Ratings' "encroachment" as not only illegal, but the ultimate provocation of their property rights dating back generations. As one older informant argued:

ARDA never went beyond a certain boundary. The problem is that they [Ratings] were given ARDA lands so that they farm in there but we are now hearing that they want to take all the land – but yet they haven't even begun farming on all the ARDA lands. They are just taking people lands!⁴

These contestations pitting the villagers against ARDA and trickling down to expressed differences within the very community suggests that while some spatial displacement has occurred, the new investments such as the one under investigation have not displaced local land uses and users.

In an attempt to weigh in on this *debate* I went through various reports dating back to the colonial era to extract the origins of Nyabadza's claims. I discovered that ARDA's claims to vast amounts of lands, in so far as determinable from the reports, emerged in the early 1980s when ARDA was under the Chairmanship of Patrick Chinamasa who reported that:

A feasibility report is being prepared for the implementation of the first phase of the Greater Chisumbanje Development Scheme. This scheme will at completion entail the construction of a major dam on the Sabi River and the development of a net irrigation area exceeding 37,000 hectares.

ARDA 1983/84

The feasibility report that Chinamasa was alluding to was conducted by Atkins Land and Water Management with the engaged encouragement and funding from the World Bank in 1983 and it proposed the expansion of the Chisumbanje irrigation scheme from an area of 24km² to 400km². This would have made Chisumbanje rank among the largest irrigated settlement schemes in Africa at the time (Atkins Land and Water Management 1983). But before the implementation of this particular recommendation that was planned to start in 1986, 2,600 hectares of land were also proposed to be brought under ARDA "based on the utilisation of residual Save River water which does not necessitate the construction of a dam" on a 50-50 allocation with the newly resettled farmers in Chisumbanje. The land areas in these proposals add up to the 40,000 hectares that Nyabadza claims were "always" under ARDA control in Chisumbanje and it is probably at this point that ARDA also pegged the adjacent land area "in anticipation of further development in the near future" (ARDA 1984/85).

However, it must be emphasised that the recommendations of the Atkins report were never implemented. From official reports, the Greater Chisumbanje Development Scheme was last mentioned in the ARDA annual report of 1988/89 when then-Chairman Robbie Mupawosere

³ Interview, displaced villager/Green Fuel employee, near Distillery, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 7 September 2012.

⁴ Interview, displaced villager, Checheche Business Centre, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 5 September 2012.

submitted the updated costs of implementing the project. Thereafter, ARDA reports become vague and bland and don't in any way report on any detailed plans. For instance, C.E. Dhlembeu, the ARDA Chairman in 1993/94, reported that ARDA "is getting more involvement [*sic*] in the improvement of the quality of lives of many rural communities through agro-based activities" (ARDA 1993/94: 2).

The above does not however discount the possibility that the post-colonial regime was simply implementing policies that had been debated in hushed tones during the colonial era whose implementation could have been disrupted by the country's 1970s war for liberation by the colonised Africans. Indeed, the colonial reports do indicate a determined drive to bring more communal lands under irrigation, as well as to control the land use patterns therein. For instance, when initial irrigation work in Chisumbanje commenced in July 1966, just 486 hectares fell under the Sabi Development Company (a division of the Tribal Trust Land Development Corporation, i.e. TILCOR), but by 1972 a total of 1,376 hectares were under irrigation. Furthermore, 120 families were catered for as out-growers in what was known as a "settler scheme", but TILCOR projected catering for upwards of 20,000 plot-holding families. In order to do this, TILCOR initiated the Tenant Development Scheme (that ARDA also adopted in the post-colonial) so as "to continue expanding the area under irrigation to eventually cover the **whole** of the usable land" (Wark 1973: 1-3). Hence, while ARDA could have given some further definition on how it was going to go about reclaiming all of the "idle" land in Chisumbanje as well as mapping the extent and expanse of the land, the idea was certainly not new.

The next section details the socio-historical context leading to the land deal in an attempt to demonstrate and how these boundaries are always mutable and to foreground the policy environment and socio-political context that culminated in the land conflict currently underway in Chisumbanje.

2 Socio-Historical Context

The idea of a quasi-state rural development agency was conceived of in the post-1965 sanctions environment following the rogue Rhodesian regime's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain. Such a body, then known as TILCOR, was charged with simultaneously ensuring the Government's policy of "separate development" by introducing rural growth points based on irrigation in African inhabited areas while also implementing a policy of Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) in response to economic sanctions. In this way, the attempts to boost peasant agricultural production were supposed to ensure that the colony would become self-sufficient in cash crops to supply the emerging textile and food processing industries. Chisumbanje planted summer cotton, winter wheat and perennial sugarcane. The TILCOR model in many ways also intended to incorporate African peasants into Rhodesian capitalist agriculture that had previously been reserved to state support for the emergent European farmers through regulating the market and price regimes in an alliance between the Rhodesian Front (RF) government and the Rhodesian National Farmers Union (RNFU) (Makombe 2011).

It is in this context that the Save Valley, a rainshadow plain in south-eastern Manicaland was identified to promote socio-economic sustainability in rural areas. The Middle Sabi ARDA Estate was situated in the Mutema Reserve, then termed tribal trust lands (TTLs). Similarly, a feasibility study was done in Chisumbanje close to where TILCOR would later site Checheche "rural township" (Whitsun 1980) and incorporated land from several chieftaincies like Garahwa and Chisumbanje. The operation of TILCOR was supposed to strengthen the central state's control over the irrigation schemes and to expand the carrying capacity of communal lands. According to the TTL (Control of Irrigation Scheme) Act of 1967, the District Commissioner had the power to "give orders" with regard to the method of cultivation, types of crops to be grown, crop rotation, times and manner of

irrigation, and the dates on which any kinds of crops could be planted, treated or harvested (UN 1980: 53). However, the intensification of the liberation war from around 1976 disrupted commercial crop production in the Save Valley, forcing abandonment in some instances as some rural villagers were forced to flee to the cities.

The post-colonial regime in Zimbabwe added to the already ambiguous and amorphous tenure regime prevailing in Chisumbanje. The façade of communal tenure rights was maintained through the Communal Land Act (CLA) of 1982 which vested power to allocate land in the hands of elected District Councils, and directed Councils to “have regard to customary law and grant land only to those people who have a customary right to it” (O’Flaherty 1998: 539). The central state, as did its settler-colonial predecessor, retained the right to intervene and reallocate land according to the dictates of land use planning. This was seen by state technocrats as essential to the conservation and management of the natural resource base. Ranger (1988) and Cheater (1990) maintain that this notion of “traditional tenure” is largely a colonial construction, invented because it was useful to the shapers of the labour reserve system. Thus, rather than introducing clarity, these redefinitions of “communal tenure” served only to muddy the picture. Struggles around land allocation practices continued, with District Councils, Village Development Committees, chiefs and village headmen all vying for authority (Cliffe 1988). In short, the successive post-independence administrations in Zimbabwe have never been able to ratify and pronounce communal land and property rights.

The ill-defined role of the District Administrator (DA) and several other government bureaucrats that extended liberally from strict administration of Rural District Councils to the politicisation of government services such as tillage and distribution of farm implements, gave the office bearers privileged access to government services such as education, advice, jobs and funds. These resources generated “additional income and ultimately [made] the office-holder the centre of a patronage network” (Otzen et al 1988: 126). In essence, the post-colonial rural administrative system ensured that the state maintained *de jure* ownership that allowed politicians to exercise authority over the same land and guaranteed the perpetuation of political patronage in the rural communities. This would also partly explain the ease with which Ratings manoeuvred the land deal as the local DA stands accused of acting as a deal-maker or broker when he “connived” with the company to give Chief Garahwa a directive to forcibly resettle his people and the Chief “buckled” assuming that this indeed was coming from the government (*SW Radio Africa* 25/08/11).

The first few decades of the country’s independence starting in 1980 did not witness any marked and significant land transfers to peasants, but rather a continuation of the RF regime’s attempts at making these arid regions productive with the aid of irrigation technology. The post-independence state concentrated on reconstruction and rehabilitation in the first instance of schemes that had been destroyed during the liberation war of the 1970s but again furthered efforts at control through reconstituting TILCOR into ARDA (Rukuni and Makhado 1994). In essence, as Jacobs and Chavunduka (2003) and Moyo (1999) rightly argue, there were no corresponding institutional reforms to support the principal objective of addressing colonial imbalances. As such, many producers in rural Zimbabwe continued to face a number of difficulties which in large part sprang from the inherited, and untransformed, discriminatory features of the larger political economy (Scoones and Cousins 1989; Derman 1990).

From the early 1990s, the state also began to systematically disinvest itself from ARDA by initially re-parcelling portions of ARDA land to resettled farmers and then later reducing government subsidies in line with austerity measures adopted under the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) (Mlambo 1997). In Middle Sabi, 489 hectares were allocated to resettled farmers. Furthermore, the Government of Zimbabwe, in the Zimbabwe Irrigation Policy of 1994, more than intimated that it planned to revise its irrigation policies and hand over the administration and management of the schemes to the peasants. Again – this never happened! However, during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLR) in the 2000s, there were further subdivisions

of estate agriculture into smallholder plots, as successive streams of “land-hungry” settlers settled on several ARDA estates. Out of the 26 ARDA estates countrywide, three estates, namely Nuanetsi, Nyamandlovu and Chirundu, were operating without title deeds.

In 2010 the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee listed the operational challenges that ARDA was experiencing after several years of Government disinvestment along with an economic meltdown that began in 1997 as:

- Absence of capital inflows from government, ARDA has not been able to re-capitalize for the last 15 years and during the last 10-12 years there has been a breakdown of irrigation infrastructure and other machinery such as tractors.
- Lines of credits have been closed by banks and financial houses.
- Brain drain as experienced workers and managers leave the parastatal in numbers (Portfolio Committee Report 2010: 8).

As a direct consequence of the above, ARDA was performing at 40 percent of its full potential and hence the BOT as a recovery strategy made sense at various levels, as this also converged with shifts in energy policy among Southern African countries which recognised the possibility of meeting future energy needs from their own natural resources, and limiting dependence on future oil imports and exposure to the price volatility these necessarily involve (Sulle and Nelson 2009). This also signified an acceleration and transformation towards the commercialisation of land involving an open land market and titling that has been predictably touted by the Bretton-Woods institutions as the panacea for the effective and intensive utilisation of Africa’s land resources for several decades now (Bruce 1990).

However, ARDA’s “partners” in this land deal, Macdom Investments and Ratings Investments, have no known institutional history and the agreement never went through any due process. Rautenbach himself is not new to major financial scandals, with a bad reputation in both South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rautenbach was deported from the DRC on allegations that he was looting diamonds from the mineral rich country (*Great Indaba* 29/12/10). To this day it remains unclear who sanctioned the Chisumbanje deal and the current Energy Minister, Elton Mangoma, maintains that the ethanol project was never granted national project status (*New Zimbabwe* 30/08/12). Events on the ground however suggest, as I will illustrate below, that there are “silent partners” who most likely also happen to hold power of the central kind sponsoring this arrangement. Thus, Rautenbach, whatever his scruples have been in the past, is not acting alone and he is perhaps in an invidious position of having to be the face of this injustice that has deprived thousands of their livelihoods.

Thus, the popular term “land grabbing”, while effective as activist terminology should not deflect “attention from the roles of domestic elites and governments as partners, intermediaries and beneficiaries” (Hall 2010: 1). More often than not “land grabbing” in Africa has been described as a new neo-colonial push by foreign companies and governments to annex key natural resources. However, the complicity of even the most avowed nationalists in these transactions necessitates a rethinking of such depictions. As Alden Wiley (2010) insists, the “grabber” is usually the state rather than foreign investors and the less or is frequently not the land rights holder, having failed to legally extinguish pre-existing communal land rights. Thus, while the re-distribution of land during the FTLR may have dismantled a system of private property rights, in the absence of political and legal momentum behind the tenure rights of land occupiers, this rendered what Scoones et al. (2010) characterise as the “new smallholders” vulnerable to second-wave elite (and state-sponsored) land grabs. In essence, it is governments rather than investors that are grabbing the land and, in this sense, the willingness of national as well as local authorities to displace rural populations in favour of “development” is not new. Prosper Matondi (2010) even suggests that some of the domestic

investors involved in such deals are former white commercial farmers finding new forms of investment in agriculture, now with the blessing of the state.

3 Corporate Responsibility or Corporate Displacement?

Macdom Investments and Ratings Investments have, since 2008, been running on a rather complex and intricate operational model in which Macdom operates from Middle Sabi, and Ratings is based in Chisumbanje. With the completion of the US\$600million ethanol plant in Chisumbanje, a third entity came on board, i.e. Green Fuel, which operates as the exclusive buyer of the cane harvested from Middle Sabi and Chisumbanje, even though the company is in the same group of companies. A fourth entity in the operations at Chisumbanje is SABOT Transport, which was previously owned by Rautenbach reportedly in joint partnership with President Robert Mugabe (*Great Indaba* 29/10/2010). Rautenbach is believed to have since disposed of his stake in SABOT to a close Russian “friend”, but the company is still operating in Chisumbanje ferrying cane from Middle Sabi. In essence, this model draws forward and backward linkages within itself since the ownership is the same. ARDA is not represented, and in 2010 ARDA representatives had only attended meetings at Middle Sabi twice since 2008 in what can best be described as a listenership capacity (Portfolio Committee 2010: 9; Several Interviews).

In the process of transitioning to take over the ARDA estates, Macdom and Ratings took over 520 workers that had been employed by ARDA and an additional 1,200 workers from within Chisumbanje. This labour force was mainly used in the initial process of land clearing and other menial tasks. Many of my informants still look back to the days when they worked on the construction of the ethanol plant with a sense of fervour because back then one could still get “overtime [wages] of US\$2.40 per hour”.⁵ However, much of this labour was either laid off or reassigned to other tasks upon completion of the land clearing exercises. This points to a labour environment that is in a state of flux such that bodies that are engaged in investigating the plight of the locals in Chisumbanje should not assume that the work environment pertaining in 2009 was carried over into the present. This is crucial because the labour requirements for the plant have been changing such that when the plant became operational, a specialised labour force from people who had experience in working in distilleries at places like Sable Chemicals and ZIMPHOS (i.e. Zimbabwe Phosphates) were headhunted to begin manufacturing ethanol.⁶

This however, did not go down well with the locals who felt doubly cheated after having been displaced from their lands only to be employed as either gardeners or cleaners around the plant. As one informant put it, “I am not saying I know how to operate the machine, but we have a lot of children from this area who have degrees and are you telling me they can’t operate the machine?—rather than [Green Fuel] going to take someone from Masvingo”.⁷ This issue appears to generate a rather emotive debate within Chisumbanje, as several local workers I spoke to allege that out of the total workforce of 600 people employed at the plant, only 38 are local. However, a worker from Harare heavily disputes this and instead put the number of “non-local” workers in the plant at just 80.⁸ The very specific figures that both sets of workers gave me point to the centrality of this issue in Chisumbanje. In total, the sugarcane and ethanol project employ in the region of 5,000 individuals with the above debate carrying over as the locals feel that they are underrepresented in terms of employment numbers compared to those from outside the Chipinge District. One informant further

⁵ Interview, local Macdom Employee, Rimbi Business Centre, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 6 September 2012.

⁶ Interview, non-local Green Fuel distillery employee (from Harare), Checheche, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 7 September 2012.

⁷ Interview, displaced villager/Ratings employee, near Distillery, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 7 September 2012.

⁸ Interview, Green Fuel distillery employee (from Harare), 7 September 2012.

charged that in his department there are only “two or three [locals] who were put in the position of *malima* [i.e. supervisors] – the rest are from areas like Murehwa, Mtoko, etc. – but the local people are just seated”.⁹

What this points to is a complexity in the saga which has gone beyond a land conflict to also incorporate a labour conflict. Indeed, several informants articulated their concerns in the workspace as: low pay, late payment, lack of job security and lack of protective clothing.¹⁰ The pay structure at Macdom/Ratings is made up of a fixed basic wage and an incentive which is oddly higher than the basic wage. However, the incentive can and is often withdrawn at a whim in the event that the worker makes a “little mistake” leaving the worker with a monthly pay of no more than US\$90.¹¹ In any event, this paltry amount is usually paid out late with one informant stating, “right now it’s the 5th [of September 2012] we are yet to get our pay [for August 2012] – we usually expect something around the 14th or 15th [of the month]”.¹²

Several informants also lamented the fact that they had been working on probation for over 18 months and a few of them who were supposed to have been made permanent employees in January 2012 were still on probation.¹³ In explaining why they are not taking up the issue with management one informant explained, “that is precisely what they want so that they can fire you there and then”.¹⁴ Apart from the threat of summary dismissals, my informants narrated how they have only been using one work-suit since they joined Ratings and how they are also not given gloves, helmets or goggles when working in the fields.¹⁵ These observations support Hall’s argument that the notion and conceptualisation around the term “land grabs”:

....draws attention away from trends that involve not the mere capture of land but the capture of labour, water, and most of all, the adverse incorporation of smallholder agriculture into new value chains, patterns of accumulation, and the wider transformations in agrarian structure and agrofood systems that these precipitate – rather than their exclusion.

Hall 2010: 22

As part and parcel of its “corporate responsibility”, Ratings entered into agreement with the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) and repaired 6 pumps each with a capacity to pump and irrigate 1,000 hectares. The facility was intended to benefit 132 farmers resettled in 2003, whose irrigation infrastructure had been vandalised during the FTLR. By March 2010, Ratings Investment Ltd. and partners had reportedly used US\$40 million in the rehabilitation process. The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee also reported that Rating Investments and Partners, as part of their social responsibility, rehabilitated irrigation infrastructure covering 1,200 hectares for 4,000 irrigation communal farmers in the Chibwe area at a cost of US\$120,000, and had also built a clinic that was serving communal people at subsidized rates (Portfolio Committee Report 2010: 9).

However, while such Parliamentary detachments and other so-called “high profile” delegations have been satisfied to point out these figures, very few have ever gone beyond these to question the plot-holders’ thoughts regarding their new irrigated holdings. In my fieldwork most of my informants were unanimous in expressing that the new holdings were uneconomic holdings for the simple

⁹ Interview, local Macdom employee, Rimbi, 6 September 2012.

¹⁰ Separate interviews with several local informants from the 4th to the 7th of September 2012.

¹¹ Interview, local Macdom employee, Rimbi, 4 September 2012.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Separate interviews with several local informants.

¹⁴ Interview, displaced villager/Ratings employee, Checheche, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 5 September 2012.

¹⁵ Separate interviews with several local informants.

reason that they fail to incorporate the probable future standard of living and the present needs of the plot-holders, as they are indexed directly against accommodating many of the displaced and landless as possible.¹⁶ In practice, the irrigated plots measure just 15 rows of crops in width by 150 paces in length. As one informant succinctly expressed:

*It's useless! I have parents in their old age, I have a family and moreover I have a brother who does not work. So to me, I would rather have my land back....If I get my land back then I can then set aside 2 or 3 hectares [of sugarcane] that I will then sell to Billy [Rautenbach]*¹⁷

Another informant went further than this arguing:

*The irrigation was not free and fair – in any case this irrigation **we did not want it** – he [Billy Rautenbach] should farm in the land he was allocated in ARDA – if he wants, **we can agree** that he builds canals [leading to our land] then we can farm in **our own** lands – then we sell him the sugarcane – just like what the settlers in Mkwesine are doing. This is what **we prefer** – that is what we long for – rather than try and strong-arm us – on **our own** things (emphasis mine).*

This captures a crucial element in all “development” efforts, and that is the need to genuinely engage the local community in any measure that is likely to affect their livelihoods. Thus far, and even historically, these efforts have been centrally imposed and the expressed commitment to consult the villagers and peasants amounts to rhetoric meant to disguise the state’s belief that in time the rural communities would grow to appreciate the wisdom of official designs.

In any event, several of my informants maintained that there are several plot-holders who were allocated irrigation plots who are yet to have water pumped onto their lands. One informant estimated that “only a quarter – maybe – were given water. The rest is just dry land. So an acre of dry land is nothing. It’s better to get 4 hectares of dry land – at least you can get something rather than 4 lines [sic] of irrigation”.¹⁸ The same informant argues that in the past he could produce 6 bales of cotton in rain deficit years or 12 bales in years with good rains and after selling the cotton (to either Cargill or Parrogate) he could afford to send his children to school. But he then rationalised his present predicament saying “I am in a better position because, at least, I am working – not everyone whose land was taken is working”.¹⁹

Furthermore, many maintain that the roads that were graded as part and parcel of Macdom/Ratings “corporate responsibility” in the townships lead directly to the houses of senior management that reside in the townships and it is only incidentally benefitting the community. Further, it is only those who reside in the townships that benefit from the company’s shuttle service that ferries workers to and from their workplace. One informant explained:

*We are tracking [i.e. walking] from our homes – even though they used to pick us up. They had to cut them [ferries] because they said they are incurring a lot of expenses, and we were told to walk because it’s not that far. But there is a bit of a distance – but I [also] thought it was inappropriate for a family man like myself to shift to the compound – so we just have to walk.*²⁰

¹⁶ Separate interviews with several local informants.

¹⁷ Interview, displaced villager, Rimbi Business Centre, 6 September 2012.

¹⁸ Interview, displaced villager/Ratings employee, near Distillery, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 7 September 2012.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Interview, displaced villager/Green Fuel employee, near Distillery, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 7 September 2012.

Once the initial group of communal farmers was displaced from areas like Machada, Nepasi, Chinyamukwakwa and Chisumbanje, it was agreed to constitute a committee that was supposed to oversee the redistribution of apportioned land with the consent of the traditional leadership. However, this process was immediately hijacked by local business elites allegedly with the consent of Ratings. One informant surmised:

The Committee that came into place was after bribes and they would say to certain people, "my friend you are a businessman give me money", then you would see someone else farming on the acres [sic] and those who were affected began asking, "How come?" You see now? Then the chiefs and headmen rebelled and said, "better to stop the whole exercise because it's useless", and this in turn was interpreted as if the chiefs refused the land allocations, but yet they only refused when they saw that "Aaaah – this is not helpful when those affected are not getting anything". So that is the position.²¹

This shows that even within such a context of powerful and state-centred takeovers, the local elite comprising of shop owners and other businesspeople belonging to a group of would-be rural accumulators often benefit disproportionately from resource capture within units such as lineages, villages or districts.

Other informants were however equally damning of the chiefs and headmen themselves, with one informant going as far as alleging that the chiefs are themselves corrupt and prone to accepting bribes from different areas even as far off as Harare. Thus, in the current context of Chisumbanje, even traditional authorities are far from immune from allegations that they were paid by Ratings to facilitate the community's forced removals. Several of my informants argued that Chief Garahwa, even after agreeing to the deal, whatever his assumptions, should have proceeded to inform his colleagues in Chisumbanje. In essence, the communities in the affected areas, which hold communal land rights, were not adequately consulted, on the rather convenient assumption that Chief Garahwa spoke on their behalf. Those familiar with Zimbabwe's history will easily recognise the divide and rule tactic that was employed in this instance. This was borrowed directly from Zimbabwe's erstwhile colonisers who from an early stage created an atomised system of chieftaincy in which several chiefs were either demoted or promoted to sub-chiefs or main-chiefs respectively depending on their level of co-operation with the colonial state. Any chief who then stepped out of line was in grave danger of being deposed or simply censured, depending on the severity of the allegation. In this instance, several chiefs such as Chisumbanje, Chinyamukwakwa, Manzvire and others were never consulted. Off-course Chief Garahwa's change of fortune since then only helps to fuel the villagers' suspicions regarding his complicity. As one informant alleged:

Garahwa has no problem – everything is well with him. He is in a good position because everything is being done for him – he gets fuel, groceries, maize and he gets a house. We heard that they [Macdom/Ratings] built him a house – so from his end it's all good.²²

Yet another informant argued that "the chiefs have no power [to influence any policy directives]".²³ Be that as it may, the role that the traditional leadership has played in this land dispute has been far from endearing which in essence prompts a thoroughgoing and critical review of the whole establishment. During colonialism, chiefs were reduced to minor adjuncts of state power and granted nominal powers designed to maintain what was termed "tribal" discipline in the rural areas through the administration of the so-called "customary" law. Chiefs also played a crucial role in

²¹ Interview, with displaced villager, Checheche, 7 September 2012.

²² Interview, displaced villager/Green Fuel employee, near Distillery, Chisumbanje, Zimbabwe, 7 September 2012.

²³ Interview, displaced villager/Ratings employee, Checheche, Zimbabwe, 5 September 2012.

recruiting forced labour, collecting taxes, and as a vital efflux control mechanism through placing prohibitions on the emigration of the youth and women to the urban areas (Bowman 1973).

In the first decade of the country's independence, such reform was indeed implemented when the chief's role was reduced to administering civil and lesser criminal cases within their chiefdoms. The CLA also shifted the authority to allocate land from the chiefs to District Councils and to Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) (see Gospel Matondi 2010: 1). However, as the need for political expediency would have it, chiefs were once again elevated to assume positions of national significance with guaranteed seats in parliament and the senate, etc. in the mid 1990s. The chiefs then became *de facto* political commissars for the former ruling party (i.e. ZANU PF) within their chiefdoms. In all this, the chiefs hardly received any training as to the function and jurisdiction of their newly defined roles, which was again not helped by the fact that most of the chiefs usually ascended to the chieftaincy in their greying days because of the system of inheritance based on collateral which ensured that the oldest surviving male heir of the ruling dynasty would ascend to the chieftaincy. This would, in turn, partly explain why Chief Garahwa, in the very least, failed to discern between a government directive and a personal directive. Further, the chief could have also questioned the DA's jurisdiction in issuing such a directive.

In the summer season of 2009, 30 households had their maize at tassling stage ploughed down and were not compensated (Portfolio Committee 2010: 10). CARE, a relief agency, then assumed responsibility for feeding the affected households. One informant, who now works for Macdom, narrated the ordeal:

*They didn't ask – we just saw the tractors ploughing down our crops and they even desecrated our graves – unearthing the skulls of our relatives who died years ago....In Chinyamukwakwa – that is the place with the skulls up there.*²⁴

The actual numbers of people who have been displaced thus far are, as is to be expected, disputed. Nyabadza estimates that only "700 families" were affected by the project (New Zimbabwe 5/9/12) while Arthur Mutambara, the country's Deputy Prime Minister, has put the figure at 1,754 households made up of 1,060 in Chisumbanje and 694 in Chinyamukwakwa, of which only a total of 516 have been resettled (Zimeye 20/9/12). However, it is likely that Mutambara's figures are actually an underestimation, as several of my informants also testified that when many households "saw that there was no deal in hanging around, many decided to silently relocate on their own".²⁵

Once the people were deprived of their land, the only source of livelihood that they had was now anchored on their cattle. Chisumbanje has a well established cattle culture dating back to the colonial era, because even the most pernicious colonial policies like the Land Husbandry Act of 1951 had allowed families in the Save Valley up to 20 heads per household compared to 8 in the more centrally located rural reserves. While the grazing veldt is generally sparse in the Save Valley, families combine their herds into droves and drovers herd these beasts on distances exceeding 15 km to the Save River in search of green pastures. However, this has been severely disrupted at two levels. Firstly, many of the men who worked as drovers have been forced into employment at the sugarcane project in various capacities and secondly, there is no land to kraal the cattle when they are in Chisumbanje.

It is this respect that the villagers have also been angered by the company's actions. The company has been confiscating "stray" heads and confining them in an enclosure, or "skirting" (to use the parlance of my informants), and the animals will only be released to the owner upon payment of

²⁴ Interview, displaced villager, Checheche, Zimbabwe, 5 September 2012.

²⁵ Separate interviews with displaced villagers in Chisumbanje.

US\$4 per cow – failure of which would see this amount rise to US\$6 for the extra day. Ratings' intention or objective in doing this is perhaps subject to speculation, but the effect has been to deprive the villagers further of their livelihoods and to simultaneously accelerate their conversion from independent producers to labourers with such rapidity that proponents of the proletarianisation thesis never envisaged (Amin 1972; Arrighi 1973). The confiscation of cattle can also be interpreted as the company's attempt to mark its territory because they confine the cattle on allegations of having "strayed" onto their lands and not necessarily of having trampled onto the sugarcane fields. As one informant put it, "they never agree to show you where the cattle are supposed to have trampled on – they just say pay the money".²⁶

Furthermore, when the plant became operational, the chemicals that were used in the initial distillation processes polluted the water streams in Chisumbanje, decimating the cattle further downstream in Mahenye. One informant explained:

*The plant has stopped working because this white man [Billy Rautenbach] is not following the stipulated conditions – he was told to construct a dam for his polluted water because his bad water would enter our streams from Jerauchera that feeds Musvazve that feeds Gombe that feeds Save [River] – Save [River] that goes all the way to the sea. He was polluting everything.*²⁷

It is because of the above that several informants maintain that Ratings has dismally failed to exercise any form of corporate responsibility to the community in Chisumbanje. As one informant argued:

*ARDA was helpful –because like right now there is hunger but they [ARDA] would grow maize and sell to us at a cheap price [they also] employed our children and they were not selective [in recruiting labour]. But Billy [Rautenbach] has failed to live with the people. They say if you are aggrieved, "keep it in". NO! This SABOT is failing to live with the people.*²⁸

As a consequence, several aggrieved parties joined the ranks of the internally displaced as several families relocated to areas like Hippo Valley, but several have also crossed the border into Zimbabwe's neighbouring countries like South Africa. A few have also swelled the numbers of those engaged in cross-border trade travelling to South Africa to purchase some consumer durables with which they return to sell at several Spaza Shops/Kiosks that have proliferated at Checheche Township and other smaller rural business centres like Rimbi with the mass employment of hundreds of people in the villages since the project began. This is however, not to be viewed as necessarily a positive result in that already overtrading has become the order of the day with the numerous shops and kiosks at the townships all engaged in selling the same low-order consumer goods. And besides, the majority of the workforce is underpaid so the net effect is rather infinitesimal because of the low cash-flow levels such that this development amounts to nothing more than a survival strategy.

Yet more families have permanently relocated to Mozambique. One of my informants, (perhaps with a tinge of hyperbole), observed:

As we speak, a lot of people are in Mozambique – there are no more people [as before] – they all relocated to Chingove and to Dhongiredhuna in Mozambique. Families like Chaibva and Bandakata – I know – all went to Mozambique. If you go there and ask them to show you the place where Zimbabweans are, you will be shocked to see that,aaaah this has

²⁶ Interview, displaced villager, Checheche, Zimbabwe, 5 September 2012.

²⁷ Interview, displaced villager, Checheche, Zimbabwe, 7 September 2012.

²⁸ Interview, displaced villager, Checheche, Zimbabwe, 5 September 2012.

become another Zimbabwe...The leaders in Mozambique even saw that we simply have no option but to accommodate these people, plus Mozambique was also affected by the polluted water in the Save [River].²⁹

The hyperbole aside, the movement and transition into Mozambique has several historical precedents that date back to forced land removals during colonialism that forced many families from Chisumbanje to relocate to Mozambique and again later during the 1970s liberation struggle. But few could have imagined being forced to relocate in peace-time, independent Zimbabwe. Such movement is also aided in part by the shared cultural heritage that the Ndau, Gowa, Hlengwe and Bunji communities of Chisumbanje share with those across the nearby Mozambique border. In any case, this revelation opens up further avenues for investigation on how these large-scale land deals have initiated large-scale transnational migration in affected communities.

Thus, while the Chisumbanje ethanol project was touted as an *outgrower model* in attempts to make the venture acceptable and present it as congenial to the needs of the inhabitants through spurious claims that the land was vacant and unused, while also promising that local people would benefit from employment, the reality has been an abrupt interruption in the people's livelihood alternatives. Instead, the operational and institutional framework in Chisumbanje has been an admixture of *extraction, colonist and enclave* models,³⁰ with hushed talk before the roll-out of the project slowed down an "investment" in fast rail linking Middle Sabi and Chisumbanje as a conduit that would have speeded the expropriation of resources from the Save Valley by the time the 20-year deal lapsed.

4 Mangoma and "Angry Villagers"

The sugar processing and ethanol production plant at Chisumbanje has the capacity to process 7,500 tonnes of raw sugar a day at its full scale. In addition, the plant at current capacity can produce more than 75 million litres of ethanol and the electricity produced from the process can reach more than 20 megawatts (*The Sunday Mail*, 16 September 2012). This is adequate to electrify the entire south eastern region of Zimbabwe up to Mutare. The ethanol plant (as the arguments go) has the potential to produce one billion litres of ethanol per year with a corresponding increase in electricity generation. But this deliberately conceals the fact that this would translate into the dislocation of a quarter of a million people.

However, it is at this point that Ratings experienced its first major hurdle since the project began. Mangoma, who is an MDC-T appointee in Zimbabwe's inclusive government that came into power in 2009, refused to accede to the company's pleas to introduce mandatory blending of ethanol and petrol. Mangoma's argument is that there is no justification for forcing all motorists in Zimbabwe to use the company's products, adding that Green Fuel had also failed to justify its prices. Green Fuel has been retailing its ethanol at over US\$1 per litre, which is 25 percent higher than the price in other countries like Brazil (*New Zimbabwe* 15/06/12). It remains unclear how much motorists will save at the pump if this provision for mandatory blending is instituted, but in the few fuel outlets that happen to sell Green Fuel E10 blended petrol (i.e. 10 percent ethanol with 90 percent unleaded petrol), the saving is hardly significant at a mere 2 or 3 cents per litre. Hence as a local economist, Machel Mawerera, argued "motorists think it is rather absurd to switch from what they were used to and try another product for no reason" (*New Zimbabwe* 1/04/12). Furthermore, in the highly polarised environment that characterises Zimbabwe, a fact-based debate has been substituted by political bickering with several media that are patently sympathetic to the former

²⁹ Interview, displaced villager, Checheche, Zimbabwe, 5 September 2012.

³⁰ See: Hall 2010: 18.

ruling party ZANU-PF accusing Mangoma “of trying to frustrate the project for political reasons” (*The Sunday Mail*, 16/09/12).

Globally even, oil price volatility has called into question the economic viability of large agrofuel initiatives, a trend that can be dated to the crude price spikes of 2007/08, but later declined to \$70 a barrel in 2009/10. Hence ZANU-PF’s attempts to guarantee a measure of economic coherence to the biofuel investment in view of oscillatory oil price trends necessitates measures at artificially inducing demand through mandatory blending so as to create demand-side certainty, thereby providing the Chisumbanje investors with assurances sufficient for the roll-out of the biofuels projects. Furthermore, as Prosper Matondi (2010) suggests “political reasons” for pursuing the biofuels route, such as an import substitution/sanction busting strategy, may explain the continued insistence of the ZANU-PF side of the transitional government on mandatory blending.

Whatever Mangoma’s motivations in opposing mandatory blending, his objections appear to dovetail with the concerns of the villagers in Chisumbanje. As Mangoma argues, “all we want is for the company to address important issues first, like giving land to resettle those whose land was taken away by the company”. However, several historical precedents justify suspicions that such a stance can be compromised, in turn sacrificing the cause of the villagers on the altar of political expediency. It is crucial to also point out that none of the MDC formations or any of the other political contenders in the country have publicly questioned the paradigm of development that promotes such deals, and the directions of agrarian change that they precipitate with their criticisms are largely confined to their usual repertoire around issues of accountability, transparency and so forth.

The villagers’ concerns, however, are not as linear as they have been presented by others who purport to speak on their behalf. Many of my informants are very much aware of the national significance of this project and the potential multiplier effects in terms of employment and regenerating the country’s economy.³¹ But the villagers are opposed to Rautenbach’s conditional provisioning that “on the issue of land we want to develop what we promised to the people but my wallet is now empty” and that he first needs to sell all of the stockpiled 10 million litres of ethanol before this can happen (*New Zimbabwe* 27/08/12). The villagers are also equally aware, if not more than others, that production on the plant has been frozen resulting in some workers being laid-off or working on reduced shifts which immediately impacts their wages, but first they would “rather have their land back” than work as formal wage workers under the labour environment at Ratings.

With the ensuing standoff between Green Fuel and the Energy Ministry, Macdom and Ratings have taken to selling some of their sugarcane to Triangle and Hippo Valley Estates in Chiredzi that manufacture sugar. Operations have also scaled down, especially on the plant that at its height was operating 3 shifts of a total workforce of around 600 workers. But this number had to be scaled down to around 400 workers considered essential staff who in the main are engaged in maintaining the equipment. 600 workers from the total workforce have been laid off and the remainder are receiving 55 percent of their salaries or wages (*New Zimbabwe* 23/08/2012). Several villagers actually consider the company’s slowdown a personal victory and testament of the outcome of their lobbying. One informant argued:

The reason the plant isn’t operating is not because of politics – but it’s because the people put in their complaints to the government to say “Hey! We are dying of hunger because our lands were taken.” And they [government] said to [Macdom/Ratings], “if you want to have

³¹ The Confederation of Zimbabwe Industry (CZI) President, Joseph Kanyekanye, estimates that Green Fuel’s E10 could help cut the country’s fuel import bill by up to US\$2.4 billion with the savings used to bridge the country’s trade deficit (newzimbabwe.com 16/05/2012).

your machine [the plant] opened, construct dams for the people and also ensure that you don't pollute the water".³²

However, Ratings has since moved from a dogmatic and stubborn insistence on the irreversibility of the project to engaging in cheap political gimmicks that at once betray or, in the very least, strongly suggest the identity of the silent partners in this ethanol project. During the last week of August 2012, several newspaper publications, especially those sympathetic to ZANU-PF, ran with the story that several "irate" villagers, workers and local war veterans in Chisumbanje threatened to beat up Mangoma on allegations of closing down the ethanol plant, jeopardising their economic survival and sabotaging the project for political reasons (*New Zimbabwe* 27/08/12). Mangoma visited the plant as part of a cabinet delegation led by Mutambara in efforts to help revive the stalled project that also included the Presidential Affairs Minister, Didymus Mutasa. The reports indicated that it was the ZANU-PF Minister Mutasa who finally managed to calm the "angry" villagers stating, "let us not kill our project because of emotions. This project has brought development in this area with people building houses and business is booming" (*New Zimbabwe* 27/08/12).

Whatever the merits or demerits of the arguments that were raised by the "angry villagers", most of my informants maintain that this was a Macdom/Ratings-cum-ZANU-PF stage-managed, directed and choreographed event and that several of the so-called villagers had been bussed in "from Birchenough [Bridge], Mutare, Masvingo, etc...with those buses known as Marsmerry, then presenting them to the Team of Ministers saying these are the affected people from Chinyamukwakwa and Chisumbanje".³³ After the altercation with the Team of Ministers, several informants also allege that they witnessed the rented mob's "anger" being rewarded when they were "given mealie meal, opaque beer and \$20 or \$30".³⁴ This rent-a-mob tactic is straight out of the handbook of ZANU-PF, which is known to widely employ such *modus operandi* during elections and going to the extent of closing down rural primary-schools before frog-marching the pupils who are invariably not even part of the electorate to its political rallies.

5 Conclusion

My case-specific field study of Chisumbanje has shown how ambiguous land rights emerge historically, particularly in areas such as state land, and that these long-running ambiguities, reflecting long term relationships between the state and local people, come to the fore when land deals are struck. This means that issues that have lain dormant for decades come out and become the focus for intense contests, which become captured by contemporary interest groups. However, these current disputes can only be understood in historical context. The contribution that I therefore make to the land grabs debate is that economic histories matter, and these need to be told to understand and perhaps resolve new disputes. In issues of land, it is rare that any dispute is 'new', but is rooted in, and played out through much longer term histories of land rights, claims and contests.

The case of Chisumbanje has demonstrated the extent to which the current wave of land transactions in the sub-region have debased the local resource base of the previous occupants and undermined their local level and household food security. While this state-sponsored land grab induced a range of local political-cum-agrarian reactions, as for instance in the emergence of strong lobby groups like the Platform for Youth Development (PYD) led by Claris Madhuku, the majority of local resistance initiatives can be characterised as latent forms of protests. This is precisely because of the community's powerlessness in the face of inherent and underlying class and political divisions

³² Interview, displaced villager, Checheche, Zimbabwe, 5 September 2012.

³³ Separate interview with several informants.

³⁴ Separate interviews with several informants.

in which those who stand to benefit as rural accumulators in the new exchange and production relations in the post-land grab dispensation tend to favour the entry of these powerful transnational firms.

The case demonstrates that the community's powerlessness emanates mainly from a policy environment characterised by disassembled private property rights and absent political and legal tenure rights and this has rendered the inhabitants of Save Valley vulnerable to another wave of elite land-grabs that simultaneously unravelled the modest gains made since the initiation of the FTLR exercise towards securing and redistributing rights to land. I pointed to several historical antecedents from the country's colonial and post-colonial past to reveal that where land users have insecure forms of tenure (i.e. the hallmark of communal tenure), conditions lend themselves to grabbing of resources by state authorities and private companies. I argued that during colonialism "communal tenure" was crucial to the functioning of the Apartheid-like model of "separate development". However, this continued in the post-colonial era precisely because the post-independence regimes of Zimbabwe view land as a source of patronage.

The discussion also observed that at the centre of these land-conflicts, beyond the actual takeover of the land itself, were contestations over the meanings of land utilisation and what constitutes "marginal lands". These contested meanings are invariably then framed around national versus local level needs and along other social and class differentials within the rural community itself. I observed that previous endeavours at centrally controlled "development" dating back to the 1960s through TILCOR all the way to the ARDA experiment in the post-colonial era were equally disastrous precisely because they paid insufficient attention to the sociological and environmental considerations of the local inhabitants. In short, it has become a lesson of social history and a sociological improbability that centrally controlled "development" can ever attain any of the intended objectives.

Instead, the picture emerging from Chisumbanje is one of development-induced displacement as the Macdom/Ratings takeover of land witnessed a new wave of rural refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries like Mozambique and internally displaced persons relocating to other parts of the country. This phenomenon remains underreported and is a direct result of the methods used in implementing the ARDA/Macdom/Ratings land deal. The discussion observed that while the transitional government dispensation ushered in by the inclusive government in 2009 has produced a context of competing policy and political narratives and discourses; this has not been felt at the local level precisely because the power structures of the former ruling party ZANU-PF, i.e. the chiefs and rural district administrators, have remained in place. In any case, as I observed above, the competing voices have not challenged the development paradigm entailed in the takeover of vast amounts of communal lands for the accelerated reproduction of biofuels, but simply the methodologies that were used in doing so.

The historical antecedents highlighted above and current land grabs in Chisumbanje make the case for a thoroughgoing examination of the "communal" land tenure system and its place in the larger political economy of Zimbabwe. This would also entail a review of rural administration policies with a view to streamlining the current regime that is largely amorphous and ambiguous in nature. As we observed above, the resettlement schemes initiated in the 1980s were not accompanied by mutually supportive measures of institutional and legal reforms, and local, provincial and national state authorities continue to play a combination of sometimes contradictory roles. Alden Wily pointedly argues that the:

Remedy lies in...legal acknowledgement that customary [i.e. communal] and other longstanding unregistered land tenancy amounts to a real property interest, registered or

not... Without this change, majority rural landholders remain little better than squatters on their own land, a condition already wrongfully endured for a century or more.

Wily quoted in Hall 2010: 22

Such “acknowledgement” would entail establishing some degree of inalienability of land in the communal areas. This would immediately empower the bargaining position of most rural communities since new investors would need to engage with those communities on the formal land markets.

While the current tenure system in which all land, including resettlement land, is regarded as State Land is purportedly supposed to guard against the fragmentation of land and guarantee that all land is being utilised for farming purposes, a system of leasehold tenure of up to 99 years can easily ensure the same, but with the added benefit of safeguarding the rural villagers against the nefarious claims of the state on behalf of big business. Now, obviously this is not a novel idea; if anything it has been on the parliamentary agenda for some time now. But it appears as if the Parliament has been chronically unable to conclude protracted processes of developing a national land policy and law. The Parliament of Zimbabwe therefore has to play a central role in making sure that the executive is accountable and open. Thus far, the Parliament of Zimbabwe has been engaged in a window-dressing exercise in which they have sent several “investigative” and “high-profile” delegations, but all this seems to be occurring at the fringes of policy changes and is rather a side-show.

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A convergence of factors has been driving a revaluation of land by powerful economic and political actors. This is occurring across the world, but especially in the global South. As a result, we see unfolding worldwide a dramatic rise in the extent of cross-border, transnational corporation-driven and, in some cases, foreign government-driven, large-scale land deals. The phrase 'global land grab' has become a catch-all phrase to describe this explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions revolving around the production and sale of food and biofuels, conservation and mining activities.

The Land Deal Politics Initiative launched in 2010 as an 'engaged research' initiative, taking the side of the rural poor, but based on solid evidence and detailed, field-based research. The LDPI promotes in-depth and systematic enquiry to inform deeper, meaningful and productive debates about the global trends and local manifestations. The LDPI aims for a broad framework encompassing the political economy, political ecology and political sociology of land deals centred on food, biofuels, minerals and conservation. Working within the broad analytical lenses of these three fields, the LDPI uses as a general framework the four key questions in agrarian political economy: (i) who owns what? (ii) who does what? (iii) who gets what? and (iv) what do they do with the surplus wealth created? Two additional key questions highlight political dynamics between groups and social classes: 'what do they do to each other?', and 'how do changes in politics get shaped by dynamic ecologies, and vice versa?' The LDPI network explores a range of big picture questions through detailed in-depth case studies in several sites globally, focusing on the politics of land deals.

Subaltern Voices and Corporate/State Land Grab in the Save Valley

The history of the Save Valley in south-eastern Manicaland provides an intriguing account of peasant encounters with the state apparatus dating back to the 1920s. However, the process currently underway, where an obscure 20-year deal involving a public-private partnership between the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) and Macdom and Rating Investments for 50 000 hectares of land represents what is perhaps the highest level of the state's coercive apparatus at work; as many as 250 000 communal farmers stand to lose or have already lost their lands and livelihoods. The case shows many features demonstrated in the wider literature on 'land grabs' and as with many cases of other 'grabs', this case centres on state land which has been also used by local people. It highlights the way the politics of relationships between the state, investors and local communities are played out. This paper seeks to capture and historicise the subjective subaltern voices in light of the current corporate and state-centric landgrabbing being experienced in the Save Valley. It captures the experiences arising out of the land deal which has curtailed the community's access to land and other livelihood alternatives. Contests over land, and ambiguous claims over land rights, as well as arguments that the land is underutilized, are central to this case. This paper in particular delves into the historical origins of these competing claims of rights of use and ownership of land at the centre of land disputes thrown up by new land deals, and points to the importance of understanding the long-term claim-making process, and its contested and ambiguous nature. Neat legal documents associated with investment contracts always have to encounter this layered and disputed history, and need to take more cognisance of such histories of land use and rights claims by different actors, if the sort of disputes and conflicts that arise, as in this case, are to be avoided.



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